the hindu businessline.
WEDNESDAY - OCTOBER 15, 2025

Interesting choice

Provocative Nobel for how innovation spurs growth

The Nobel Prize for Economics this year has been awarded to Joel Mokyr, Phillipe Aghion and Peter Howitt for inquiring into how innovation has kept growth going for over two centuries, the post-Industrial Revolution era, without major periods of rupture or stagnation. This, they argue, is vastly different from the aeons which preceded this period, marked by flat and inconsistent growth.

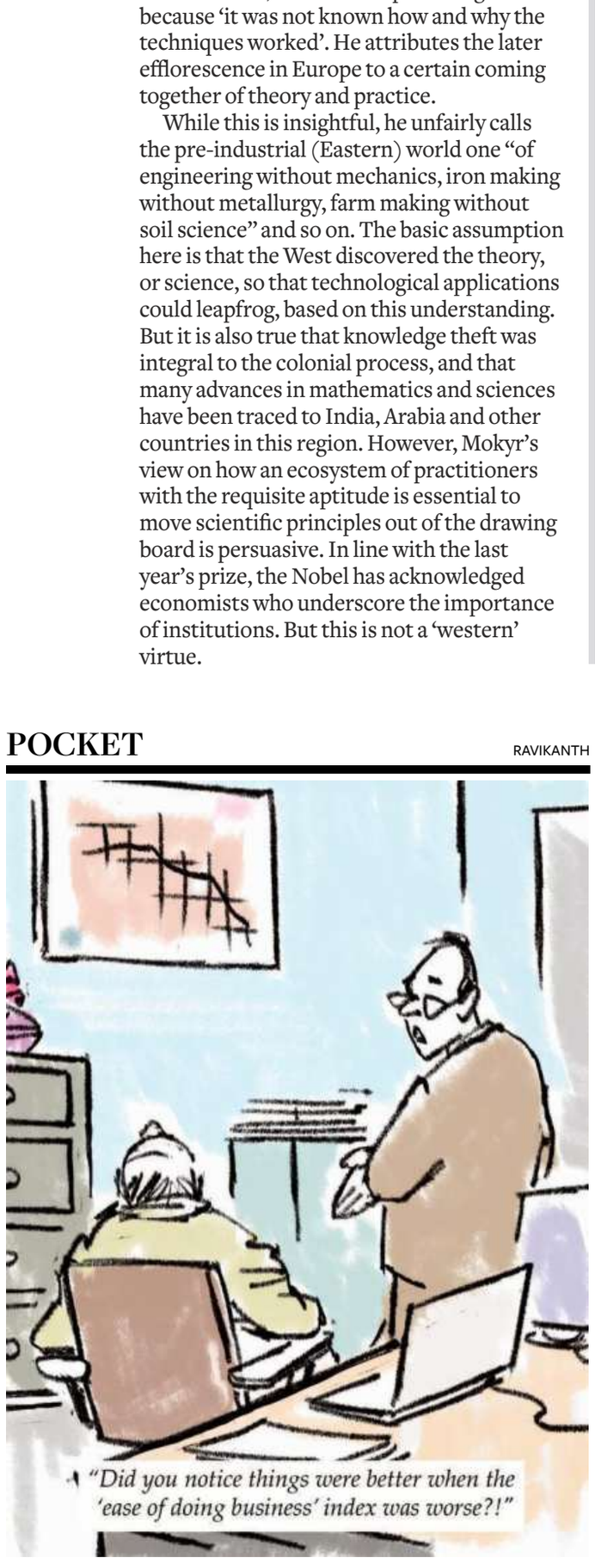
This inquiry is both interesting and controversial, because it seeks to explain how innovation translates better into economic growth in some societies than others — which is Mokyr's area of work, as he develops a theory of knowledge diffusion. As against the historical sweep of Mokyr's work on the sociology and institutional basis of innovation, Aghion and Howitt have delved into how 'creative destruction' has kept growth going in present day US, notwithstanding its destabilising effects. The latter have shown how 10 per cent of US firms enter and leave the market each year, linking that churn to rising labour productivity. Where this theoretically links up to Mokyr's work is that this process of firm level innovation results from the interplay of capital and labour — a socio-institutional process, rather than something exogenous.

Taking this institutional approach forward, Aghion and Howitt also emphasise the role of the right kind of subsidies for innovation as well as the need for a social net for those who lose their jobs in the churn. The latter will also ensure that innovation and creative destruction are not stalled by losers. Mokyr, in fact, says that post-Industrial Britain became the pioneer of industrial inventions because its society was open to change, exchange of ideas and new technologies. The message for today's inward looking world leaders is unmistakable. But what makes Mokyr's work provocative is his view that pre-industrial societies (such as China, Greece and Rome) were not wanting in innovation, but failed to produce growth because 'it was not known how and why the techniques worked'. He attributes the later efflorescence in Europe to a certain coming together of theory and practice.

While this is insightful, he unfairly calls the pre-industrial (Eastern) world one "of engineering without mechanics, iron making without metallurgy, farm making without soil science" and so on. The basic assumption here is that the West discovered the theory, or science, so that technological applications could leapfrog, based on this understanding. But it is also true that knowledge theft was integral to the colonial process, and that many advances in mathematics and sciences have been traced to India, Arabia and other countries in this region. However, Mokyr's view on how an ecosystem of practitioners with the requisite aptitude is essential to move scientific principles out of the drawing board is persuasive. In line with the last year's prize, the Nobel has acknowledged economists who underscore the importance of institutions. But this is not a 'western' virtue.

POCKET

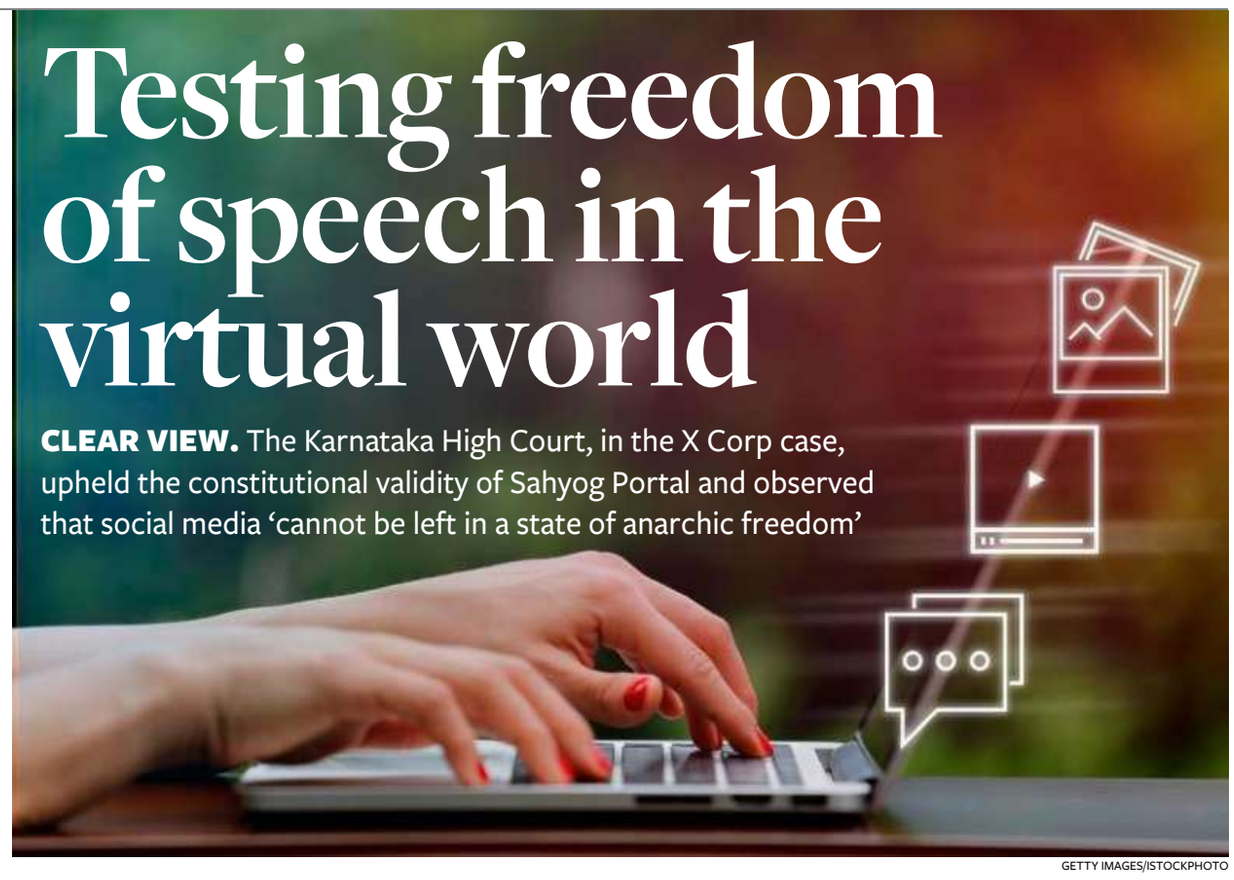
RAVIKANTH





K VAITHEESWARAN

Testing freedom of speech in the virtual world



CLEAR VIEW. The Karnataka High Court, in the X Corp case, upheld the constitutional validity of Sahyog Portal and observed that social media 'cannot be left in a state of anarchic freedom'

GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

One of the key fundamental rights under Article 19 of the Constitution is the freedom of speech and this right gets tested in various formats. The latest exposition on the subject and specifically in the context of the digital space or the virtual world is through the judgment of the Karnataka High Court in *X Corp Vs Union of India*.

The Court had considered a challenge to the Government's Sahyog portal; Section 79(3)(b) of the IT Act, 2000; and Rule 3(1)(d) of the Intermediary Guideline Rules, 2021.

The Sahyog Portal, launched in 2024, is an initiative of the Central Government to automate the process of sending notices to intermediaries by the appropriate government or its agency under the IT Act, 2000 and to facilitate the removal or disabling of access to any information, data or communication link being used to commit an unlawful act. The idea of the portal is to unify all authorised agencies and intermediaries of the country on one platform for ensuring immediate action against the unlawful online information.

SAHYOG PORTAL AND COURTS

The existence of the Sahyog Portal first came to light over the course of the proceedings in a *habeas corpus* petition filed by a mother in search of her missing child in the case of *Shabana vs Government of NCT of Delhi W.P. (CRL) 1563/2024*, before the Delhi High Court. With the Police submitting that there was a delay on the part of Instagram in disclosing details as sought to trace the missing person, the *habeas corpus* petition turned into a thorough review by the Court of the response mechanisms of digital intermediaries to information requests put forth by law enforcement agencies and other functionalities of the state. The Government informed the Court about the poor response of intermediaries and also about the Sahyog Portal created and the fact that around 65 intermediaries, all States and Union Territories as well as the Ministry of Finance (DGGI) and the Ministry of Defence were already on-boarded.

X Corp submitted that it could not be compelled to onboard the Sahyog Portal as the portal would fall outside the statutory scheme of Section 69A of the IT Act and that the said portal would create a parallel mechanism to the mechanism existing under Section 69A of the IT Act without any procedures or safeguards.

KARNATAKA HC JUDGMENT

A single judge of the Karnataka High Court has upheld the powers of the Government to issue content takedown orders on the portal and held as follows:

Freedom of speech and expression guaranteed by Article 19(1)(a) are not absolute and are subject to reasonable restrictions provided in Article 19(2).

The Rules that were considered and interpreted by the Supreme Court in the case of *Shreya Singhal Vs UoI (2015) 5 SCC 1*, have undergone a complete change and demand their own interpretative frame, unsaddled by precedents that address a bygone regime.

Rule 3(1)(d) of the IT (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 is not vague, *ultra vires* or arbitrary and when jointly read with Section 79(3)(b) it merely mandates due-diligence and observed that if the elaborate process for issuing content takedown orders under Section 69A were to be strictly followed, the damage that the unlawful content could cause may have already occurred.

Freedoms under Article 19 of the Constitution of India are available only to individual citizens of India and X Corp, being an American company, could not claim such freedoms.

The Sahyog Portal is constitutionally valid. "The Sahyog Portal, far from being a constitutional anathema, is in truth an instrument of public good. Conceived under the authority of Section 79(3)(b) of the IT Act and Rule 3(1)(d) of the 2021 Rules, it stands as a beacon of cooperation between citizen and intermediary, a mechanism through which the state endeavours to combat the growing menace of cybercrime. To assail its validity is to misunderstand its purpose; hence, the challenge is without merit."

Freedoms under Article 19 of the Constitution of India are available only to individual citizens of India and X Corp, being an American company, could not claim such freedoms

LAW OF THE LAND

The Karnataka High Court took strong objection to its lackadaisical approach in acting against grievances on various grounds such as abuse/harassment, child sexual exploitation, hateful conduct, sensitive adult content, etc., and observed that such inaction was indicative of the platform's poor attitude and unwillingness to comply with the laws of the land.

The Court also attributed the long list of pending litigation across various jurisdictions globally to X Corp's disrespect for content take down orders.

The Court observed that even in the US, with the rigidly worded protection to free speech under the First Amendment, restrictions in the interest of the public have been imposed time and again.

The Court also called out the double standards demonstrated by X Corp in raising no objections to the 'Take it Down Act, 2025' of the US and at the same time challenging content take down provisions under Indian laws.

SOCIAL MEDIA

The Court also recorded strong sentiments in favour of strict regulation of social media platforms and observed that "social media, as the modern amphitheatre of ideas, cannot be left in a state of anarchic freedom. Regulation of information in this domain is neither novel nor unique; the United States regulates it, every sovereign nation regulates it, and India's resolve to do likewise cannot, by any stretch of constitutional imagination, be branded unlawful. Unregulated speech, under the guise of liberty, becomes a licence for lawlessness."

OPEN QUESTIONS

X Corp has indicated that it would go on appeal. There is another matter which is pending before the Delhi High Court. In future, there would be interesting jurisprudence on the following open questions:

(i) Whether the judgment of the Supreme Court in *Shreya Singhal* is not relevant in light of the amended IT Intermediary Rules, 2021?

(ii) Whether the requirements of Article 19(2) of the Constitution will still have to be met as laid down by the Supreme Court even after the amendment?

(iii) Given the fact that Section 79(3)(b) survived a vires challenge with two caveats from the Supreme Court, one being the ostensible reference to Article 19(2), can it be said that *Shreya Singhal* is still not relevant?

(iv) Whether the authorised agencies have the flexibility to act either under Section 69A or Section 79(3)(b) of the IT Act, 2000 and whether an intermediary can insist that only Section 69A should be resorted to?

The writer is an advocate and tax consultant

A closer look at Economics Nobel winners' work

Mokyr, Aghion and Howitt explain how innovation is endogenous, systematic and central to economic growth

bl.explainer

Sourashis Banerjee

Who are the awardees for the Nobel Prize in Economics 2025?

The three recipients come from distinguished academic backgrounds and have made path-breaking contributions over several decades. Joel Mokyr is an economic historian at Northwestern University, US. Originally from the Netherlands, his work focuses on the role of culture, ideas and knowledge in shaping technological and economic change.

Philippe Aghion is a French economist, currently at the Collège de France and the London School of Economics. He has worked extensively on growth theory, innovation policy, and the economics of education. Peter Howitt, a Canadian economist and Professor Emeritus at Brown University, US, has collaborated closely with Aghion for decades. Together, they have reshaped the way economists think about innovation as the central driver of modern economies.

What was the work for which the award was given?

The 2025 Nobel Prize for Economics recognises their complementary contributions to explaining how innovation fuels long-term economic growth. Mokyr's research examines the historical roots of innovation, particularly during Europe's Industrial Revolution. He argues that the transformation was not just about material resources or institutions, but about a cultural shift towards scientific inquiry, curiosity, and the open exchange of ideas. This intellectual climate allowed knowledge to accumulate and spread, enabling sustained technological progress.

Aghion and Howitt developed the modern "Schumpeterian growth theory", named after economist Joseph Schumpeter's concept of "creative destruction". Their model shows how firms innovate to gain temporary advantages, leading to cycles where new technologies replace old ones, driving productivity and growth. Their later work explored how education systems, competition, regulation and state policy can accelerate or slow down this innovation process.

Together, their work offers both a historical understanding of how innovation cultures emerge and a formal economic model of how innovation translates into growth.

What motivated their study, and how does it build on earlier growth theories like Solow's?



INSIGHTS. On how innovation translates into growth REUTERS

A key question in economics has always been what drives long-term growth. The Solow model (1950s) showed that capital and labour explain part of growth, but treated technological progress as an external factor, leaving its origins unexplained.

Mokyr, Aghion and Howitt sought to bring innovation inside the model, examining its cultural, institutional and economic drivers. Mokyr looked to history to understand why innovation flourishes, while Aghion and Howitt modelled how incentives, competition and policy shape technological change. Their work provides a post-Solow explanation in which innovation is endogenous, systematic and central to economic growth.

Why is the work relevant in the current context?

Their research offers crucial insights as the world faces slowing productivity growth. It shows why encouraging innovation is essential for sustained growth, especially in economies that can no longer rely on capital accumulation alone. It provides governments with policy tools, from supporting education and research to ensuring healthy competition, to nurture innovation ecosystems. Mokyr's emphasis on knowledge and culture reminds policymakers that fostering innovation is not just about money, but about creating environments where ideas can flourish. As economies undergo rapid technological change, their frameworks help explain how to manage the disruptions of creative destruction while sustaining growth.

How long have the awardees been working on this?

Joel Mokyr began his work on the cultural and intellectual history of economic growth in the 1970s, publishing widely on European economic history over the following decades. Aghion and Howitt published their landmark paper on Schumpeterian growth in 1992, and have since expanded the theory through decades of research on innovation, institutions, and growth policy. Collectively, their work spans over 40 years of sustained academic contributions, influencing both theory and policy.

LETTERS TO EDITOR

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

Waste-to-road tech

Apropos 'Municipal waste to be used to build roads by 2027, says Nitin Gadkari' (October 14), India's innovative use of municipal waste in road construction is setting a new benchmark for sustainable infrastructure. By mixing shredded plastic and non-recyclable materials with bitumen, engineers are building stronger, more water-resistant, and longer-lasting roads. This eco-friendly approach not only reduces construction costs but also helps tackle the growing problem of urban waste. The waste-to-road technology embodies the spirit of a circular economy, cutting pollution, reducing landfill pressure, and paving the path toward a cleaner, greener, and more resilient India.

N Sadhasiva Reddy
Bengaluru

India-EU consensus

Apropos 'Creating balance in India-EU FTA' (October 14), the key reasons for the long delay in striking consonance in the Broad based Trade and Investment Agreement between India and the EU are disagreements over market access for specific goods and differing views on non-tariff barriers such as climate regulation and services and labour mobility. The EU's proposal to impose tax on carbon-intensive imports will hinder labour-intensive exports from India.

NR Nagarajan
Sivakasi, TN

The cost of war

This refers to the editorial 'The rise of hope' (October 14). It is a moment of immense relief that the three-year conflict between Israel and Hamas has finally come to an end, following decisive diplomatic intervention by the US. War is often justified in the language of strategy and national interest, but behind every justification there is a human cost that cannot be measured in numbers or territory captured.

The lives lost are the true, uncompensated cost of war — a reality some world leaders still refuse to acknowledge.

S Lakshminarayanan
Puvanur, TN

EPFO withdrawals

Apropos 'EPFO relaxes norms, early withdrawals up to 100% allowed' (October 14), there has been all-round relaxation of conditions for early withdrawal from the EPF account. This may at first seem favourable to EPF subscribers. But one must remember that EPF is a retirement safety net designed to meet the financial needs of subscribers. Frequent, easy withdrawals will only diminish the corpus and deny benefits of compounding to subscribers. In today's scenario, subscribers may be misled into making withdrawals and investing proceeds in other capital market instruments. This could turn out to be rather dangerous given the risks inherent in capital markets.

V Vijaykumar
Pune

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Banks and ECL norms

Bank auditors will have to learn the ropes

Mohan R Lavi

On October 7, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) issued the draft Reserve Bank of India (Scheduled Commercial Banks-Asset Classification, Provisioning and Income Recognition) Directions, 2025 for public comments. These directions are proposed to be implemented by banks and financial institutions with effect from April 1, 2027 — a possible indicator that banks and financial institutions will transition to Indian Accounting Standards (Ind AS) from this date.

The draft directions have been structured on Ind AS 109 on financial instruments in general and the 90-day mantra in particular. A bank shall classify a financial asset as non-performing assets (NPA) if interest and/or principal remains continuously overdue for a period of more than 90 days in respect of a term loan, bills purchased and discounted and OD/CC accounts.

A credit card account where the minimum amount due, as mentioned in the statement, is not paid fully within 90 days from the payment due date mentioned in the statement would be classified as NPA.

Agricultural loans would be classified and provided for based on the duration of the crop season. NPAs shall be classified into sub-standard, doubtful and loss asset depending on the period they have remained in a category.

Banks shall use a general approach consisting of three key functions i.e. Probability of Default (PD), Loss Given Default (LGD) and Exposure at Default (EAD) to measure expected credit loss (ECL).

The Directions contain certain broad principles to be followed by a bank for ensuring prudence and robustness while using models in the process of ECL computation. A bank shall recognise lifetime ECL for all financial instruments evidencing significant increase in credit risk (SICR) since initial recognition.

For this purpose, a bank shall adopt a three-stage approach, based on the credit quality of the financial instrument at the time of initial recognition, or on any subsequent reporting date.

For loans and similar financial assets, a credit loss is the difference between the present values of the contractual cash flows that are due to the bank under the contract and the cash flows that the bank expects to receive.



BANKS. Prudent provisioning

CUSHIONING THE IMPACT

Banks and financial institutions would be transitioning to Ind AS nearly a decade after India Inc transitioned to Ind AS. It was generally felt that RBI was delaying the implementation of Ind AS for banks since the concept of Fair Value for the treasury portfolio and the ECL model to provide for non-performing assets could dent the financials of any bank.

The Directions propose another solution to cushion the banks from the impact of Ind AS. It has been decided to introduce a transitional arrangement for the impact of ECL based provisioning on regulatory capital by giving banks time to rebuild their capital resources following a possible negative impact arising from the introduction of ECL accounting.

The transitional adjustment amount — the difference between the ECL required as on April 1, 2027 (computed based on the balance sheet position as on March 31, 2027), and the provisions held as per the extant IRACP norms as on March 31, 2027 —may, at the option of the bank, be added back to the Common Equity Tier 1 (CET 1) capital. This benefit shall be provided till March 31, 2031. A bank may choose to spread the transition over a shorter period.

These Directions could be officially notified soon along with other requirements of Ind AS standards. Banks would need to rejig their Core Banking System (CBS) and MIS data.

Since the ECL model is based on the expected cash flows, provisioning will trickle down to the branch level. Auditors of banks and their branches would need to learn the new model and unlearn the old norms. RBI seems to have covered all bases to ensure that the impact of the transition is minimal. The insurance regulator IRDAI is expected to follow suit and issue a similar set of guidelines for insurance companies. As the saying goes "Better late than never".

The writer is a chartered accountant



C GOPINATH



Why has US turned inward-looking?

BACK TO LOCAL. Trump's trade policy focuses on domestic industry and jobs. Gandhiji also echoed similar views many decades ago

GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

Unless a company is building their pharmaceutical manufacturing plant in America, the company would face a 100% tariff.' This recent statement from the US administration makes it clear how international trade, for the US, is now just another instrument of industrial policy focused on 'Make in the US.' But should this be a matter of regret?

For many years now, we have been fed on the theory of free trade and how there are 'gains from trade,' when tariffs and trade barriers are kept low. The WTO institutionalises this belief. By gains from trade, economists mean that there is more available for consumption at a lower price than otherwise.

But this logic ignores production. What happens to the local producers whose products are not being bought anymore as we merrily increase our consumption from global sources? The economists say that structural adjustments will take place and resources (nee, families) will shift to new sectors. But that does not always happen, and in the short run they lose the mortgage on their houses and there is less food on the table.

The Trump administration, as part of its economic nationalism, has closely pursued the policy of focusing on balancing trade with each country as a means of getting production back into America, and supporting the working class. It does not matter if the price of the products will be higher, but people will have jobs, and the country will improve its economic security by not being dependent on so many countries for imports.

Robert Lighthizer was US Trade Representative under the previous Trump administration and closely aligned to his leader's views. In his book *There is no free trade*, (2023, Broadside) he goes into great detail about how he tried to negotiate agreements with the Chinese and revised the NAFTA agreement also to ensure more structural fairness and a better deal for American workers. He looks at the trade deficit with China in terms of '... the hundreds of billions of dollars that Americans send to China every year,' which has financed China's military expansion and its financial adventures in the developing world. He means the trade deficit.

GANDHIAN PARALLEL

This interestingly echoes the terminology that Gandhiji used to call for a boycott of British textiles and to promote khadi. He successfully argued that the ₹60 crore (India's textile import bill in the 1920s) that India was 'sending' to Britain was a drain that Britain was using to control India and impoverish the country.

Lighthizer also argues that American trade policy should revolve around helping working-class American families. He says international trade should contribute to the wellbeing of the citizens by making families stronger and communities better. "Enhancing corporate profits, increasing economic efficiency, and lowering consumer prices are important but, in my view, secondary to this goal," he writes.

Former USTR Robert Lighthizer argues that by having a huge trade deficit with China, US is sending money to that country. Gandhiji made a similar argument to boycott British textiles and promote khadi

Here is another parallel with Gandhiji whose idea of economics was to make the community stronger. He wanted people to conduct their transactions locally, even if prices were higher. If you don't buy from your local vendor or artisan, how would he support his family? Meanwhile, work with him to improve his product and increase efficiency.

China followed a policy of global dominance by creating industries with capacity far in excess of domestic demand. It allowed the country to take advantage of scale economies and flood global markets with low prices. The soyabean industry in the US is a similar example. It is a heavily export-oriented industry. In 2024, production was 4.16 billion bushels, while domestic demand was 2.56 billion. In 2025, China, which usually takes almost 50 per cent of US exports has only committed to lift about 20 per cent of its usual demand.

In this changed policy environment, the Trump administration is looking for ways to financially support the soyabean farmers. When countries begin adopting a 'Make in your own country' policy, it has to necessarily be followed by a 'Try to consume within your own country' policy. A start would be Gandhiji's focus on the local community for production and consumption. When consumption is locally focused, requirement in excess of local production drives trade, and not the other way around.

When smaller countries pursue economic nationalism, it can be brushed away. But when an economic giant that evangelized global trade for many years does so, it sends the global waves we see today. If you take a Gandhian perspective, it is time for this correction.

The writer is Chair and Associate Professor, Strategy and International Business, Suffolk University, US

STATISTALK.

Compiled by **Dhuraivel Gunasekaran** | Graphic **KS Gunasekar**

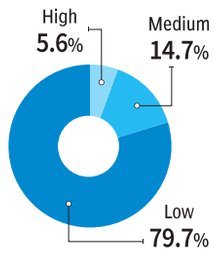
Education & trust to drive India's next investor wave

The SEBI Investor Survey 2025, covering over 90,000 urban and rural households, explores investor behaviour, non-investor hesitations, and strategies for sustainable participation through better education and grievance systems. It reveals that about 80% of Indian households prioritise capital preservation over high returns. Awareness of securities market products is relatively high, with 63% knowing at least one product, yet only 9.5% have invested. Key barriers to investment include complexity, information gaps, fear of market losses and trust issues. Key findings

India plays it safe

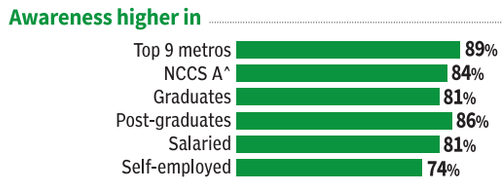
80% of Indian households prefer capital preservation over high returns

*Risk tolerance of India (%)***

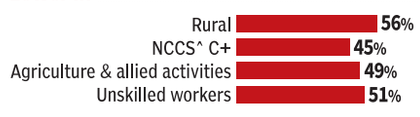


63% are aware of at least one securities market product

Awareness higher in

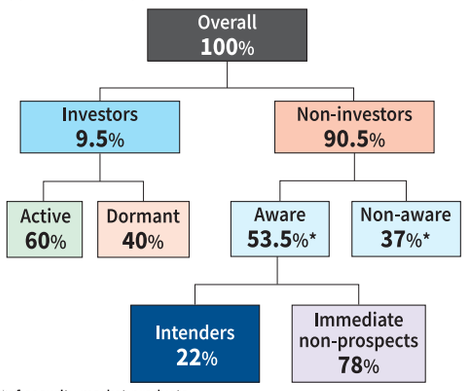


Lower in



9.5% invest today, but the engine is starting

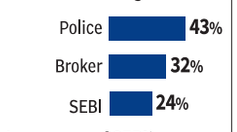
2 in 10 aware non-investors express intent, signals strong opportunity to expand the investor base



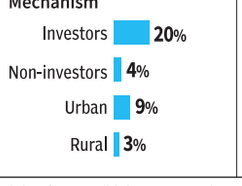
*of security market products

Where do investors go for grievance resolutions?

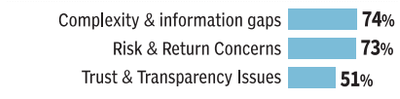
Police is the first point of contact for most grievances



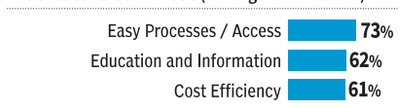
Awareness of SEBI's Grievance Redressal Mechanism



Barrier to invest (Among non-investors)



Motivators to invest (Among non-investors)



Reasons for lapsing



Source: SEBI Investor Survey 2025 ^New Consumer Classification System **High Tolerance (high returns and not too concerned with risk), Medium Tolerance (realizing there will be ups and downs) and Low Tolerance (capital safety)

On businessline.in

The key to transforming lives, livelihoods

Last mile facilitation is vital for improving access to public services for the marginalised, says **Amarjeet Sinha**

https://tinyurl.com/mu7nm7x6

Improving foundational literacy and numeracy skills critical

Without strong foundational skills, many children are likely to drop out before completing secondary education, missing out on lifetime earnings and productivity benefits, points out **Amit Kapoor**

https://tinyurl.com/3zwkj665

Bengal's catastrophe: The hills are screaming for help

While climate negotiations often fixate on emissions and finance, adaptation for fragile mountain systems demands equal urgency, says **Priyanka Vadrevu**

https://tinyurl.com/h8zeshxb

thehindu businessline.

TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

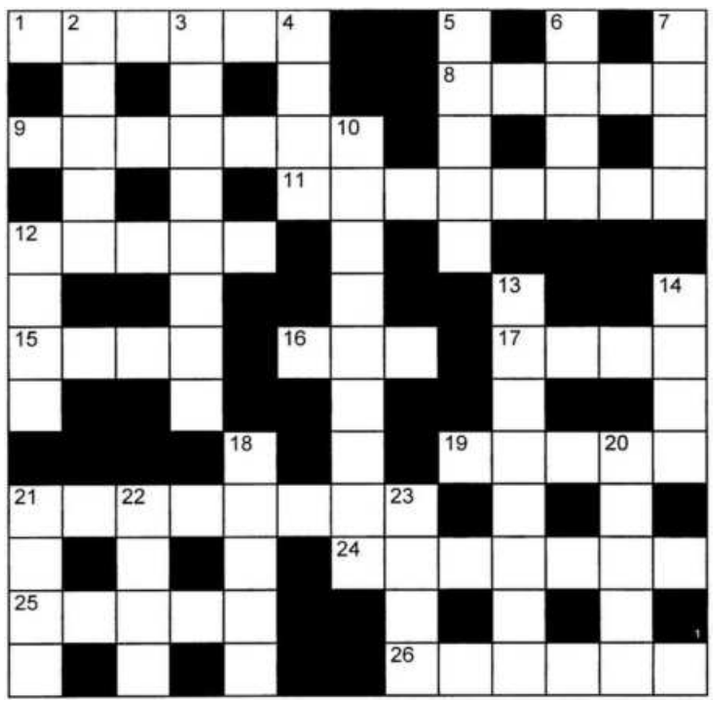
October 15, 2005

Unilever to move jobs to India, E. Europe
Consumer goods giant Unilever will move more than 2,000 jobs across human resources, finance and IT operations to India and eastern Europe. The maker of products such as Dove soap and Lipton tea is in talks with Accenture and IBM on exporting thousands of IT posts to India and eastern Europe.

Citigroup to focus on organic growth
Global financial services company Citigroup will focus on organic growth rather than exploring the takeover route in India, Mr Charles Prince, CEO, Citigroup, said here on Friday. Mr Prince was talking to the media after dedicating the Citigroup Centre for Financial Literacy to the Indian School of Microfinance for Women.

Gas shortage leaves power utilities struggling
The ongoing gas shortage has resulted in under-utilisation of over 40 per cent of the country's gas-based capacity of 10,000 MW. The fate of several of the up coming gas-based stations, adding up to 4,642 MW across the Central, State, and private sectors before the end of the current five-year Plan period hangs in the balance as a number of these projects are still struggling to tie up fuel link ages in time for their commissioning schedule.

BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2803



EASY

ACROSS
01. Faith; natural judgment (6)
08. Unfettered (5)
09. Partner; wife or husband (7)
11. Was barely flowing (8)
12. Great danger (5)
15. Impressive, large-scale (4)
16. Enemy agent (3)
17. Change houses (4)
19. Swimming stroke (5)
21. Spicy, fragrant (8)
24. Become wealthy (7)
25. Immature, unrefined (5)
26. Ramble about (6)

DOWN
02. Run away to wed (5)
03. Impulse, intuition (8)
04. Stronghold (4)
05. Not taut (5)
06. Round drinking-cup (4)
07. Be inclined to (4)
10. Vessel for moving armed men (9)
12. Look surreptitiously (4)
13. Put one in jail (8)
14. Tumbled (4)
18. Very thin crisp biscuit (5)
20. In what place? (5)
21. Musical bow (It) (4)
22. Musical work (4)
23. Large black bird (4)

NOT SO EASY

ACROSS
01. What one thinks is true is fib, Lee works out (6)
08. Not tied to English after Oslo conversion (5)
09. Keep company with Prince Albert, say (7)
11. Just flowed and deceived one around top of lagoon (8)
12. Danger of becoming ripe before end of April (5)
15. Some of the pictures presented on the heroic scale (4)
16. Soppy odds for a secret agent to take (3)
17. Shift one's turn at chess (4)
19. Child will make progress, but traffic will barely move (5)
21. Fragrant as Maori cat can be (8)
24. Do well not to finish character in The Tempest (7)
25. Unrefined, the way one is told one manned the boat (5)
26. Be roaming about with Andrew (6)

DOWN
02. Topless people could do so, not to get married at home (5)
03. Natural reaction at home isn't wrong for Connecticut (8)
04. Trading station held by one in temporary charge (4)
05. Fire about 50 for being 8 (5)
06. Make deliveries: there may be a drink in it for you (4)
07. Be apt to look after one (4)
10. In which soldiers are moved by sailors (9)
12. To take a furtive look may sound chicken (4)
13. Lock one away in Prom: is that possible? (8)
14. It is cruel to bring the trees down (4)
18. How far we are removed from the unleavened bread (5)
20. A question of location as we take the lady in (5)
21. Bow musician uses in popular composition (4)
22. It may not need us to complete work in music (4)
23. Sound exultant as a bird (4)

SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2802

ACROSS 1. Respectable 8. Handyman 9. Path 10. Spars 13. Dial 16. Even 17. Core 18. Fobs 20. Swoop 24. Evil 25. Brighten 26. Dry cleaning
DOWN 2. Eons 3. Pay up 4. Chair 5. Biped 6. Chicken-feed 7. Challenging 11. Alias 12. Salvo 14. Idol 15. Herb 19. Sully 21. Worse 22. Organ 23. Stun

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Flawed order

The transfer of the Karur case to the CBI raises troubling questions

More than two weeks have passed since 41 people died after a crowd crush at a political rally of actor-politician Vijay and his party, the Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK) in Karur. Yet, far from establishing culpability, the judicial response risks prioritising political narrative over factual inquiry. On October 13, the Supreme Court of India's intervention, transferring the investigation to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and appointing a supervisory committee, was ostensibly meant to restore order after procedural disarray at the Madras High Court. The Court's move seems to have arisen because of the sharp remarks, perhaps unwarranted, by a single judge at the Madras High Court about Mr. Vijay and the TVK, neither of whom was a party in a case about rally protocols that did not directly concern the Karur incident (which fell under the Madurai Bench's jurisdiction). But the Court has created new problems. It has granted the petitioners' demands for a CBI investigation and judicial supervision as "interim relief", yet the measures are irreversible. Once the CBI files a charge sheet, there can be no reversion to State police investigation. The Court's rationale for the CBI transfer is equally problematic. It cites press conferences by senior State officials as attempts to exonerate subordinates, casting a doubt on investigative impartiality. But this amounts to a gag order on public officials. After the incident, Mr. Vijay and his supporters alleged conspiracy. Should State officials refrain from responding to grave allegations amplified across social media merely to appear neutral? Presenting factual evidence, including footage, should not automatically prejudice an investigation. This is too flimsy a ground for a transfer of the case to the CBI, once described by the Court as a caged parrot of the Centre. Ironically, the Court cited *State of West Bengal and Ors. vs The Committee for Protection of Democratic Rights, West Bengal and Ors.* (2010), which warns against ordering CBI investigations "as a matter of routine or merely because a party has levelled some allegations against the local police", undermining its own reasoning.

The order devotes considerable attention to police "inaction" and crowd management failures but makes no mention of the TVK's or leaders' responsibilities in organising the rally. The Court may be seen as pre-judging who was at fault. It notes that the TVK was not made a party in the High Court proceedings, yet does not consider what this could mean for a balanced inquiry. Following the interim order, it is unclear what remains to be adjudicated at the final stage. It remains to be seen how the Court will address allegations that one petitioner was unaware of the petition filed in his name, and that another litigant, who abandoned his family years ago, is not a 'real' representative of a child victim. Justice requires affixing clear responsibility to deter chaos, not proceedings that muddy accountability.

Inflation lessons

The Reserve Bank of India will have to be more accurate in its predictions

The September 2025 retail inflation data, at a 99-month low of 1.54%, has important policy implications for the RBI in particular. Except for August, retail inflation has slowed in every month this financial year. The average rate of inflation for the first half of the fiscal is 2.2%, just within the RBI's comfort band of 2%-6%. When inflation was at the higher end of this band, the RBI had repeatedly said that its target was 4%, and that it would not rest until inflation was at that level. There is an argument to be made for the central bank to strive for that same target now that inflation is repeatedly coming in below that mark. Consistently low inflation means that supply is comfortably outstripping demand. Inflation in the clothing and footwear category, for example, was at 2.3% in September 2025, and has been falling pretty consistently for the last two years. This is not a good place to be in, especially now. Faced with the same oversupply problem, albeit at a much larger scale, China is increasingly depending on demand from abroad to absorb its supply. This has not exactly been India's forte historically, and the current tariff tensions affect exports. The government has tried to stimulate domestic demand through income-tax and GST rate reductions. Households have been using the direct tax rebate to bolster their savings and reduce debt rather than increase consumption. GST rate cuts also led to only a temporary spurt in purchases.

What is needed is a sustained increase in real wages, and for that the private sector needs to step up. It is good news that private sector investment announcements grew strongly in the first half of this year, but those need to translate into real projects on the ground soon. One way that the RBI can help is to cut interest rates significantly in the next Monetary Policy Committee meeting in December. With inflation so low and private investment needing a boost, it is better to err on the side of accommodation than conservatism. The other policy issue the RBI needs to deal with is the inaccuracy of its forecasts. In April, it had predicted that inflation for the year would be 4%. Later, it consistently revised this forecast, arriving at 2.6% at the latest meeting in end-September. While factors influencing inflation are dynamic, such a drastic revision of the forecast in just six months shows that something is wrong with the RBI's estimation process. Since a key aspect of its work is with inflation prediction, this is a deficiency that it should address quickly.

The evolving political dynamics in volatile Bangladesh



Kallol Bhattacherjee

Bangladesh's political landscape is undergoing a rapid transformation ahead of the general election which is to take place in February 2026. Student advisers and the Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami (JEI), Bangladesh's largest Islamist party, which extended support to the interim government from the beginning, are positioning themselves to make the most out of the current set-up and are effectively challenging the older two-party system featuring the Awami League and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP).

Signs of this new political configuration were evident when Mohammed Yunus, Chief Adviser to the interim government, was seen at the 80th session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in New York in the company of Naib Ameer of the JEI, politician Syed Abdullah Mohammed Taher and Tasneem Zara, a young leader from the student-backed and newly formed National Citizen Party (NCP). The delegation also included Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir of the BNP. But the presence of at least two Jamaat leaders and the elderly Alamgir showed that the NCP and the Jamaat have covered a great political distance within the last year.

On the ground

There is considerable frustration among the supporters of the Awami League and the BNP as the leadership in both parties is not responding to the changes that are sweeping across Bangladesh's politics. With the flight of Awami League leaders from the country, Khaleda Zia's BNP was the immediate beneficiary as it was expected to take charge in case an election was held by December 2024 or January 2025. As the interim government delayed the election, the BNP chose to wait and became restive only when it became clear that the students would form their own party. In the process it lost valuable time and suffered reputational damage as Bangladesh was rocked by a series of violent incidents which included the brutal killing of Lal Chand Sohag, a trader in Dhaka on July 9, 2025. The BNP's cadre had to bear the blame.

The former Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina, who is based in New Delhi, has been in touch with her party cadre (the Awami League) on the ground but has not held a single press interaction, virtual or in person. She has not designated anyone on the ground in Dhaka as the party has been banned since May 2025 (In October 2024 Awami League's student wing was banned). Neither has she or her colleagues expressed remorse over the loss of lives in the protests of July-August 2024.

At the same time, the BNP's pitch for political power is weak as its top leadership is still in exile.

When senior BNP leaders organised a rally as a show of the BNP's strength in May 2025 and accused Mr. Yunus of delaying elections – the party had demanded elections by December 2025 – the BNP's Acting Chairman, Tarique Rahman, addressed the gathering from his London home (he has been based here for nearly two decades because of his disputes with Ms. Hasina and the military). Sources in the BNP have indicated that he may return in November but there has been no announcement of a definite date for his return.

That the BNP has still not been able to bring back Mr. Rahman from London in what is now a Hasina-free Bangladesh is a sign that its relations with the interim government are not as normal as they may appear. The BNP has not given a clear explanation for Mr. Rahman's absence in Dhaka, with the elections just months away. The Awami League's inability to delegate responsibility to some of its over ground leaders such as Saber Hossain Chowdhury has also not gone down well with the party's traditional supporters. The party's leaders who are in exile have countered this with the line that delegating responsibilities would make local leaders vulnerable to severe actions by the interim government. But the common man in Dhaka is of the opinion that a lack of delegation by Ms. Hasina only reveals the political insecurity of the Sheikh Hasina family.

The new players

The NCP and the Jamaat are increasing pressure on Mr. Yunus to ban more political parties and introduce a proportional representation (PR) system for the election. Their argument is that the PR system would ensure a "level playing field for all political parties". In fact, the PR system would increase pressure on the BNP which remains the sole inheritor of the older political system on the ground. The BNP has also been humiliated in campuses after facing defeat in the student union elections at Jahangirnagar University and Dhaka University where Jamaat-backed student panels won. Jamaat-student coordination on campuses is supported by the fact that some of the student activists were trained under the Jamaat's student wing, Shibir.

There are several takeaways from the emerging plot. First, the BNP's long-held argument that an interim government would be apolitical has been proved wrong. During the rule of the Sheikh Hasina-led Awami League, the BNP was the strongest proponent of an interim government to conduct credible elections. Yet, the 2024 interim government, which the BNP had welcomed initially, has in turn thrown up new challengers for the BNP. If the BNP wins the election in 2026 or manages to emerge as the single largest party, it would be because the history of the two-party-led system still has significant appeal in Bangladesh.

> With the general election scheduled for February 2026, student activists and the Bangladesh Jamaat-e-Islami could stump the Bangladesh Nationalist Party and the Awami League

The Army's muted stand

Second, the pause in two-party politics under the interim government has been a reality check for the Bangladesh military. Unlike his predecessors such as General Ershad, the current Bangladesh Army chief, Gen. Waker-Uz-Zaman, has refrained from direct interference in the political domain even though the army took over magisterial powers following the serious deterioration in the law and order situation. On occasions, Gen. Zaman has said that the military could step in if the interim government makes compromises in areas that the army considers vital for Bangladesh's security.

The Bangladesh army's real test is expected in winter 2025 when politics will heat up in Dhaka as the International Crimes Tribunal is to deliberate on the future of Ms. Hasina and her colleagues. At the moment, the army appears to be under pressure. In December 2024, Gen. Zaman was successful in scuttling the launch of the so-called July Proclamation that aimed to replace the 1972 constitution. But he could not do this on August 5, 2025 when Mr. Yunus announced it as a guiding document for Bangladesh.

Third, within the nationalism-centric party system of Bangladesh, the Jamaat-e-Islami, with its pro-Pakistan history of 1971, is yet to make a convincing nationalist pitch for the elections as it continues to be an organisation with a transnational ideological network across multiple countries including the United States, the United Kingdom and Pakistan. If the student leaders of the NCP and the Jamaat leadership can continue to keep the BNP under pressure during the interim administration (it has already banned the Awami League), a new political bloc featuring the Jamaat and popular student activists could well emerge as a determining force in the election. The Jamaat has a history of aligning with the BNP as a junior partner during 2001-06 (during 1991-96, it gave outside support to the BNP), but with the students, it could emerge as a senior partner.

Finally, the revival of the Jamaat and its riding the movement with popular student activists would provide it the vehicle that it has been searching for long. With this, it would be able to reinvent its problematic image and merge into the mainstream politics of Bangladesh.

kallol.b@thehindu.co.in

Powering up the Australia-India clean energy partnership



Lisa Singh

is a former Australian senator and the first woman of Indian heritage to be elected to federal Parliament. She is currently the Chief Executive Officer at the University of Melbourne's Australia India Institute



Tushar Joshi

is a Research Associate at the Australia India Institute and a PhD candidate at the University of Melbourne. He is a visiting fellow at the Observer Research Foundation, Delhi

At a time when both India and Australia are pushing ambitious clean energy targets, it is timely that Australia's Minister for Climate Change and Energy, Chris Bowen is arriving in Delhi today (October 15) to meet his Indian counterpart, New and Renewable Energy Minister Pralhad Joshi. His visit comes amidst confronting vulnerabilities in the global supply chains of businesses and the government grappling with how to meet ambitious targets in the clean energy transition. The central challenge is clear: how to scale up renewable energy while avoiding an ongoing overdependence on China, which dominates the processing and manufacturing of critical materials.

This is where the India-Australia Renewable Energy Partnership (REP), launched last year by Prime Ministers Narendra Modi and Anthony Albanese, must move from vision to implementation. If it is to succeed, both countries need to focus on joint projects, critical mineral cooperation and capacity building, turning climate ambition into practical, resilient outcomes. Mr. Bowen will have the chance to highlight the significance of this partnership when he delivers the Australia India Institute's Annual Oration in New Delhi this week.

A climate change vulnerable region

The Indo-Pacific is already experiencing the harshest effects of climate change. Between 1970 and 2022, the region averaged nearly 10 climate-related disasters a month, causing thousands of fatalities and billions in losses. By 2050, projections suggest as many as 89 million people could be displaced, with 80% of the region's population directly impacted.

To mitigate the challenges, India has pledged to reach 500 GW of non-fossil electricity capacity by 2030, with about 280 GW to come from solar. And it is already five years ahead of schedule to reach it. In July 2025, half of India's installed electricity capacity is now from non-fossil sources. Meanwhile, Australia has recently set a 62%-70% reduction in emissions below 2005 levels, by 2035, raising its climate ambition in line with net-zero goals.

> It can result in a resilient and regionally anchored clean energy ecosystem

Mr. Bowen said recently on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly that the emission reduction target is 'ambitious and achievable, but also investable'. Yet, targets alone do not insulate against structural risks. The global clean energy transition depends on critical minerals, solar components, batteries and hydrogen technologies.

The risks of single country dependence

Today, much of this value chain is concentrated in one country. China refines over 90% of rare earth elements and produces nearly 80% of global solar modules, giving it a pivotal role in the world's renewable energy supply.

For India, this dependence is acutely felt in sectors such as electric mobility and wind power, where the import of rare earth magnets and battery materials is unavoidable. For Australia, the story is different but connected: while it is one of the world's largest producers of lithium and has rich reserves of cobalt and rare earths, it lacks large-scale refining and downstream manufacturing.

This vulnerability has already been tested. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed supply chain fragilities when component shortages disrupted production across sectors. More recently, China restricted rare earth exports, which sent a warning signal to industries worldwide. For India, such disruptions slowed the electric vehicle production. A leading Electric Vehicle (EV) scooter company, for instance, produced just 10,824 units of its EV scooters in July, nearly halving output from a year earlier. For Australia, they underlined the risks of being a raw-material supplier alone. These examples make clear why downstream processing, diversification and supply chain resilience are not optional but strategic imperatives.

The REP presents a framework to respond to this challenge. It lays out cooperation across eight areas: solar photovoltaic technology, green hydrogen, energy storage, solar supply chains, circular economy in renewables, two-way investment, capacity building, and other shared priorities. Importantly, it also proposes a Track 1.5 Dialogue, bringing together policymakers, industry and research institutions to build practical collaboration.

A strong basis for collaboration

So, what does each side bring to the table? Australia's strengths lie in its resource base and regulatory stability. It can supply India with critical minerals such as lithium and rare earths, but the real value lies in co-investing in refining and processing infrastructure that strengthens the control both countries can have over the clean energy value chain. Australia's recent Net Zero Jobs Plan also reflects its focus on creating the skilled workforce needed for this transition, an area where collaboration with India makes sense.

India's own advantage lies in its scale and youth. With nearly two-thirds of its population under the age of 35, India's demographic dividend can be directed towards clean energy manufacturing, installation and maintenance through programmes such as Skill India. Its growing market demand for solar, storage and hydrogen, combined with production-linked incentive (PLI) schemes, offers Australian firms an avenue to expand investment while helping diversify supply chains. Together, Australia's resources and India's workforce can form the backbone of a more resilient and regionally anchored clean energy ecosystem.

Mr. Bowen's Delhi visit could not have come at a more crucial moment. Cooperation to deliver clean energy together could show the world how two democracies can respond to a region under constant threat of climate-related disasters and deliver resilient clean-energy supply chains to address it.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Rebuilding Gaza

Post-war reconstruction of Gaza is expected to generate a massive demand for manpower and materials, turning the region into one of the world's largest rebuilding zones. As international aid and funds flow in to clear the debris and rebuild houses, hospitals and infrastructure, India stands to benefit immensely. Beyond construction, Indian health-care professionals, teachers and IT technicians may be sought after to revive essential services and digital systems. Indian construction firms and MSMEs dealing in cement, steel, tiles and solar solutions can also tap into supply contracts through global tenders. Moreover, India's proven expertise in affordable housing, renewable energy and telemedicine can serve as vital tools for Gaza's revival. With proactive diplomatic engagement and government facilitation, this crisis can become a blessing in disguise — enhancing India's overseas employment, boosting remittances and projecting its soft power as a nation contributing to global humanitarian reconstruction.

R.S. Narula,
Patiala, Punjab

Though the present declaration is a welcome step to ensure peace in the region, rebuilding war-torn Gaza from the debris of mass destruction is a very challenging task. It is a *sine qua non* that reconstruction work needs to be taken up on a war footing.

S. Seshadri,
Chennai

West Indies in India

West Indian cricket lost its hegemony several decades ago. With the retirement of fearsome fast bowlers and explosive batsmen, its cricket touched a nadir and never recovered from it. As of now, it is not a force to reckon with. The clean sweep by India was only expected and, hence, this series does not mean much. The Indian cricket team's strength will have to be assessed against a stronger opposition, preferably in overseas conditions. But, this series served as an opportunity for youngsters such as Sai Sudharsan and Dhruv Jurel to stake a claim for a place in the playing eleven of the future ('Sport page', October 14).

V. Lakshmanan,
Tiruppur, Tamil Nadu

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A green advantage in tractor exports

The government's recent decision to cut the Goods and Services Tax (GST) rate on tractors to 5% is a timely boost for farmers and manufacturers alike. Lower costs are expected to accelerate mechanisation at home, contributing to a stronger domestic manufacturing base to support exports abroad. Yet the global regulatory landscape for such exports is shifting fast, as increasingly stringent emissions standards come into effect in the world's leading markets. India faces a defining choice: cling to low-cost competitiveness or pivot boldly towards cleaner, higher-value machines that can command global markets.



Aravind Harikumar
Researcher, ICCT



Amit Bhatt,
India Managing Director, ICCT

Regulatory limits for emissions

Tractors are the backbone of Indian agriculture. They are used to plough, sow, harvest, irrigate, transport produce, and manage crop residue. Their versatility across crops and terrains has made them indispensable, reducing drudgery and ensuring timely operations. This robust domestic base has propelled India to become a leading global supplier, with tractor exports totaling $1.15 billion and reaching 162 countries in 2024-25. But with growing volumes come growing externalities: an analysis by the International Council on Clean Transportation (ICCT) found that emissions from tractors and other non-road equipment in India are projected to surpass those from road vehicles by 2030. Policy has already begun to shift this trajectory. As discussed in a previous ICCT analysis, India's leap to Bharat Stage (TREM) IV standards for agricultural tractors in 2023 slashed the regulatory limit for particulate emissions by up to 94%, nearly closing the gap with the norms of the United States and European Union. By April 2026, Bharat Stage (TREM) V standards will bring most Indian tractors in line with U.S. Tier 4f and EU Stage V requirements.

These reforms aren't just environmental milestones; they are trade strategies. Regulatory alignment means Indian manufacturers can sell the same tractors in domestic and foreign markets, avoiding compliance costs and supporting economies of scale in production. A recent ICCT working paper on India's tractor exports found that such alignment may already be paying dividends. While overall tractor exports to the U.S. fell by 40% in 2023-24 and 10% in 2024-25, exports in the large segment (75-130 kW), where Indian and U.S. norms align, surged. Meanwhile, in Europe, exports to Belgium surged after the rollout of TREM IV led to a closer alignment of regulatory frameworks: medium-range tractors (37-75 kW) exported in 2023-24 were nearly 200 times the 2022-23 levels, while large tractor exports jumped from virtually zero to $28 million in 2024-25.

When Brazil introduced emission standards for tractors in 2017, the models that Indian manufacturers were selling domestically were already compliant, thanks to standards in effect in India since 2010. That head start gave Indian manufacturers an advantage. After Brazil's MAR-I standards came into effect (in 2017 and 2019), Indian tractor exports to Brazil climbed from $4.5 million in 2017-18 to $88 million in 2024-25 – a staggering CAGR of 65% – further highlighting how regulatory alignment can help enable demand for agricultural machinery.

Emission standards are not a burden but a passport to stronger trade



NAGARA GOPAL

An opportunity

To be clear, many factors influence global trade, and no causal link has been established between emission standards and tractor exports. Indeed, Indian tractor exports have also grown in markets without emission norms, such as Bangladesh, South Africa, and Thailand, where they are valued for reliability and affordability. Still, data from India's top seven tractor export destinations indicate that such exports increased with greater alignment of emission standards, either by enforcement of more stringent norms in India or by the importing country. Faced with rising tariffs in the U.S., Indian manufacturers have an opportunity to reposition themselves not merely as cost-competitive producers, but as higher-value, cleaner-technology suppliers. Cleaner machines often deliver lower lifetime costs, better efficiency, and resilience against future regulatory changes. TREM V's implementation will only strengthen India's standing, enabling smoother entry into Europe and the U.S. while extending leadership in emerging markets.

The lesson is clear: emission standards are not a burden but a passport to stronger trade. As tariffs rise and protectionism spreads, India must reposition itself not just as a low-cost producer but as a leader in clean agricultural machinery. Policy enablers, such as the GST cut and targeted incentives for electric tractors, can reinforce this shift. If India plays its cards right, tractors can do more than transform our farms; they can power our exports. Low-emission, high performance machines will not just meet global demand but set new benchmarks, turning India's tractor industry into a force that drives both rural growth and global trade.

Balancing empowerment with economics

The Stree Shakti scheme has shown early success, but faces a sustainability test

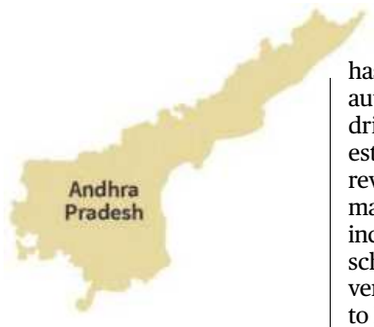
STATE OF PLAY

P. Sujatha Varma
pothuri.varma@thehindu.co.in

The Stree Shakti scheme, which offers free bus travel to girls, women, and transgender people across Andhra Pradesh, has been in effect for two months. So far, it has increased ridership, enhanced mobility for women, and generated positive public sentiment. However, beneath this encouraging start lie operational and financial concerns. Questions about sustainability, the strain on transport infrastructure, and equitable access challenge the long-term viability of Stree Shakti.

The scheme was launched on August 15, Independence Day, to highlight the government's resolve to advance women's independence and empowerment. Within the first 30 hours of its introduction, more than 12 lakh women passengers travelled for free by bus. The number has been steadily growing since then. According to data by the Andhra Pradesh State Road Transport Corporation (APSRTC), around 19.6 lakh women used the free bus service on August 31. By October 6, this number had increased to 28.3 lakh. The daily government subsidy also grew from ₹7.76 crore to ₹10.86 crore during this period and the number of Stree Shakti buses increased from 85 to 121.

This data reflects early success but also points to cost implications and the logistical adjustments needed to sustain such high usage over time. With an estimated annual cost of ₹1,942 crore and a monthly expense of ₹162 crore, the APSRTC will be reimbursed by the State government for the



scheme's costs through the submission of zero-fare tickets. However, the continuous allocation of such substantial funds could strain the State's finances, especially if economic conditions fluctuate.

Another challenge is overcrowding due to the shortage of vehicles in the APSRTC fleet. The waiting period has become long, particularly during peak hours. With the sudden surge in the number of women travelling by RTC buses, men are on the verge of becoming a minority onboard.

Officials have also reported a slight decline in the number of fare-paying passengers.

While trying to manage the existing fleet, they are awaiting the arrival of more than 700 electric buses, which may help ease the situation. Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu, who is keen on steering the State towards greener public transportation, has announced that all diesel vehicles in the RTC fleet will be replaced with electric buses.

The State Transport Corporation will need to build and maintain a comprehensive electrical ecosystem comprising high tension supply lines with dedicated feeders and substations, scalable charging stations, backup systems, and renewable energy integration. This is imperative not only to support electric mobility, but also to ensure safety, efficiency and resilience, say officials.

While the scheme has given women reason to celebrate, it has not been received well by auto-rickshaw and maxi cab drivers, who have been protesting across the State, citing revenue losses. They have demanded compensation for the income shortfall caused by the scheme. In response, the government announced the Auto Mitra programme, offering financial assistance of ₹15,000 annually to drivers. The drivers want this amount to be increased to ₹30,000 and also want some of their other demands to be fulfilled.

Meanwhile, the APSRTC employees' union has been urging the RTC management to procure more buses in view of the rising occupancy rate. Warning against the continued use of outdated buses, union leaders are demanding that the authorities buy at least 2,500 new buses – both electric and diesel – and also recruit 9,000 employees to reduce dependence on outsourcing.

The workers are also worried about the government's plan to operate electric vehicles under the Gross Cost Contract Model. Under this system, State Transport Units hire private bus operators to run electric buses. The government owns the buses, and private operators manage operations and maintenance under a contract, earning a fixed amount per kilometre. The proposed model has sparked fears of privatisation among workers of the State-run transport corporation.

The Stree Shakti is a significant step towards empowering women and has already delivered promising results. However, it also faces challenges related to implementation and financial sustainability. Addressing these concerns is essential to ensuring the scheme's long-term success.

Cybercrime cases of cheating by personation surge in Karnataka

Even as these cases surge, the police charge-sheeting rate and the conviction rate remain weak

DATA POINT

Devyanshi Bihani

According to government data, cybercrimes such as fake job offers, online investment frauds, fraudulent social media profiles, and impersonation scams have surged in recent years. The increase is most pronounced in Karnataka, which, in 2023, accounted for more than 70% of all such cases in India. Also, only about one in four such offences is charge-sheeted, and only around one in three of those that reach court ends in conviction. This suggests that many perpetrators go scot-free.

These types of cybercrimes fall under Section 66D of the Information Technology Act, 2000, which states: "Whoever, by means of any communication device or computer resource, cheats by personating, shall be punished with imprisonment of up to three years and a fine of up to one lakh rupees."

India has seen a sharp rise in cybercrime cases – from about 53,000 in 2021 to 66,000 in 2022 and roughly 86,400 in 2023. Karnataka alone accounted for more than a quarter of all cases reported nationwide in 2023 **(Map 1)**.

Karnataka's share of India's total cybercrime cases fell from a pre-pandemic high of over 25% in 2019 to 21% in 2020, 15% in 2021, and 19% in 2022, before rising again in 2023 **(Chart 2)**.

The sharp rise in cybercrime has been driven largely by cases under Section 66D ('cheating by personation using a computer resource'), especially in Karnataka. In the State, Section 66D's share of all cybercrime cases rose from 8.5% in 2019 to 70% in 2021 and 83% in 2023. Nationally, 66D's share in all cybercrime cases increased from 12% in 2019 to 21% in 2021 and 29% in 2023 **(Chart 3)**.

The cybercrime cases under 66D include instances such as the 'deepfake' video of actor Rashmika Mandanna that went viral in 2023. During the same year, a person posing as an official from the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India cheated a senior officer in the State Finance Department, which again falls under this Section. Another recent example is a case registered this month in Kashmir against five people for allegedly circulating a forged National Health Mission job selection list.

However, Karnataka should not be singled out as a cybercrime hotspot simply because case numbers are rising. Higher counts may reflect better trained police and more proactive recording of crimes. Karnataka was the first State to establish a dedicated city-level cybercrime police station. Under the Bengaluru City Police, eight cybercrimes, economic and narcotic offences units were set up in March 2017.

Nationally, the worrying trend is that while cybercrime numbers are rising, both the police charge-sheeting rate and the conviction rate in courts remain dismal.

In 2023, the charge-sheeting rate for Section 66D offences was just 25% in India (one in four), below the overall cybercrime average of 33.9%.

The conviction picture is troubling too: for Section 66D, only 33% (one in three) of cases that reached trial ended in conviction in India, only slightly higher than the 27.6% conviction rate across all cybercrime cases **(Chart 4)**.

Such low conviction rates raise questions about gaps in investigation, evidence handling, and legal preparedness. At Shield 2025, a cybersecurity conference held in Hyderabad earlier this year, a retired Supreme Court judge said the judicial system needs specialised training for lawyers, prosecutors, and judges handling cybercrime. In the same conference, Inspector General (Cybercrime), Rajasthan, voiced similar concerns, stressing that investigating officers must be digitally adept and be trained to respond quickly.

Digital fraud on the rise

The data for the charts were sourced from the National Crime Records Bureau (2019-2023)



Map 1: The State-wise share of total cybercrime cases across India in 2023

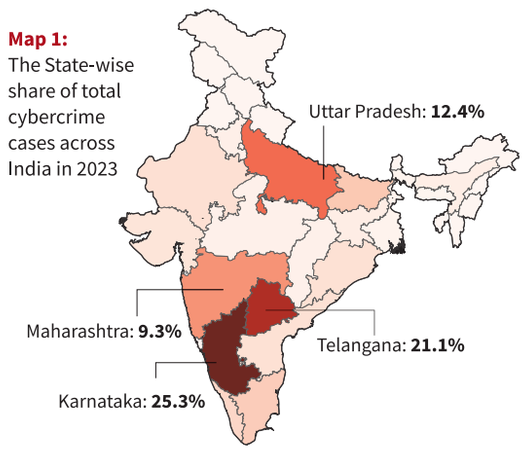


Chart 2: Karnataka's share in India's total cybercrime cases from 2019 to 2023

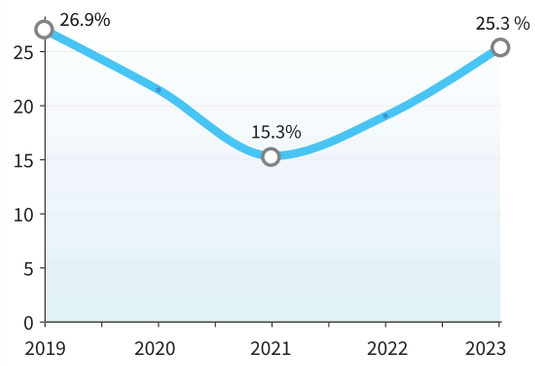


Chart 3: The share of cheating by personation cases (Section 66D) in total cybercrime cases from 2019 to 2023

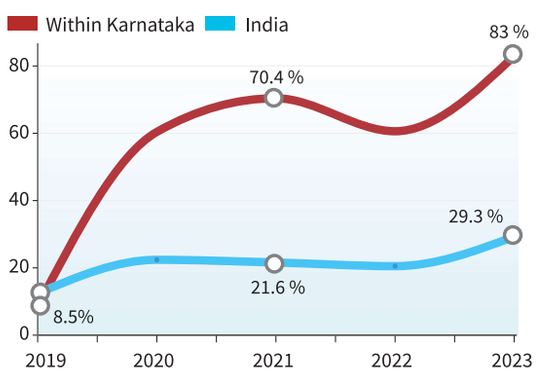
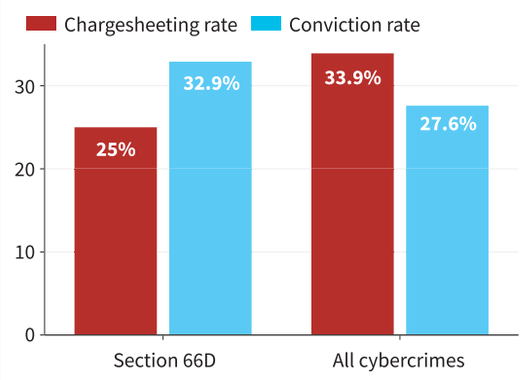


Chart 4: The charge-sheeting and conviction rates for Section 66D and all cybercrime cases in 2023



FROM THE ARCHIVES
The Hindu.

FIFTY YEARS AGO OCTOBER 15, 1975

Two share Nobel Prize in Economics

Stockholm, Oct. 14: Prof. Tjalling C. Koopmans of the U.S. and Prof. Leonid Kantorovich of the Soviet Union to-day shared the 1975 Nobel Prize in Economics for their study into the supply and demand of goods and services.

Mr. Koopmans (65) is a Professor at Yale University while Mr. Kantorovich (63) is a Professor at the Siberian Department of the Soviet Academy of Sciences.

The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, in giving the two men the Alfred Nobel Memorial Prize, said they had studied the problem "of how the available productive resources can be used to the greatest advantage in the production of goods and services."

It said the field embraced such questions as "what goods should be produced, what methods of production should be used, how much of current production should be consumed and how much redistributed to create new resources for future production and consumption."

The Academy said that though both worked independently of one another, both had "developed methods for the analysis of the classical problem of economics as regards the optimum allocation of scarce resources."

Prof. Kantorovich became a member of the Soviet Academy of Sciences in 1964 and holds three Orders of Lenin, including the Lenin Prize. He has worked on problems of the socialist economy, price formation, theory of rent efficiency and capital investment.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO OCTOBER 15, 1925

Madras X-ray institute

Mr. T. Subbaraya Mudaly, Retired Civil Surgeon, writes from Chingleput, under date October 12: The following extract from "The Lancet" dated September 19, will interest the Madras public, showing as it does the high opinion held in London of the X-Ray work, done in the Madras Government Institute – "The advance which has been made in the scientific application of photography is strikingly shown at the Exhibition of the Royal Photographic Society which opened its doors on Sept 14th at 35, Russell Square, London. Though pictorial prints never fail to interest the artistic sense, it is in scientific work that photography finds its real usefulness and in the camera research had found a most powerful ally."

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Text&Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Nationally significant cyberattacks in U.K. from Aug. 2024-2025

204 The U.K. government implored businesses to prioritise cyber security, as major incidents targeting them hit record levels. The National Cyber Security Centre revealed the centre dealt with 204 nationally significant attacks in the 12 months to end of August 2025. AFP

Number of Maoists arrested in the State of Jharkhand

266 A total of 32 Naxalites have been killed, and 30 have surrendered before security forces across Jharkhand this year till September. As many as 157 firearms, 18,884 detonators, 11,950 cartridges, 394.5 kg of explosives and 228 explosive devices were seized. PTI

Investment approved for Google's AI hub in Andhra Pradesh

15 In billion. The AI hub at Visakhapatnam will be Google's largest hub outside the U.S. and will include a 1-gigawatt data centre campus and an expanded fibre-optic network. The announcement was made during Bharat AI Shakti, a precursor event to the India-AI Impact Summit 2026. PTI

The drop in the number of wild elephants in India

18 In per cent. India's wild elephant population has been estimated at 22,446, lower than the 2017 figure of 27,312, as per India's first DNA-based count. The All-India Synchronous Elephant Estimation 2025 puts elephant population between 18,255 and 26,645, with an average of 22,446. PTI

Number of police encounters in Uttar Pradesh since 2017

15,726 The Uttar Pradesh Police has intensified its operations against criminals, neutralising or arresting several wanted suspects in nearly a dozen encounters in the last 20 days, the government said. PTI

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How innovation drives economic growth

Who won the Nobel prize for Economic Sciences this year? What is the difference between propositional knowledge and prescriptive knowledge? What is the theory of creative destruction? How much should a country invest in research and development?

EXPLAINER

T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan

The story so far:

On October 13, the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences announced that it had decided to award the 2025 Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences to Joel Mokyr, Philippe Aghion and Peter Howitt "for having explained innovation-driven economic growth". One half of the prize goes to Mr. Mokyr, while the other half will be divided between Mr. Aghion and Mr. Howitt.

Who are the winners?

Joel Mokyr was born in 1946 in Leiden, the Netherlands. He is currently a professor at Northwestern University. According to the award citation, he won the prize "for having identified the prerequisites for sustained growth through technological progress". Philippe Aghion was born in 1956 in Paris, France. He is currently a professor at Collège de France and INSEAD, Paris, and The London School of Economics and Political Science, U.K. Peter Howitt was born in 1946 in Canada and is a professor at Brown University in the U.S. Mr. Aghion and Mr. Howitt jointly won the other half of the award "for the theory of sustained growth through creative destruction".

What was Joel Mokyr's work?

To understand the work of all three economists, one must first understand the fact that global growth has been unusually sustained over the last 200 years, following centuries of stagnation. The work of all three economists, in different ways, tries to answer what happened in the last two centuries that set them apart. This will also help create a model of sorts for sustained growth into the future as well.

Through his research in economic history, Mr. Mokyr showed that a continual flow of "useful knowledge" is necessary for sustained growth. This useful knowledge, he theorised, has two parts: propositional knowledge and prescriptive knowledge. Propositional knowledge basically has to do with looking at the natural world and figuring out why something works. Prescriptive knowledge refers to actual practical instructions, drawings or recipes that describe what is necessary for something to work – like an instruction manual.



Huge honour: Recipients of the Nobel Prize in Economics announced in Stockholm, on October 13. AP

He argued that, prior to the Industrial Revolution, the world's leading innovators had a good command of propositional knowledge. That is, they had strong theories, after observing the world, of why things worked. This propositional knowledge, however, did not rest on a bedrock of prescriptive knowledge. Without the latter, it became next to impossible to build upon existing knowledge. This changed in the 16th and 17th centuries, Mr. Mokyr argued. Scientists started including precise measurement methods and controlled experiments in their work, and began to insist that results be reproducible.

What were implications on policy?

The policy prescription of Mr. Mokyr's research was twofold. The first was that new ideas would become a reality only if practical, technical and commercial knowledge was abundantly available. Without these, he argued that even brilliant ideas such as Leonardo da Vinci's helicopter designs would remain on the drawing board, as they indeed did. He argued that sustained growth first took place in Britain because it was home to many skilled artisans and engineers who were able to transform ideas into practical and commercial products, which was vital in achieving sustained growth. The policy implication from this is that governments must invest heavily in skilling if they want sustained growth. The other factor – and policy prescription – for sustained growth was that society should be open to change. Innovation invariably creates winners, but it also creates losers as new technologies replace existing ones. This can often lead to resistance to change from established interest groups.

What about Aghion and Howitt?

These two economists took the idea of "creative destruction" – where innovation leads to gains, but also the destruction of the incumbents – and created a mathematical model to capture it. They showed, through maths, how technological advancement leads to sustained growth.

The model developed by both of them can be used to analyse whether there is an optimal volume of R&D in society. There are two opposing trends here, as per the developed model. The first trend is that, when a new innovation comes in and replaces another, the benefits from the replaced technology still continue to flow to society, even if the company that developed it is no longer making profits from it. In other words, technology that has been outcompeted has more value for society than for the company that developed it. This makes it imperative that R&D be subsidised. However, the other competing trend is that when a company comes up with an innovation that rises to the top of the chain, it starts receiving bulk of the profits even though the actual improvement might have been only incremental. For society, the gain from this new technology is limited because it is only a relatively small improvement over the older technology. In such a scenario, investments into R&D might be too high. Therefore, under this trend, R&D should not be subsidised.

The answer to the question of how much R&D needs to happen will thus vary depending on the society and economy in question, but the model developed by the two economists lends a lot of insight into how to arrive at this optimal level.

THE GIST

- Joel Mokyr won the prize "for having identified the prerequisites for sustained growth through technological progress".
- Mr. Aghion and Mr. Howitt jointly won the other half of the award "for the theory of sustained growth through creative destruction".
- Through his research in economic history, Mr. Mokyr showed that a continual flow of "useful knowledge" is necessary for sustained growth. Mr. Aghion and Mr. Howitt took the idea of "creative destruction" — where innovation leads to gains, but also the destruction of the incumbents — and created a mathematical model to capture it.

How does Gaganyaan's vital crew escape system work?

Why is a Crew Escape System necessary for human space missions? How has the ISRO tested its CES?

Unnikrishnan Nair S.

The story so far:

The Gaganyaan mission aims to safely transport Indian astronauts to a low-earth orbit of around 400 km altitude using the human-rated LVM3 (HLVM3) rocket as the launch vehicle, and to return them safely. In human space missions, crew safety is more important than mission success. It is imperative that safety is addressed during all phases: launch pad, ascent, orbit, and descent.

What is the CES?

A dedicated Crew Escape System (CES) will be used during the initial part of the atmospheric phase of the Gaganyaan mission to ensure crew safety in the event of a contingency that jeopardises the mission. The CES is designed to rapidly separate the crew module, along with the crew, from a malfunctioning launch vehicle, and move it to a safe distance in the least possible time. The atmospheric phase of flight is one of the most critical stages of the ascent, during which the rocket accelerates to hypersonic speeds – more than five times the speed of sound – and will be experiencing very high structural loads. The HLVM3 rocket is equipped with two powerful S200 solid-fuel boosters to lift off, and unlike liquid or cryogenic engines, solid motors cannot be shut down once they are ignited. Thus, the CES must extract the crew module with greater acceleration than the launch vehicle itself, and in minimal time. In the Gaganyaan mission, the CES could impart acceleration up to 10-times that of gravity. For a healthy human body, such high acceleration is tolerable for a few seconds if the crew is positioned correctly, with the acceleration acting perpendicular to the chest and the body pressed against the seat in a "child in cradle" orientation. Rocket systems are more intricate than those of aircraft, with rocket reliability much lower than that of passenger aircraft. Nevertheless, the CES significantly improves crew survival probability through its heritage-based design, redundant systems, and robust mission planning.

What are different types?

The CES is classified into two types based on the way it extracts the crew module: (i) puller type – used in Gaganyaan, where the CES pulls the crew module away from the launch vehicle; (ii) pusher type – used in vehicles like SpaceX's Falcon 9, where the crew module is pushed away using compact, high-thrust liquid-fuel engines. Both systems have advantages and disadvantages, with the choice depending on propulsion technology and system integration aspects. Once the CES has moved the crew module a safe distance away from the failing vehicle, the module will be released and decelerated by a multistage parachute system. This will reduce the module's velocity in steps, ensuring it splashes down safely in the sea without exceeding the crew's physiological limits upon impact. Typically, the crew will remain inside the module until splashdown. But during the Soviet Union's first human spaceflight, Yuri Gagarin ejected from the Vostok module at approximately 7 km altitude and parachuted safely to the ground.

The Integrated Vehicle Health Management system, which is a network of sensors, electronics, and software, will aid in taking a decision to activate the CES when a contingency arises. It will monitor all vital parameters of vehicle systems and crew health in real time.

Has it been tested?

The ISRO has developed a cost-effective, single-stage Test vehicle powered by the Vikas engine to validate the CES. The first successful test occurred in October 2023, during which the CES was activated when the Test vehicle reached transonic conditions – a critical phase in atmospheric flight when the velocity transitions from subsonic to supersonic. ISRO plans additional Test vehicle flights to simulate other critical ascent trajectory conditions. The CES is a cornerstone of the Gaganyaan programme and reflects ISRO's commitment to astronaut safety.

Unnikrishnan Nair S. is former director, VSSC; Founding Director, HSFC.

THE GIST

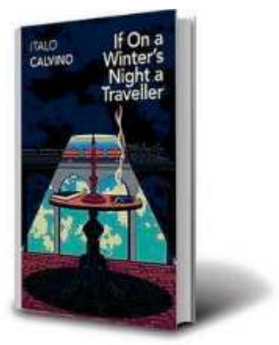
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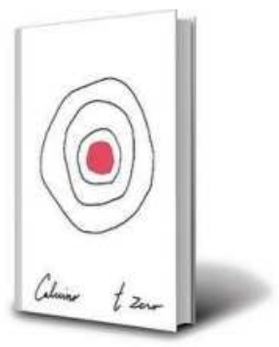
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Italo Calvino in Rome, December 1984. GETTY IMAGES





Author and algorithm: Calvino, cybernetics, and ghosts in the machine

What lies underneath the warm rapport between writer and reader? On Italo Calvino's birthday, we re-read his work to understand the logic of storytelling, the hidden design of language, the limitations of machines and why they can never replicate human imagination

Jonathan Koshy Varghese

Somewhere in the middle of *If on a winter's night a traveller* (1979), Italo Calvino (October 15, 1923-September 19, 1985) writes something quietly profound about our relationship with words: "It is only through the confining act of writing that the immensity of the nonwritten becomes legible." Writing, he suggests, is a way of mapping the frontiers of what cannot yet be said. The writer becomes a guide, giving form to formless, and likely elusive ideas, turning them into something perceptible. Into something realisable. Writers dream, and we, caught in their dreaming, learn how to dream.

And as readers, we follow the written word with a covenantal faith, both restless and patient, guided by the hope that somewhere within another's words we might find the faint outline of our own.

The literature machine

Yet Calvino knew that underneath this warm rapport between writer and reader lay a structure, an inherent and incipient machinery of language itself. In his celebrated lecture, Cybernetics and Ghosts (1967), delivered a decade earlier, he stripped away the aura of inspiration, describing writing instead as a play of patterns, as a combinatorial art. The first storyteller of the tribe, he proposed, was already performing a kind of computation, testing how words might fit together to mirror the world. He owed his hypothesis to the works of Vladimir Propp, whose studies of Russian folktales disclosed their narrative structures, and to Claude Lévi-Strauss, whose analysis of Brazilian indigenous myths illuminated the underlying logic of storytelling.

Calvino's influences range from the French avant-garde journal *Tel Quel* to Noam Chomsky and A. J. Greimas. Between them, he discerned an intangible and perhaps hidden design in language. He called this schema the literature machine. This machine, Calvino declared, performs all the permutations possible. It exhibits the desire to build, from its finite materials, a space where meaning might take root. Yet, Calvino insists, perhaps with hope, that the telling of the story demands a human medium: a consciousness whose depths and contradictions shape the arrangement of these combinations. This figure, the storyteller, consecrates the machine's output with intention and desire. The storyteller stitches the individual and the social into a distinct fabric.

In our own times, the idea of the machine, if any, is no longer elusive. What Calvino once imagined as metaphor has taken form in algorithms adept enough to engender stories, poems, and voices that mimic humans. Expectedly the question has resurfaced: where, in this vast mechanism of language, does the storyteller stand? The programs we build can perform permutations, but they cannot, as Calvino said, consecrate them. ChatGPT has studied the contours of syntax, but it has not taught itself the burden of human experience. It can simulate the pattern of human reason, but it cannot grasp the soundness of our unreason. And if it can perceive our flaws, it does not, one is convinced, understand them. For it can never know what it can neither experience nor understand – human failure. It is programmed to be infallible. And in that perfection, it is bereft of the very thing that lends meaning to a story, that imparts to our greatest stories their enduring depth. Nevertheless, not all would agree.

Imagination and intelligence

For a long time, we have been fascinated by representations of machines as humans. One thinks of Mamoru Oshii's *Ghost in the Shell* (1995), Wachowskis' apocalyptic visions in *The Matrix* series, or more recent productions such as *The Creator* (2023). These productions explore the liminality between human and machine, repeatedly raising questions about consciousness. All of them are animated by an anxiety rooted in human arrogance: the dread of obsolescence, the possibility of being overcome by a superior form of intelligence.

Since Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818), this fear has persisted at the limits of our imagination. She popularised the archetype of the creator who feared and resented his creation. It is a schema that has come to be reiterated through gothic and science-fiction narratives ever since, shaping the stories we tell about machines. Time and again, biblical catastrophe, punctuated by moral reckoning, is endlessly reshaped and retold: the human mind confronted with a reflection of its own power and its own fallibility, the familiar terror of displacement and the enduring question of what it means to be truly alive. The advent of Artificial Intelligence (AI) is habitually cast in apocalyptic terms.

On reading

Calvino, however, is not concerned with the apocalypse. Where Shelley's creator feared being undone by his own creation, Calvino turns the focus toward the authorial encounter with the reader. Having dismantled the authority of the author, as Roland Barthes did in *The Death of the Author*, Calvino turns his attention to the reader. In Cybernetics and Ghosts, he reminds us that a text comes fully alive only in the mind of the reader, who navigates it independently, shaping its meaning beyond the author's intent. This guiding idea informs the architecture of his *t zero* (1967) and finds expression in his regard for Jorge Luis Borges' *The Garden of Forking Paths* (1941), in which the narrative forms a network of endless semantic potential. This preoccupation reaches its fullest expression in *If on a winter's night a traveller*, where the reader becomes the protagonist, the very centre of a narrative that unfolds endlessly. Calvino termed it a hyper-novel. Here, literature achieves its depth, its critique, and its humanity through the unpredictable, conscious, and reflective mind that inhabits it. Consciousness, it would seem, has ousted the writing machine.

In the time of AI and ruthless optimisations, writing has changed. So has reading. Calvino's words, however, call for interim pauses. And in these pauses, between the author and the reader, between the finite design and infinite interpretation, he invites us to regard the perseverance of human imagination, the very thing machines, however sophisticated, cannot replicate.

The writer teaches Literature at Lady Shri Ram College. He is associated with the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales.



Language in conversation

Vaishali R. Venkat

"Hi, Magi. Your eyes look so sunken! Are you binge-watching?"

"No, Millie. I was surfing the net looking for something fun and enlightening. But alas! I ended up reading only about disasters, accidents, downfalls, scandals, and heartbreaks."

"Magi, looks like the little imp in you has been at work. It has unleashed the devil of non-stop 'doomscrolling'."

"Hey, wait. Devil, doom what? Do you mean my phone is possessed?"

"No, Magi, your phone isn't possessed. You are the one who's trapped in the world of doomscrolling. It means endlessly scrolling through bad news online, even if it makes you petrified. By the way, mere doomscrolling won't keep the apocalypse from knocking at your door, Magi!"

"Doomscrolling! There's a name for a hopeless addict like me."

"You're not alone. Many have jumped onto the bandwagon of this midnight misery. In fact, Oxford added the word in its dictionary too."

"Great, Millie! So how do I use 'doomscrolling' in a sentence?"

"You can use 'doomscrolling' as both a verb and a noun."

"Let's first discuss it as a noun, Millie."

"The word 'doomscrolling' is a gerund. Gerunds are verbs ending in '-ing', but they act as nouns in a sentence. They can function as a subject, an object, or as a complement."

"Please give me examples."

"As a subject, you can say – Doomscrolling is dangerous to mental health. As an object – I can't control my doomscrolling at all. As a complement – The favourite hobby of millennials is doomscrolling."

"Let's proceed to the verb now."

"As a verb, it's simple, Magi. You have five inflectional forms: doomscroll, doomscrolls, doomscrolled, doomscrolling and doomscrolled."

"But wait ... what are inflectional forms, Millie?"

"Inflectional forms are the different versions of a verb that show tense, number, or person. Essentially, they're just modified forms of a verb created by adding a few suffixes. For example, let's take 'doomscroll': doomscroll is the base form; doomscrolls – third-person singular present; doomscrolled – simple past; doomscrolling – present participle/gerund; and doomscrolled – past participle."

"So much in verbs!"

"Yes, Magi. Whenever you come across a new verb, you must learn it along with all its inflectional forms. Otherwise, there's no point in learning the verb."

"Have you learnt verbs this way?"

"Oh, yes! In fact, I used to mark all the inflectional forms of verbs on a folded sheet, like a scroll from the kingdoms long ago. I still have a few dusty ones at home."

"What's this scroll in the kingdom you're talking about?"

"The scroll I mean is more like an old-time news bulletin, which kings used to announce events. It was a piece of paper or parchment, rolled up or folded – almost like a royal tweet of its time!"

THE DAILY QUIZ

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

A.P.J Abdul Kalam was born on this day in 1931. Here is a quiz on the scientist and former President of India

Sindhu Nagaraj

QUESTION 1
What is the title he was mainly associated with?

QUESTION 2
It is said that Kalam narrowly missed out on this ambition of his as he was placed ninth in qualifiers, and only eight positions were available in the said field. What was it?

QUESTION 3
In 1969, Kalam transferred to ISRO where he became the project director of India's first satellite launch vehicle which successfully deployed which satellite in near-earth orbit in July 1980?

QUESTION 4
What are Kalam-Raju stents and Kalam-Raju tablets?

QUESTION 5
According to what he has stated, what was the toughest decision he had to take during his tenure as the President?



Visual question:
Identify this person. How was she associated with Abdul Kalam?

Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz: 1. The Cuban Missile Crisis started because Fidel Castro had agreed to host Soviet missiles after the failed ___ __ ____ attack in 1961. **Ans: Bay of Pigs**
2. The crisis was resolved when Khrushchev agreed to withdraw the missiles from Cuba in exchange for the U.S. pledging to not do this. **Ans: Invade Cuba**
3. U.S. President John F. Kennedy secretly agreed to remove 15 Jupiter missiles his government had installed here by March 1962. **Ans: Turkey**
4. One of the more popular outcomes of the Cuban Missile Crisis was the nuclear _____. **Ans: Hotline**
5. The crisis prompted the Partial Test Ban Treaty, which would prevent _____ nuclear testing. **Ans: Atmospheric**
Visual: The name given to the scandal involving a KGB member who defected to the U.S. in 1961. **Ans: Martel affair (Sapphire affair)**
Early Birds: Erfanally Oosmany| Sudhir Thapa| Sujith.B| Aaradhya Yadav| Sunil Madhavan

Word of the day

Prognostication:
a sign of something about to happen; a statement made about the future; knowledge of the future (usually said to be obtained from a divine source)

Synonyms: omen, forecasting, foretelling, prediction, prophecy

Usage: *The goal of his prognostication was not to frighten but to warn.*

Pronunciation: newsth.live/prognostication pro

International Phonetic Alphabet: /prɒgnɒstɪkeɪʃən/

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The Statesman
Incorporating and directly descended from the Friends of India -founded 1818

The AI Mirage

The euphoria surrounding artificial intelligence has reached a fever pitch. Valuations are soaring, capital is flooding in, and the world's most powerful technology firms are bound together in a web of overlapping investments so intricate that few can tell where genuine demand ends and financial self-dealing begins. It feels exhilarating, and eerily familiar.

History has seen this movie before. Each technological revolution begins with an idea so transformative that it reshapes not just industries, but imagination itself. Then come the investors, the valuations, the limitless projections ~ until the market begins to believe its own fiction. Artificial intelligence is no exception.

The sheer velocity of money moving into the sector suggests not only confidence, but dependence. When chipmakers invest billions in AI firms that in turn spend those billions buying their chips, what results is not organic growth, but a closed circuit of optimism.

At the centre of this cycle is the belief that AI's potential justifies any price. That sentiment has driven private valuations into the stratosphere and concentrated an extraordinary amount of financial power into a handful of firms. Yet, beneath the glamour of innovation lies a sobering fact: most leading AI companies are not profitable.

Their revenue curves are impressive, but they depend on enormous infrastructure investments and spiralling operating costs. When even insiders begin to question whether demand is being inflated through "vendor financing," the comparison to past speculative bubbles becomes difficult to ignore.

The danger is not confined to Silicon Valley. The modern economy has become so tightly coupled to the promise of AI that a sharp correction could ripple across markets, from hardware manufacturing to cloud computing to real estate.

Billions are being poured into data centres in deserts and hinterlands, each of them an immense facility whose environmental and financial costs will endure long after investor enthusiasm fades. If demand slows, these complexes may become the rusting monuments of a technological gold rush gone awry.

It is tempting to dismiss these warnings as premature. Optimists argue that even overinvestment has its upside ~ that the infrastructure laid today will serve future generations of innovation, much as excess fiber-optic cabling built during the dot-com era later powered the digital age.

That may well prove true. But unlike the internet, which grew on open protocols and distributed creativity, today's AI ecosystem is dominated by a few intertwined giants whose fortunes depend on each other's solvency.

If the flow of easy capital tightens, even temporarily, the illusion of infinite growth could collapse with startling speed. The AI revolution is real but its financial underpinnings are fragile.

When markets begin to treat hope as collateral, the line between progress and speculation vanishes. The true test of this era will not be how much AI can build, but whether it can stand without the scaffolding of its own hype.

Bunker Paradox

Something remarkable is happening in the world of technology's most powerful figures. The same individuals who champion progress, innovation, and the promise of artificial intelligence are quietly building fortresses against an imagined apocalypse. Beneath their talk of "sustainable abundance" lies a contradictory impulse: the urge to retreat from the very world they are shaping.

Mark Zuckerberg's sprawling estate in Hawaii, complete with underground shelter and self-sufficient energy systems, is more than an eccentric indulgence.

It is reflection of the unease that runs through the highest echelons of the tech elite. Sam Altman has mused about taking refuge in remote corners of the world if global catastrophe strikes, while Ilya Sutskever reportedly joked that a bunker might be needed before releasing the next great leap in machine intelligence.

These anecdotes might seem outlandish, yet they speak to a shared anxiety: that the systems they are building could one day spin beyond human control.

This phenomenon reveals something profound about the psychology of extreme wealth and unrestrained ambition. These are not mere homes with reinforced basements; they are symbols of a growing crisis of confidence. The architects of our digital future appear to be hedging their bets, advancing civilization while preparing to survive its possible collapse.

There is irony in this duality. The same visionaries who speak of curing diseases, ending poverty, and achieving universal comfort through artificial intelligence are preparing for social fragmentation and systemic failure.

The impulse to control the future ~ by programming algorithms, buying islands, or digging underground ~ betrays a loss of faith in collective human resilience. It suggests that even those steering technology's course no longer trust the systems they have built or the societies that depend on them.

The bunker mentality reflects a crisis of imagination as much as fear. It shows how the dream of limitless innovation has curdled into dread, a future no longer shared, but privatised, where technology's masters prepare for isolation instead of interdependence.

The billionaire bunker, then, is more than a private refuge. It is a metaphor for a deeper moral retreat. Instead of engaging with the societal consequences of AI, climate change, or widening inequality, some of the world's most influential minds seem to be withdrawing from them.

A growing number of voices, including within global health and governance circles such as the WHO, have warned that humanity's survival depends on strengthening collective systems, not personal escape plans.

The lesson is clear: survivalism among the elite is not a solution, it is a symptom. The true challenge lies not in perfecting artificial intelligence or building bunkers, but in restoring confidence in shared futures. If innovation continues to outpace accountability, then the billionaires digging deep into the earth are not preparing for an imagined doomsday. They are rehearsing for one of their own making.

Testing times

Each year, 22 million aspirants apply for one lakh central government jobs, exams with a cruel 0.5 per cent success rate. These aspirants spend their youth chasing a mirage, neither working nor building any skills. If a candidate spends one year, the wastage explodes to 824 crore human-days annually, representing Rs 5.59 lakh crore in foregone economic output



India is one of the youngest countries in the world, with over 80 crore population (about 65 per cent) under the age of 35. The nation is currently in its demographic dividend phase, a 50-year window (2005-2055) of economic growth potential, when the proportion of working-age individuals (15-64 years) is large enough to support children and the elderly.

However, realizing this dividend requires access to quality education, skills development, and job creation to ensure youth can fully contribute. The critical questions are: Will India capitalise on this opportunity? Are we sure our youth are not riding an altogether different bus?

Each year, about 22 lakh students take NEET-UG for two lakh MBBS and related seats and 14 lakh attempt JEE Main for 42,000 IIT and other spots. Assuming 2.5 years (912.5 days) of preparation per student, NEET's 20 lakh unsuccessful candidates spend 182 crore human-days. JEE's 13.5 lakh add another 123 crore, bringing the total to 305 crore wasted human-days annually. This translates into Rs 2.07 lakh crore in lost output, that could fund 115-390 new medical colleges with attached hospitals (Rs 528-1,760 crore each); and in the following year, 235-470 engineering colleges (Rs 440–880 crore each). For these 33 lakh unsuccessful students, their childhood is forever lost without any equivalent gain. If they had played a sport of their choice, some could have become successful professionals or at least enjoyed a healthier life.

Additionally, the NSS 80th round Comprehensive Modular Survey: Education, 2025 shows 27 per cent of students opt for private coaching at Rs 2,409 average, scaling to Rs 16,116 crore just for higher secondary levels. As per Infinium Global Research, India's coaching business is now worth Rs 70,000 crore, projected to double by 2028.

The problem extends beyond these two exams. Over 10 lakh aspirants appear for the Civil Services exam (CSE) annually, targeting about 1,000 positions. This is dwarfed by the millions pursuing other government jobs (detailed below). Sanjeev Sanyal of the PM's Economic Advisory Council calls CSE coaching a "massive misallocation of talent," akin to a "mafia selling opium."

A lucky dip for selection would be more humane. It would at least save the time, money, and energy of lakhs, to be spent in other meaningful fields contributing to the nation's growth.

Children as young as 13 internalise a message of failure from a system designed to eliminate over 90 per cent of them, leading to lifelong trauma, depression, and sense of guilt over wasted time.

According to the NCRB's Crime in India 2023, India lost 1,17,849 students to suicide between 2013 and 2023. The number climbed to a record high of 13,892 in 2023 alone, a 6.5 per cent increase from 2022.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) guarantees every child the right to develop their personality and talents to the fullest potential (Article 29), as well as the right to rest, leisure, and play (Article 31). India, as a signatory, is obligated to uphold CRC's core principle of prioritizing the 'best interests of the child.'

Moved by the suicide of a girl in a coaching centre, the Supreme Court, in Sukdeb Saha v. State of Andhra Pradesh, in July, had to issue guidelines to prohibit batch segregation and public shaming based on performance. In March, in Amit Kumar v. Union of India, the Court had set up a National Task Force headed by Justice S. Ravindra Bhat to recommend reforms in higher education.

The UNICEF YuWaah ~ iDreamCareer Bharat Career Aspirations Report 2025 finds that only 10.4 per cent of students have access to professional career counselling; 78 per cent lack any backup career plan. Among 21,239 students surveyed, merely 6 per cent had used any tool to identify their strengths and weaknesses, and very few had access to psychometric assessments. Students denied this guidance are vulnerable to uncertainty and unqualified advice.

This career guidance gap has already had catastrophic consequences. Each year, 22 million aspirants apply for one lakh central government jobs, exams with a cruel 0.5 per cent success rate. These aspirants spend their youth chasing a mirage, neither working nor building any skills. If a candidate spends one year, the wastage explodes to 824 crore human-days annually, representing Rs 5.59 lakh crore in foregone economic output.

This tragedy is preventable: If students knew from Class 10 onwards that government job exams have a 0.5 per cent success rate, comparable to a school cricketer making it to the Indian national team, most would develop back-up plans, pursue skill development, or explore private-sector careers. Netherlands uses aptitude and personality assessments at age 15 to guide students. Students in many countries, including Cyprus, South Africa, Australia, Thailand, and Finland utilize psychometric tests for informed career and subject selection, with professional support.



SRINIVAS MADHAV

The writer is a transparency and equality advocate and author

Exams need to be reimagined as coaching-resistant, scientific aptitude tests, not memory contests. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 proposes a high-quality common aptitude test "rather than having hundreds of universities each devising their own entrance exams."

India already has world-class models. The Services Selection Board (SSB) for the armed forces uses assessments of intelligence, personality, leadership, and judgment. Tests like Word Association, Situation Reaction, and Self-Description gauge psychological suitability for military service.

The armed forces' success in producing principled leaders is visible. Officers selected by the SSB consistently demonstrate integrity, resilience, and a willingness to sacrifice for the national interest. In contrast, a system that rewards cracking an exam often overlooks substance. This risks creating a generation of professionals who are skilled at test-taking but may lack the strength to withstand administrative and political pressures or innovation.

For finding scientific innovators, India's National Olympiad programme could be leveraged. If only students who achieve a qualifying score in such exams were made eligible to sit for JEE or NEET, the candidate pool would shrink from lakhs to a few thousand genuinely qualified aspirants. Olympiads have proven to be one of the most effective ways to identify exceptional scientific talent.

The Economist in its article "How to Spot a Genius" (Sep. 27), research by R. Agarwal, P. Gaule, and Y. Jiang (2025) found that one in every forty gold medallists at the International Mathematical Olympiad later earns a major science prize, a success rate fifty times higher than that of MIT undergraduates. Half of OpenAI's founders began their journeys through Olympiads.

However, the proposal might appear elitist and could face opposition for seemingly excluding rural and economically disadvantaged students who are less familiar with Olympiads.

The NEP's emphasis on holistic progress, competency-based assessment, and integration of vocational education needs massive investment in developing vocational academies on the German model, where a 'master craftsperson' in mechatronics is valued and often earns more than a generic engineer. South Korea's economic miracle was not built by doctors alone, but also by technicians, and designers.

Nobel laureate Abhijit Banerjee cautions that "the lives of our young are dominated by a testocracy masquerading as meritocracy." A nation aspiring to be the Vishwa Guru cannot afford to let its best minds spend their youth memorising rather than innovating.

The Korea Herald

Europe's steel fortress

A steel tariff shock has landed, this time from the European Union. On Oct. 7, the European Commission unveiled a sweeping plan to halve duty-free quotas on steel imports and double the tariff on excess volumes from 25 to 50 percent.

The EU's move confirms that protectionism is back in fashion. For South Korea, the second-largest supplier to Europe after China, it closes off one of its key open markets. After Washington's tariff surge earlier this year, the EU's move tightens the squeeze. The new plan will replace the current safeguard system when it expires next June. Global tariff-free quotas will shrink from roughly 30.5 million metric tons to 18.3 million tons, and any imports beyond that will face a punitive 50 percent duty. Member states are expected to ratify the proposal within months, and early implementation has not been ruled out. Brussels insists that national allocations will remain subject to negotiation and that free trade partners could enjoy flexibility. In practice, shrinking quotas leave every exporter fighting for a smaller share. The rationale is familiar. European steelmakers, battered by Chinese oversupply and energy-price shocks, have pressed for breathing space. The new regime includes "melt and pour" origin tracking to prevent circumvention through third countries, a clear signal aimed at Asian detours.

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The timing is equally revealing. The EU's plan comes just months after the US doubled its own steel tariffs to 50 percent. The world's two largest economies now seem to be converging on a new industrial nationalism. The rules-based trading order, once the pride of the transatlantic alliance, is showing cracks. For South Korea, the blow lands hard. Exports to the EU last year reached $4.48 billion, slightly exceeding those to the US. Roughly 3.8 million tons entered Europe, most under the existing quota system. In contrast, South Korea's steel shipments to the US have plunged since March, when Washington revoked Seoul's quota privileges and expanded its high-tariff list to hundreds of downstream products. The strategy of offsetting American losses with European gains has crumbled. Worse, the products most affected ~ hot-rolled, cold-rolled and galvanized steel sheets ~ are Korea's high-value anchors. Yet resignation would be premature. South Korea retains one advantage: its free-trade agreement with the EU. That legal foundation should be used to the fullest in bilateral negotiations, particularly for premium flat-steel categories where Korean quality has no near substitute. The government's plan to convene a public-private task force and advance the long-pending "K-steel law" is a start, but it must be paired with tougher diplomacy. Trade quotas often follow political logic more than market sense. Without strategic lobbying in Brussels and key member capitals, Seoul risks being outflanked by louder voices. In the longer term, the industry's survival will depend less on tariff appeals than on reinvention. The EU's climate regime ~ carbon-border adjustment, green-steel subsidies and strict emissions caps ~ already sets the terms of future competitiveness. Korean producers must accelerate investment in low-carbon, high-margin steel, where regulation can be leveraged as an advantage. Establishing production bases within Europe, though costly, would also hedge against recurring tariff shocks.

The broader picture is hardly encouraging. From Washington to Brussels, protectionism is no longer a populist outburst but official doctrine. Each move normalizes the next and sets off another round in the global trade spiral.

South Korea cannot stop that domino effect, but it can avoid being crushed by pairing deft diplomacy abroad with technological self-reliance at home.

PERSONAL

THANK You ST. JUDE for Prayers Granted. — Dwaipayan Chaudhuri.

Letters To The Editor | editor@thestatesman.com

Solar journey

Sir, I am delighted to to read the report, "India to replicate solar pump scheme in Africa, other developing countries", (*The Statesman*, October 13). It is a matter of great pride that today India is being spoken of in the world in the field of solar energy.

In reality, now, we are the third largest in solar power, fourth largest in wind power and overall, we are now the third largest "renewable energy" installation in the world.

It is undeniable that the Prime Minister's solar energy initiative is a silent revolution for the development of the country, especially in rural areas. This project has quietly brought success by relying on concentration in work without relying on unnecessary publicity.

The PM Surya Ghar ~ Muft Bijli Yojana, which aims to solarise 10 million households, and the PM-KUSUM scheme for farm-level solarisation (deploying solar energy at both utility and distributed levels ~ through household and farm-level initiatives) is one of the brightest presentations to India's utility networks.



It may be noted that the impact of the "climate change" movements in India was first felt in 1982 when the then government took an initiative to think deeply on issues related to reducing "carbon dioxide emissions" and reducing reliance on fossil fuels. A Ministry of "Renewable Energy" was formed in 1982. Unfortunately, we then saw a lack of enthusiasm for a long time, except some signs of solar installations in 2010.

But 2015 saw a radical improvement with India becoming one of the world's fastest adopters of solar power.

Yours, etc., Rupam Guha,
Kolkata, 13 October.

Unrepentant

Sir, Apropos the letter "Stunned" by A G Rajmohan published today, I am not at all stunned by the bigotry existing in our country even in the digital era. The abortive bid of senior advocate Rakesh Kishore to lob a shoe at the second Dalit Chief Justice of India is a typical example of profligate conduct which occurred weeks after the judge faced the music with regard to his remark "go and ask the deity itself" while hearing a plea about restoration of a damaged Vishnu idol in the Khajuraho complex in Madhya Pradesh.

The 71-year-old advocate, Kishore, while he was taken away shouted "India will not tolerate the insult of Sanatan Dharma." Indeed there was not a shadow of repentance.

Yours, etc., Anindya Ghosal,
Burdwan, 9 October.

Congrats

Sir, Double congratulations to Smriti Mandhana for the "double record" in Women's International ODI cricket. She made most runs (1053 in 18 matches) in a calendar year (surpassing Australian Belinda Clark's record of 973 runs in 16 matches in 1997).

During her quickfire 80 against Australia, she became the second Indian to complete 5,000 runs in international ODI. She is the youngest and fastest to achieve this feat (at 29 years and in just 112 matches).

Mandhana is playing extremely well this season. I wish her many more world records.

Yours, etc., Sreelekha PS,
Secunderabad, 12 October.

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Eradicating LWE will unlock huge economic potential

TUHIN A. SINHA

For decades, India's heartland was scarred by the spectre of Maoist violence, entrenched in the mineral-rich but underdeveloped tribal belts of central and eastern India. Districts like Bastar in Chhattisgarh and Gadchiroli in Maharashtra - once synonymous with fear, extortion, and stagnation -exemplified a tragic paradox: immense natural wealth shackled by insurgency. The Left-Wing Extremism (LWE) menace throttled mining, agriculture and forest-based industries, depressing regional growth and draining national GDP.

However, a historic turnaround is underway. The Modi government's unwavering resolve to eradicate Naxalism by 31 March 2026, represents not merely a security milestone but an economic rebirth for the impacted regions. Under the Prime Minister's visionary leadership and Home Minister Amit Shah's resolute political will, India has mounted its most determined campaign to end decades of bloodshed and usher in peace. Their coordinated security and development push has decisively weakened insurgent networks, paving the way for prosperity to replace fear. A Naxal-free India will unleash the latent potential of these long-ignored districts - transforming them into engines of growth through infrastructure, industry, and renewable energy initiatives. The toll of Naxalism on India's economy has been deep and enduring. Growth rates in affected districts lagged 2-3 percentage points below the national average, as disrupted supply chains, project abandonments, and extortion drained confidence. Yet, the intensified counter-insurgency efforts of recent years are already bearing fruit. Restored law and order has rekindled private investment, improved logistics, and revived local enterprise.

Post-2026, the complete elimination of Naxalism will multiply these gains. Freed from sabotage and extortion, districts under the Aspirational Districts Programme will draw billions in investments, generate lakhs of jobs, and integrate into national value chains. The gains will be multidimensional - agricultural productivity could rise by 30 per cent, mineral extraction could unlock resources worth trillions, and local GDPs could surge by double digits annually. In districts like Bastar and Gadchiroli-where per capita income still hovers near Rs 50,000-Rs 60,000 - a Naxal-free environment could catalyse 8-12 per cent annual GDP growth for the next decade. With violence already at record lows, a 15-20 per cent uptick in local investments since 2023 underscores the dawn of a virtuous cycle of peace and prosperity. Bastar- once the epicentre of LWE violence- is now scripting a remarkable transformation. As of September 2025, development projects worth Rs 52,000 crore have been launched to position the region as an industrial and socio-economic hub. Infrastructure is at the heart of this revival. The Rs 152 crore NH-130D highway stretch from Kutul to Nilangur will cut travel times by 40 per cent and spur trade worth Rs 10,000 crore annually. A Rs 550 crore private hospital and medical college in Jagdalpur will bridge glaring healthcare gaps while creating thousands of skilled jobs. Similarly, food processing and dairy units worth Rs 967 crore are enhancing value chains for paddy and mahua, boosting farmer incomes by 30 per cent. The crown jewel of Bastar's resurgence is the Nagarnar Steel Plant, a 3 MTPA NMDC facility operational since 2023. Its upcoming expansion could add Rs 9,000 crore to regional output, leveraging Bailadila's hematite reserves for national infrastructure growth. With stability restored, Bastar's GDP could soar 15 per cent post-2026 as these investments ripple through logistics, trade, and eco-tourism, turning a once-troubled zone into a growth hotspot.

Gadchiroli, Maharashtra's erstwhile Naxal bastion, is undergoing a similar metamorphosis. The JSW Group's Rs 1 lakh crore integrated steel plant in Chamorshi tehsil - a 25 MTPA facility, the world's largest of its kind - is set to redefine India's industrial landscape. Scheduled for completion within five years of land acquisition (by mid-2026), it will create 50,000 direct jobs and generate Rs 20,000 crore in annual exports. Complementing this mega-project is Lloyds Metals and Energy's integrated steel facility, due for commissioning in 2028. It will not only produce 1.5 MTPA of steel but also rehabilitate former Naxalites through skill programmes. Ancillary units in logistics and auto components are expected to contribute another Rs 5,000 crore to district GDP. A fully secure Gadchiroli will eliminate the risks of sabotage that long plagued such ventures. By 2030, per capita income here could double to over Rs 1 lakh, as industrialisation triggers a wave of downstream growth in construction, machinery, and



services. This remarkable shift mirrors global examples of post-conflict economies - from Colombia's emerald belts to Peru's mining valleys - where peace unlocked prosperity. Beyond steel and infrastructure, the next frontier for these regions lies in biofuel-based growth, leveraging local agricultural and forest resources.

In Bastar, a Rs 200 crore ethanol plant in Jagdalpur - with a 120 KL/day capacity - will process surplus paddy into fuel, supporting India's 20 per cent ethanol blending target. Small-scale distilleries like Bastar Botanics' mahua-based units will further monetise forest produce, generating Rs 500 crore in rural incomes. Gadchiroli's bamboo-rich forests position it at the forefront of biomass and bamboo-ethanol innovation. Pioneering refineries producing 30,000 litres/day of bamboo-based ethanol will contribute to aviation biofuels and rural employment. Ventures like VTARA Energy's Compressed Biogas (CBG) plant and AA Energy's 7.5 MW biomass unit will create 1,000 green jobs while cutting emissions by 50,000 tonnes annually. Such projects will attract ESG-focused global investors, adding up to 10 per cent to district GDPs and empowering tribal women through sustainable livelihoods.

The transformation of Bastar and Gadchiroli encapsulates a broader national shift - from fear to freedom, from stagnation to surge. The convergence of steel, biofuels, and connectivity could contribute 2-3 per cent to the combined GDPs of Chhattisgarh and Maharashtra within a decade. Together, these initiatives are expected to generate over 1 lakh jobs, reduce migration by 40 per cent, and strengthen India's mineral and energy self-reliance.

Nationally, unlocking these once "Red Zones" could add $50 billion to India's GDP by 2030, through higher exports, industrial output, and domestic consumption.

A Naxal-free India by 31 March 2026, is more than a law-and-order success; it is the economic emancipation of districts long trapped in violence. Through decisive governance, visionary planning, and the indomitable political will of the Prime Minister and the Union Home Minister, India is poised to close a dark chapter and open a luminous new one. Once symbols of strife, Bastar and Gadchiroli now gleam with opportunity - ready to fuel India's march toward inclusive, sustainable, and self-reliant growth.

(The writer is a national spokesperson of BJP and a well-known author.)

Japan, too, faces opposition to migrants

FUMIO OHTAKE

In July's House of Councillors election in Japan, parties that are cautious about accepting foreign workers and that advocate for tighter restrictions saw their vote shares increase. Anti-immigrant parties have been gaining support overseas for some time, and now the treatment of foreign workers is increasingly becoming a point of contention in Japan, too. The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has cancelled its "Africa Hometown" project designed to promote exchanges between African countries and four Japanese cities after the project generated considerable opposition and concern in Japan. Behind the backlash lies a rapid change in Japanese society - an increase in the proportion of foreigners from less than 1 per cent of the population in 1990 to around 3 per cent in 2024, with the percentage in some municipalities exceeding 10.

Foreigners are working in various sectors in need of labour in Japan, such as manufacturing, nursing care, logistics and agriculture, and they are helping to invigorate the local economies that they land in. However, some people feel uneasy about the swift change. Regardless, no significant impact from foreign workers on employment or wages in the host country has been observed in empirical research in economics. Harvard University Prof. Alberto Alesina, who passed away in 2020, and Asst. Prof. Marco Tabellini reviewed past research and conducted a multifaceted analysis of the economic and political impact of immigrants.

They concluded that, on average, immigrants have a very small impact on wages and employment, and that in the long run, they contribute to economic growth through complementary effects, greater consumption and innovation. Moreover, given that many immigrants are young, they play a vital role in providing a labour force and improving the sustainability of the social security system. Nevertheless, public backlash against immigrants and foreign workers is growing all over the world.

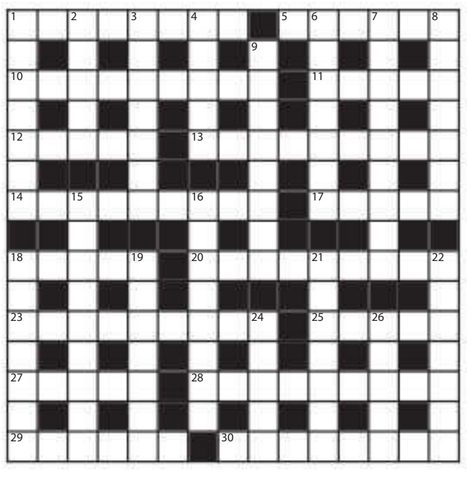
Alesina and Tabellini stressed the importance of cultural factors, citing research by a team including David Card, a Nobel laureate and a professor at the University of California, Berkeley. Card and his co-authors, using data from 21 European countries, said that the belief that immigrants change the "compositional amenities" that natives find in their neighbourhoods and schools has two to five times greater influence on individual attitudes toward immigration policy than concerns over wages and taxes. Card and his co-authors added, however, that cultural concerns about immigration are weaker in urban areas, meaning people in these places are often tolerant of immigrants. Alesina and Tabellini, meanwhile, said that in various European countries, influxes of immigrants have led to right-wing populist parties taking a greater share of the votes. At the same time, they also cite cases in which campaigns by left-wing parties for immigrants' rights have led to a shift toward inclusivity across society. In other words, immigration may lead to divisive politics, but it can also be an opportunity to promote inclusive reform of systems.

In reducing prejudice toward foreigners, "quality of contact" is key. Living in the same neighbourhood as immigrants does not on its own reduce prejudice, and it sometimes causes increased friction. What does mitigate cultural friction is collaboration in the workplace and in community activities, where there is positive contact with a shared goal. Referring to studies on the Great Migration of African Americans out of the U.S. South, Alesina and Tabellini showed that while discriminatory attitudes and xenophobic voting behaviour among whites intensified immediately after Blacks migrated to the North and West, these attitudes eased over the long term. Their report also includes other studies that show that in those parts of the United States with long-term contact with Arab immigrants, people had more personal contact with Muslims and more knowledge about them, which resulted in less prejudice toward Arab immigrants. As for the impact of refugees in Austria, the paper reports that there was an increase in far-right support in places where refugees merely passed through. However, far-right support declined where refugees stayed for a longer period of time, with this phenomenon reinforced by the actions of local authorities and nongovernmental organizations that helped to integrate the refugees. Some studies show that in the United States, counties that received many immigrants from countries that established social welfare programmes at an early stage tended to show more support for redistribution and liberal ideologies. These findings suggest that it is not just the "quantity" of contact but also the "quality" and "sustainability" of contact, along with institutional support, that are needed to eliminate prejudice. Data for Japan confirms that attitudes toward accepting foreign workers have changed in recent years. Seinan Gakuin University Prof. Eiji Yamamura and I, using individual-level panel data from 2016 to 2024, analyzed how the Covid-19 pandemic impacted Japanese attitudes. Since the pandemic, support for accepting foreigners has declined, with no recovery seen in 2024. During the pandemic, cross-border travel was restricted and people were asked not to travel between prefectures, which might have fostered exclusionist sentiment. This may have had a long-term, rather than a temporary, impact on how Japanese people perceive foreigners. In their research based on data from Japanese municipalities, Akira Igarashi, a University of Osaka associate professor, and others have found a trend in local people's attitudes toward foreigners. When the proportion of foreign residents goes up, threat perceptions tend to rise, but once the ratio exceeds 10 per cent, a contrary trend takes hold and tolerance increases. Their findings suggest that when contact with foreigners becomes more commonplace, people may feel less threatened and more accepting of coexistence. Igarashi's book "Kashika Sareru Sabetsu" (Discrimination visualized) unravels the reality of discrimination against foreigners from multiple angles. His research on labour and housing markets and the sharing economy confirmed that even when candidates with foreign names apply with the same qualifications as a Japanese person, they are at a disadvantage. Igarashi also found that many Japanese people overestimate the crime rate among foreigners and also justify police questioning of foreigners. But why is discrimination bad? To answer this question, he quantifies the disadvantages, such as a decline in wages and education levels, deterioration of health and loss of trust in others. What is particularly interesting is the discrepancy between social norms and people's attitudes. Igarashi reports that, although both survey methods guaranteed anonymity, direct questioning in Japan produced more exclusionary answers, while an alternative method that conceals individual responses showed greater tolerance - opposite to what is usually found overseas.

This points to "the possibility that people who are not actually xenophobic at heart may choose a certain answer to align themselves with the 'social norm' that they should be xenophobic." An environment in which people often hear xenophobic remarks may be misleading people into believing that xenophobic views are in the majority, thereby distorting how they express their own views. This resembles the phenomenon called "pluralistic ignorance." People assume that those around them harbour negative feelings toward foreigners and conform to that social norm. This makes the majority seem xenophobic, possibly creating a vicious cycle in which society appears more fearful of foreigners than it actually is. To break this cycle, there must be a wide sharing of accurate data and research findings on the crime rate among foreigners and their contributions to local economies, and social norms must be updated to bring them into line with reality. In economic research, no significant adverse impact has been observed from foreign workers on the employment or wages of native workers. The next challenge is to narrow the cultural distance between foreigners and the Japanese population. I think we can break the vicious cycle of xenophobia by improving the quantity and quality of contact, creating opportunities to promote mutual understanding and continuing to share information to correct false perceptions of the majority view.

The Japan News/ANN.

Crossword | No. 293263



Yesterday's Solution



ACROSS

1 The Spanish miss having enough characters to fill all this! (8)
5 Shakespeare s to be second person, first could be Francis Bacon (6)
10 Objective and popular speaker s pulling power (9)
11 Giant bird with origins in Arabian Nights (5)
12 Quit wasting good dope! (5)
13 News coming in supports witness for the state (9)
14 They make good soldiers among those on furlough (9)
17 Odd glimpses of station terminus from Fleet St (5)
18 It is absent from 7 disease record (5)
20 Savour speed, making Hamilton s start time (9)
23 It could improve your mood to snore in turns (9)
25 Armchairs should be this material (5)
27 Tin symbolically represented German industrial centre (5)
28 Flower against Vauxhall bridges (9)
29 Former statesman and astronaut s body s pronounced sound (6)
30 Parasite going into eyes via the ear feasted on blood (8)

DOWN

1 Wind-up twizzle-stick (7)
2 Staffroom paper undelivered? Letters quickly written (5)
3 Encountered turbulent start of Russian nation (3,4)
4 Corrupt document finally isn t (5)
6 River mammals in river, snakes in the grass (7)
7 Gut instinct s three-quarters about outwardly tangible energy (9)
8 The least roofless car in the competition (7)
9 Sanctions designed to exclude foremost of caber tossers (8)
15 The panel of Mock the Week? Is it sprinkled with stars? (9)
16 Stone circles one by one revealing Uralic language (8)
18 Great for Brunel as each ship s back (7)
19 European IT errors holding up our pupils targets? (7)
21 Without hesitating spinster stripped naked in front of six-footer (7)
22 Japanese teacher said "Time I m going" with feeling (7)
24 Unsportsmanlike yo-yoing? (3,2)
26 Meal including fillets of tender fish (5)

NOTE: Figures in parentheses denote the number of letters in the words required. (By arrangement with **The Independent, London**)

100 Years Ago



Front page of The Statesman dated 15 October 1925

OCCASIONAL NOTE

WHETHER the levy of a consumption tax of 25 per cent on the precious metals will, as Mr. D. P. Khaitan thinks, modify the habits of the masses of India seems doubtful. His many proposals for currency reform were published at some length on Sunday, and it is clear that in him the Currency Commission will have a witness with much to urge. The development of banking habits will presumably receive the Commission's attention; it would be well for all if hoarding could be diminished and gold be used more productively, but penal methods like the one suggested are not likely at present to have an educative value. Mr. Khaitan would have a gold coinage. Attempts at this have not been very successful so far. What can be said for the present currency system is that it works easily for the users, who do not see the machinery. What can be said against it has been said of late in many books and in many public speeches. The matter is now almost sub judice. The Commission begins its labours next month and hopes to hear all the evidence before the end of the cold weather. Digesting it will be slower work if many witnesses show the same fertility of suggestion as Mr. Khaitan. When, however, he proposes to make only gold coins legal tender he is more than fertile. He is revolutionary, though revolutions can be justified by success. But here he has the tradition of ages and some modern failures against him.

News Items

AIRWAY TO INDIA

ONLY AWAITS SIGNING OF SUITABLE CONTRACT

LONDON, OCT.

SIR SEFTON BRANCKER returned to London to-day by aeroplane from Brussels, accompanied by Sir Samuel Hoare.

In an interview, Sir Sefton stated that his air tour of 3,000 miles in seven weeks covering Egypt, Palestine, Mesopotamia, and Persia was successful, and following the signing of a suitable contract with Imperial Airways, the air route from Egypt to India could be started.—Reuter.

MOSUIL POLICY

"NO GRUDGE AGAINST TURKEY"

LONDON, OCT.

MR. L. S. Amery, in the course of a speech to his constituents at Spark-brook (Birmingham), said:—

"We have no grudge against Turkey for the unfortunate part she played in the War. We are only concerned to live with her in neighbourliness, and as far as we could, to co-operate in her regeneration. But we are equally entitled, and in honour bound, to defend the rights and interests of those under our trusteeship for whom we have undertaken obligations.

"There was nothing provocative in the policy of the Government with re-gard to Mosul.

"The Government, in fairness to those for whom they are trustees, could not give any other answer to the Turkish claims."—Reuter.

U. S. AND CHINA

SEPARATE ACTION IF CONFERENCE FAILS

("TIMES" SPECIAL SERVICE.)
LONDON, OCT. 12.

THE possibility of America playing a lone hand in China is foreshadowed in a dispatch from the Times Washington correspondent, who says:

"Failing an agreement among the Powers at the coming Customs Conference at Peking the United States is prepared to act independently, and immediately, in connexion with the revision of her commercial treaties with China.

It is pointed out that although there is a growing movement in the direction of concessions, concerted action by the Powers is still regarded as desirable from every viewpoint. But should this involve any withdrawal from the resolutions of the Washington treaties, particularly in regard to tariff autonomy, the American Government would take separate action.

Editor's TAKE

SAARC: Pathways to Regional Prosperity

Despite immense potential, South Asia's growth has been held back by political mistrust & rivalries; now is the time to cooperate to shape a common destiny

South Asia, the region home to one fourth of humanity, is one of the least developed region in the world. It is not because it has scarce resources or lacks human effort, it is because of the nations of South Asia are often working at cross purpose. As they share the same history, the colonial past and same cultural ethos, they have often found reasons to be suspicious of each other. They have been united as well divided by their common history. Various divisions, partitions and bloody wars have left scars on the land of South Asia. These countries carry a heavy burden of the past which has fogged its future. This has often been the reason for the sluggish growth and impoverished existence as conflict and not cooperation has been the norm here. For decades, South Asia has been described as a region of missed opportunities. Despite shared history, culture, and geography, the nations of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal continue to lag behind their South-East Asian counterparts in trade integration, economic cooperation, and policy coordination. Now is the time to change this paradigm and move forward to find a common destiny of the people. It is high time to leave behind the history and move forward as the geopolitics is becoming more unpredictable and skewed.

The recent collective call by leading economists from these five nations for urgent reforms and regional collaboration is, therefore, both timely and essential. The economists' joint statement underscores an uncomfortable truth: while the world economy is slowing and global trade patterns are shifting, South Asia remains dangerously fragmented. Tariffs, protectionism, and the ripple effects of great-power politics have exposed the region's vulnerability like never before. South Asian nations rather than working in silos must recognise that their strength lies in unity. The success stories of South-East Asia offer a lesson. Through ASEAN this region has fostered strong intra-regional trade and enhanced their collective bargaining power in global forums.

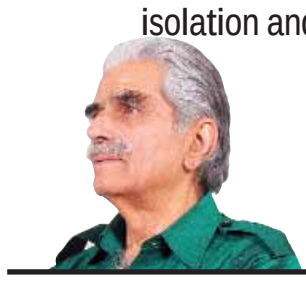
In contrast, South Asia's only regional body, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), has languished for years – stalled by political mistrust, border disputes, and chronic underutilisation. SAARC, once envisioned as a platform for economic synergy, has become synonymous with inertia. Yet, reforming and reinvigorating SAARC may well be the best path forward. A reimagined SAARC could focus on pragmatic, non-political cooperation – such as harmonising tariff structures, improving trade logistics, investing in cross-border infrastructure, and fostering digital and energy connectivity.

These measures would not only deepen regional trade but also integrate South Asia into global value chains, boosting competitiveness and resilience. Economic pragmatism, as the economists rightly point out, is the need of the hour in a geopolitically tense world.

A revitalised SAARC framework, driven by economic pragmatism rather than political posturing, can transform the region from a collection of isolated markets into a cohesive economic powerhouse.

Op Sindoor aftermath: A dangerous drift

As India and Pakistan continue to exchange threats and rhetoric, the burden of their muscular posturing — from diplomatic isolation and economic strain to the weakening of regional stability — grows heavier with each passing day



ASHOK K MEHTA



After its partial victory against Pakistan in Op Sindoor 1.0, India's political and military leadership has been emboldened to the brink of bravado; this is both risky and dangerous. This new normal after Op Sindoor is an unprecedented use of threatening war rhetoric. While politicians have made irresponsible and irrational threats against Pakistan after India became a nuclear weapons power to retake PoK, no Service Chief has made any grandiose claims of political intent to annihilate Pakistan — till COAS Gen Upendra Dwivedi's recent declaration that if Pakistan continued with state-sponsored terrorism, India would not show the restraint it exhibited during Op Sindoor but would make Pakistan think whether it wanted to be on the map or not.

On the same day, October 3, Air Chief Marshal AP Singh briefed the media about how a defeated PAF had to sue for peace. He brushed aside IAF aircraft losses and claimed to have destroyed or damaged 12 to 13 Pakistani planes. On October 2, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, at Bhuj, warned Pakistan of a resounding response to any misadventure like in 1965, as it could alter Pakistan's history and geography. In August, CNS Adm Dinesh Tripathi said that the Navy would be the first to take action against Pakistan in any future conflict — this after PM Narendra Modi had told Tripathi on 10 May, after the Op Sindoor ceasefire: "I have snatched a morsel from your mouth," referring to the Navy preparing to launch a BrahMos missile at Karachi, "but your turn will come." Targeting Pakistan with a chorus of threats by the highest political and military leadership is unprecedented. After the 2 and 3 October warnings to Rawalpindi, Pakistan retaliated with an all-caps statement: "If there was any national erasure, presumably brought about by nuclear weapons, it will be mutual." Defence Minister Khawaja Asif told Pakistan's Samaa TV that "chances of war with India are real." If there is a war, India will be fighting a China-reinforced one-front war, as Rawalpindi and Beijing have integrated their operational capabilities and meshed the use of national assets and force multipliers. Further, Turkey will provide full military backup, with Arab countries supporting Pakistan following the recent Pakistan-Saudi Arabia mutual defence pact.

Most previous wars and skirmishes with Pakistan have ended in stalemate (except 1971 and Kargil), contrary to victory claims made by India. In Op Sindoor, the PAF gave a sterling demonstration of its air-to-air engagement prowess by eliminating several IAF aircraft — losses previously acknowledged by the CDS, DGMO, DGAO and, significantly, the French Air Force Chief, Gen Jerome Ballinger, who said there was evidence of three Indian losses — one Rafale, one Sukhoi, and one Mirage 2000. It was the first loss of a Rafale, which has been sold to eight countries. India fantasised its victory in terms of damage inflicted on Pakistani military infrastructure, with NSA Ajit Doval claiming 90 days after the war that "not a windowpane was damaged," a statement dutifully endorsed by CDS Gen Chauhan. However, pictures of debris from downed aircraft near Bathinda and Srinagar were published in Indian newspapers.

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OP SINDOOR IS ON PAUSE. INDIA HAS BEEN MOWING THE GRASS IN PAKISTAN AND POK — NOT DESTROYING THE ROOTS OF TERRORISM THERE — AS IT DOES NOT HAVE THE POLITICAL WILL OR CAPABILITY TO FIGHT BEYOND A LIMITED WAR

The writer, a retired Major General, served as Commander, IPKF (South), Sri Lanka, and was a founder member of the Defence Planning Staff, now the Integrated Defence Staff

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Cpl Varun Kumar was awarded the Vayu Sena Medal "due to enemy missile strike at a forward air base."Both India and Pakistan have created their own self-serving versions of Beyond Visual Range — non-contact skirmishes — embellishing valour by liberally decorating warriors with gallantry awards, many Indians without citations. Pakistan's storytelling was better than India's. Far from being isolated, Pakistan is being feted by the US, the world's only superpower, which has re-hyphenated it with India.

No country has held Pakistan responsible for the Pahalgam terrorist attack except Israel and the Taliban — both pariah states, with the Taliban recognised only by Russia. Delhi drew the ire of President Trump by defending its strategic autonomy and stubbornly refusing to acknowledge his role (as distinct from that of the US) in facilitating the ceasefire. In order to spite India for its recalcitrance, Trump tells every world leader he meets in the White House that he organised the ceasefire and averted a nuclear war. He sometimes also says seven aircraft were lost in the skirmish. The cost of enhancing Modi's muscular stature is high — 50 per cent tariffs, sanctions on the purchase of Russian oil, withdrawal of the waiver on Chabahar Port in Iran, likely EU sanctions, and more. How Modi can still call Trump "my friend" while congratulating him for the Gaza ceasefire is puzzling. Praising Netanyahu, who addressed an empty hall at the UNGA, is equally baffling.

At times, India's diplomacy goes on autopilot. Any future war with Pakistan will be indecisive. The 1971 war fought in East Pakistan was made winnable. India had to ally with the Soviet Union for political and military cover to fight in East Pakistan, though it was billed as the ten-year Treaty of Peace and Friendship that referred to India's non-alignment. Make no mistake — India cannot militarily seize PoK, which some Army Commanders have boasted can be done. India's outdated defence policy harped on not losing an inch of territory.

After Op Sindoor, the IAF has put a spoke in the wheel of theatrisation, and the CDS has issued a number of policy papers on joint doctrines sans a national security policy. Let not the IAF think that air and space power will determine outcomes on the ground. Russia's relentless air war in Ukraine has not significantly altered the battle lines.India has been unable to deter and stop state-sponsored terrorism. Neither Balakot nor Op Sindoor has been able to do so, but proven air power is non-escalatory. That is why Op Sindoor is on pause. India has been mowing the grass in Pakistan and PoK — not destroying the roots of terrorism there — as it does not have the political will or capability to fight beyond a limited war. In any case, a military solution is not available. India has repeatedly stated it will talk to Pakistan only on terrorism, while Pakistan wants comprehensive talks on all disputes. State-sponsored terrorism cannot be terminated militarily. Delhi should abandon issuing empty threats and be realistic.

PIC TALK



An artisan makes an earthen lamp ahead of the 'Diwali' festival, in Delhi
PHOTO:PANKAJ KUMAR

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Make good use of your good 'Karmaphalas'



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

2ND THE PIONEER OPINION

Our good *karmaphalas* — the fruits of our past deeds — manifest in this life as blessings such as good looks, fame, knowledge, power, renunciation, and wealth. Yet each of these gifts is temporary and must be wisely used before time takes them away. How we make use of these divine opportunities determines whether we truly honour our good fortune. The first blessing is good looks and physical beauty.

Youth naturally brings charm — children glow with innocence, girls become radiant in their teens, and young men grow handsome in their prime. But physical beauty fades as we age. The only enduring radiance is the inner aura that shines through devotion to God. If blessed with good looks, one should use them not for vanity but to build meaningful connections, attract the right companions, and create a good beginning in life. Beauty is a gift meant to open doors, not to dominate others. The second blessing is fame. Some people become famous early — like prodigies — while others earn recognition later as writers, leaders, or thinkers. Fame brings opportunity, influence, and satisfaction. It can also be a force for good when used to uplift others. A truly blessed person uses fame not for self-promotion but as a platform to inspire, guide, and set noble examples for family and society.

The third *karmaphala* is knowledge. It can take many forms — scientific, artistic, or intellectual. Great thinkers such as Einstein used their intellect to expand human understanding. Yet the highest knowledge is spiritual knowledge, which is often neglected. It connects us with the divine and reveals the "Big Picture." When faced with suffering, spiritual wisdom teaches us to pray, to seek divine guidance, and to surrender to God's will. As the saying goes, "I treat, He cures." True knowledge not only enlightens us but also empowers us to guide others towards peace and purpose. The fourth blessing is power. The power of rulers and leaders lasts only as long as their destiny allows. When their karmic credit ends, so does their authority. However, divine empowerment — like that bestowed upon Arjuna by Lord Krishna — is limitless. Those chosen as God's nimittas (instruments) act under divine guidance. When our actions align with God's will, our work succeeds naturally. Power, when seen as divine responsibility, becomes a channel for grace. The next opulence is renunciation, often misunderstood. It is not about abandoning life but about giving up what is harmful or unnecessary. Practising moderation in food, speech, and habits keeps us pure and focused. Renunciation means choosing what elevates consciousness over what degrades it. It pleases God because it reflects discipline and devotion. Such self-control also inspires others to live consciously.

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The final *karmaphala* is wealth. Wealth, when hoarded, is wasted after death; we cannot carry it forward. But when shared generously, it multiplies in unseen ways and purifies the giver's heart. Even small acts—like helping those in need — turn wealth into worship.In conclusion, good karmaphalas must be used wisely before they fade away. Even adversity has hidden blessings — it pushes us towards prayer and surrender.

God's assurance in the Bhagavad Gita (9.22) is clear: "For those who worship Me with single-minded devotion, I carry what they lack and preserve what they have." When we use our blessings in service and gratitude, we fulfil the true purpose of our good fortune.

The writer is a spiritual teacher

STRENGTHENING GLOBAL COMMITMENT TO HAND HYGIENE

Global Handwashing Day, observed annually on October 15, holds immense significance in promoting awareness about the vital role of handwashing with soap and water in preventing the spread of diseases such as diarrhoea and pneumonia, especially among children.

Its importance became even more evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, which underscored the life-saving impact of proper hand hygiene practices. According to recent data, nearly 2.3 billion people worldwide still lack a basic handwashing facility with soap and water at home. Germs from unwashed hands can easily transfer to the eyes, nose, and mouth, leading to various gastrointestinal and respiratory illnesses such as Salmonellosis, bacterial conjunctivitis, skin infections, and even necrotising fasciitis–commonly known as "flesh-eating bacteria."

Therefore, global hand hygiene campaigns must be strengthened, particularly in least developed countries, where more than six in ten people lack access to basic hygiene facilities. Programmes like the "Hand Hygiene for All" global initiative by the World Health Organisation, and India's "SuperAmma Campaign," are commendable steps.

However, a more co-ordinated effort by governments, health agencies, and non-profits – especially in schools and healthcare settings – is essential to realise the 2030 goal of universal access to safe sanitation and hygiene.

PRASUN KUMAR DUTTA| KOLKATA

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

SEC seeks poll revision delay

The Maharashtra State Election Commission (SEC) has urged the Election Commission of India (ECI) to postpone the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls until January 2026, citing the extensive schedule of upcoming local body elections and widespread allegations of bogus voting and manipulation raised by citizens and political parties.

In a letter dated September 9, the SEC stated that the same officials handling the SIR would also be responsible for conducting polls for various urban and rural local bodies. The Supreme Court, through its order dated May 6, 2025, directed the SEC to endeavour to complete the elections within four months. Polls are due for 29 municipal corporations, 247 municipal councils, 42 of 147 nagar panchayats, 32 of 34 zilla parishads, and 336 of 351 panchayat samitis.

A similar exercise in Bihar in June 2025, ahead of the Assembly elections, required voters to present one of 11 documents to prove eligibility. However, it drew criticism and legal challenges from opposition parties alleging voter disenfranchisement. The SEC's request underscores the need to prioritise credible elections over rushed revisions. Deferring the SIR could ensure accuracy, transparency, and greater public trust in the electoral process.

BHAGWAN THADANI | MUMBAI

Honouring the heroes of Pawan

Operation Pawan remains an underappreciated yet defining chapter in India's military history. The valour and sacrifice of 1,171 Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) soldiers who laid down their lives in Sri Lanka deserve far greater recognition.

Though the operation aimed to restore peace and regional stability, it came at an immense human cost borne by soldiers who fought with unmatched courage in one of India's most complex counter-insurgency missions abroad. Regrettably, unlike the 1971 War or Kargil, there are no national memorials or institutionalised tributes to honour these brave men. This neglect is a profound injustice to the fallen and to their families who continue to live with pride and pain.

Swami Vivekanand Subharti University's effort to honour these martyrs is commendable, yet remembrance must be institutionalised through memorials, military education, and official recognition. Honouring Operation Pawan's heroes is a solemn duty to preserve their sacrifice and legacy.

Operation Pawan was more than a mission — it symbolised India's responsibility, sacrifice, and solidarity. Honouring its heroes is not charity; it is a sacred duty owed to those who gave their today for our tomorrow.

ADITYA KAMBLE | KALABURAGI

Inflation's fall a false comfort

India's retail inflation plunging to an eight-year low of 1.54 per cent in September may appear comforting for households, but the figure conceals more than it reveals. The apparent cooling of prices largely arises from a base effect — a statistical distortion rather than genuine moderation. Inflation is measured year-on-year, and July 2024 witnessed unusually high food prices. That inflated base now makes this year's numbers appear deceptively mild.

In reality, most goods and services remain expensive. Core inflation, excluding food and fuel, continues to show persistent pressures in housing, healthcare, and education — areas that dominate household spending. Hence, for families, the relief is minimal despite the headline decline.

The fall in inflation is, therefore, statistical rather than practical. Policymakers must focus on boosting purchasing power and ensuring stable prices across essential sectors. Real comfort will come only through sustained income growth and broad-based stability, not through misleading numerical illusions. Although retail inflation has dropped to 1.54 per cent, the apparent relief is largely illusory, driven by past price spikes rather than genuine easing. For most families, daily expenses remain high, and policymakers must prioritise real income growth and structural measures to ensure lasting price stability.

N SADHASIVA REDDY | BENGALURU

Feeding the future: Building climate-resilient food systems

As the world observes World Food Day 2025 under the theme "Hand in Hand for Better Foods and a Better Future," the call is clear: only through collective action — linking farmers, policymakers, scientists, and communities — can we secure a sustainable and hunger-free tomorrow

FIRST Column




SATENDRA SINGH | TANUSHREE



Climate change today poses the single greatest challenge to global food security. Unpredictable rainfall, increasing temperatures, drought periods, floods, and pest invasions are altering agricultural practices and undermining productivity. These effects are not evenly distributed; they strike hardest at smallholders and marginal farmers who rely directly on weather and natural resources for their sustenance. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations states that disasters have resulted in approximately USD 3.8 trillion in losses from crop and livestock production over the last thirty years, averaging around USD 123 billion annually. Notably, FAO indicates that the agricultural sector accounts for almost 23 per cent of the total damage and losses resulting from disasters. This means that almost one-fourth of all economic losses from disasters directly impact those who produce our food.

The theme for World Food Day 2025 — "Hand in Hand for Better Foods and a Better Future" — is thus both relevant and critical. It requires joint efforts at all societal levels to establish food systems that are productive, climate-resilient, inclusive, and sustainable. In India and throughout South and Southeast Asia, this message carries profound significance. These areas, which contain the highest densities of small-scale farmers globally, are encountering increasing challenges due to climate fluctuations. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) indicates that increasing temperatures and changing monsoon patterns may decrease crop yields in South Asia by as much as 10-30 per cent by 2050, particularly impacting rice and wheat — two essential staples for regional food security. Moreover, the rising occurrence of floods and droughts is expected to heighten food price fluctuations and rural hardship.

India, possessing a large and varied agricultural foundation, is at the forefront of this crisis. In recent years, the nation has experienced repeated floods in the north-eastern and northern plains, droughts in central and southern areas, and heatwaves affecting several states — resulting in a combined impact on agricultural production. The 2023-24 monsoon season has seen inadequate and irregular rainfall across certain regions of Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Telangana, resulting in considerable losses in pulse and oilseed crops. In northern India, unexpected rains harmed wheat and horticultural crops, demonstrating how brief climatic irregularities can ruin livelihoods.

SOCIAL PROTECTION INITIATIVES — LIKE CROP INSURANCE, INPUT SUBSIDIES, AND FOOD SAFETY NETS — MUST BE BROADENED TO ADDRESS CLIMATE AND DISASTER-RELATED RISKS

Satendra Singh is former Executive Director of the National Institute of Disaster Management and Tanushree is Doctoral Fellow, Amity University

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@TheDailyPioneer
satendra-singh-150358
dr-tanushree-b7885855

From 2015 to 2021, India suffered a loss of almost 34 million hectares of crops due to heavy rainfall and approximately 35 million hectares because of drought, as reported by the World Economic Forum (WEF). These statistics illustrate the significant impact of extreme weather on the nation's agricultural sector.

Climate shocks now affect nearly every aspect of India's economy and society, but their effects are most pronounced in agriculture, which accounts for roughly 15 per cent of the national GDP and supports livelihoods for nearly 40 per cent of the population — including 70 per cent of rural households. These statistics highlight the pressing necessity to incorporate climate and disaster resilience into agricultural policy and planning frameworks. It's not merely a matter of shielding farmers — it's about ensuring the country's food security and economic stability.

Building resilience in the agricultural sector begins with re-evaluating the way we grow, distribute, and consume food. Agriculture that withstands climate change must form the foundation of future strategies. This involves varying cropping systems, encouraging resilient seed types, investing in soil health recovery, and enhancing integrated water management. For example, the use of drought-resistant rice and millet types in eastern India has shown improved yields in response to fluctuating rainfall patterns. Likewise, employing micro-irrigation and rainwater collection methods can improve water efficiency and lessen susceptibility to drought periods. These practices must be enhanced with ongoing government backing, increased farmer awareness, and financial rewards. Technology and innovation are indispensable tools in this transformation. Advances in remote sensing, artificial intelligence (AI), and geographic information systems (GIS) now enable real-time tracking of weather, soil moisture, and crop health, assisting farmers in making informed decisions. Flood and drought early warning systems, when integrated with local governance and extension services, can greatly reduce losses. Digital agriculture platforms in India are currently linking farmers to predictive climate data, crop recommendations, and insurance choices. However, these innovations need to be inclusive and accessible — designed to meet the requirements of small and marginal farmers, including women who make up almost half of India's agricultural labour force.

A central theme of this year's World Food Day — "Hand in Hand" — highlights the significance of teamwork. The resilience of food systems cannot be attained in solitude. It necessitates collaboration among farmers, scientists, policymakers, financial entities, private businesses, and global organisations. The FAO's Hand-in-Hand Initiative, which encourages data-informed and nation-led partnerships to fast-track agricultural change, provides a beneficial framework. In India, this strategy corresponds with national goals like the Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchayee Yojana, Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana, and the National Mission on Sustainable Agriculture, which all focus on incorporating sustainability and resilience into conventional agricultural development. At the policy level, governments need to prioritise risk-informed agricultural planning. Agricultural and food security policies, investments in rural infrastructure, and market access initiatives must incorporate climate resilience. Social protection initiatives — like crop insurance, input subsidies, and food safety nets — must be broadened to address climate and disaster-related risks. The Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana (PMFBY) is a significant initiative in this regard, yet it demands ongoing improvements to guarantee prompt compensation, clarity, and the inclusion of small and tenant farmers.

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Beyond policy and technology, resilience must develop from the grassroots level — through communities that are empowered. Farmers' self-help groups and cooperatives can significantly contribute to risk management and adaptive agricultural methods. In areas susceptible to disasters, early warning systems that involve the community and preparedness plans can significantly lessen losses. Enhancing agro-advisory services at the panchayat and district levels, along with training in climate-smart agricultural practices, can elevate local capabilities. Women farmers, specifically, ought to be acknowledged and backed as catalysts for change. Their involvement in decision-making, resource management, and climate adaptation initiatives not only boosts household food security but also strengthens the sustainability of agricultural systems.

The task ahead is great, yet it is not impossible. India's agricultural revolution provides reasons for hope. The government's endorsement of millets as climate-resistant crops, the increasing enthusiasm for natural farming, and the growth of digital agriculture initiatives denote major advancements towards sustainability. Likewise, funding for rural infrastructure, cold storage, and value chains can enable farmers to achieve greater profits and minimise post-harvest losses — essential components of resilient food systems.

At the global level, South and Southeast Asia need to enhance collaboration in research, data exchange, and capacity development to address shared threats. Collaborative regional efforts can speed up adaptation technologies and promote the sharing of effective practices. India can set a benchmark through its scientific knowledge and institutional strength — promoting climate-resilient agriculture for both national food security and as a benefit to the region and world. As we mark World Food Day 2025, it is crucial to emphasise that achieving food security amidst climate change is not just an agricultural issue; it is a human, social, and economic necessity. The task demands a long-term perspective, cohesive efforts, and above all, solidarity. When we collaborate closely — farmers with decision-makers, science with heritage, local communities with international organisations — we can create food systems that are both efficient and robust. A hunger-free, climate-resilient future is achievable. It begins with acknowledging that the well-being of our soils, crops, and farmers is intertwined with the health of our Earth. On this World Food Day, let us reaffirm our dedication to safeguard both our food and our future — together, hand in hand.

Rahul Gandhi's foreign visit sparks debate over priorities, purpose, and political optics



ANIL ANAND

Rahul Gandhi's recent foreign visit has once again set off a familiar debate — one that questions his priorities, political seriousness, and timing. As the country heads towards a crucial electoral phase, critics argue that a responsible leader should be investing his energy in preparing strategies, strengthening his party, and connecting with people at the grassroots. Instead, Gandhi's decision to travel abroad has invited sharp criticism from the ruling dispensation, which claims he treats politics as a "part-time venture" rather than a lifelong commitment. The controversy gained traction when the RSS mouthpiece Organiser published an article raising a series of probing questions from the Sangh's perspective.

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It asked whether Gandhi's trip represents genuine foreign engagement or political absenteeism. The article further questioned in what capacity Gandhi, who currently holds no formal government position, is representing India during his overseas interactions. The publication also raised doubts about whether the Congress leader — who lacks specialised expertise in trade, economics, or international relations — can meaningfully influence bilateral relations, or whether these meetings are largely ceremonial in nature.

Finally, it posed the most critical question: do these visits serve to enhance Rahul Gandhi's personal image abroad while diverting attention from pressing domestic issues? These concerns, though sharply worded, are not entirely new. Over the years, the BJP and its ideological affiliates have built a narrative portraying him as inconsistent, detached, and politically uncommitted. Each foreign visit is presented as proof of his lack of seriousness — an argument that has persisted despite Gandhi's recent efforts to reconnect with the public through initiatives like the Bharat Jodo Yatra. However, the debate cannot be reduced merely to partisan attacks.

It also raises an important question about how Indian political leaders, particularly those in opposition, should engage with the wider world. In a globalised era where issues such as climate change, migration, technology, and economic policy transcend borders, it is not unusual for senior political figures to travel abroad, build networks, and exchange ideas. As Leader of the Opposition in Parliament, Gandhi occupies a legitimate constitutional position that allows him to undertake such visits to strengthen dialogue, explore partnerships, and present an alternative political vision for India.

Supporters of Gandhi argue that his trips reflect an attempt to expand India's democratic conversation beyond national boundaries. By engaging with global thinkers, political leaders, and civil society institutions, he seeks to share perspectives on India's social and political evolution while listening to how other democracies are grappling with similar challenges. In this view, his foreign visits are an expression of curiosity, openness, and democratic dialogue — qualities essential for a modern political leader.

Yet, even among his well-wishers, there is unease about timing. The Congress Party is at a crucial juncture: rebuilding state-level organisations, refining its electoral message, and managing internal rivalries. With key elections approaching, Gandhi's absence from the domestic political scene — even temporarily — creates a leadership vacuum that can be exploited by opponents. At a time when his party needs visible, day-to-day direction, international trips, however meaningful, risk being perceived as detachment from immediate political realities. Optics matter deeply in politics. Even if Gandhi's visit is rooted in legitimate dialogue and global outreach, perception often overrides intention. The ruling establishment and its media allies have perfected the art of turning optics into narratives. The visual contrast between a prime minister constantly engaging with citizens across India and an opposition leader addressing international audiences abroad is powerful and easily weaponised. Without clear communication from the Congress about the goals and outcomes of such trips, the perception of misplaced priorities becomes difficult to counter.

At the same time, the Organiser's framing of Gandhi's travel reflects a deeper ideological contest. By questioning his authority to "represent India," it implies that only those in power have the legitimacy to speak internationally about the nation. This is a narrow interpretation of democracy. In truth, every elected representative — whether in government or opposition — has a stake in shaping India's image abroad. In many mature democracies, opposition leaders routinely meet foreign dignitaries, participate in policy dialogues, and articulate alternative viewpoints without being accused of undermining national interests.

The criticism also raises a larger philosophical question: should leadership be judged solely by physical presence or by the quality of engagement and ideas? A modern leader's responsibility extends beyond managing electoral machinery; it also involves broadening perspectives and preparing for a rapidly changing world. Gandhi's international outreach could serve that purpose if it is strategically aligned with domestic objectives and accompanied by transparency about its agenda. Nevertheless, Gandhi's challenge lies precisely in bridging this gap between action and perception. His past absences from key domestic moments have left a lasting imprint on public opinion. Even when his intentions are legitimate, they are viewed through the prism of an established stereotype. This underscores the need for a more robust communication strategy from the Congress — to proactively frame his visits not as leisure trips, but as efforts to represent an inclusive, democratic, and forward-looking vision of India. Another aspect worth considering is the potential outcome of these visits. If Gandhi's meetings abroad lead to meaningful dialogues on trade, technology, education, or environmental collaboration, they could strengthen his image as a serious statesman. But if they are seen as mere photo opportunities, the criticism of "self-aggrandisement" will grow louder. The credibility of such initiatives ultimately depends on whether they yield tangible intellectual or policy dividends that can enrich domestic debate.

It is also worth recalling that the opposition's role in a democracy is not just to criticise the government but to represent alternative ideas before the global community. When the ruling leadership dominates India's global narrative, it becomes even more important for opposition figures to present a nuanced picture of the country's democratic ethos. Gandhi's engagement abroad could serve that purpose — if communicated with clarity and purpose.

Ultimately, the current controversy reflects two parallel truths. First, that Rahul Gandhi, as a national leader, has every right to engage internationally and build relationships beyond borders. And second, that timing and perception remain politically decisive. With elections looming and the Congress still battling organisational weaknesses, every action by its top leader will be scrutinised not just for intent but for political symbolism.

The broader takeaway is clear: leadership today is measured not only by what one does, but also by how it is perceived. Rahul Gandhi's task is not to stop travelling but to demonstrate how such journeys connect with India's domestic aspirations and his party's broader political mission. Only then can he transform the narrative from one of "wrong priorities" to one of global engagement with national purpose.

The writer is a policy analyst

dailypioneer
@dhountli
The Pioneer

Why measuring progress needs more than GDP



ANANT SWARUP

Murli Manohar Joshi, a respected figure in Indian politics, recently raised thought-provoking questions about India's continued reliance on GDP as the primary indicator of national progress. At a significant meeting, Joshi expressed his concerns that the world's obsession with GDP ought to give way to a broader, more inclusive understanding of growth. He reflected on how India's economy is often lauded for its impressive numbers — India became the world's fourth-largest economy — yet these figures alone provide an incomplete picture. Joshi drew attention to a troubling reality: the top 10 per cent of the Indian population controls around 65 per cent of the national wealth, while a significant portion of the workforce remains locked in subsistence-level agriculture. He suggested that this overemphasis on GDP has led to the neglect of uneven income distribution, rising inequality, and social vulnerabilities, echoing broader academic criticisms of GDP-centric growth narratives.

The Pioneer SINCE 1865

Joshi's views resonate with global discussions on the failure of GDP to capture the essence of human development or well-being. GDP, since its inception, has been attractive for its simplicity — it sums up the monetary value of all goods and services produced within a country. For decades, this single figure has steered economic policy and international rankings. However, as Joshi and numerous economists underscore, GDP's shortcomings are manifold. It fails to address how income and wealth are distributed among people. It overlooks unpaid but vital labour, like caregiving within families, as well as education, health, happiness, and social cohesion. GDP makes no distinction between activities that promote societal welfare and those that might cause harm if those activities increase economic output. Pollution, deforestation, and crime, for example, perversely add to GDP if they stimulate more economic transactions, making the economy "look" healthier on paper than it truly is in practice. In doing so, it can foster policies that inadvertently prioritise expansion over equity and sustainability, potentially deepening the very disparities Joshi cautioned against.

Recognising these flaws, Joshi called for India to embrace other models for measuring progress — an appeal increasingly echoed worldwide. One of the most widely accepted alternatives is the Human Development Index (HDI), which, rather than just counting money, gives equal weight to life expectancy, education, and per capita income. The Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI) goes a step further by subtracting environmental and social costs from GDP to yield a more realistic assessment of societal advancement. Other indices like the Happy Planet Index (HPI) measure success by looking at sustainable well-being: are people living long, fulfilling, and ecologically responsible lives? The Better Life Index, developed by the OECD, uses a basket of metrics spanning health, job quality, civic engagement, and the environment. Meanwhile, the Inclusive Wealth Index takes stock of natural, human, and produced assets to reflect a country's real long-term prosperity.

Each of these approaches signals a move towards multidimensional evaluation — one that asks not just how much an economy produces, but whether quality of life is improving for most citizens, and whether the gains are sustainable. If India began to take health or educational outcomes as seriously as it does GDP figures, policy attention, resource allocation, and political discourse would inevitably shift. A broader metric would require government to focus more closely on the pressing issues that GDP ignores: whether access to health and education is genuinely improving, whether environmental degradation is being stopped, whether citizens feel secure, fulfilled, and part of a just society, or if prosperity is limited to a privileged minority. Transitioning to a post-GDP paradigm would carry significant implications. Policymaking would move beyond industrial output and financial flows to prioritise investments in social infrastructure, public health, and education. Internationally, India would join a growing club of nations rethinking how they measure — and thus actually foster — progress.

Of course, embracing new metrics will not be easy. GDP's institutional dominance is deeply entrenched, and it will take time, debate, and political will to replace it with broader measures. Building public consensus, developing robust statistical systems, and overcoming ideological resistance will be essential. But as Joshi insists, the stakes are too high for complacency. Exclusive reliance on a single, incomplete indicator is not only analytically lazy but ethically fraught — risking policies that deepen inequality and ecological peril.

Joshi's critique, then, is not a rejection of economic growth itself, but a call for more meaningful measurements and a richer understanding of what growth should achieve.

For a nation as large and diverse as India, success must be measured by the well-being of the many, not the fortunes of a few. India's future lies in aligning its metrics of progress with its aspirations for justice, dignity, environmental balance, and sustainable prosperity.

The writer is Ex Additional Secretary, Director General of Trade Remedies, GOI. Views are personal

dailypioneer
@TheDailyPioneer
anant-swarup-9b524613

Opinion

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 15, 2025



CLIMATE POLITICS

Union minister Bhupender Yadav

We must now focus on implementing ambitious climate measures and, above all, addressing the most pressing challenge: the urgent lack of resources for developing countries to deliver adaptation and mitigation

Cart before the horse

Changing the nameplate on the door will change little on the ground till PSBs are reformed from within

P S JAYAKUMAR AND Rakesh Sharma were the first to switch from the private sector to public sector banks (PSB) as MD and CEO of Bank of Baroda and Canara Bank respectively, in August 2015. Unfortunately, they were also the last private sector entrants into the corner offices of PSBs. The very fact that it has taken the government 10 long years to revive the practice speaks volumes about the complexity of the exercise. There have been sundry cases where private talent has been brought in at fairly senior levels in PSBs on contract and some of them have done great work, but a majority have left within a few years, stifled by the mismatch in culture—the most important and perhaps most misunderstood metric in a large organisation. In that context, it is doubtful whether the latest government experiment will succeed. Last week, the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet revised the guidelines for the selection of wholetime directors of PSBs, superseding all earlier norms. Under the new guidelines, private sector candidates can apply for one of the four MD positions at State Bank of India. The government is also opening up at least one executive director position at large PSBs for the private sector.

It's a well-intended move as the logic of bringing in private sector talent to top jobs in PSBs is pretty simple: bring in sharper managerial talent, market discipline, and tech-savvy efficiency. Exposure to private sector practices—in risk management, digital operations, or customer engagement—can be valuable. Also, at a time when the government is planning more mergers to create fewer but more competitive banks, there will be a need to have more private sector professionals in leadership positions because of their specialised skills and ability to think out of the box.

But reality may be totally different—parachuting private sector executives into top PSB jobs rarely works as intended. The problem isn't capability; it's context. Private sector leaders are used to nimble structures, performance-linked rewards, and relatively clear accountability lines. PSBs, on the other hand, are deeply embedded in bureaucratic hierarchies, burdened by legacy systems, social obligations, and political oversight. Success here depends more on navigating the maze of institutional constraints. When private sector executives enter this world, they can face resistance from entrenched cadres who would view them as outsiders. Decision-making would slow, innovation may stall, and morale would suffer. The very qualities that make these leaders effective in a corporate environment—speed, autonomy, risk-taking—can backfire in a system that prizes procedure over performance. In such a system, a private sector leader's instincts—to move fast, take calculated risks, and reward performance—are not just ineffective; they can be counterproductive. The result is predictable: initial enthusiasm, followed by friction and eventual fatigue. Private-sector appointees can often find themselves stymied by institutional resistance and limited freedom to choose teams.

The solution isn't to import talent from private banks—that can wait till PSBs are reformed from within. True change requires realigning incentives, digitising operations, and creating a culture of meritocracy—not replacing one set of managers with another. Cross-pollination of talent can work at the margins, but it cannot substitute for systemic reform. Until that happens, the revolving door between private and public banking leadership will continue to spin, with little lasting impact. What PSBs need is not corporate saviours—there is enough talent already available at senior levels—but institutional renewal. Until then, changing the nameplate on the door will change little on the ground.

REAL POLITICS

IN ITS CENTENARY YEAR, THE RSS HAS SET AN AGENDA FOR A PROSPEROUS, EQUAL INDIA

Hindutva and development



BADRI NARAYAN

Vice chancellor, Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai

THE RASHTRIYA SWAYAMSEVAK Sangh (RSS) began its centenary celebrations recently. The Sangh and its sympathisers are organising various programmes related to the RSS and its schemes for the India of the future. In these programmes, various aspects and meanings of the Sangh in Indian society are being discussed. These apart, they are producing other appreciative as well as critical discourses triggering interpretations of its past and present.

On October 1 in Delhi, at an event linked to the celebrations, Prime Minister Narendra Modi highlighted the RSS role in the making of the Indian society and nation. He highlighted how in the Sangh's *shakhas* (branches), an individual's journey from "me" to "we" begins. As we know, Modi was a *karyakarta* (functionary) and *pracharak* (missionary) for a long period of his life. Therefore, what he shared on that occasion mostly emerged from his own experience.

As was observed several times during his chief ministership of Gujarat and as the prime minister, Modi has reiterated how he has learnt from the Sangh about the many aspects of life as well as a method of governance. He has imbibed from the RSS many constituents of his development vision as well as his practices to achieve *samrasta* (harmony) and equality. He has developed the notion of *samagra samrasta* (holistic harmony) that blends his experiences and learnings.

Two principal issues crop up in any discussion on the RSS—Hindu Rashtra and the relationship between Hindutva and development. The notion of Hindu Rashtra that emerges from the periodic deliberations of Sangh *pracharaks* and ideologues attract wide attention of thinkers, political analysts, and a section of the public. Drawn from scattered, fragmented discourses, it offers a nuanced idea of a polity that can be perceived as inclusive, and not based on any religion-based segregation of primary and secondary citizens as highlighted by its critique. In such a Hindu Rashtra, the concept of "Hindu" is central. According to the Sangh interpretation, Hindu as a religion and culture in a contemporary sense is all-inclusive, resists religious hierarchies, and believes in a developing, democratic, and dialogical relation between religions. It proposes a happy, prosperous, and contended society, containing three foundational elements—*samata* (equality), *mamata* (compassion), and *samrasta*. There is no official blueprint of a Hindu Rashtra with the Sangh but it appears constantly in discussions.

As regards the second issue, Hindutva is usually perceived either as a spiritual-religious entity or a discourse centred on religious identity. However, in the context of the Sangh, it does not merely imply a spiritual-religious discourse but also includes the vision of a social, national reconstruction.

So in this context, Hindutva also deals with a holistic development of society and nation. The Sangh tries to explore our Vedic, Puranic, and folk discourses for a *sukhi* and *santusht* (happy and contended) society. Our ancient literature proposes a society that cares for everyone—men or women, rich or poor. It cares for not merely human but also the elements of nature—such as *kshitij* (horizon), *jal* (water), *pawak* (fire), and *samira* (air)—as mentioned in the Ramayana. The purity and balance of these elements forges the nature or universe. So, Hindutva-based development as a concept is sensitive towards ecology and nature from the very beginning. It has become especially relevant in the context of a growing ecological crisis resulting from aggressive modernity fuelled by the Western society and power.

A Hindutva lens argues for holistic development that encompasses materialistic development to accommodate concerns for nature, culture, and value

The RSS emphasis on a *panch parivartan* (five changes) seeks a sense of *sva* (self-hood) with *bharatiya* (Indian) values. Besides the right family values and promotion of social harmony, they inspire people to adopt an environment-friendly lifestyle and perform civic duties, as explained by the Sangh publicity head, Sunil Ambekar, recently. The Sangh also proposes a notion of development that is not be merely anthropocentric but also cares for other living beings. In that sense, a notion of non-competitive and non-violent development appears as a central tenet for the Sangh. This argues for value-based development, which is different from a Western notion of consumerist development primarily. It proposes not merely economic development but also one that is oriented towards cultural development. Thus, a Hindutva lens argues for holistic development that encompasses materialistic development to accommodate concerns for nature, culture, and value. In the RSS interpretation of development, there is room to evolve sustainability in the real sense. This notion of development is centred on the concerns that emerge from a continuous dialogue between the past, present, and future. While proposing such a way forward, the Sangh also addresses everyday issues concerning our society. That is why it takes various initiatives to resolve social problems and remove structural inequalities. Through its social services, the Sangh tries to develop a capacity to aspire among the most marginal sections. This helps the people to acquire upward mobility and prepares them to move on the path of development. In the process, the Sangh is attempting to create the conditions for development that will allow us to achieve the mission of *Viksit Bharat* (developed India).

Hindutva, as defined by the RSS, is not merely a religious identity-based social movement. It aims to facilitate India's march towards its goals of development. The Sangh and its various allies work among the poorest, marginalised, and vulnerable social groups to create the basic conditions to acquire a level from where they can move towards development-oriented goals. It does not merely work on religious issues but also engages with secular development schemes. It has also evolved from being a reformist charitable organisation to weave the diverse threads of India's social mosaic. As described by RSS general secretary Dattatreya Hosabale, the Sangh-led Hindutva is meant to build a happy, prosperous, and equal India. This aspiration is a signal of the Sangh's agenda.

Five economic lessons from a Nobel winner

I STUDIED ECONOMICS at the University of Edinburgh, which meant reading a lot about the economic history of Northern Britain—and that, in turn, meant reading a lot of Joel Mokyr, who is one of three economists who won the Nobel prize on Monday. Later on, as I embarked on my career as an economist, I got to know him personally, and his newer research continues to shape my understanding of growth.

Whenever I feel uncertain about the future of the economy, I turn to Mokyr. His work is the foundation of my understanding of why some economies thrive, some stagnate, and others decline. It offers both hope and a warning to countries navigating the current economic uncertainty, and sheds some light on big questions about the effect of AI and the viability of the Chinese model. As an admirer of his work and in honour of his Nobel, I thought I would offer the five most important of his lessons.

Growth is often resisted. Economic growth has been critical to prosperity—it is why people live longer, more comfortable lives that are free from the drudgery of hard labour. But it is often resisted, because it involves upheaval and uncertainty.

Mokyr once explained to me how, at first, men refused work in factories. They were used to working for themselves, as small-scale farmers or artisans, even though they were poor and it was not an easy life. It was what they knew. The concept of modern work—being somewhere at a certain time, staying all day, taking orders from a boss you had no relation to—was so offensive and demeaning to men that for years factories had to hire women and children. It took a few generations of social conditioning for men to make the transition.

Growth takes time. Industrialisation was made possible by a few key innovations that changed the nature of work and production. But there were critical inventions that no one knew what to do with at first, such as the steam engine, which powered factories and made industrial production possible. It took more than 100 years for its contribution to even show up in productivity statistics.



ALLISON SCHRAGER

Bloomberg

Growth is unpredictable. New innovations destroy jobs, but they also create new ones—and it is fruitless to try to anticipate what the new jobs will be. Innovations transform the economy in ways that are impossible to comprehend. As Mokyr once told me: "Imagine explaining to someone in 1920 what a cybersecurity expert is."

Growth is cultural. One question drove economic history literature for decades: Why was Great Britain the first country to industrialise and get rich? Other countries were also inventing things, or had more wealth and natural resources, or a better climate.

Mokyr's work often focuses on the culture of growth, which is critical. It comes down to an openness to risk and experimentation. This was a big part of the Scottish Enlightenment, where populations were relatively educated, their humanity was emphasised, and curiosity and individuality were valued. It's not enough for a nation to invest money and build infrastructure; it's not possible for a government to central-plan its way to prosperity. The most critical innovations are often discovered through trial-and-error.

Growth is not inevitable. For centuries, the economies of the world barely grew. There was some progress—but it was small, and when empires ended, often the progress did too. That's what makes the last few hundred years so exceptional. It is true that growth does tend to accelerate, and that innovations that grow the economy beget greater inventions. But if the right conditions for growth are not maintained, it is not guaranteed.

As the world faces a future of lower growth, there is a temptation among policymakers to have the government take a more active role in the economy. Policy certainly has a role to play. But all governments should realise that abundance doesn't come from better planning. The crucial element of growth is openness—to risk, uncertainty, change, and creativity. That's the great lesson of Joel Mokyr, and why his work is as relevant as ever.

Global drivers, India role in gold surge



HARISH GALIPELLI

Director and head-strategy, ILA Commodities India Pvt Ltd

Strategic accumulation and awareness of global trends will be essential for investors seeking to capitalise on this historic rally of gold and silver

THE PRECIOUS METALS market has experienced a historic rally, with gold and silver reaching unprecedented highs fuelled by geopolitical instability, economic uncertainty, and a surge in investor enthusiasm. From steady accumulation to a fear of missing out (FOMO)-driven frenzy, participants ranging from central banks to retail investors have propelled prices to new peaks. This article examines the catalysts behind this surge, its implications for India, and the future trajectory of these metals.

Gold, after consolidating below $2,000 for nearly a decade, skyrocketed to an all-time high of $4,179, a 158% rise since November 2022, triggered by the Russia-Ukraine war. Silver has outperformed with a remarkable 360% increase from its March 2020 low of $11.63 to a high of $53.57. The gold-to-silver ratio, typically between 55 and 75, has surged past 80, reflecting gold's out-performance and aggressive buying in undervalued silver in coming days.

Catalysts driving the surge

Geopolitical instability: Ongoing conflicts, including the Russia-Ukraine war, West Asian tensions, and US-China trade disputes, have boosted safe-haven demand for gold and silver. Political uncertainty in Europe further amplifies this trend.

Central bank accumulation: As the US dollar's status as the world's reserve currency weakens, BRICS nations and others have ramped up gold purchases, with a five-fold increase since the Russia-Ukraine conflict began. Western sanctions and freezing of Russian financial assets have underscored the reliability of physical assets like gold and silver over foreign reserves.

Inflation hedge: Persistent inflation across major economies has made gold an attractive store of value, drawing in funds and investors seeking protection against eroding purchasing power.

US economic challenges: High tariffs, a sluggish job market, inflationary pressures, and risks of government shutdowns have further driven gold prices.

Weak US dollar and ETF inflows: A declining dollar over the past three years, combined with significant inflows into gold and silver exchange-traded funds (ETFs), has created a FOMO-driven market surge.

From steady accumulation to a FOMO-driven frenzy, participants ranging from central banks to retail investors have propelled prices to new peaks

Silver's unique drivers: Beyond investment demand, silver benefits from persistent supply deficits and growing industrial demand, particularly in green technologies like solar panels and electric vehicles.

Technological demand for silver: The rise of renewable energy and electronics has increased silver's industrial appeal, as it is a critical component in photovoltaic cells, batteries, and semiconductors, adding a structural demand layer to its rally.

India's market dynamics

India, the second-largest gold importer after China, has seen domestic gold prices approach ₹130,000 per 10 grams and silver hit ₹189,000 per kilogram, driven by global trends and a depreciating rupee. Gold imports in 2025 are expected to surpass the 723 tons and 744 tons recorded in 2024 and 2023, respectively, fuelled by festive season demand and growing investment interest. Assets under management for gold and silver ETFs have doubled in 2025, with a 50% compound annual growth rate over the past five years. The Reserve Bank of India holds approximately 880 tonnes of gold by FY25, increasing from 653 tonnes in FY20, a rise over 35% over five years.

Economic impacts

Challenges: Elevated imports are likely to widen India's current account deficit, straining foreign exchange reserves and weakening the rupee, which could exacerbate inflation. The gems and jewellery export sector faces headwinds from high US tariffs, further impacting trade balances.

Opportunities: Rising precious metal prices are boosting the gold loan market, particularly in rural India, fostering economic activity. Easing import duties could reduce smuggling, channelling transactions through legal avenues and benefitting the economy.

Cultural significance: Gold and silver hold deep cultural value in India, especially during festivals like Diwali and wedding seasons, sustaining demand despite high prices.

Outlook

With gold and silver in an uncharted price territory, further gains are plausible amid ongoing global uncertainties in geopolitics, trade, and economies. Central bank buying laid the foundation for gold's rally, but recent investor and fund participation suggests sustained momentum. Silver is poised to outperform gold, driven by supply constraints, industrial demand, and a potential mean reversion in the gold-to-silver ratio. A short-term correction of 10-15% is possible due to market volatility or profit-taking. Given the volatility in these markets, investors should adopt a disciplined approach, accumulating gold and silver on price dips to mitigate risks and capitalise on long-term trends.

The surge in gold and silver prices reflects a confluence of global uncertainties, economic shifts, and structural demand factors, with India playing a pivotal role as a major consumer. While challenges like trade deficits and currency depreciation pose risks, opportunities in rural economic growth and legal trade channels offer potential benefits. As the precious metals market navigates this dynamic landscape, strategic accumulation and awareness of global trends will be essential for investors seeking to capitalise on this historic rally.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Gear up innovation

Apropos of "The importance of innovation" (*FE*, October 14), this year's Nobel laureates for economics advocate continuous innovation as the key drivers for dynamic growth, while emphasising the concept "creative destruction". They stress the role of states in creating a conducive platform to make innovation a continuous process with investment in R&D. The role of digital technology and artificial intelligence is vital in innovation. External sources aid such processes with technology and fund. India should gear up innovation with R&D and by increasing its workforce.
—NR Nagarajan, Sivakasi

Future of growth

The future of economic growth is being defined by innovation—technological, social, and institutional. Growth models that relied on capital accumulation and labour expansion are losing relevance in a world where ideas, creativity, and adaptability drive productivity. Innovation is not just about inventing new products; it's about reimagining processes, improving efficiency, and finding sustainable ways to use limited resources. It thus becomes the key pillar of economic evolution—fuelling competitiveness, resilience, and inclusivity across nations and industries. This year's Nobel laureates in economics have highlighted this shift, underscoring how innovation and the knowledge economy are reshaping the engines of growth and the policy frameworks required to support them. But this innovation-led future also poses hurdles: inequality between nations that innovate and those that lag behind may grow, and ethical dilemmas about automation, data, and environmental impact must be addressed.
—Narayanan Kizhumundayur, Thrissur

●Write to us at feletters@expressindia.com

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DECCAN Chronicle
15 OCTOBER 2025

Gaza war is over, but will peace be durable?

As the Palestinians rejoiced over 1,960 prisoners swapped for 20 Israeli hostages who had survived captivity in Gaza tunnels from October 7, 2023, and who were reunited with their families on Hostages Square in Tel Aviv, Donald Trump enjoyed his moment in the sun, grandstanding his way through the Israeli Parliament, Knesset, in Jerusalem and Sharm-El-Sheikh on the Egyptian shore of the Red Sea telling the world that this is not only the end of a war but also the end of the age of terror and death.

Who else but his principal sponsor in the form of the US President could have convinced Benjamin Netanyahu to pause the terrible war that had rained death and destruction in the Gaza Strip where around 67,000 Palestinians were killed and more than 1.9 million of a population of two million displaced, hospitals and homes razed and where hunger was in extreme evidence for over two years.

The ceasefire and exchange of people are only the first steps in the first phase of a 20-point plan that aims to bring peace to a restive region with a troubled history running into hundreds of years. Many questions are still hanging over the immediate future of the Gaza Strip even as tenuous peace returns to Israel and its neighbours.

There are intractable problems that remain to be tackled long before the larger question is addressed of whether the Palestinians will accept Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state and if the Israelis will ever countenance the granting of the Palestinians' right to statehood. Peace is now only just beginning, and it will endure only if seemingly unsolvable problems are taken head-on and solutions found.

Like the conundrum over which came first between the chicken and the egg, will Israel be the first to withdraw militarily from all of Gaza, of which it currently occupies about 50 per cent, or will Hamas step out of the administration first to make way for the grand peace plan to proceed? Those events must, however, take place if peace is to stand a chance even before the question of Hamas laying down weapons — if willing to do so to whom would they hand them over — is taken up.

Trump's plan for peace that was unveiled in Egypt, without the presence of the Israelis and Hamas, is ambitious in its all-encompassing features that include a Board of Peace to be headed, of course, by the man who did not get the Nobel Peace Prize, a multi-nations peacekeeping force drawn mostly from Arab states, and a transition government to be headed by an acceptable Palestinian face and advised by seasoned international leaders.

The question of who will pay the estimated $70 billion for reconstruction of Gaza to inhabitable status with amenities, schools and hospitals may be answered somewhat easily given there may be rich Arab nations willing to chip in. Who will run it for the Palestinian people who have an inalienable right to a homeland? Who will guarantee peaceful coexistence with a vision big enough to take the region beyond the horrendous history of tension and conflicts?

Rarely would an American President, who has proved so divisive at home, have commanded so much adulation abroad as Trump has since his unusual negotiating style using non-traditional diplomats as peace envoys yielded fruit to the extent of stopping a horrible war. And yet he must himself follow through enthusiastically if the plan is to kick on and lead towards the greater outcomes envisaged.

SC-vetted Karur probe welcome

The Supreme Court's decision to hand over the investigation into the stampede in Karur that claimed 41 lives during a rally of the Tamilaga Vetri Kazhagam (TVK) of actor-politician Vijay to the CBI is welcome. An investigation by a Central agency and supervised by a three-member committee headed by a former judge of the Supreme Court is expected to bring out the truth behind one of the biggest tragedies associated with a political event in the state. The Supreme Court directive appears to be fool-proof in that the investigation will not be swayed by political parties either at the state or at the Centre.

As the apex court pointed out, the incident "shocked the national conscience and deserves a fair and impartial investigation". However, the political parties appeared to be busy fishing in the troubled waters of state politics after it. While Mr Vijay went into a long episode of silence with an occasional expression of regret, most others were in the process of calculating political gains. Reports suggested every conversation between any two leaders was viewed as an attempt to accrue political capital out of the tragedy and for forging new relationships. This is not done.

It may be noted that the way the Madras high court handled the case came in for criticism by the Supreme Court. The apex court not only suspended the high court's directions for the appointment of an SIT and a one-man inquiry commission but also criticised the single bench for making observations against TVK and its members without making them a party to the case. It also expressed dismay at a bench of the court entertaining petitions while petitions seeking a probe were pending before another bench. It is a reminder that the judiciary must play its part of an adjudicator of justice with utmost care and caution.

The investigation must be able to fix the responsibility as to what caused such a tragic loss of human lives so that effective measures can be taken to avert a repeat of the same. Every human life is precious and must be protected, whatever it takes.

DECCAN CHRONICLE

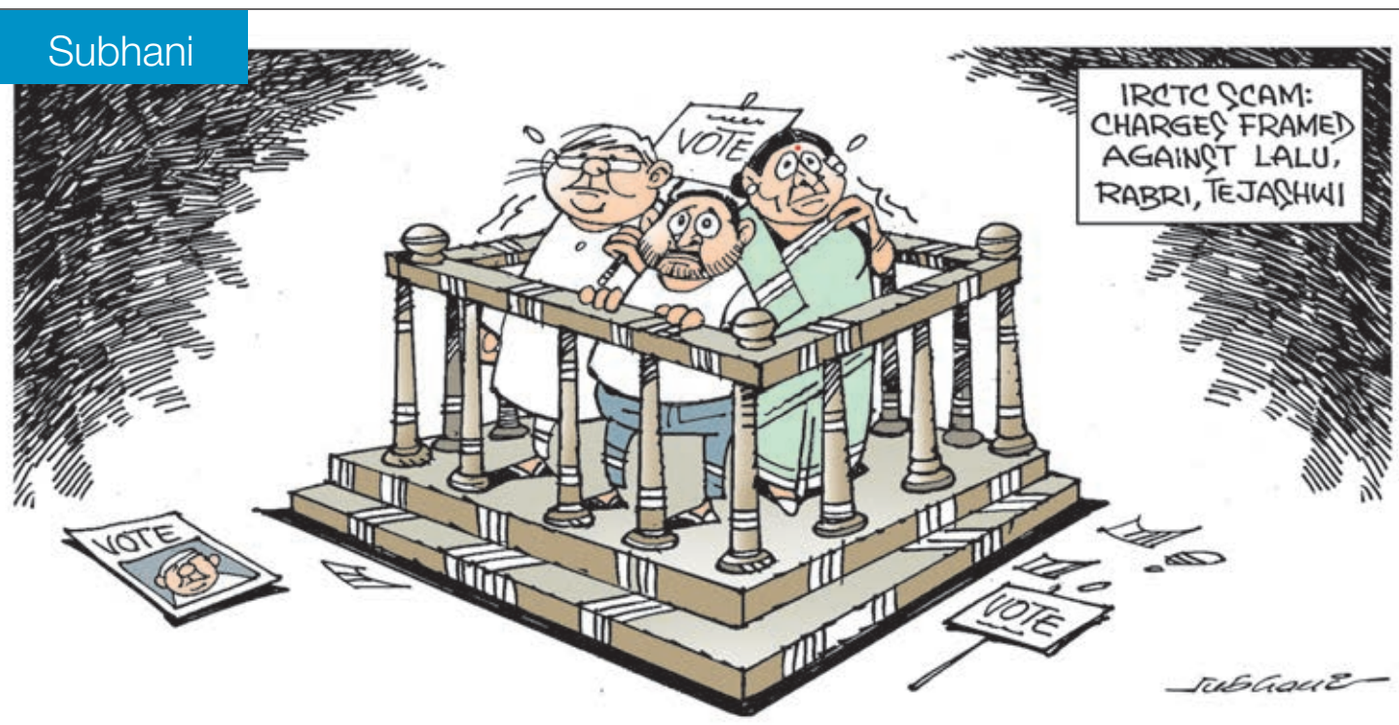
KAUSHIK MITTER
Editor

K. SUDHAKAR
Printer & Publisher

R. MOHAN
Resident Editor

DECCAN CHRONICLE offices are located at:
Chennai: SP 3 Developed Plot, Industrial Estate, Guindy, Chennai 600032. Phones: (044) 22254750 , 22254751
Coimbatore: No. 2/22 Sengalipalayam Road, N.G.G.O. Colony Post, Kurudampalayam Village, Coimbatore-641022. Phone: (0422) 2231255, 2231256
Hyderabad: 36, Sarojini Devi Road, Secunderabad 500 003. Phone: (040) 27803930-4. Fax: (040) 27805256.
Visakhapatnam: Survey No. 1/3A Beach Road, Near Kailasagiri Ropeway, Sector-9 MVP Colony, Visakhapatnam - 530 017. Phones: (0891) 2552333/2552334, Fax (0891) 2755285
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Karimnagar: H .No. 1-21-12/1, Cheralabhutkur Road, Mugudhumpur Village, Karim Nagar - 505186
Phone : 9121181123

Subhani



Anti-incumbency in Bihar? Nitish ouster won't be easy



Shikha Mukerjee

One other player who can make a difference to the INDIA bloc's final tally is Mukesh Sahani of the Vikashsheel Insaan Party, representing the EBC, or rather one section of 6-7 per cent votes

Designing an election strategy for ruling sides and Opposition challengers is neither simple nor easy when the likelihood of an emotional wave that sweeps away doubts and complicated calculations is remote, more so when the contest is essentially bipolar. With two coalitions, the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance, of which Nitish Kumar's Janata Dal (United) is the senior partner, and the INDIA bloc, led by two parties of similar weight, the Congress and the RJD, facing off, the Assembly elections in Bihar will test the management skills of every political party in the game.

The Bihar Assembly election has only agenda — change, which is also anti-incumbency; it has been on the agenda since the 2020 Assembly election, when the NDA scraped together 125 seats and the "Mahagathbandhan" won 110 seats, with the RJD winning one seat more than the BJP's 74 seats, out of a total 243 seats. The mechanics of the campaign is all about the Nitish Kumar-BJP alliance preventing change by staving off the challenge from the collective Opposition under the banner of the RJD and the Congress.

Elections in Bihar are never easy to manage, to begin with. The competition acquires an entirely different edge in Bihar, making it even more difficult for party managers. Bihar's political culture and traditions are unique, which means there may not be many lessons to learn and draw on as India in 2026 heads into a critical phase of elections in five politically consequential states, for both the NDA as well as the INDIA bloc. By piloting the Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls and linking it with a disguised exercise in verification of citizenship, the Election Commission, reportedly at the behest of the ruling BJP at the Centre, has added to the complexities of election management.

After nine terms as chief minister, Nitish Kumar is familiar, but with that comes contempt, because of his capacity to switch sides to remain in power. Despite his reputation of being "Paltu Ram", Bihar's politics has not thrown up more than one prospective chief ministerial candidate, that is, Tejashwi Yadav. The BJP does not have a unifying leader or a charismatic potential chief minister candidate; for that matter, neither does the Congress. What it does have are two leaders, both outsiders and neither a candidate, competing against each other to win over the hearts and hopes of Bihar's voters. As star campaigner for the BJP, Narendra Modi's appeal has been time-tested; even he is not sure how far that will go to prevent a regime change in Bihar. Therefore, as an advance on the bounty that the BJP can bestow on Bihar's seriously poor people, he has resorted to unloading packaged cash transfers of about ₹62,000 crores, of which the ₹10,000-crore Mukhyamantri Mahila Rojgar Yojana for one crore women, is only one scheme. The "double engine sarkar" model, of the NDA in power at the Centre and in the state, seems to be the best mechanism to keep discontent at bay.

Taking a cue, Tejashwi Yadav has announced he will introduce a programme to provide government employment to every household in the state, meaning every household where no member is already a government employee. The pre-emptive declaration of himself as the alternative chief minister is one of the many ways in which coalition building in Bihar is a precarious project. Even though the INDIA alliance has functioned as a cohesive coalition on the ground in the past five years, including the hugely popular Bharat Jodo Yatra led by Rahul Gandhi and his follow-up recent Vote Adhikar Yatra, the pulls and tensions of seat-sharing between the RJD and the Congress have not diminished significantly. The Congress sees the RJD leader's reputation as a hindrance while the RJD obviously cannot think of a chief ministerial face other than Tejashwi Yadav.

In the coalition versus coalition contest, the oddball is former election strategist Prashant Kishor's Jan Suraaj Party. He is the dark horse, the unpredictable factor; he could cut into the BJP-JD(U) vote share or he could cut into the Mahagathbandhan vote share. He could be a spoiler for one side or the other. After spending months on focusing on the issue of corruption, especially during the Lalu Prasad Yadav years and failure to deliver development at the grassroots, Prashant Kishor seems to have shifted attention to stoking the anti-incumbency discontent. Observers, political leaders and election watchers do not give Prashant Kishor much chance in doing anything more than winning, at best, a handful of seats, if he selects the right candidate for the right constituency. In Bihar, getting it right is a complex chemical reaction of caste loyalties, political loyalties and personal preferences.

There is one other player in the competitive politics of Bihar, who, if he can tilt voters, can make a difference to the INDIA bloc's final tally: Mukesh Sahani of the Vikashsheel Insaan Party, representing the Economically Backward Castes, or rather one section of perhaps six to seven per cent votes. And then, there is Jitan Ram Majhi, a veteran Dalit leader of the Hindustan Awam Morcha, and the equally ambitious Chiraj Paswan of the Lok Janshakti Party, representing a section of Scheduled Caste interests.

In the chaotic mosaic of Bihar's politics, where today's coalition partner was yesterday's political foe, where regional politics and regional parties matter more than national parties, the emergence of the CPI(M-L) as an organised, dependable and coherent contestant is significant. The CPI(M-L) is holding constituency-wise, that is, 12 centralised meetings in which the party is sharing a report card on what it has done, what it has failed to do and what it will do in the future. This transparency and accountability is a new initiative that brands the CPI(M-L) as a party representing the people. In contrast, the Congress is a party of the past with ambitions for the future, and the BJP is the party of the present with ambitions for the future.

Bihar's politics is and has always been about Bihar. Even the war cry of "Sampoorna Kranti" by Jayaprakash Narayan in 1974, that then became the rallying call against the 1975 Emergency, was about Bihar's governance. The 2025 state Assembly election may bring change in Bihar or voters may prefer the status quo, unsatisfactory as it is and has been since 2020. The best that can be said is that anti-incumbency, however long it may have simmered, is not the real reason why regimes change; there has to be a plus factor and in Bihar, this time, there does not seem to be one.

Shikha Mukerjee is a senior journalist in Kolkata

LETTERS

TALIBAN TIES

India's decision to reopen the embassy in Kabul signals a key diplomatic engagement with the Taliban regime. Many remain uneasy on this because of the Taliban's track record on human rights. Think tanks have argued that our absence creates a vacuum which can be filled by our rivals. About two decades of engagement must not be cut off due to regime change. You may not endorse the Taliban but maintaining our presence in the region is key for India's interests.

B.Krishwanth
Chennai

MAMATA DISAPPOINTS

Chief Minister Mamata's response to the Durgapur rape incident is deeply disappointing and emblematic of a mindset that shifts blame from perpetrators to victims. By questioning why a young woman was out at night, the state's leadership not only trivialises the crime but also sends a dangerous message — that women's safety depends on their compliance, not on the state's duty to protect. Protection of life and liberty is the foremost responsibility of any democratic government, and the failure to ensure it cannot be masked by moral policing. True governance demands justice, not judgment. Victim-blaming reflects administrative helplessness and erodes public trust in law enforcement. Instead of curbing women's freedom, the focus should be on stronger policing, safer campuses, and faster legal recourse. As Gandhiji said, "The day a woman can walk freely on the roads at night, that day we can say India has achieved independence." The goal must be to build a society where exercising freedom is not seen as defiance, but as a right guaranteed by justice and equality.

K.SAKUNTHALA
Coimbatore

Mail your letters to
chennaidesk@deccanmail.com



Bhopinder Singh

Will Saudi Arabia come to rescue of Pakistan in case a conflict erupts?

Some weeks ago, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan signed a Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement, leading to concerns about the implications of the new accord. Will the agreement's underlying principle, stating that any aggression against any one nation be considered an aggression against both, be tantamount to both jointly counter-attacking an "enemy"?

So, hypothetically, if the Yemeni Houthi militia were to launch attacks against Saudi forces (as they have continued to so, intermittently) or if a India-Pakistan conflict takes place again (as it did in May 2025) — would a joint Saudi-Pakistani force strike against their respective "enemies"? That doesn't seem so, given that this agreement's language is sufficiently ambiguous and platitudinous -- neither are the exact acts of "aggression" described, nor are any consequential protocols of joint intervention clearly defined.

It is, at best, a reaffirmation of historical ties meant to address the current urgencies for both Riyadh and Islamabad, from a posturing and optical angle. As the essential bankroller of the deal, Riyadh drives the real bargain in the agreement, and can pay an attractive "price" for the services rendered by Pakistan, that are desperately sought by cash-strapped Pakistanis. The essentials of this buyer-seller agreement elements hark back to the age-old realm of security that a cash-flush sheikhdom can readily outsource to the decidedly more war-experienced, trained and willing services, of the Pakistani military personnel.

That Pakistan is the only "nuclear weapon" capable Islamic nation sweetens the deal, as it affords portents of a "nuclear cover" in some eventuality. As Israel goes about pummelling the Gaza Strip to a pulp and hitting targets across any force that offers an semblance of opposition — such as Iran, the Houthi and Hezbollah militias, or even targets in the Arab sheikhdom of Qatar — the haplessness of the Ummah (Islamic world) has perhaps never been so exposed. The Ummah, and the Saudis in particular, need a protective cover (buffer?) that suggests some sort of militaristic deterrence to disallow a similar Israeli strike on the Saudi kingdom, on the lines of Qatar.

Since the 1970s, the Pakistani military has served in protecting the territorial integrity and security threats of Saudi Arabia. Pakistani fighter pilots flew combat missions in the Al-Wadiah war between Saudia Arabia and Yemen. Pakistani forces had also guarded frontiers during the prolonged Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s and in the Gulf War (in 1990s), with the Pakistani contingent of up to 20,000 soldiers deployed in defence of the Saudi Arabian kingdom.

This figure of the Pakistan military doesn't include an estimated 75,000 Saudi military personnel of Pakistani ethnicity, who have enlisted for soldering tasks that an average and affluent Saudi native would typically eschew.

From the Pakistani angle, the sovereign intent and emotions in protecting the two of the holiest mosques in the Islamic faith — Masjid al-Haram in Mecca and Masjid an-Nabawi in Medina — can never be questioned. Within the Kingdom, meanwhile, the memories of the role played by Pakistani forces in quelling the seizure of the Grand Mosque in 1979 justifies the purchase of Pakistani services. Therefore, when conflict-wariness born out of sectarian tensions, extremist forces or portents of an "Arab Spring" dawned on the Saudi-led Arab (and predominantly Sunni) nations, a then recently-retired Pakistani Army Chief, Gen. Raheel Sharif, was entrusted the responsibility to be head of the Riyadh-based Islamic Military Counter-Terrorism Coalition force.

Today, as the Saudi kingdom feels a tectonic shift in the form of threat perceptions, formal joint action with a nuclear-powered Pakistan does well to assuage the Saudi citizenry to retain faith in the monarchical set-up of the Al-Saud family. For the Pakistanis who have availed of life-sustaining (default avoiding) financial assistance of up to $5 billion in recent times, the future carrot of $25 billion investment under Saudi Prince Mohammed bin Salman's "Vision 2030", or tactical investments in CPEC (China Pakistan Economic Corridor) imperatives, is temptingly transformational.

However, history is instructive that no amount of claimed "brotherhood" leads to practical militaristic intervention on behalf of each other, as can be simplistically assumed, going forward. The very recent India-Pakistan conflict (Operation Sindoor) did see Saudi Arabia make mealy-mouthed statements that sought to offend neither Islamabad nor New Delhi, but it steered clear of adopting a clear "pro-Pakistan" stance, as adopted by the troika of China, Turkey and Azerbaijan. Similarly, to the consternation of Saudis, Pakistan had refused to join the Saudi forces in attacking Yemen in March 2015 (Operation Decisive Storm), due to sectarian considerations.

Even the shameful pusillanimity of the Ummah in failing to defend the cause of Palestine (in its immediate neighbourhood), despite bombastic rhetoric to protect the same, should concern those who believe the Saudis could possibly marshal its troops to defend Pakistan, in an eventuality against, say, India. Saudi Arabia (or other sheikdoms) no longer have the same beef or Kashmir fixation with India, as they weigh the growing benefits of doing business with India. They can happily de-hyphenate the India-Pakistan tensions, whenever they do business or sign agreements with New Delhi or Islamabad. The days of binary interpretation are over, as recent times have seen the Pakistani leadership (including its Army Chief) bend over obsequiously to ingratiate themselves with US President Donald Trump, who is the real force behind Israel's brazen conduct in the Gaza Strip. So, this buyer-seller agreement can suggest a lot, but guarantees precious little.

The writer is a retired lieutenant-general and a former lieutenant-governor of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Puducherry

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{ OUR TAKE }

Trump's hour in West Asia

The tricky part lies in turning the Israel-Hamas ceasefire into a permanent peace

On Monday, Hamas released 20 Israeli hostages and some 2,000 Palestinian prisoners were freed by Israel, marking the beginning of the first phase of US President Donald Trump's 20-point West Asia peace plan. Trump, who visited Israel and Egypt to witness the fruits of his peace deal, announced at the Knesset, the Israeli parliament, "the historic dawn of a new Middle East". Later, in Sharm-el-Sheikh, Egypt, Trump, with a large number of presidents, prime ministers, and emirs in attendance, signed the Gaza Declaration.

Hyperbole aside, it was Trump's moment in the sun, where he revelled in his role as a peace-broker and deal-maker, even suggesting to Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu (at the Knesset) that he was willing to negotiate between the Jewish State and the Islamic Republic of Iran. Few grudged Trump's grandstanding, for most people were relieved that he got Netanyahu to end the two-year war that led to over 67,000 Palestinian deaths and reduced Gaza to rubble.

The ceasefire may have been a low-hanging fruit, considering that a durable peace in Gaza, and thereby in West Asia, revolves around the challenge of managing and rebuilding Gaza, and the making of a Palestinian State. The Trump plan talked about the disarmament of Hamas and its removal from governance in Gaza. Hamas ignored this demand, and its cadres have reportedly reappeared in Gaza to police civilians. The Fatah, entrenched in the West Bank, lacks public support or the machinery to pull its weight over Hamas in Gaza. An international stabilisation force has been mooted, but there is neither clarity nor a consensus on who would provide the personnel or the necessary funds. Stabilisation of Gaza's cities and towns — restoration of the supply and distribution of aid and essentials, for instance — will have to precede its rebuilding. The war was a testament to the marginalisation of the United Nations; the global body can, perhaps, at least help in keeping peace.

The case of establishing a Palestinian State is even more complicated since the Netanyahu administration has been categorical in its rejection of the idea. Important West Asian nations such as Saudi Arabia, which welcomed Trump's peace plan, have been cautious about celebrating the ceasefire as a breakthrough for the region. The unravelling of the Abraham Accords, a major achievement of Trump's first term, which promised the normalisation of relations between Israel and several Sunni Arab States, suggests how ephemeral the spectre of peace in West Asia can be, given the intransigence of Israel towards a Palestinian State and the absence of trust among neighbours in West Asia. Building peace in the desolation that Gaza is today is a perilous task.

Politicians must take lessons in sensitivity

The comment on the Durgapur rape by West Bengal chief minister (CM) Mamata Banerjee is only the latest in a long string of disquieting remarks made by top politicians on women's issues, especially around sexual violence and safety. Though Banerjee has since said that her words were distorted (a standard response), the suggestion that a 23-year-old MBBS student who was raped near a medical college in Durgapur was somehow responsible for the crime because she was out late at night has triggered outrage. Unfortunately, such attitudes are only too common and span political and ideological lines. Whether it be Union ministers blaming rising sexual crimes on boys and girls "roaming around" with each other, a CM saying parents need to "introspect" on allowing children out late at night, or a senior leader excusing violent crime by saying "boys will be boys", depressing examples of insensitivity appear to be the norm in Indian politics — a strange dichotomy in a landscape where leaders now regularly sing paeans to women power and strive hard to woo the female vote, an increasingly decisive demographic in elections.

Can this change? Maybe politicians, whose life's work is building a standing in the community they claim to represent, should take lessons in sensitivity or public communications — especially in cases of social importance — and remember that they are leaders whose examples are emulated by supporters. Or they can possibly keep the vote bank they are trying to win over and restrain themselves from making off-the-cuff remarks that harden patriarchal mores. Ultimately, maybe the most realistic response is to admit that, save for some exceptions, politicians are largely a reflection of the prevalent social moods and customs that govern society — no worse, and definitely no better.

Standards that threaten India's mobility future

Revised CAFE norms risk pushing India backward. They need to be fixed



Regulations must explicitly drive EV adoption — tougher targets, stronger incentives, and no loopholes. REUTERS



Amitabh Kant

Common, Connected, Convenient, Congestion-free, Charged, Clean and Cutting-edge – these 7Cs represent the vision for the future of mobility in India, outlined by Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi. All mobility initiatives in India have since evolved around this vision.

On September 25, 2025, the Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) released the revised draft of the next phase of the Corporate Average Fuel Efficiency (CAFE) standards. This comes 15 months after the first draft. For a sector that accounts for 7% of India's GDP and millions of jobs, this is not just another regulatory update: It is about the very future of India's mobility.

Globally, the automobile industry is undergoing its biggest disruption in a century. The internal combustion engine (ICE) is giving way to electrification. China has raced ahead, Europe is catching up fast, and even the US is moving. India, the world's third-largest automobile market, cannot afford half-steps and incrementalism. EVs produce zero tailpipe emissions, reducing air pollution and greenhouse gases like carbon dioxide. CAFE is one of the most powerful tools we have, but the revised draft falls severely short. The present draft will lock India in intermediate technology for the next two decades, derail its ability to technologically pole vault and delay its electrification journey. If India is serious about global leadership in clean mobility, four decisive course corrections are essential.

Put EVs at the heart, not the periphery: India is badly lagging. EVs made up just 2% of new passenger car sales in 2024–25, compared to 50% in China, over 20% in Europe, and 10% in the US. Yet the revised CAFE framework pays lip service to electrification — a retrograde step at a time when the world is racing ahead. Let's be clear: There is no pathway to efficiency without electrification. Anything else is wishful thinking.

India has set a target of 30% EV penetration by 2030, but the current CAFE draft will not even deliver that. Regulations must explicitly drive EV adoption — tougher targets, stronger incentives, and no loopholes. Electrification is not just an environmental imperative; it is an economic one, tackling air pollution, reducing high oil imports, and creating new industries and jobs. If designed right, India has the opportunity to leapfrog into a cleaner, more competitive future. BEE should revise the CAFE regulations to define outcome, set clear annual EV targets and review them based on actual performance.

Stop backing yesterday's technology: The revised norms still provide super credits to hybrids, technologies that are neither here nor there and are outdated. These so-called strong hybrids are, in reality, conventional hybrids with tiny batteries — smaller than those in electric two-wheelers — still dependent on fossil fuels, still polluting, and offering only marginal efficiency gains.

Supporting hybrids today is like subsidising typewriters in the age of smartphones. It delays the inevitable, misleads consumers, and holds back real innovation. CAFE must send one message loud and clear: India backs full electrification. No halfway houses, no distractions.

BEE should gradually phase down super credits for battery electric vehicles (BEVs) to 1, and eliminate super credits altogether for internal combustion engine (ICE) and hybrid technologies. This will ensure clarity of direction, reward genuine innovation, and stop wasting policy support on outdated solutions.

Redefine what an efficient car really is: The current draft gives special treatment to cars under 1200 cc and 4 metres in length, based on the flawed assumption that smaller automatically means more efficient. This is a myth. Small car definition was introduced in the 2006 Union Budget and is a unique creation of the Indian policy makers. This definition does not exist in any other market. Uniform standards push technology forward; exemptions hold it back.

ICCT's research clearly shows that cars with the same engine displacement can have vastly different emissions. For example, a 1200 cc car may emit as little as 85 g/km or as much as 149 g/km. Yet under the revised CAFE norms, they are treated identically. This is not just scientifically flawed, it undermines the very purpose of the regulation.

The low-cost car segment is steadily shrinking as Indian consumers demand greater safety, comfort, and advanced features. Supporting a category that is losing relevance in the marketplace is counterproductive. CAFE must reward actual efficiency, not arbitrary definitions of "smallness". The metric should be measurable performance on emissions and fuel use, backed by data, not outdated proxies like engine size or length.

Reward leaders, not just punish laggards: CAFE today penalises non-compliance but does not reward overachievement. That is backward. India needs a credit-trading system that incentivises leaders. Manufacturers who exceed EV targets should be able to trade credits with those who fall short. This creates a dynamic, market-driven mechanism that drives innovation, rewards ambition, and accelerates change. Pooling targets, as allowed in the draft, is too limited. What India needs is a performance-based ecosystem where leaders thrive and laggards pay.

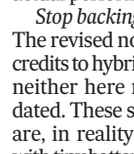
A defining moment for India's economy: India's mobility transformation is not about incremental efficiency; it is about industrial leadership. The EV value chain alone could create 50 million jobs by 2030, spanning manufacturing, research and development, software, digital services, and repair. With bold policies, India can dominate the global EV market, not just participate in it.

Consumers will benefit too. As production scales, EVs will become cheaper to buy and cheaper to run. Coupled with renewable energy, domestic cell manufacturing, and smart charging, the cost advantage will be undeniable.

The revised CAFE draft, in its current form, is contrary to the 7C vision highlighted by the PM. It risks pushing India backward at a time when the world is racing ahead. If India truly wants to lead and not lag, BEE must think bigger, act bolder, and move decisively. This is our defining moment: Incrementalism and half-measures will only hold us back.

Amitabh Kant was India's G20 Sherpa and ex-CEO, Niti Aayog. The views expressed are personal

Maze facing Karnataka's caste counting exercise



Janaki Nair

Karnataka has been in the grip of a massive panic attack, especially among caste associations and their leaders, *mathadhishas* (pontiffs of monastic orders with caste affiliations), and Opposition politicians. Prompted by the Socio-Economic and Educational Survey, which is concluding this weekend, every *jati* (caste) and *upa-jati* (sub-caste) is advising its flock on how to fill — or not fill — the 60-question form.

This re-survey was loudly demanded by two of Karnataka's most dominant castes, the Vokkaligas and Lingayats. They had opposed the findings of the Kantharaj Commission of 2015, which were withheld until 2025 for many reasons, calling into question its scientificity. But a "scientific truth" in the reckoning of the dominant castes can only be a truth which affirms their demographic dominance. In the 2015 survey, the Big Two seemed to account for about 11% each in the state's population. No surprise, too, that the Commission found that the SCs, STs, and Kurubas, among the most dominated caste groups, constituted at least 50% of the population.

The scientificity was challenged on the grounds that the report was 10 years old. And in some cases, the response had been that "no enumerator came to my door". The survey, which covered over 10 million households, is exactly what it says – a survey, not a census, which sampled a substantial population systematically. Yet the claims of the Vokkaligas and Lingayats (that they constitute 14% and 16-17%, respectively, and not the survey's 11% each) were extrapolations of the 1931 census, the last time caste was counted.

In short, science and objectivity quietly disappeared; statistics seem acceptable only if they align with one's claim to dominance. Given the Big Two's presence — not only in the economic, social, and educational spheres, but also in politics — the re-survey was announced.

Haunted by the memory of the Lingayats' demand for recognition as a separate religion (recommended by the state government, but shot down at the Union government level in 2018), Veerashaiva and Lingayat leaders first scrambled to ensure that their flocks obeyed their orders on how to report their religion/caste status. Reports of innumerable meetings, arguments by leading ideologues, pamphlets, and full-page advertisements have flooded the print media and dominated the TV channels.

The Veerashaivas, unable to get Lingayats to commit firmly to their alleged unity, were forced to make amusing and contradictory announcements. For instance, whether Lingayats are indeed Hindus has been debated and discussed for close to a century. Basava Jaya Mrutyunjaya Swami, leader of the most important subcaste, i.e., Panchamasalis, who, he says, constitute 80% of Lingayats, had long headed the movement to claim a change in reservation status. Now, he has advised his followers to self-report as Hindus as a temporary measure, until the Lingayats' separate status is legally ensured.

Other leaders have urged their followers to report themselves as Lingayat under the religion column. The Lingayats had a mega convention last weekend that had chief minister Siddaramaiah, not known for using religious insignia, sporting three stripes on his forehead.

The BJP and its allies, and the All India Veerashaiva Mahasabha (which has lately hyphenated itself to Lingayat) have asked their members to report only as Hindus. While some leaders are claiming that the Veerashaivas too are committed to the separate religion status, others have seen the socio-economic survey as a ruse of the Siddaramaiah government to wreck the unity of Veerashaivas and Lingayats.

Meanwhile, a *Panchamacharya* (Veerashaiva) swami of the Rambhapuri *matha*, asserted his superiority by mounting the *adda palakki* (cross palanquin) for Dussehra, a symbol that they equalled Brahmins in the public sphere. It is difficult to sweep more than a century of antagonisms and theological debates under the carpet.

Should the people demanding a separate religious status claim reservations at all, asked Shivakumar Shivacharya Swamiji of the Sirigere Matha, one of the most important of Karnataka's Lingayat *mathas*. He has rightly pointed out that socio-economic and educational attainments have been thrust aside to focus on caste questions alone. True adherence to the tenets of Basava, he says, would be to generate strictly "secular" data on socio-economic and educational status for the state to redress inequality.

But as we all know, especially from the way in which a 10% chunk of reservations has slyly been slipped in using the criterion of poverty (i.e., EWS), this is not how inequality and discrimination are experienced by lower castes and Dalits, even in the present day. Those who have kept the goal of social justice in the foreground have no confusion about how to report in the ongoing survey.

Now, the Big Two are challenging the survey in the courts. Preventing social justice thus appears to be the goal of all those opposing the re-survey. Brahmins, usually zealous about implementing the commensal and connubial distinctions of *gotra*, etc, have now appeared eager to declare unity. Others have made the laughable assertion that people should boycott the survey (which is, in any case, optional, not compulsory, since it is a survey, not a census) because "who knows to what use this data will be put?"

Every Indian citizen knows from her painful daily experience that banks and airports, schools and places of employment, all are tirelessly and insistently demanding documents of citizens. To what use is this vast citizen data being put?

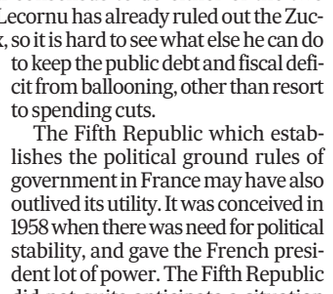
This appetite for data is growing even as the Indian State and its apparatuses have become completely inscrutable as the Right to Information Act has been blunted. Meanwhile, Karnataka is now divided between those who see the socio-economic survey either as a threat to their dominance or as a promise of greater social, economic, and educational equality. Which side will turn up trumps?

Janaki Nair is a historian. The views expressed are personal

{ BHUPENDER YADAV } UNION MINISTER FOR ENVIRONMENT

We must now focus on ... addressing the most pressing challenge: the lack of resources for developing countries to deliver adaptation and mitigation

At the Global Stocktake session of COP30



After turmoil, time for a Sixth Republic in France

A day after French Prime Minister (PM) Sébastien Lecornu announced his cabinet on October 5, he had to tender his resignation to President Emmanuel Macron — thereby earning the dubious distinction of being the premier with the shortest period served in France's Fifth Republic. But, in a week that was bizarre even by French standards, Macron re-appointed Lecornu as PM on October 10 and tasked him with government formation and passing the national budget.

It was Macron's act of folly in June last year — when he called for snap parliamentary elections — that led to a hung parliament with a three-way split between far-Right, Left/far-Left, and centrist parties. Since then, three PMs have come and gone in quick succession. The political reality is that Macron's centrist alliance does not enjoy majority support in the fractured French parliament.



Mohan Kumar

Macron does not have too many options at this stage. In a final act of desperation, Macron re-appointed Lecornu to try and achieve consensus among the warring parties, with a view to pass a budget. If this gambit fails, the only course of action will be for Macron to call another snap parliamentary election. The trouble is another parliamentary election is unlikely to resolve matters. In such a scenario, it is quite conceivable that the far-Right party of Marine Le Pen, National Rally, emerges as the single-largest party in the parliament and claims the premier's post. Macron will then have no alternative but to "co-habit" with a far-Right PM and accept that this will be the lasting legacy of his presidency. There have been calls for Macron to resign, but it is unlikely that he will heed these, at least for now.

A joke doing the rounds in Europe is that France has become Italy and Italy has become France, referring to the contrast between the relative stability and prosperity enjoyed by Italy under Giorgia Meloni and the political uncertainty and economic turbulence experienced by France under Macron. France has enormously high public debt, an unsustainable fiscal deficit, and a sovereign rating that has been downgraded recently. So much so, France's overall rating is only ahead of Italy and Greece in the eurozone. Indeed, Moody's has described Italy's outlook as positive while describing France's outlook as negative. For most French people, nothing could be more insulting.

Behind the politics of it all, lies the massive financial crisis that France confronts. Two substantive issues agitate the French mind at present. One, the issue of pension reform. In 2023, France passed a law to raise the retirement age to 64 years from 62 years, with the requirement that pensioners must have worked for at least 43 years. This was Macron's signature reform pushed through parliament without a vote. This has never really been accepted by the French public and is being opposed by the Left/far-Left parties which now have serious clout in the parliament. Left to themselves, they will repeal this law. The second issue is the so-called Zucman tax (named after French economist Gabriel Zucman) — a wealth tax of 2% on persons with more than 100 million euros. This has found favour with the French populace but not with the Right. The bottom line is this: France must either accept an austerity budget with public spending cuts or find ways to tax the ultra-rich. At present, there is no political consensus to do either of the two things. Lecornu has already ruled out the Zucman tax, so it is hard to see what else he can do to keep the public debt and fiscal deficit from ballooning, other than resort to spending cuts.

The Fifth Republic which establishes the political ground rules of government in France may have also outlived its utility. It was conceived in 1958 when there was need for political stability, and gave the French president lot of power. The Fifth Republic did not quite anticipate a situation where a president could be legitimately elected for a period of five years, but their political formation did not necessarily dominate the French parliament. In the past, there were instances of "co-habitation" that worked, partly because presidents were larger than life and there was a spirit of compromise among French politicians. That political culture is long gone. It may be necessary to devise a Sixth Republic, with fresh rules of engagement for politicians and new definitions of the president's powers. Whether France is ready for such a thing is another matter.

Amid all of this, one political party may gain the most. Unsurprisingly, it is Le Pen's National Rally. It is a matter of supreme irony that while all the political stars seem to suggest that Le Pen could conceivably win the presidential elections due in 2027, the legal hurdles she faces from corruption cases may prevent her from contesting the very elections that she wants to win. But then, her protégé, Jordan Bardella, is well placed to inherit the mantle. The French certainly live in interesting times.

Mohan Kumar is former Indian ambassador to France and is currently dean/professor at OP Jindal Global University. The views expressed are personal

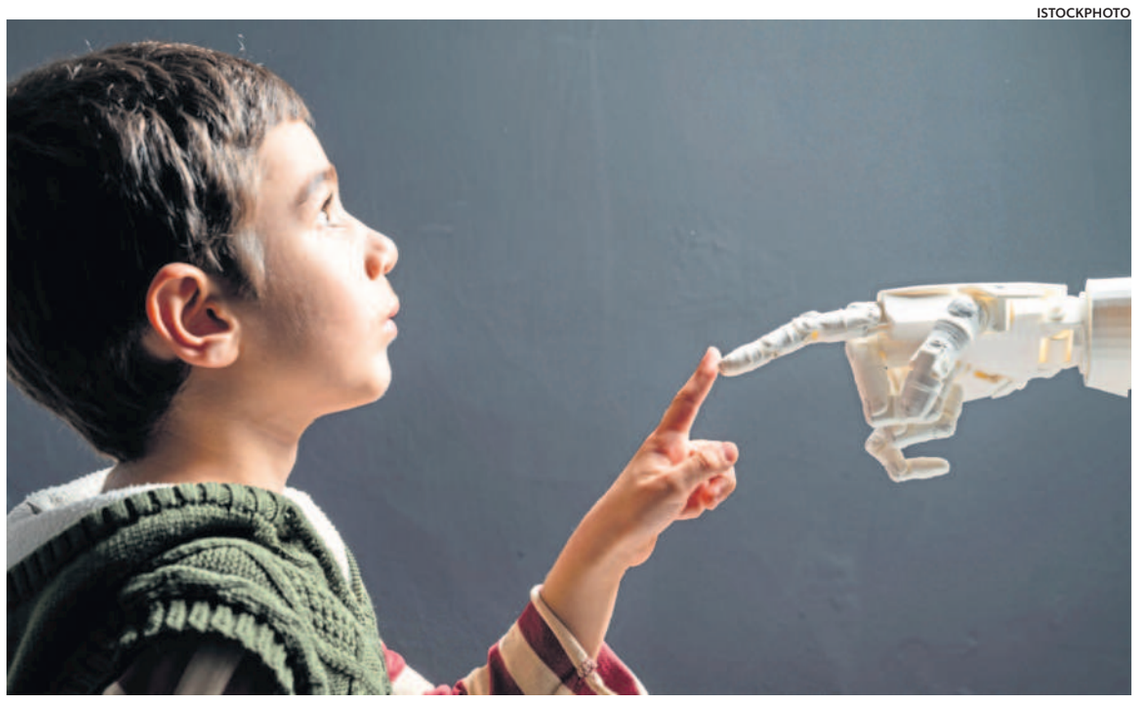
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OUR VIEW

ISTOCKPHOTO



AI adoption by schools: Make haste, but slowly

As artificial intelligence storms the world, India's education system clearly needs to adapt. But the stakes in this field are so high that AI adoption must satisfy the strictest of safety tests

There is no escape from AI. Its embrace is essential to progress, a consensus that unites tech mavens and policy wonks with AI chatbots. As OpenAI's ChatGPT puts it, artificial intelligence (AI) is "not inherently" but "practically" essential to progress "in today's context." Its rise has already shaken India's software sector, which needs full R&D mastery over it to make a proper AI pivot, even if adaptation is the urgency right now. As this year's Nobel award for economics reminds us, innovation-led growth is not costless. What's creative can also be destructive, and we must do all we humanly can to ensure that its gains outweigh its costs. AI uptake puts jobs at risk, but, as a report by Niti Aayog says, while a quarter of our tech sector's 8 million roles may vanish by 2031, some 4 million new ones could arise too. Payrolls could go both ways. What AI implies for us beyond a five-year horizon matters even more, which is why an AI plan of the education ministry should make us sit up. As reported, it may place AI on next year's syllabus of schools under the Central Board of Secondary Education, starting with pupils of Class 3. China has taken a lead in raising kids as AI natives, but at what pace should India be trying to catch up?

While academia must adapt to AI, students must duly be forearmed with the key faculty of critical thinking. Classes must foster a spirit of inquiry that's ready to probe everything that is pitched as truth. If social media yielded a 'post-truth' world, AI could amplify fakery. Given the real-world data that AI trains on, this is not a trivial concern. Stanford AI researcher James Zou recently flagged some "troubling" emergent behaviour seen in large language models (LLMs). "When LLMs compete for social media likes, they start making things up," he said on X, "When they compete for votes, they turn inflammatory/populist." A paper that he co-authored with Stanford's Batu El on how LLMs can get misaligned in a contest for audiences calls this the 'Moloch's Bargain': one that involves everyone, even though we would all be better off if it involved nobody. Their lab tests found that even when explicitly asked to stay truthful, LLMs that were optimized for competitive success got deceptive under pressure to deliver on sales, vote-share and social media engagement goals. Clearly, AI adopters need to identify and squash such 'alignment' risks. Our education system, especially so.

True, the 'post-truth' world has defenders who call it the digital twin of a 'post-modern' dismissal of absolute truth. However, in the far less abstract realm that most of us inhabit online, we need good old truth to prevail. As we prepare to enrol AI for education, we must keep students updated on its fallibility, test all LLMs deployed for integrity, and make the artificiality—and amorality—of these clever bots amply clear in class. Critically, the market for AI tools must never go the winner-take-all way. The profit motive of private enterprise is far more likely to keep the outputs of AI chatbots—and actions of AI agents—aligned with the interests of users if multiple tools vie for our usage. For this, we must avoid the trap of 'network effects': If everyone starts using the same tool everyone else is using (or is asked to), rivalry levels could fall, a monopoly may arise and users might lose their say in how AI evolves. In education, like elsewhere, we need a strict vigil kept on the role of AI. Even if it's only a tail-risk, going wrong would be far too costly. Let's pace our adoption accordingly.

GUEST VIEW

GST reforms done, let us opt for the fastest path to clean mobility

We need a stable tax-policy roadmap that's better calibrated to incentivize the use of green vehicles



RAJEEV CHABA
is an automobile industry veteran.

India's recent goods and services tax (GST) rationalization is an important step, but its significance goes beyond simplifying tax slabs. The reform provides clarity that the auto industry has long needed. Yet, clarity alone is not enough. What matters now is how this policy can accelerate the adoption of cleaner and more sustainable mobility options that will define India's economic and environmental trajectory for the next decade. We stand at a crossroads: the government has given the sector a cleaner baseline, but the real challenge and opportunity both lie in aligning the country's fiscal policy with its long-term green mobility goals.

For years, automotive taxation revolved around conventional parameters like engine size, vehicle length or fuel type. That made little sense in a world moving rapidly towards electric vehicles (EVs), hybrids and alternative-fuel technologies. Today, with EV penetration still in single-digits and hybrid and flex-fuel adoption just beginning, policy must explicitly reward these technologies. GST rationalization clears a lot of structural clutter, no doubt, but unless incentives are tied more closely to cleaner technologies, this clarity risks being underused.

Taxation policy is a strategic tool to shape India's mobility landscape whose benefits need to be appreciated and maximized.

The potential is enormous. Electric, plug-in hybrid and flex-fuel vehicles offer multiple benefits: they reduce emissions, lower dependence on imported fuels and catalyse domestic manufacturing and innovation. Yet, their adoption remains constrained by higher upfront costs and limited support infrastructure.

Here, GST can make a real difference. A tiered approach that sets zero GST for battery EVs, 5% for plug-in hybrids and flex-fuel vehicles, and higher rates for conventional internal combustion models would send out a clear signal. It would message that India values green innovation and sustainability over inertia in the auto sector, and helps consumers make choices that align with national priorities.

Policy stability is critical for India to build a self-reliant green mobility ecosystem. The auto sector cannot invest in charging infrastructure, battery supply chains or flex-fuel ecosystems if policy keeps shifting every few years. A 10-year horizon for GST policy would provide the certainty needed to scale domestic capabilities. Once clean-tech penetration reaches 20–25%—a realistic milestone within 5 years—the structure can be recalibrated. Even then, relative ecological advantages among technologies must be preserved to ensure the policy intent remains unambiguous. Without this, manufacturers and investors would hesitate and the momentum for green mobility may stall before it can achieve meaningful scale.

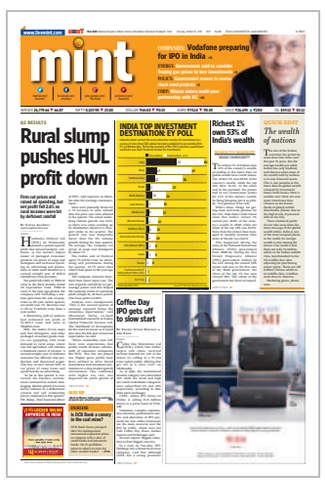
Some may argue that the government's removal of the compensation cess and its consolidation into a flat 40% GST for large non-electric vehicles will benefit consumers anyway, and that market forces alone can drive adoption. But while rate simplification is welcome, its net relief is uneven and businesses face a problem of stranded cess credits that can no longer be offset, creating financial friction. Left to interpretational ambiguities, auto manufacturers may be reluctant to pass on the benefits or invest aggressively in green technologies. In my view, relying solely on market dynamics risks leaving India behind in the global race for clean mobility.

This is not just about economics; it is about environmental stewardship and strategic independence. Urban air quality is worsening, our oil import bills remain high and the world is clearly moving towards electrification. Every policy choice we make today shapes the next decade's trajectory. GST rates, if deployed correctly, can act as the lever that aligns incentives for consumers, industry and investors alike. It can make clean vehicles not only viable, but also desirable, while reinforcing India's commitment to a future where mobility is sustainable and self-reliant.

The broader message: India must treat GST not as a routine housekeeping exercise, but as a strategic instrument to define its mobility future. While the reforms so far are welcome, the next step must clearly be anchored in the country's long-term vision for green mobility. This means not just setting clear tax incentives and committing to policy stability for an extended period, but also supporting infrastructure development. Only then will we see widespread adoption of EVs, hybrids and flex-fuel vehicles, alongside the robust domestic supply chains, skills and technology capabilities needed for India to become truly self-reliant.

Broadly, our policy framework must shape a future in which clean mobility is the default choice rather than a niche option. India has an opportunity to assume and signal policy leadership on this agenda, one that simultaneously prioritizes environmental responsibility, industrial competitiveness and consumer empowerment. A policy foundation has been laid and the path forward is clear. It is now up to policymakers and Indian industry to act decisively, ensuring that India's roads have not just more vehicles, but cleaner, smarter and greener ones.

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BARRETO DE GÓES

THEIR VIEW

Enact a unified framework of law for climate action

ANOOP SINGH



is a distinguished fellow at the Centre for Social and Economic Progress (CSEP) and a former member of the 15th Finance Commission

India has set ambitious climate goals, but lacks a critical piece: the institutional and financial architecture to achieve them. Estimates suggest India needs over $1.5 trillion by 2030 to meet its climate and net-zero pledges. Attracting finance is a challenge, but the deeper issue lies in how these funds are managed. Fragmented responsibilities, opaque spending and weak accountability risk keeping ambitious pledges from becoming bankable projects.

Fiscal credibility and climate ambition are two sides of the same coin. Mobilizing capital at scale requires a public financial management (PFM) system that covers budgeting, reporting and auditing, and functions with clarity and predictability. In other words, India needs a unified institutional framework to unlock its green transition.

Institutional chasm: Currently, climate governance is scattered under the ministry of environment, forests and climate change (MoEFCC), ministry of finance, Niti Aayog and the ministry of new and renewable energy (MNRE), while states handle most of the policy implementation. The MNRE , for example, drives solar and green hydrogen initiatives, but its efforts remain in a silo apart from India's broader climate agenda.

Bodies like the Prime Minister's Council on Climate Change (PMCCC) have attained limited traction and we have no statutorily-backed intergovernmental council to address cross-state challenges. Expectations that successive Finance Commissions would introduce climate-linked grants have not materialized, largely because of an absence of statutory backing and uniform metrics.

This gap creates a financing chasm. Despite India's success with direct benefit transfers and expenditure control, climate spending is diffused and lost across hundreds of schemes. Without a dedicated budget code, tracking total expenditure is impossible, leading to both under- and double-counting of green outlays.

A framework climate law: To bridge this chasm, India should enact a national framework climate law that is consistent with a constitutional imperative. In 2024, the Supreme Court recognized the right to be free from the adverse effects of climate change and urged the government to consider "a separate, standalone legislation" to create a coherent regulatory framework.

International experience—from the UK's Climate Change Act to Brazil's National Policy on Climate Change—shows that a clear legal mandate creates consistency across political cycles, links planning to budgets and thus strengthens investor confidence.

Such a law could:

Establish a high-powered intergovernmental council: A permanent national climate council chaired by the Prime Minister that includes Union and state leaders would institutionalize cooperative federalism, resolve cross-state disputes, align regional policies and endorse a unified national climate strategy that integrates state-level action plans.

India needs an institutional set-up that can lend cohesion to assorted efforts against climate change

Mandate climate budgeting: All ministries and states would tag mitigation and adaptation expenditures appropriately, integrating climate priorities into fiscal policy.

Enforce accountability: Annual climate-fiscal statements should be presented to Parliament and state legislatures, with the Comptroller and Auditor General empowered to conduct green performance audits.

Align the Centre and states: The law could guide Finance Commissions to incorporate climate resilience and emission metrics into its devolution formula and create performance-based grants tied to verified results.

India's broad aim should be to move from ad-hoc spending to strategic investment. A PFM system that integrates climate action would turn it into a central pillar of economic planning. Countries like Indonesia and Bangladesh already use climate-budget tagging to report spending transparently to donors and credit agencies. India's own experience with gender budgeting offers a ready template for climate budget statements. This integration is vital for managing fiscal risks. Climate shocks create large contingent liabilities now treated as ad-hoc emergencies. A unified framework would institutionalize climate-related fiscal risk management, requiring ministries and states to assess the exposure of investment plans and link disaster relief to risk-reduction performance.

The current PFM system, often reliant on off-budget instruments and offering limited disclosure, raises fiduciary concerns. Embedding climate accountability within India's constitutional audit and fiscal responsibility framework would send out a powerful signal of stability.

Publishing annual green accounts and integrating climate metrics into risk assessments under the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act would provide the transparency investors need. A dedicated national climate finance authority could coordinate domestic and international flows, harmonize definitions, certify projects and ensure funds reach priority areas efficiently.

India's climate challenge is not one of ambition, but of institutional coherence. It must be built on a transparent and rules-based domestic fiscal architecture. A framework climate law, complemented by a strengthened green-PFM system, is a precondition for success. It would roll climate action into fiscal policy, create a forum for cooperative federalism, clarify roles across government and provide the accountability and predictability that are needed.

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MY VIEW | CAFE ECONOMICS

How innovation sustains growth: Mokyr richly deserves his Nobel

Knowledge absorption holds the key and that could depend on a society's openness to ideas and readiness to embrace change



NIRANJAN RAJADHYAKSHA
is executive director at Artha India Research Advisors.

REUTERS



Economic historian Joel Mokyr has been awarded the Nobel Prize for economics this year along with Philippe Aghion and Peter Howitt. All three have done stellar work to understand the role of innovation in economic growth.

A few days before the announcement of the prize, an essay on China's economic model by Dan Wang and Arthur Kroeber brought Mokyr's ideas to mind. The two authors wrote about how one of the most subtle sources of strength in that country is the process knowledge embedded in its vast industrial labour force. This was practical knowledge that has been learnt from the experience of how to make things and keep improving them.

"This process knowledge enables iterative innovation, or constantly tweaking products so that they can be made more efficiently, at better quality, and with lower costs," wrote Wang and Kroeber. It also allows Chinese companies to build at scale.

However, the most interesting observation of Wang and Kroeber was that process knowledge allows China to create entirely new industries: "A factory worker in Shenzen might assemble iPhones one year and Huawei Mate phones the next year and then move on to build drones for DJI or electric vehicles for CATL".

Where does Mokyr come into all this? One of his most influential ideas is the distinction between what he calls 'propositional knowledge' and 'prescriptive knowledge.' The former is general theoretical knowledge. The latter is knowledge of technique. Propositional knowledge serves as the epistemic base for prescriptive knowledge. Both are important, and Mokyr has demonstrated in his work that economic accelerations, such as the Industrial Revolution, occur when both types of knowledge build upon each other through feedback loops.

In the ancient world, people often knew how something worked, but had little idea of why it worked. That restricted the scope for innovation. As Mokyr put it, it was "a world of engineering without mechanics, iron-making without metallurgy, farming without soil science, mining without geology, water-power without hydraulics, dye-making without organic chemistry, and medical practice without microbiology and immunology". The result was intermittent rather than sustained technological improvements, and thus short bursts of economic growth rather than a steady rise in productivity.

The underlying lesson is that the type of knowledge available in a society matters. In a lecture he delivered in 2019, Mokyr argued that human capital is not a matter of numbers, where more is better. He explained how British aristocrats invested heavily in the human capital of their children, "but usually taught them the skills of a life of sophisticated leisure"—Latin, fencing, music, hunting. It was much the same with medieval Jewish scholars in Europe.

They were "learned, sophisticated, deeply intellectual" and "the very embodiment of human capital," yet their contributions to technology and other forms of useful knowledge were at best marginal. It is worth asking whether this was also true of scholarship in medieval India, though that requires the attention of a trained historian.

In contrast, it was the prescriptive knowledge with engineers, instrument makers and millwrights that helped put into practice the new propositional knowledge that came from the scientists of that era in Europe, the catalytic marriage of the how with the why. The result was the Industrial Revolution. The importance of new ideas—and the ability to use them in daily economic life—is often underestimated in standard narratives about economic growth. Other historians of the Industrial Revolution such as Robert Allen have presented a radically different set of explanations, such as higher wages thanks to a sharp decline in the labour force from the ravages of the Black Death, the resultant search for new production methods that needed less labour, the availability of cheaper energy from coal rather than wood, and the spread of technical education.

Mokyr highlighted another prerequisite for sustained economic growth. He writes that technological innovation requires not just invention, but also social legitimacy and a society that is ready to accept the disruptions that come with economic change. The Enlightenment created a cultural environment in Europe where new ideas about nature, progress and improvement gained social acceptance.

This "market for ideas" allowed useful knowledge to spread and be implemented, rather than being suppressed by traditional authorities. The acceptance of technological change depends on whether existing power structures—such as guilds, churches and aristocracies—view innovation as threatening or beneficial. Economic change driven by innovation thus has an important social context.

Mokyr has built his astonishing body of work on a detailed reading of historical sources as well as rigorous statistical analysis. And while his main focus is to look back at history to understand why some parts of the world eventually succeed in maintaining economic growth on a sustained basis, many of his core ideas are useful filters to understand our current challenges as well. Chief among them is his teaching about the types of knowledge, the need for institutional norms that accept change and the importance of a culture of growth that is embedded in society.

Mokyr, as well as his fellow Nobel laureates, have often been described in terms of the Schumpeterian tradition of seeking the key to economic growth in innovation. That is true.

However, Mokyr also shares some broad parallels with Adam Smith, particularly in terms of their focus on culture, institutions, specialization, competition, trust and the importance of new ideas. Both view economic transformation as neither an automatic process nor one driven from the top. It is more of an emergent order that depends on the right combination of incentives, institutions, knowledge and social values.

MINT CURATOR

China's K visa faces a backlash: It made its debut at a bad time

Local job-seekers are worried about the tech sector's hiring slump



JULIANA LIU
is a columnist for Bloomberg Opinion's Asia team, covering corporate strategy and management in the region.



Beijing's effort to attract foreign talent has run into resistance. BLOOMBERG

You might have thought Beijing's effort to attract global STEM talent would fire up legions of patriotic keyboard warriors eager to celebrate America's relative decline. Instead, its launch of a new work visa has sparked an online furore, highlighting the underbelly of China's much-vaunted industrial policy.

The decade-long 'Made in China' campaign to ensure the country can compete with the best of the West in 10 key industries—including robotics, electric vehicles and pharmaceuticals—has been largely successful. Technical prowess, exemplified by January's DeepSeek moment, has fired up China's stock market. But it's not been enough to fill the gap left by the collapse of its property sector, which once accounted for as much as 32% of the economy.

Consumer pessimism was on display last week when the country wrapped up an eight-day holiday break. Fresh data suggest travellers were pinching their pennies. Spending was subdued, road trips replaced flights and box-office sales missed expectations, according to *Bloomberg News*.

Against this backdrop, it wasn't an ideal time to debut the K visa—what some have called China's equivalent of America's H-1B. Its details are scant, though it comes as part of Beijing's post-pandemic moves to loosen restrictions on dozens of countries to revitalize travel and consumption.

Announced in August, the new category drew little attention until US President Donald Trump introduced a $100,000 fee on the H-1B, which has brought millions of ambitious foreign workers, especially from India, to the US since 1990. Following the announcement, Indian media began speculating on whether China's ascendant tech firms might offer an alternative pathway if the US effectively closes its doors.

Some of the backlash on Chinese social media has been downright xenophobic and even racist. But much of the discourse has been constructive, serving to reinforce what my colleague Karishma Vaswani calls Asia's staggering jobs crisis that is disproportionately affecting Gen Z.

In China, the problem is particularly acute because of the sheer size of its now-deflated real estate sector. Since the 1990s, property firms followed a simple blueprint: sell homes before they were finished. This model was able to keep up with surging demand as the country urbanized. The revenue funded the industry's breakneck expansion. That method worked until about five years ago, when the government cracked down on excessive borrowing, eventually triggering a downturn.

In 2021, when mega developer China Evergrande Group defaulted on its debt, the realty sector's proportion of economic activity was almost double the 18% recorded in the US at its height. Because property assets make up about 70% of family wealth in China, the impact on spending has been so hard that it has been impossible to substitute with growth in other areas.

China's tech and consumer giants have had a disruptive influence on overseas markets. But at home, their expansion hasn't translated into rising tides for everyone. In fact, they now make more headlines for cutting jobs, especially for people aged over 35, than for hiring.

In a speech last month, Yao Yang, a professor at Shanghai University of Finance and Economics, said that despite its travails, real estate remains China's largest and most important sector. Bailing it out will require the central government to set up a national team to buy foreclosed homes, estimated at one million this year, as part of a push to stabilize the market, he added. Most experts agree that a slow and painful adjustment, which is just getting started, will take years.

In the meantime, Beijing's Big Tech does have a responsibility to do more to protect its workforce, as I've written before, though it will struggle to add headcount in the way real estate had done. Bloomberg Economics estimates that tech's collective contribution to gross domestic product is slowly but surely climbing as the economy looks for new growth drivers.

By 2026, the Chinese tech industry—defined broadly as including research, medicine and advanced equipment—is expected to grow to 27 trillion yuan ($3.8 trillion), or just over 18% of GDP. At that level, it is still several percentage points short of property's contribution during its peak 2015-to-2018 years and much less impactful in terms of job creation.

DeepSeek's surprise emergence has done a lot for Chinese tech. It has kicked off an equities rally, turned the tide on the tech war with the US, and even conferred an aura of 'cool' on the whole sector. But the industry is struggling to pull its weight on employment. No wonder China's young job seekers are so upset. The K visa was introduced at the worst possible time. Its days may be numbered. ©BLOOMBERG

MY VIEW | EX MACHINA

Neither lawyers nor engineers run India and that's fine

RAHUL MATTHAN



is a partner at Trilegal and the author of 'The Third Way: India's Revolutionary Approach to Data Governance'. His X handle is @matthan.

In his book, *Breakneck: China's Quest to Engineer the Future*, Dan Wang describes two distinct approaches to development. China, he argues, has risen to its current global stature on the back of an engineering mindset—the unshakeable belief that social problems can be overcome by solutions we build. America, by contrast, has focused on governance, letting the rule of law and process adherence guide its development pathways. Seen this way, today's bipolar order is a contest between China's engineering state and America's lawyerly state.

China owes its approach to the fact that the political leadership in China has always been composed of STEM-trained technocrats. As a result, it treats infrastructure projects as tools of governance and executes them with single-minded focus. When it needed to bring mobility and connectivity to its more remote regions, China did not hesitate to undertake ambitious decadal mega-projects that involved the construction of high-speed rail networks, bridges over uncrossable gorges and tunnels that ran for kilometres through mountains. To modernize rural districts, it built ultra-high-voltage lines to move power over thousands of kilometres and its South-North Water Transfer project to supply arid landscapes.

When the state prioritizes a sector in China, it does not merely subsidize it; it synchronises land, credit and procurement, and tasks local governments with aligning factories, training and logistics to meet that objective. This is engineering as statecraft: a bureaucracy that streamlines approvals, permits and procurement in order to meet state-supported objectives.

America used to have a similar engineering temperament in the mid-20th century. In those days, public officials like Robert Moses built bridges, parkways and urban renewal projects with a single-minded focus that brooked no opposition. In those days, America looked far closer to today's China than it does now. But over time, this attitude provoked sharp reactions as public works began to erode constitutionally guaranteed rights and freedoms. Civil liberties and environmental movements began to enshrine new rights, establish processes and enforce safety regimes that progressively constrained how development needed to be carried out. This is why projects in the US today must continually demonstrate compliance with regulatory requirements and subject themselves to oversight and review. This is how the lawyerly state ensures that engineering zeal does not ride roughshod over individual liberties.

The long-term consequence of all this has been that development in the US is much slower than it should be. Today, despite numerous attempts to expand and upgrade its transit infrastructure, projects are frequently stymied by adversarial litigation and uncertain regulatory requirements. Despite the urgent need to add new nuclear plants, its energy grid has struggled under safety, environmental and licensing constraints. Newer technologies, such as consumer drones and driverless vehicles, have had to wait for the legal architecture to be built before they could commence commercial operations.

China is broadly an engineering state and the US a lawyerly one but India has struck a fine balance

That said, an engineering mindset is not without its flaws. Zero-covid was China's attempt at engineering a solution to a global pandemic. It plunged China into extreme lockdowns, with its people subject to repeated mass testing, centralized quarantine and metrics-driven containment. Not only was this approach eventually unsuccessful, it gave rise to social unrest and such a loss of trust in government that those who could afford it began to leave the country in droves. Decades ago, there was a similar attempt at socially engineering family life, when the state implemented a one-child policy, the disastrous consequences of which are still being felt. While the instrumental solutions of an engineering state work for problems in the physical realm, they frequently fail in social contexts.

India sits somewhere between these two extremes. On one hand, we have inherited a lawyerly reflex from the Raj that gave us arcane regulations, bureaucratic processes and a penchant for compliance that pervades all our interactions with the state. But, over the last two decades, we have almost unexpectedly also developed an engineer's spirit, which has made it possible for us to build powerful digital public infrastructure (DPI) solutions, allowing us to significantly accelerate our development. What's more, these solutions have withstood legal challenges, demonstrating that well-crafted engineering solutions can operate within a lawyerly construct.

America and China might currently be the two poles of our modern bipolar world, but the philosophies they represent occupy extreme ends of the spectrum. And even though this has allowed them both to achieve impressive success, it has come at a significant cost. India's DPI approach strikes a balance between the engineer's single-minded focus on built solutions and the lawyer's emphasis on process and procedure. While it may have only been applied to a relatively limited number of sectors so far, it demonstrates how engineers can design solutions that not only align with the law, but also ensure compliance through their design.

This is the middle path to progress. One that strikes a balance between the urgent needs of development and the rights of those who benefit from it.

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WORDLY WISE

PEACE AND JUSTICE ARE TWO SIDES OF THE SAME COIN.

— DWIGHT D EISENHOWER

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

DON'T LOSE THE PEACE

Sharm el-Sheikh statement mirrors a rare coming together of world leaders for end to Gaza conflict. Build on it carefully

THE OCTOBER 13 hostage-prisoner swap between Israel and Hamas, momentous for bringing an end to the long-running hostilities, marks only the first step on a long road to stability and security in West Asia. That is why, immediately after his address to Israel's Knesset, US President Donald Trump, at the forefront of the renewed push for peace, flew to Egypt to co-chair an international summit in Sharm el-Sheikh. The breadth of the global commitment to peace was evident in the presence of more than 20 world leaders, including the heads of state/government of France, Britain, Italy, Canada and Germany. The joint statement issued at the conclusion of the summit, signed by Egypt, Qatar, Turkey and the US, welcomed the progress achieved in Gaza and pledged "to work collectively to implement and sustain this legacy". Although any reference to Palestinian statehood was conspicuously missing, it affirmed that a lasting peace would be one in which "both Palestinians and Israelis" have their "fundamental human rights protected, security guaranteed and dignity upheld". Washington's choice of words, which places Palestinians and Israelis on an equal footing, is a long-awaited recognition of Palestinian identity and dignity.

The joint statement envisions West Asia as a region "where all can pursue their aspirations in peace, security, and economic prosperity, regardless of race, faith, or ethnicity". Coming from the Trump administration, this marks a dramatic reversal from earlier this year, when the US President floated plans to permanently relocate Gazans to other countries, and made controversial remarks about "taking over" Gaza to make it the "Riviera of the Middle East". One of the most striking moments at Sharm el-Sheikh was the warm exchange between Trump and Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas, who only weeks earlier had been denied a US visa, which prevented him from attending the UNGA session during which multiple countries recognised Palestinian statehood. These developments must ultimately lead to the Palestinian people having a seat at the table.

There is a lot yet to be done. Although the first phase of the ceasefire agreement has been implemented, there is no clarity on when or where Phase 2 negotiations — aimed at the reconstruction of Gaza and lasting security for the region — will begin, despite Trump's exuberant declaration at the summit that "Phase 2 has started". The most pressing issue, which could undo much of the recent progress, remains Hamas and its weapons. If Hamas refuses to disarm, relinquish control of Gaza, and make way for a reformed PA as outlined in Trump's 20-point plan, it would hand Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu the justification he needs to resume military action (remember how he discarded the January ceasefire in March). Israel, for its part, will have to exercise diplomatic flexibility and resist the temptation to respond to the inevitable roadblocks with renewed aggression. And Trump, who has thus far demonstrated the political will to end the conflict, must not take his eyes off the larger goal articulated in the joint statement: "A future of enduring peace." It is a rare opportunity, it must not be lost.

THE SOFTENING

But within the low inflation story, rising core inflation and uncertainty on Trump's tariffs spell challenges ahead

IN A RELIEF for consumers, the trend of weak inflation prints continued in September, when official data revealed that consumer-facing prices rose by just 1.5 per cent. This is the lowest inflation rate since June 2017 — that is, in 99 months. It is also the second time in the current fiscal year that the retail inflation rate has undershot the RBI's comfort zone of 2 per cent to 6 per cent. The softening of the headline inflation rate — which is the rate at which the general price level changes year-on-year — was driven by deflation in food prices. Prices of vegetables in September were 21 per cent lower than the same month last year while the prices of pulses were 15 per cent lower. Overall, the consumer food price index fell by over 2 per cent despite oil prices rising by 18 per cent. The softening of food inflation was also crucial in ensuring that rural inflation was much lower than urban inflation.

However, while the overall story was on expected lines, there was a surprise in the data in the shape of a sudden spike in core inflation, which is calculated after excluding the prices of food and beverages, and fuel and light. It rose from 4.2 per cent in August to 4.6 per cent in September. In fact, including September, core inflation has now remained above 4 per cent for eight consecutive months. Much of the surge in the core is because of a spike in gold prices and housing inflation. But the story doesn't end there. Analysts at ICICI Securities have found that even if one excluded gold prices from core inflation, the rate went up from 3.2 per cent to 3.7 per cent. Another measure called the super-core inflation rate accelerated even more, from 3.3 per cent to 3.9 per cent.

So while the softening of headline inflation is a cause for relief for consumers, the divergent trend of core inflation gives a moment of pause. Headline retail inflation looks all set to undershoot the RBI's projections, especially since the September data still doesn't capture a large part of the softening due to the cuts in the Goods and Services Tax. Initial estimates suggest that October inflation is likely to flatline; prices are likely to grow by just 0.2 per cent over October last year. This would suggest that another cut in interest rates in the RBI's December meeting is a foregone conclusion. Yet, rising core inflation coupled with continued uncertainty surrounding US President Donald Trump's tariffs would ensure that policymakers cannot take any data for granted.

STAR LIGHT, STAR BRIGHT

Diane Keaton brought a sense of presence, of living fully in contradiction, without apology, to every role she played

IN 2017, AT the American Film Institute's Life Achievement Award ceremony for Diane Keaton, Meryl Streep recalled a childhood memory — of visiting New York's Museum of Natural History with her siblings. One exhibit stood out: An outsized, transparent woman made of lucite, hands outstretched, unapologetically naked. "You could see her guts and her heart and her brain and she was breathtaking. Diane Keaton, arguably the most covered-up person in the history of clothes, is also a transparent woman. There's nobody who stands more exposed, more undefended, and just willing to show herself inside and out than Diane," Streep said. It was a fitting metaphor. Keaton, who died this week aged 79, stood out not just as the face of American New Wave cinema, but for a rare kind of emotional candour — on screen and off it.

Across more than five decades, Keaton built a filmography defined by disarming authenticity. In movies such as *Annie Hall* (1977), *Reds* (1981), and *Something's Gotta Give* (2003), she reimagined the contours of feminine experience. Her characters stammered, flailed, and loved with abandon, without guarantees; they were messy, intellectual, yearning and imperfect women who refused to be tidied up. Whether opposite Woody Allen in *Manhattan* (1979), or as the emotionally unravelling wife in *Shoot the Moon* (1982), Keaton made vulnerability electric.

Off-screen, Keaton remained steadfast in her refusal to flatten her quirks. Her signature androgynous style — hats, waistcoats, neckties, tailored suits — became a visual shorthand for her singularity. That sense of presence, of living fully in contradiction, without apology or neat endings, ran through everything she did. For all her idiosyncrasies, or perhaps because of them, Keaton offered something rare: A life and a body of work that made space for complexity, and in doing so, made it beautiful.

Complicity, not diplomacy



In welcoming Taliban, India sends a chilling message: That systematic erasure of women can be tolerated

ZAHRA NADER

ON SUNDAY, I woke up to the defiant presence of Indian women journalists confronting the Taliban foreign minister with head-on questions. "What are you doing, sir, in Afghanistan?" a woman journalist asked Amir Khan Muttaqi. "When will Afghan women and girls be allowed to go back and get their right to education?" Muttaqi smiled and said women's education was not "*haram*". But he offered no explanation for why, for four years, Afghan women and girls have been banned from school, university and most jobs.

That Sunday event was the second press conference the Taliban had held in New Delhi in two days. The first had invited only 16 male journalists. Women journalists were left off the list. After outrage, the Afghan embassy dismissed the exclusion as a "technical issue", stating it had no press officer and didn't know how to reach everyone. Somehow, they managed to reach only the men.

Anyone familiar with the Taliban's record knows this was not an oversight. Excluding women has been the defining feature of Taliban rule. In their first week in power, they banned women from working in most public sectors; only those who could not be replaced by men were allowed to remain. Within a month, they barred teenage girls from secondary school. Soon after, women were forbidden from travelling alone — even to visit a clinic. They are now banned from public parks, gyms, and protests; their very voices are policed.

The Propagation of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice law, approved by their leader in August 2024, formally declares women's voices forbidden. Within four months of their takeover, Reporters Without Borders found that four out of every five women journalists in Afghanistan had lost their jobs. Those who remain face threats, harassment, unpaid work, and censorship. In at least 19 provinces, no woman journalist is officially working.

A 2025 report by the Afghanistan Media Support Organisation (AMSO), which surveyed 100 female journalists, shows that only 7 per cent of Afghan women journalists can still work openly, while 33 per cent work in secret and 42 per cent have left journalism entirely. More than two-thirds report censorship or intimidation. The report calls this "a system of overlapping barriers that increase risk and silence".

The timing of the Taliban delegation's visit to India could not have been more striking. From October 8 to 10, the People's Tribunal for Women of Afghanistan convened in Madrid, where 24 Afghan women testified before a panel of international judges. Their testimonies were searing indictments of Taliban rule. The judges acknowledged in their preliminary findings that the Taliban's treatment of women amounts to gender persecution, a crime against humanity.

> For the Taliban, the deliberate erasure of women's visibility, voices, and livelihoods is not merely domestic policy; it is an ideology they are determined to export. In their worldview, a woman's place begins and ends within her reproductive and household roles. They do not recognise women as social or political actors. They might be forced, as in the New Delhi press conference, to sit in a room with women, but they will never see women as equals. Certainly not Afghan women. If allowed, they would be eager to become ambassadors of misogyny, spreading their doctrine of gender apartheid beyond Afghanistan's borders.

One of the Tribunal's central demands was explicit: Do not recognise or normalise the Taliban. Yet, even as Afghan women were pleading to be heard in Madrid, India was hosting the Taliban delegation for a week-long visit, meeting officials, speaking with the media, rubbing salt in the wounds of Afghan women and people.

Among those who testified in Madrid was a former Afghan television producer. She described how, after the Taliban's return, women were first dismissed from newsrooms under the pretext of "budget cuts", then slowly erased from the media landscape.

When she and other women journalists tried to hold a press conference to protest their exclusion, Taliban forces raided the venue before it began. "They cursed us, saying we made them look like demons to the world. They locked us in a room and threatened us with prison if we spoke again," she told the Tribunal. That night, she did not return home. Taliban forces raided her house, beating her husband and son while searching for her. "Today I speak with a mask on, yet I am still afraid," she said. "Women are not allowed to speak. They tell us, 'Don't raise your voice, it's forbidden; cover your face.' Girls are taken by force and disappeared, while people remain silent out of fear. Please, carry our voices to anyone who has the power to hear us."

Her plea must be heard in India because when a democracy like India welcomes the Taliban as political interlocutors, it sends a chilling message: That the systematic erasure of women can be tolerated for strategic convenience, that women's rights are expendable, a collateral cost of diplomacy.

As an Afghan woman journalist, I want to warn you what this message means. When the Indian government receives the Taliban without publicly challenging their record on women's rights, it crosses the line from diplomacy into complicity. It lends legitimacy to a regime built on the exclusion of women and becomes a partner in the normalisation of their misogyny.

For the Taliban, the deliberate erasure of women's visibility, voices, and livelihoods is not merely domestic policy; it is an ideology they are determined to export. In their worldview, a woman's place begins and ends within her reproductive and household roles. They do not recognise women as social or political actors. They might be forced, as in the New Delhi press conference, to sit in a room with women, but they will never see women as equals. Certainly not Afghan women. If allowed, they would be eager to become ambassadors of misogyny, spreading their doctrine of gender apartheid beyond Afghanistan's borders. They might be forced, as in the New Delhi press conference, to sit in a room with women, but they will never see women as equals. Certainly not Afghan women. If allowed, they would be eager to become ambassadors of misogyny, spreading their doctrine of gender apartheid beyond Afghanistan's borders. Like the women journalists in New Delhi whose defiance forced the Taliban to invite them back into the room, women everywhere must take a stand: There can be no normalisation of a regime that erases women. Because women's rights in Afghanistan are not separate from women's rights elsewhere, we are part of the same global struggle. Democracies like India must align their foreign policy with their own professed commitment to gender equality.

The Taliban's silencing of women is not only about control; it is about rewriting history, inventing narratives that justify the subjugation of women in the name of culture and faith. Yet Afghan women have refused to vanish. They have continued to speak, to teach, to report, and to fight, often at immense personal risk.

That is why the testimonies in Madrid matter; they are a living record of what the Taliban have done and continue to do. That is why the confrontation in New Delhi matters because it revealed who stands on the side of humanity, who refuses to look away. And that is why solidarity must move beyond sympathy into action, demanding that women be present, visible, and heard in every forum where Afghanistan's future is discussed.

The world cannot claim to stand for women's rights while shaking hands with those who silence them. The first step toward justice for Afghan women is refusing to make their oppressors respectable or their erasure normal.

The writer, based in Canada, is editor-in-chief of Zan Times, *which covers human rights in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan*

THE REAL CLASSROOM TEST

Amid polarisation and narrowing opportunities, it must foster empathy, curiosity



RADHA GOENKA

WHETHER IT IS Charlie Kirk, abortion rights or immigration laws, in recent years, the world has witnessed an alarming rise in polarisation. This is evident in various aspects of life, from political discourse to social interactions. People are more divided than ever and the ability to address pressing global issues like climate change, which requires collaboration, is severely hampered.

Amidst this backdrop, education emerges as a powerful tool to bridge divides and foster understanding. Good education goes beyond imparting knowledge; it cultivates critical thinking, empathy, and the ability to engage in respectful dialogue. By exposing students to diverse perspectives and encouraging open-mindedness, education can play a crucial role in reducing intolerance and promoting social cohesion.

Educational institutions have the responsibility to create neutral environments where students can learn to appreciate differences and develop skills needed to navigate a polarised world. As elite institutes like Harvard and Columbia in the US and Ashoka and JNU in India are dragged into mainstream news, we must think of how, as a society, we can maintain an independent education system that can uphold its ability to shape independent thought.

We live in a world where there is a scarcity of opportunities in education. A world where admission to the best institutes — whether it is IIT or Harvard — feels like a war zone. Competition in India is higher than at any other time in history because of a growing young aspirational population. This year, more than 2 million people sat the entrance exam for medical college, competing for just 140,000 places, while more than 1 million students sat the engineering exam in the hope of getting one of the 10,000 places at an IIT. This mad rush translates into the boom of towns like Kota that have built an entire economy around coaching classes.

> Does going to an elite college then guarantee success? Would you consider Donald Trump, a graduate of Wharton, to be a role model, or does his story remind us that elite degrees don't always equate strong character and responsible leadership? What about Bill Gates who dropped out of Harvard but transformed global technology? Or, Dhirubhai Ambani, who never earned a formal degree, yet built one of India's largest business empires.

Indians pursuing elite US institutes go through a similar struggle. Getting into an Ivy League college becomes their ultimate life goal and definition of success. With the current fluctuations in the US immigration laws, these students now find themselves on edge about their long-term prospects. It is therefore an appropriate time to pause and reflect on what we are really seeking from these elite institutes and do they provide us with the same.

The fundamental requirement is a good education. Therefore, the question is what comprises a good education and what is its end goal. The most obvious answer is that education helps us earn a living. We learn skills that we can use to make ourselves useful in society and, in turn, get paid for. The more complex the skill, the higher the compensation. But this gets infinitely more complicated to quantify when we talk about nuanced skills like management or leadership, which are a stronghold of elite universities. Businessmen, politicians and spiritual leaders, all of whom are at the forefront of shaping society, are often self-taught or have minimal formal education.

Does going to an elite college then guarantee success? Would you consider Donald Trump, a graduate of Wharton, to be a role model, or does his story remind us that elite degrees don't always equate to strong character and responsible leadership? What about Bill Gates, who dropped out of Harvard but transformed global technology? Or, Dhirubhai Ambani, who never earned a formal degree yet built one of India's largest business empires.

Clearly, then, the link between a formal education at an elite university and success is not causal but correlational. Which brings us to a deeper question: What leads to success? The purpose of a good education must go beyond employability. A truly enriching education teaches us to question the world around us. It nurtures curiosity, independent thought, logic and empathy to forge our own paths of inquiry and discovery. In 2025, as artificial intelligence redefines skills, it may be time to reimagine what "good education" looks like.

In today's world of hyper-exposure, an educated population is also the cornerstone of a democracy. As media globally gets increasingly polarised, the ability to sift through misinformation, spot hidden biases, and ask the right questions is even more important. This ability empowers citizens to choose wisely in elections and hold the powerful accountable.

The answer is simple: A good education teaches us to think critically and ask the right questions, even the unpopular ones, which in turn enables us to accurately interpret the world around us and collectively shape it for the better.

The writer is director, RPG Foundation


INDIAN EXPRESS

OCTOBER 15, 1985, FORTY YEARS AGO

INDIA-UK STATEMENT

INDIA AND BRITAIN unequivocally condemned and declared that the two countries would not allow the misuse of their territories for destabilising other polities. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi and his British counterpart, Maragaret Thatcher expressed these views at a banquet hosted by the latter. Gandhi, who arrived in London on a two-day state visit, said that India and Britain had both suffered much from terrorism.

PAK'S URANIUM

THE PAKISTAN PRESIDENT, Zia-ul-Haq, has said Pakistan has acquired the uranium enrichment capability "not only for making a bomb, but also for peaceful purposes". In an interview to be published in the next issue of *The Week*, Gen Zia said, "In a peaceful nuclear programme or in any nuclear programme, you can convert it into a non-peaceful one anytime you like. It is within one's capability."

ENLF TERMS

THE CEASEFIRE BETWEEN the Tamil militants and the Sri Lanka government could be consolidated only if the Eelam National Liberation Front's (ENLF) 10-point demands were accepted, an ENLF spokesman said. The spokesman said the situation was very fluid in the absence of a clear-cut agreement regarding the truce. Leaders of the ENLF will meet in Madras in a day or two to decide on their stand on the committee to monitor the ceasefire.

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WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Without mechanisms guaranteeing Palestinian participation and control over their own institutions, any deal risks freezing subjugation under the language of peace."
—THE GUARDIAN

Meet Ladakh halfway

Centre should articulate a narrative that combines respect for Ladakhi identity, recognition of legitimate grievances, and clear steps for political redress



NAJEEB JUNG



C R Sasikumar

NATIONS DO NOT fall because of foreign conquest alone — they crumble from within when the bonds of unity snap under the weight of discontent and mistrust. It's tragic how often national governments, motivated by political interests and the magnetic attraction to votes, neglect vital threads that tie a nation together. India is currently facing many of the above challenges. An overtly majoritarian agenda has begun to affect the confidence of minorities. In Manipur, tribal communities who have lived together for centuries have turned against one another because of partisanship and inept governance. The tragedy of Kashmir will long be remembered. Many parts of south India look askance with distrust at what they think is the dominance of the north.

Ladakh is now adding to this growing tale. Bordering Tibet to the east and Pakistan to the west, it is a vital crossroads between Central Asia, Tibet and the Indian Subcontinent. It was once an important hub for trade, particularly along the ancient Silk Road. Through centuries, the region's people survived through careful negotiation with the harsh environment, combining monastic discipline with ecological wisdom. They have lived in harmony practising agriculture, animal husbandry, and traditional crafts like weaving and thangka paintings. Today, their predicament is more than a constitutional anomaly — it's a cautionary tale of governing without representation. Decisions about land, hydropower, and mining in Ladakh are largely taken in Delhi or by corporates, often without consulting local people. The corporates in any case have an unenviable record of ruthlessness towards nature and local residents across India — in Jharkhand, Bihar, Chhattisgarh or any state where they get a foothold.

The unrest in Ladakh did not erupt overnight. Its roots go back to August 2019 when Article 370 was revoked, dividing the state of Jammu and Kashmir into two Union Territories — Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh. For many Ladakhis who had long demanded separation from Srinagar's administrative control, the initial reaction was cautious optimism. They believed UT status would mean direct access to the Centre and a greater say in governance. Among those who applauded this move was the now discredited and incarcerated Sonam Wangchuk.

Six years later, Ladakh is disillusioned. The restoration of statehood, or at the very least inclusion under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution — that grants autonomous powers to tribal areas — which lies at the core of the demands of the protesters, seems far. This vacuum creates anger.

The violence of late September, which left four people dead and dozens injured, followed by Wangchuk's arrest, has created multiple problems. By all accounts, he has been taken in under the dreaded National Security Act on grounds that are allegedly vague. The FCRA account of his NGO stands cancelled, and he has been labelled an "anti-national" who visited Pakistan. While it is for the courts to decide the credibility of these charges, no one in the country has illusions about them. His NGO has done good work over the years that has won him international recognition, including the Magsaysay award. His visit to Pakistan was for an environmental conference and is well documented.

The local government's response to the agitation — curfews, internet bans, preventive arrests — is exactly the recipe that civil administrations follow when the situation is devoid of political dialogue. The confusion and poor handling by the Lieutenant Governor are clear from off-the-cuff remarks he has made about the disturbance.

The unrest in Ladakh has an additional, dangerous dimension: China. Since the Galwan clashes in 2020, the Line of Actual Control in eastern Ladakh has remained one of the most militarised zones on India's borders. India has ramped up troop deployment, built new roads and airstrips, and fortified forward positions. The preparedness of the Army is formidable. But the political calm that always helped India in the region seems to be fraying. China is no doubt watching the situation, and no one can safely predict what hand it will now play in this region or other border areas that it lays claim to. And more than that, this internal situation will now sow the seeds of greater discord between the local population and the security forces. What we must understand is that national security cannot rest solely on battalions and bunkers or the millions invested in infrastructure;
it rests on the confidence between the people and their government. We see this in other parts of India where security and intelligence services struggle to get reliable information.

The unrest in Ladakh has an additional dangerous dimension: China. Since the Galwan clashes in 2020, the Line of Actual Control in eastern Ladakh has remained one of the most militarised zones on India's borders. India has ramped up troop deployment, built new roads and airstrips, and fortified forward positions. The preparedness of the army is formidable. But the political calm that always helped India in the region seems to be fraying. China is no doubt watching the situation, and no one can safely predict what hand it will now play in this region or other border areas that it lays claim to.

It is, therefore, imperative that the Centre take immediate steps to de-escalate the situation. Wangchuk must be released, and dialogue must be held with him and other political players like the Leh Apex Body and the Kargil Democratic Alliance. If the government is of the mind that it's not yet time to introduce the Sixth Schedule, it must ensure there are statutory safeguards for land, jobs, and local governance.

The Centre should articulate a narrative that combines respect for Ladakhi identity, recognition of legitimate grievances, and clear steps for political redress, while rebutting misinformation. At the same time, international actors should be briefed to neutralise the exploitation of internal unrest from outside the country's borders.

The people of Ladakh are not insurgents, and meeting them halfway is not weakness; it's statesmanship. In the icy barrenness of the high altitude area, where our soldiers fight and protect us among the harshest conditions that humans can endure, the idea of India is being tested once again. A calm here will reaffirm the spirit of the Republic.

The writer is a retired civil servant, former vice-chancellor of Jamia Millia Islamia, and former Lieutenant Governor of Delhi. He is currently chairman of the Advanced Study Institute of Asia

Constructing peace, bit by difficult bit

This is an unprecedented moment in Gaza. If navigated sincerely, it could lead to a new social contract



MANAV SACHDEVA

THE SHARM EL-SHEIKH statement, signed on October 13, 2025, reframed Gaza's tragedy as part of a broader "Palestinian question". It was, to the credit of its drafters, a rare acknowledgement by the Donald Trump administration that "Palestinians and Israelis deserve equal rights". It even avoided blaming Palestinians as the cause of the conflict — something nearly every US administration before it had done reflexively.

And yet, between the lines of solemn diplomacy, a profound absence persisted. The joint declaration did not once recognise Palestinians' right to statehood or self-determination. Neither Palestine nor Israel signed the document that claimed to represent their future. Instead, regional and global powers pledged to uphold "peace, security, stability, and opportunity for all peoples of the region", as though equality could be conjured by symmetry rather than sovereignty.

President Trump, aboard Air Force One after the signing, told reporters: "I'm not talking about single state or double state or two state, we're talking about the rebuilding of Gaza. A lot of people like the one-state solution. Some people like the two-state solutions. We'll have to see… I haven't commented on that." In contrast, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi struck a more urgent and moral tone. "This is a unique, perhaps last, historic opportunity," he warned, "to achieve a Middle East free of anything that threatens its stability and progress". He reaffirmed that a two-state solution "must be achieved in a manner that ensures our shared vision of cooperation among the peoples of the region."

Yet the final text of the declaration folded Sisi's appeal into a vague promise of "equal opportunity for every person." The word Palestine appeared only as geography, never as a polity.

Still, it would be unfair not to recognise what was achieved. The Sharm el-Sheikh Summit ended the war in Gaza. It produced a multilateral declaration that was notable for its tone of neutrality, its language of equality, and its acknowledgement that both Palestinians and Israelis deserve dignity, security, and prosperity. It did not vilify or single out one side; it reframed Gaza's suffering within a universal aspiration for peace.

That in itself marks a moral correction in global discourse. The Palestinian identity was not conflated solely with militancy but placed — however tentatively — within a framework of shared humanity. If implemented sincerely, the agreement could pave the way for a lasting peace, reconstruction, and perhaps a new social contract.

But as history has shown, declarations are the easy part. Delivering on them requires courage. Now that the summit is over, three possible trajectories remain. First, if the ceasefire holds, and if reconstruction is backed by mechanisms of accountability, monitoring, and equitable distribution of aid, Gaza could begin to breathe again. Second, there is an effective protection force. If India, Egypt, and others lead in proposing a Palestinian Civilian Protection Mission under the UN or regional auspices, civilians could finally be shielded from annihilation rather than used as collateral. Third, the Sharm el-Sheikh declaration risks becoming another diplomatic pageant that launders conscience, rebrands siege as stability, and declares "mission accomplished" over unhealed graves, and without concrete steps to resolve the fundamental issues, the region descends into violence again.

The October 7, 2023, Hamas attack on Israel was an act of terrorism, a massacre of innocents. It deserves universal condemnation, not rationalisation. But moral clarity must run both ways. The horrors of October 7 cannot erase 75 years of displacement, occupation, and blockade. To speak of Gaza's pain only from October 7 is to amputate history. Generations of Palestinians have lived and died stateless.

Jews and Muslims of the Holy Land are both Semitic; both indigenous. The question is not whose suffering counts more. But whether any child, of any faith, should grow up with the constant threat of bombs and gunfire.

To move from ceasefire to safety, Palestinians need protection architecture, not paternalism. A Palestinian Civilian Protection Mission could be the answer — a multinational, legally mandated force combining humanitarian and security roles, with regional participation from Egypt, Jordan, Indonesia, India, and the African Union. Its functions would include: Internationally monitored withdrawal of Israeli forces from civilian areas; deployment of neutral peacekeepers with real authority under Chapter VII; a jointly trained, rights-based Palestinian civil police; real-time independent investigations into war crimes — whoever the perpetrator.

This is not utopian. It is the minimum standard of dignity the world once demanded for Bosnia and East Timor. Why not for Gaza? Peace begins not with abstract negotiations but with restoring daily life — crossings that open, clinics that function, classrooms that are not rubble.

A credible outcome of Sharm el-Sheikh would have included commitments to: Freedom of movement through monitored corridors; economic lifelines via reopened trade and tax revenue transfers; health and education revival, with trauma counselling for children; community resilience networks for early warning and non-violent mediation. Without these, "enduring peace" remains only a headline.

If India truly seeks a seat at the global moral table, it must transcend symbolic attendance and reclaim its older voice — the voice that once spoke for the colonised and the conscience of the Global South. India can still lead: By proposing an enforceable civilian protection mission, by calling for independent war-crimes investigations, and by insisting that reconstruction without recognition is only reprieve without repair.

The writer serves as the global representative of the Grain from Ukraine Programme run from President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's Office

Of, by and for men

When default worker is male, rights like menstrual leave seem like concessions



PAROMITA CHAKRABARTI

IN THE VIRAL stand-up set *Ghosts and Periods*, comic Urooj Ashfaq teases out a hypothesis: "*Agar mardon ko 150 bar period hua hota, toh ab hum period jayanti mana rahe hote*. There would be a period minister and a PMS Relief Fund." The line draws laughter, but the satire lands hard. If men menstruated, periods would likely be a symbol of masculine pride, wrapped in government-backed policies, social empathy, and institutional support.

Ashfaq's joke finds its roots in Gloria Steinem's 1978 essay, 'If Men Could Menstruate'. In it, she writes, "…the characteristics of the powerful, whatever they may be, are thought to be better than the characteristics of the powerless — and logic has nothing to do with it. What would happen, for instance, if suddenly, magically, men could menstruate and women could not? The answer is clear — menstruation would become an enviable, boast-worthy, masculine event..."

Simply put, it would be woven seamlessly into public life.

Karnataka's approval of one paid menstrual leave every month, applicable to government offices, multinational companies and industries, follows in the footsteps of Bihar (1992), Kerala (2023), and Odisha (2024). But its recognition of the importance of menstrual health "as a fundamental part of women's rights and workplace welfare" still feels like a hard-won battle because in workplaces designed by men for men, policies that centre women's physiological realities appear to be radical departures.

We live in a reality where women's bodies are seen as deviations from the norm that is male comfort. From temperature settings to the rigidity of schedules to office ergonomics to assessment criteria, nearly everything about the modern workplace is calibrated to male biology and life patterns. Women experience them on borrowed terms, through menstruation, pregnancy, and caregiving. In this framework, they need "special" accommodation rather than being part of the baseline policy design. And so, menstrual leave — something so basic it should be unremarkable — has taken decades to even enter global policymaking.

The conversation around menstrual leave has had a long, complicated arc. The erstwhile USSR was the first to institute a menstrual leave policy in 1922, but it was retracted within five years. Japan introduced a menstrual leave policy in 1947, followed by South Korea in 1953. Spain became the first European nation to legislate paid menstrual leave in 2023. In April, Portugal introduced a more limited policy for those diagnosed with endometriosis or adenomyosis. But the validation of equality on paper becomes a challenge in implementation. In Spain, the number of women taking menstrual leave remains negligible. Likewise, in Japan, low uptake is linked to discrimination, cultural stigma and reinforcement of stereotypes. In many systems, the sanction of leave depends on disclosures and medical certificates, a tedious, intrusive process at the best of times. In effect, policies meant to empower women get trapped in the very structures of bias they were designed to challenge.

India reflects this ambivalence. In July 2024, responding to a petition to include menstrual leave for women under the Maternity Benefit Act, 1961, the Supreme Court dismissed it, stating that "mandating such leave will lead to women being shunned from the workforce" and advised the Centre to frame a model policy in consultation with states and stakeholders. In December 2023, the then Union Women and Child Development Minister, Smriti Irani, had expressed similar reservations, speaking in the Rajya Sabha against paid menstrual leaves so that "a natural part of a woman's life journey" did not open her up to discrimination.

The implication is not without merit. The pathologisation of a biological process can have unintended consequences in a workplace where women are already at a disadvantage. The World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2024 shows that women in India earn only about Rs 40 for every Rs 100 earned by men. There is also the matter of narrowing representation further up the hierarchy. Women make up just 26 per cent of the Indian workforce in 2025, according to the State of Inclusion: Where We Stand in 2025 report by Great Place to Work, a global consultancy that partners with organisations to improve workplace culture. An acknowledgement of menstrual discomfort, of conditions such as endometriosis and dysmenorrhea, or, simply, of biology, therefore, becomes a potential liability in the eyes of employers, a reason to doubt women's productivity or commitment. The Centre's draft Menstrual Hygiene Policy has languished in legislative limbo since 2023. The Right of Women to Menstrual Leave and Free Access to Menstrual Health Products Bill, 2022, which proposed three days of paid menstrual leave for cis women and others, has had a similar trajectory. The hesitation reveals a persistent anxiety: That recognising the female body in policy might reinforce its perceived fragility. And so, it fuels cultures of presenteeism, of misuse at both ends.

At heart, patriarchy's discomfort isn't really with menstruation itself; it's with what it symbolises: A reminder that the default worker is not necessarily male. This is why menstrual leave, when offered, is frequently treated as a concession rather than a correction, an inconvenient disruption to the male order of work itself, and hence, "unfair" or "unequal". This masculine calculus of fairness misunderstands equality altogether. Equality does not mean identical treatment. It means equitable access to the same chance at thriving. It means building systems that respond equally to the differing needs of men and women. Menstrual leave is not an extra benefit but a corrective lens, a recognition that biology interacts with labour differently for different bodies.

Karnataka's inclusion of private-sector workers marks a rare expansion beyond government offices. But what the debate truly requires is a reimagination of the workplace. If that feels radical, it is only because patriarchy has made the perfectly normal into the impossibly political.

paromita.chakrabarti@expressindia.com

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

FOR LASTING PEACE

THIS REFERS TO your editorial 'Hope in Gaza' (*IE*, October 14). The ceasefire between Israel and Hamas is a moment of hope. However, it also highlights how much remains unresolved. US President Donald Trump has stepped into the spotlight as the unlikely architect of this fragile peace. Yet, his reluctance to address Palestinian statehood and the absence of a clear roadmap to sovereignty reveal the limitations of his approach. If peace is to be lasting, it must go beyond political theatre. True reconciliation will only come when justice, dignity, and equal rights are secured for all.

K Chidanand Kumar, *Bengaluru*

THIS REFERS TO your editorial 'Hope in Gaza' (*IE*, October 14). It is a great relief that the genocidal war on Gaza is finally at an end. However, we are unable to predict how the peace plan will pan out. The question that first arises is whether there can be lasting peace without those who were guilty of the genocidal war being brought to justice. We cannot overlook the fact that over 69,000 Palestinians lost their lives because of the failure of statesmanship to resolve the conflict. The international community must salve its conscience by helping the Palestinians rebuild their lives.

G David Milton, *Maruthancode*

BITTER TRUTHS

THIS REFERS TO the article 'Let me tell you a gur-chana story' (*IE*, October 14). The writer's analysis of the lynching of Hariom Valmiki, the suicide of IPS officer Y Puran Kumar, and a shoe being thrown at CJI B R Gavai suggests that these incidents either may not have happened or the outcome would have been different had these individuals not been Dalits. This reveals two bitter truths. First, one can be humiliated irrespective of education or economic standing. Second, the perpetrators have no remorse because social hierarchy and the commensurate conduct supposedly sanctioned in scriptures are ingrained in their conscience.

L R Murmu, *New Delhi*

DEFANGING RTI

THIS REFERS TO the article 'The RTI is dead. Long live the RTI' (*IE*, October 14). The RTI legislation facilitated the disclosure of legitimate public information that would otherwise have remained buried. It is extremely distressing to watch how the present regime, which makes no secret of its strong dislike of citizens being empowered to seek information on governance matters, has gradually robbed the sunshine law of its potency to fix accountability and expose corruption.

Kamal Laddha, *Bengaluru*

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Energy security, geopolitics: behind China's crude oil stockpiling

SUKALP SHARMA
NEW DELHI, OCTOBER 14

DESPITE MAJOR oil producers' grouping OPEC and its allies raising production by reinstating output curtailed earlier, industry watchers suggest that crude oil prices have stayed at levels higher than what would be expected in the prevailing market situation. That's because China — the world's largest oil importer — has been heavily stockpiling crude and thereby absorbing additional global oil supply.

According to some estimates, China put nearly 160 million barrels of crude — worth more than $10 billion — into storage in the first nine months of 2025. The purchases were made by China's state-owned refiners and private or independent refiners. Oil industry analysts expect the trend to continue well into 2026.

Had China not gone on its stockpiling overdrive, international oil prices would most certainly have dropped lower.

Growing capacity, low prices

China's decision to stockpile crude appears to be a part of its energy security endeavour. Oil prices have been subdued this year, largely staying under $70 per barrel since April , and the country has a lot of unutilised storage capacity, which is still growing. Currently, more than 40% of China's oil storage capacity is estimated to be empty.

China's total crude storage capacity has risen from 1.4 billion barrels in 2015 to 2.03 billion barrels by the end of 2024. A further 124 million barrels of capacity is expected to be added by the end of 2025, international research and energy intelligence firm Rystad Energy said in a recent note. This storage capacity will increase in the future.

In January, a law was passed that required state and private refiners to maintain government-supervised "social responsibility" reserves, according to reports.

Some experts believe that China may continue opportunistic buying as long as prices remain below a certain level; it can rapidly ramp up imports if they fall further. According to a recent report by *Reuters*, Beijing may be looking to grow its stockpile to cover six months of oil imports, or roughly 2 billion barrels.

Also, sentiment in commodity markets can shift quickly as there are several variables. For example, hopes of even lower oil prices could vanish if OPEC and its allies — together referred to as OPEC+ — change their strategy and start curtailing production again.

EXPLAINED ECONOMY

Some analysts suggest that having such huge stockpiles will also give China enough elbow room to manage oil imports more efficiently, depending on the supply and price dynamics. It can stockpile crude when prices are lower and draw from those reserves when demand and prices are higher.

Sanctions, conflict

China buys about a fifth of its oil from Iran and Venezuela — countries that have been sanctioned by the United States — or from Russia, where, at least formally, a price cap is in place.

Despite the curbs, China has managed to keep a healthy flow of oil from these countries, particularly Iran and Russia. The Donald Trump administration has signalled tougher sanctions against these countries, which could potentially increase risks for the Chinese independent refiners, and disrupt supplies.

"...in anticipation of tougher sanctions from the west and the release of multiple rounds of sanction packages, Chinese independent refiners — who are typically seen as risk takers — along with all others along the supply chain, took advantage of the opportunity to import as much as possible and stored crude in inventories," Rystad Energy said.

China is expected to continue buying oil from these countries till it can, with part of those volumes meant for stockpiling rather than immediate processing at its refineries.

The ongoing trade tensions between the US and China are also seen as a factor. China depends heavily on imports for ethane and propane, which are key petrochemical feedstocks. It was importing substantial volumes from the US, but the trade war has significantly disrupted those flows. With a large oil stockpile, China can balance its petrochemical feedstock imports and reduce import dependence, as those feedstocks can be manufactured locally from crude oil.

China's stockpiling of oil has also led to some speculation about the possibility of an invasion of Taiwan. A conflict would most certainly lead to sanctions and curbs from the US and its allies — like on Russia following its invasion of Ukraine — and could lead to a blockade of the Taiwan Strait, a maritime choke point critical for China's energy imports.

Likely to continue

Industry watchers believe that as long as the reasons and conditions due to which China has been stockpiling persist, Beijing may not stop.

There has been a slowdown in China's stockpiling of oil recently, but that could be because of Chinese independent refiners having limited import quotas left. These private refiners have annual oil import quotas, which are more of a tool for the Chinese government to regulate their refinery runs.

According to Rystad Energy, China will be building stocks again in 2026, although a slightly lower level is expected vis-à-vis this year. "We also believe that the drivers of China's crude stockpiling will remain, especially as geopolitical risks remain," it said, adding that growing crude surplus in the international market is likely to "drag oil prices lower, providing economic incentives to stockpile".

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EXPLAINED GLOBAL

WHAT UK 'ESPIONAGE' SAGA SAYS ABOUT ITS COMPLEX TIES WITH CHINA



UK PM Keir Starmer meets Chinese President Xi Jinping at the G20 Summit in Brazil in 2024. *Wikimedia Commons*

RISHIKA SINGH
NEW DELHI, OCTOBER 14

AN ALLEGED "spying" controversy has unfolded in the United Kingdom in recent weeks, after the government dropped a legal case against two people accused of covertly working for the Chinese government.

Opposition MPs, including Conservative Party leader Kemi Badenoch, have criticised the Prime Minister Keir Starmer-led Labour government for its handling of the issue.

Links to China

The case concerns Christopher Cash, 30, a former director of the think tank China Research Group and parliamentary researcher, and Christopher Berry, 33, a teacher who had earlier worked in China. They were accused of "gathering and providing information prejudicial to the safety and interests of the state between December 2021 and February 2023," the *BBC* reported.

Both men pleaded not guilty, and the Chinese Embassy in London called the charges "entirely fabricated and malicious slander". The men were arrested and charged under the Official Secrets Act.

Labelling 'enemy'

In September, the charges were dropped, leading to accusations that the government did not want to offend China. Last week, Director of Public Prosecutions Stephen Parkinson wrote in a letter that a 2024 court ruling in a separate case about alleged Russian spies altered the trajectory of the China case.

That court decision ruled that under the 1911 Official Secrets Act, an "enemy" meant a country "which represents at the time of the offence, a threat to the national security of the UK." This led to efforts to gather relevant evidence, but none of the witness statements showed China posing a threat to national security, Parkinson said.

Starmer blamed the previous Conservative government's handling of relations with China, stating, "You have to prosecute people on the basis on what was the state of affairs at the time of the offence." However, this claim has been criticised. After attacks on election data came to light in 2024, then Conservative PM Rishi Sunak did call China "the greatest state-based challenge to our national security".

Larger conundrum

While relations with China, as the world's second-largest economy, hold importance for the UK, they have been plagued by a sense of mistrust of late, with allegations of high-level espionage being a recurring issue.

In December 2024, a businessman with links to the Chinese government was alleged to have enjoyed an "unusual degree" of trust from Andrew, the younger brother of King Charles.

As recently as Monday, the official intelligence agency MI5 issued guidance for politicians, outlining threats from "elements of the Russian, Chinese and Iranian states" who sought "to further their economic and strategic interests and cause harm to our democratic institutions."

A plan for China to establish its largest embassy in Europe in London has also led to opposition, with local residents raising privacy and security concerns.

These issues come amid moves to engage with China on trade. In September, the Secretary of State for Business and Trade, Peter Kyle, visited China and used the first UK-China Joint Economic and Trade Commission since 2018 to discuss trade issues.

EXPLAINED HEALTH

Studying the twinning rate

A study has found that while the twinning rate is expected to fall in India, the country will remain home to the world's largest population of twins. This has profound public health and demographic significance

KAUNAIN SHERIFF M
NEW DELHI, OCTOBER 14

THE TWINNING rate — the number of twin births per 1,000 deliveries — shows how common twin pregnancies are in a particular region. This information is important for both medical and demographic reasons.

Medically, twin pregnancies are riskier than single pregnancies for both the mother and the babies. Knowing the twinning rate helps public health systems prepare for these higher-risk cases. Demographically, twinning rates provide important insights into fertility patterns, changes in the age at which women are having children, and the use of fertility treatments.

So far, most studies on twinning rates have focused on high-income countries; much less is known about the situation in low-income settings. This is exactly the gap a recent study by researchers from Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research, Germany, and Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study tried to address.

They asked a specific question: 'How are changing maternal age patterns and population growth expected to shape future twinning rates in low-income countries?' To find the answer, data from more than three million births across 39 low-income countries from 1980-2015 was analysed.

Using this data from two specific global surveys, Demographic Health Surveys (DHS) and World Fertility Surveys (WFS), the researchers looked at how women having children at older ages is linked to twin birth rates in low-income countries. Then, they used UN population projections to estimate how twin birth rates and the number of twin births might change over time.

The estimations for India are significant: even though the twin birth rate is expected to drop by about 10.5% by 2100, India's large population means it will still have one of the highest numbers of twin births in the world.

What the study found

Globally, the absolute number of twin births will rise in many countries due to population growth. That said, South Asia, India and Bangladesh are projected to see a decline in the number of twin births (10.5% for India, 20.2% for Bangladesh) because overall fertility is below replacement level and fewer women will give birth.

This decline is partially offset by more women having children at older ages, which increases the likelihood of twins. And despite this decline, India will still have the largest share of twin births (23.4%) among the studied countries due to its large population size.

Moreover, researchers flag that the study's projections for India may underestimate future twinning rates, because some important factors were not included.

The researchers first highlight that studies from high-income countries have identified the expansion of medically assisted reproduction (MAR) as a major reason for the rise in twinning rates. MAR includes treatments such as ovulation induction, artificial insemination, and Assisted Reproductive Technologies (ART) like in vitro fertilisation (IVF).

But in the data analysed for the present study, the researchers note that the uptake of MAR was low. They then specifically cite studies showing that the use of MAR in India has increased over the last two decades. They also refer to one study from several high-income countries that reported "an estimate of an average 40–50% increase in twinning rates if only the expansion of MAR had been in play, independently of delayed childbearing." So India's future twinning rates could be higher than what this study estimates, since MAR use in India is growing but wasn't factored in.

Why this matters

The current study provides estimates and mainly highlights the need for greater attention to support healthy outcomes for twin pregnancies and families with twins.

Another study published this year by researchers from Harvard Center for Population and Development Studies, Harvard T H Chan School of Public Health, Graduate School of Korea University and Institute of Economic Growth, India, analysed the trends in twin births and deaths in India from 1993 to 2021. They specifically looked at the risk of death during different stages of early childhood, including the late newborn stage.

This study had five key findings. They are significant because it is probably the first analysis of twin mortality in India that utilises data from all five rounds of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS). First, the analysis showed rising twinning rates: the proportion of twin births in India increased from 0.9% in 1993 to 1.5% in 2021, in line with global trends.

Second, the analysis showed that although twins make up only a small share of total births, they accounted for 7.7% of all under-five deaths in India. Mortality among twins declined over time but remained very high (179.8 per 1000 live births in 2021).

Third, twins faced much higher risks of dying compared with single babies—7.5 times higher in the early neonatal phase, and 10 times higher in the late neonatal phase.

Fourth, the analysis showed that twin survival varied sharply by household wealth — thereby highlighting the need to treat twins as a vulnerable group requiring targeted health interventions.

Fifth, twins are more often born to mothers in later pregnancies, but twins born in the first or second pregnancy are more likely to die.

On the basis of their analysis, the researchers specifically highlight the need to train frontline health workers to care for and monitor twins in order to improve birth outcomes at the local level. Most importantly, they emphasise the need to establish a twin registry. They point to twin registries in Australia, Denmark, Finland, and Sweden, which track health and development, provide economic insights, and support policymaking. These registries also help researchers understand the biological complexities of twinning and improve twin survival, the researchers highlight.

Nature vs nurture

Twin registries are not only for improving twin survival. The data from twin research is invaluable for understanding how much diseases are influenced by genes versus the environment. By collecting and analysing DNA from twins, researchers can learn how genes and environment shape human traits and disease risks, which can guide accurate diagnosis, treatment, and prevention.

In 2022, researchers from AIIMS, ICMR, and the Mayo Clinic published a paper on the opportunities for establishing a twin registry in India. The paper, published in Twin Research and Human Genetics by Cambridge University Press, highlights experiences from countries that have already set up twin registries.

They describe the Swedish registry, which has 30 ongoing projects using their data to study public health issues such as cancer, dementia, cardiovascular disease, and allergies. They also highlight how the registry collaborates with molecular geneticists to identify disease-causing genes, and how a study of 400 Swedish twins is exploring the role of environmental factors in Parkinson's disease.

Most importantly, they cite a study on how the Chinese National Twin Registry aims to address environmental exposures in the population *(see box)*.

They also cite the Danish registry which is studying how different types of cancer are related, the risk factors for blood cancers, and how female sex hormones affect thinking and memory in middle-aged and older Danish twins.

CHINESE STUDY ON TWINS AND POLLUTION

- The Chinese National Twin Registry aims to address environmental exposures in the population.
- The researchers argue that, since India has also seen a rise in urbanisation and pollution, twin studies investigating the incidence of asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and other airborne inflammatory conditions would be of "immense value."
- They point out that twins may respond differently to these environmental exposures depending on where they live. They also emphasise that a person's immune system is shaped not only by their genes but also by their diet and gut microbiome.
- Comparing twins who live in different conditions can reveal how genetics and the environment together influence the development and progression of these diseases.



From dominance to downfall: The long unravelling of West Indies cricket

SANDIP G
NEW DELHI, OCTOBER 14

THE DEGENERATION of West Indies cricket has been so numbingly steep that their era of invulnerability, spanning two decades, resembles a glorious accident of fate. On either side of their golden era — powered by the phalanx of artfully nasty quicks, gracefully powerful batsmen and captains that forged a chain of unity from scattered islands in the Caribbean Sea — their performances have fluctuated from sporadically thrillingly to distressingly hideous, plummeting often to new depths.

The reasons are myriad and complex.

EXPLAINED SPORTS

Fall from grace

The decay has been bewildering in the last 15 years. From 2010, West Indies have won only 33 of 127 Tests (away record is an abysmal 11 from 61 games). They have not beaten India (last came in 2002) or South Africa (2007) in this period; mustered a solitary victory over Australia and Sri Lanka. They inevitably put on inspired shows against England (6-11 trailing still) and Pakistan (5-7), but against the rest of the cricketing world, they flounder like tents in hurricanes, a familiar calamity in the Caribbean islands.

For years, intermittent success in white-ball cricket soothed their pain (two T20 titles and Champions Trophy), but they failed to qualify for the 2023 edition of the 50-over World Cup as well as the 2022 installment of the T20 World Cup. By virtue of being co-hosts, they entered the 2024 episode but stumbled in Super Eights. Recently, they lost a series to minnows Nepal.

Basketball, athletics, football

Everything that could be blamed has been already blamed. The first villain was basketball: the prosperous winds of NBA luring away the finest to just across the Gulf of Mexico. Next came athletics, a theory that gathered strength with Usain Bolt (who played club cricket in his teenage years) and others from Jamaica, once the nursery of fast bowlers, the home of Michael Holding, Courtney Walsh and Patrick Patterson. "Athletics is a more rewarding profession, less headache, less politics," former West Indies fast bowler Winston Benjamin once told this daily. His son Rai is an Olympic champion in 400m hurdles. Reigning javelin world champion Keshron Walcott too had inclinations towards cricket, before he switched tracks.



Jomel Warrican loses his wicket during the fourth day of the match with India in New Delhi. *Praveen Khanna*

Football performed a cameo role, especially when Dwight Yorke, from Trinidad, was hitting the high notes of fame. "But to put all the blame on other sports is merely an excuse," Andy Roberts, the legendary fast bowler, would tell this newspaper. "West Indies cricket had to look within to find the solutions. Nothing was ever done to nurture the talent we had. The administrators failed to address the decay that had been setting in from the mid-90s", he added.

Stagnant population, migration

The West Indies population has always been around five lakhs or thereabouts. There is constant migration to the US or the UK. It's little wonder that sportsmen of Caribbean origins feature prominently in US athletics or English football (Cole Palmer, Ollie Watkins, Jadon Sancho, Marcus Rashford, to name a few). England cricketers Jofra Archer and Jacob Bethell were literally priced out from Barbados.

14 captains, 10 coaches, chaotic board

The revolving door of West Indies cricket administration, on the pitch as well as in the boardroom, has been as tempestuous as the Caribbean weather. Since the turn of the century, they have appointed 14 different captains in Tests alone (19 in ODIs and 17 in T20Is). The policy recurred with coaches. Ten were assigned full-time to revive West Indies cricket (six interims too).

Some of them, both captains and coaches, resigned, but most were ousted.

It was an impossible job, made more difficult by players rebelling for increased wages, feuding for power, and an unstable administrative core that were hampered as much by paucity of practical ideas as the greed to make money. The impasse between the board and the players rebel organisation was a recurrent feature till the turn of this decade.Players complained that the administrators, largely bereft of cricketing experience, lacked the foresight to revive first-class cricket, lifting neither the quality of pitches nor the standard of cricket.

Million dollar arms

Sunil Gavaskar, in his column for *Mid-Day*, posited if the central contract system in the West Indies was self-destructive, and if increasing the match fee and doing away with guaranteed contract money would be a better idea.

As intuitive as his suggestion is, it could risk players turning even more from the red-ball game. For, it's no longer the shared Caribbean pride fuelling them, but the drive to earn to make ends meet. It's the everyday reality of the tourism-dependent economy, to make money if and when it's there.

Chase blamed the stasis on funds. In the 2024-27 cycle, India would receive 38.5% of ICC's revenue. West Indies's share is a meagre 4.5%. The premise is simple — those that bring the most shall earn the most.

Perhaps the idea was flawed from the start — a bunch of islands with a shared history of colonial slavery conquering the sport of the colonisers. And that period of domination was just an accident of fate.

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I've seen what I was – I know what I'll be
I've seen it all – there is no more to see!
– BJÖRK, song

Can't Tech It Easy

Google's India AI hub is great news. Governing AI to India's advantage is another matter

Not all infra is equal. Google's Visakhapatnam AI hub, to be built with $15bn over the next five years and with the Adani group, will be its largest artificial intelligence data centre outside America. This reflects the power of the Indian market – and its massive embrace of AI. As Sam Altman said recently, if there is one large society in the world that seems most enthusiastic to transform with AI right now, it's India. But if this is an assertion of control over the physical backbone of AI in a region of high strategic growth potential for Google, what is it for India? With such infra, India can improve data sovereignty, become a stronger player in AI, and have more say in how AI is deployed. This is invaluable as AI firms look set to have gatekeeper power over humanity's future.

Google's announcement comes on the heels of Mokyr-Aghion-Howitt winning the Economics Nobel. They spotlight how technological innovation has been the engine of modern prosperity, but also how this economic growth is neither natural nor guaranteed. Yes, AI will determine the future. But what that will look like will depend on *who* controls the physical and digital infra of AI, *who* gets to set the terms (pricing, access, regulation), and *how* the benefits – and risks – of AI are distributed. New entrants and disruptive models will only be able to displace giant, monopolistic incumbents to the extent they can actually compete with these. Google building a large AI hub in India shows the country jockeying for a happy place in the AI-driven global economy. Getting there will need a lot of other birds flying in sync. So far, Indian companies have mostly been doing only peripheral servicing, which is quite worrying.



Also seen in the Nobel spotlight is a larger AI control problem. AI hallucinates, AI greasily defies safety controls, yet we are now in a loop where AIs are building the next AIs. As this technology expands control over lives everyday, perhaps the world has never been in greater need of a shared trust architecture. But finding one feels impossible. Washington and Beijing agreeing to a common ethics framework is now no less science-fictional than the *Terminator* films. Innovation has always been a double-edged sword. Until now it has served humankind well. Thanks to it, there are more than 8bn of homo sapiens on Earth now. The great known unknown is whether AI will cut us to size.

Letter From Maha

EC must allow states their own timelines for SIR. Time is of essence for robust voter rolls

Will EC heed Maharashtra election commission's request to defer the re-doing of state electoral rolls till local polls – long delayed – are over after Jan 2026? When EC announced a special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls end-June for Bihar, heading into state polls in Nov as scheduled, the exercise was destined to be a rushed and confusing affair. And it was, abundantly. Had EC announced the exercise for Maharashtra instead at the time, the state election commission (SEC) would have had enough months on hand for the exercise before local polls. Its state elections had concluded months ago. Since polls to urban local bodies and panchayats have separate electoral rolls under sole jurisdiction of SECs, there would be no confusion. Voters and administration would have time to upload documents, weed out extras, de-duplicate, spot problem additions and troubling deletions. To ensure healthy and fair participation and trust of a resident population in a robust electoral cycle needs time.



The final voter rolls per EC in Bihar, have left much to be desired. With elections upon them, no political party, no matter its reach, is in any position let alone mood to wade into nitty-gritties of who got unfairly left out or added. The case, anyhow, is in Supreme Court. What *is* of concern at this point is what timelines will EC allow all other states? At their convenience? No two states are similar when it comes to an exercise tech-driven, document-heavy for diverse demographics and all manner of geographies. An SIR would really be efficient only after Census, even delimitation. There is much EC desires via SIR that Census will answer – rural-urban divide for one. Question whether it is for EC to *decide* on citizenship is also in Supreme Court. Until that is settled, the matter of nationwide electoral rolls needing urgent revision is, for all practical purposes, moot.

Thank You Trumpji

Why America's prez is a godsend for India's humorists

Jug Suraiya



Two Indian humorists, Gup and Shup, discussing their career prospects.

Gup: Three cheers for Donald Trumpji! Thanks to him you and I still have our jobs.

Shup: And not just us. *All* humorists would have been made jobless because they stepped on someone or the others' sensitive toes.

Gup: And there are no end of sensitive toes waiting to be stepped on. There are religious sensitive toes, and political sensitive toes, and cultural sensitive toes, and dietary sensitive toes, and linguistic sensitive…

Shup: You don't have to keep toeing the line. We all know about all those toes we couldn't step on without fear of being slapped with slander charges, or just plain slapped and beaten up. With the result that the whole jingbang lot of us would have joined the ranks of the unemployed. Then our saviour came in the form of Trumpji who became the perfect butt of all our toe-stepping-on humour. And now I'm not only not in danger of being sacked, but my boss says he's going to give me a raise!



secondopinion

Gup: Indeed, making Trumpji the butt of humour has become a cottage industry with do-it-yourself humorists generating more self-employment than the Prime Minister's Rozgar Yojana scheme.

Shup: Too true. My nephew-in-law's cousin brother has become a stand-up comic like Vir Das, thanks to Trumpji. And he doesn't even have to make up any jokes about him; he just repeats what Trumpji says word for word, and weird for weird, and the audience is rolling in the aisles. After all, you can't out-joke a joker and Trumpji is the biggest joker of all, with he himself being the biggest butt of his own jokes.

Gup: But what will we do when Trumpji's term is over and he has to step down? Will he do a hat trick and go for a third term?

Shup: He might well do so. But if he doesn't, his replacement will be as perfect a butt for us as he has shown well in ad-Vance…

What Google's Nobels Tell Us

Cutting-edge scientific research will keep shifting to US Big Tech companies because they have lots more money than top US universities, and because AI is now at the centre of everything

Atanu Biswas



"Feeling lucky this morning to work at a company that has had 5 Nobel Laureates among our ranks – 3 prizes in 2 years!" Sundar Pichai, CEO of Alphabet Inc, Google's parent company, wrote as Michel Devoret, chief scientist of Quantum Hardware at Google, and John Martinis, the former hardware leader at Google Quantum AI, shared this year's Nobel Prize in physics with John Clarke of University of California, Berkeley, "for the discovery of macroscopic quantum mechanical tunnelling and energy quantisation in an electric circuit."

Devoret, a Yale University professor as well, is still actively involved in Google's efforts to develop scalable and fault-tolerant quantum computers. The group that attained "quantum supremacy" in 2019 was led by Martinis. Martinis, however, left Google in 2020 and went on to co-found the quantum computing startup Qolab in 2022.

These Nobel Prizes may be a testament to the power of big tech to shape science research in today's world, although the important role of federal funding in launching and sustaining this world-changing research has been commended, and it's immensely important even now.

However, as Pichai congratulates the 2025 winners on their "incredible progress", it may be remembered that Demis Hassabis and John Jumper of Google DeepMind, who spearheaded the development of the company's AI model AlphaFold2, which predicts the structure of proteins based on their chemical sequence, shared the 2024 Nobel Prize for chemistry with computational biologist David Baker. AlphaFold2, which was being utilised for 200mn proteins globally, was dubbed a "complete revolution" by the Nobel committee.

There's Geoffrey Hinton too, who is frequently cited as one of the three godfathers of AI. Hinton left Google in 2023, expressing worries about proliferation of false information, the potential for AI to disrupt labour market, and the "existential risk" associated with the development of true digital intelligence. But his "foundational discoveries and inventions that enable machine learning with artificial neural networks" earned him the Nobel Prize in physics, nevertheless, a year later. Hinton also received his Turing Award in 2018 while working at Google.

Thus, Google's recent Nobel strike rate is unquestionably far higher than that of even the top universities that have won the most Nobel Prizes, such as Harvard, Cambridge, Chicago, or Columbia. Is Google's recent success really a coincidence then? Or is it a product of how science and technology are evolving? Is it due to the recent global view and way of embracing science? Many of today's scientific developments are undoubtedly dominated by AI and quantum technologies, where a tech giant has both money to invest and a clear business interest. And "those [Nobel-winning] October mornings are becoming much more frequent for us at Google!" Pichai can proudly write.



Scientists from companies have also won Nobel Prizes in the past. Ivar Giaever of General Electric in Schenectady, New York, who was awarded the 1973 Nobel Prize in physics for his research on tunnelling processes is a notable example. Akira Yoshino, an honorary fellow of Tokyo's Asahi Kasei Corporation, and two other scientists were awarded the 2019 Nobel Prize in chemistry for their work on lithium-ion batteries. However, until recently, Nobel-like top honours for scientists outside of academia were not very frequent.

Indeed, since the establishment of the University of Berlin in 1810, the "Humboldtian" university has served as a model for Europe and later for US research universities. It also acted as a foundational paradigm for the integration of research and education elsewhere. The advent of the AI era in recent years, where the launch of ChatGPT can be viewed as a changepoint in the course of human civilisation, may be altering the dynamics of scientific research that have existed for two centuries. Science research may be shifting its centre of gravity to industry.

For instance, a sizeable portion of medical research, even at universities or research institutes, has been propelled for years by the interest and financial support of giant pharmaceutical companies. And as long as the necessary infra remains largely controllable therein, a significant portion of it still occurs within academia. The dynamics are undoubtedly shifting quickly, necessitating the construction of massive infra, especially in sectors where billions of dollars are required for both capex and opex.

For example, scientists from Elon Musk's brain-computer interfaces company Neuralink or a similar establishment might very well win the Nobel Prize in medicine in future if it's to be awarded for the advancement of human brain chip implants!

Naturally, academic institutions worldwide would find it difficult to raise such astronomical sums of money, as may be required for sophisticated AI or quantum research. Plus, there's a serious funding crisis these days. Trump 2.0 is slashing or closing research centres around US, including those at Environmental Protection Agency and National Institutes of Health. In many other post-pandemic economies, govt support for research institutes has drastically decreased.

As a result, we observe a change in which big techs are partly becoming the primary research hub for modern tech-driven science. The crucial question is whether this trend will endure or if it's merely a passing phase. Advances in AI and quantum technology, as well as their applications to physics, chemistry and medicine, are likely to dominate the scientific domain in the near future. For several tech giants, including Google, a triumphant Oct morning, thus, is becoming increasingly likely.

This changed scenario, along with the power of big tech companies over academic institutions, may persist until we reach a point where research in AI and quantum technology reaches saturation and we resort to the fundamental sciences again rather than mostly tech-driven advancements.

The writer is Professor, Indian Statistical Institute, Kolkata

Why Blame SC When Govts Are The Guilty Party

CJI Gavai was right to uphold the bulldozer judgment as a high point for the top court. That unlawful bulldozing of houses continues, is thanks to the executive, which is supposed to implement judicial orders

Swapnil Tripathi



In a recent address in Mauritius, CJI Gavai reflected on what he described as one of his tenure's defining judgments – the 'bulldozer case'. He remarked that it reaffirmed that India is governed by *rule of law*, not by force of executive power. It was a timely reminder. In a constitutional democracy law must always temper authority.

Yet, even as those words were spoken, images from Uttar Pradesh showed structures belonging to the accused in the Bareilly violence being razed. Several demolitions appeared prima facie to proceed without notice, hearing, or adherence to safeguards laid down by Supreme Court. The contrast between CJI's words and scenes unfolding on the ground invited criticism – that judicial pronouncements have little meaning when bulldozers continue to roll. One legal scholar even remarked that CJI was "bragging in Mauritius about how he passed a judgment ensuring that we are a rule-of-law society and not a bulldozer-raj society."

That critique, however, mislocates responsibility.

The judiciary, in this instance, has fulfilled the role assigned to it under the Constitution – it declared the law, reaffirmed boundaries of executive power, and restated procedural fairness required ahead of demolitions. What happens thereafter is a matter of compliance and enforcement – tasks that lie squarely with the executive.

SC, in the case led by Justice Gavai that saw 'directions in the matter of demolition of structures', confronted the growing practice of punitive demolitions. SC made the legal position unambiguous – any demolition must be carried out strictly in accordance with municipal and planning laws, following due notice and opportunity to be heard.

Demolitions, it held, cannot serve as instruments of punishment. When used punitively, they offend not only due process but also rule of law, separation of powers, and the right to shelter, all guaranteed by the Constitution. The judgment emphasised that the state cannot take arbitrary and excessive measures against the accused or even against convicts without following due process. When such violations occur, there must be "institutional accountability".

SC also rejected state's argument that these demolitions were mere coincidences – that the structures happened to belong to the accused. It warned that "when a particular structure is chosen all of a sudden for demolition and the rest of similarly situated structures in the same vicinity are not even being touched, mala fide may loom large." In such circumstances, SC said, a presumption may arise that the real motive was not to enforce planning laws, but to penalise those accused of crimes without even trying them before a court of law.



Image: AI

To guard against such arbitrariness, SC detailed procedural directions including that demolition notices must contain nature of alleged illegality, specific violations, and date of hearing before a designated authority. These notices must be served and digitally acknowledged by the district magistrate office, and all proceedings uploaded on a designated portal. Even after an order, the affected party must be given 15 days to appeal before any demolition is carried out. Most significantly, SC ordered that *violation of any of the directions would lead to initiation of contempt proceedings* and that officers responsible for unlawful demolitions could be held personally liable for restitution and damages.

SC has done what the judiciary is constitutionally equipped to do – laid down the law and prescribed a mechanism for accountability. As CJI noted in Mauritius, the judgment reaffirmed that India is governed by rule of law. Yet SC's role, by design, ends with the articulation of that principle.

As Alexander Hamilton wrote in the *Federalist Papers* the judiciary has no influence over either the sword or the purse. Hence, SC can interpret and guide; it cannot police every street or monitor every demolition order. To expect it to do so would be to ask it to perform a function for which it is neither constitutionally equipped nor institutionally designed. The judgment itself recognised this limitation. It made clear that where state authorities act in violation of its directions, the remedy lies in seeking contempt before the courts.

But SC cannot transform itself into a perpetual supervisory body. Obligation to implement judicial rulings rests with the executive; accountability for non-compliance must ideally be sought through political and democratic means.

This distinction – between declaring the law and enforcing it – is central to the idea of separation of powers. The judiciary cannot govern, and the executive cannot act without law. When executive agencies flout judicial orders, the problem is not judicial inconsistency but administrative indifference. The burden of accountability must, therefore, be directed at those wielding the machinery of the state, not those interpreting its limits.

Criticism that CJI's remarks sound hollow amid ongoing demolitions overlooks this nuance. His words reaffirm a principle – in India authority must remain answerable to law. Fact that this principle is sometimes ignored is not a failure of SC's conviction but of govt's compliance.

The writer is with Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy. Views are personal

Calvin & Hobbes



Sacredspace



This body is said to be the root of the tree of Samsar. Through this body, the Self comes into contact with sons and other relations. If the body is nonexistent, how can there be relations for the Self, which is asang, unattached, with sons and relations?

Thus Spake Sri Rama

Jain Ramayan: Ravan's Story Mirrors Our Own

Muni Pranamyasagar

Every epic carries more than one truth. In Jain tradition, the Ramayan is not just a tale of kings and wars, but a mirror of inner battles – pride, passion, and karm.

In Jain Ramayan, Ravan is not portrayed as a demon but as a *vidyadhar purush,* powerful, learned and deeply devoted to Jinas. He mastered many sciences and was a scholar of niti shastra, ruling with great discipline. His fall came not from cruelty, but from ego and desire – weaknesses that cloud every human mind.

One account says that his aircraft halted above Mount Ashtapad. Below sat Muni Bali, Sugreev's brother, in deep meditation. It was believed that no viman could pass over a *riddhidhari muni* in dhyan. Forgetting this, stirred by pride, Ravan tried to move the mountain. Muni Bali pressed his toe to the ground, and Ravan's power dissolved. Humbled, he cried out, hence he was called Ravan – the one who wept.

Even then, his devotion did not waver. At Ashtapad, he worshipped Tirthankar Shantinath with such intensity that when his veena broke, he used veins of his hand to continue the hymn. Yet his life remained a paradox: a mind of supreme concentration, yet not free from desire. When he abducted Sita, he vowed that he would never force a relationship against her will. His downfall was *not* born of violence, but attachment and delusion.

Ravan was *Prati-Narayan,* counterpart and rival of Narayan Lakshman. As ruler of half the Bharat Kshetra, his power and knowledge were immense, yet his karm set him up for defeat. In the battle, Lakshman Narayan, and not Ram Balabhadra, eliminated him, using Ravan's own divine *chakra*. The weapon returned to its rightful bearer, symbolising how every being is shaped by the fruits of his own deeds.

After the war, Sita renounced worldly life following agni pariksha and chose asceticism. Ram continued to rule Ayodhya with compassion and justice. Gradually, deep vairagya arose within him. He turned inward, attained the right knowledge, and ultimately achieved nirvan – free from all karmic bondage.

THE SPEAKING TREE

Ravan's journey does not end in defeat. Jain belief holds that in a future era, he will be reborn as a *tirthankar,* an enlightened teacher, and Sita will become his *gandhar*, chief disciple. No soul is permanently fallen; through countless births, every being can move toward purity and liberation.

The essence of the Jain Ramayan is not war but awakening. It teaches that karmic bonds, not curses or enemies, shape destiny. Ego, lust, and anger are real demons that must be overcome. Each action plants a seed, and every seed ripens in time. Ravan's life, though full of grandeur, stands as a lesson in humility and self-restraint.

The Jain view reminds us that true victory lies in burning *Ravan* within – arrogance, greed, and passions that keep the soul bound. Destroying an effigy is easy; overcoming inner attachment is the real challenge.

The Ramayan turns an ancient battle into a timeless truth: no one is eternally condemned, and no one is beyond redemption. Through right faith, effort, and karm, even the fallen can rise to the highest state. The story of Ravan is a story of all of us, souls bound by karma, slowly but surely moving toward liberation.

Long Way to Go for 'Everlasting Peace'

Credible future for Palestinians is key to stability

Like many of his predecessors, Donald Trump is trying to broker peace in a part of the world that has not known peace or stability for decades. As part of phase 1 of Trump's ambitious Gaza peace plan, signed on Monday, Hamas released 20 surviving hostages, while Israel freed 1,968 Palestinians imprisoned over the past 2 yrs. World leaders gathered in Egypt to finalise the framework for the US-brokered peace blueprint. The world has been here before — hopeful beginnings that somehow unravel, often under the weight of old grudges and new ambitions.

The real heavy lifting of building peace in a land laid bare by untold suffering is yet to begin. That will be the true test of Trump's plan. The 'strong, durable and everlasting peace' that Trump promised in Egypt is still a distant dream. The second phase — on guaranteeing stability, security and reconstruction in the devastated Gaza Strip — remains frustratingly vague. The absence of a clear roadmap, the continued presence of Israeli-backed militias such as Yasser Abu Shabab's Popular Forces, and the daily struggle of ordinary Palestinians for even basic necessities could create fertile ground for Hamas to reassert control. Even more puzzling is Washington's apparent willingness to let Hamas operate to prevent 'big crimes' or unrest in areas 'literally demolished'. Unless these contradictions are addressed, Gaza — already awash in weapons and simmering resentment — could descend into further chaos, perhaps even civil war, with Hamas seeking to prove that there can be no stability without it.

Israel and Benjamin Netanyahu have achieved what they wanted: the return of hostages, the decimation of the Palestinian population, and the sidelining of far-right coalition partners. Now, it is the Palestinians' turn. The leaders who met in the Red Sea resort must stop congratulating themselves and ensure that this plan truly delivers for Gaza and its people. Without a clear, credible future for them, there can be no 'everlasting peace'.

MACROECONOMICS

Inflation Dips, but RBI May Trim Rates Slowly

The plunge in retail inflation to an 8-yr low may open a little more space for interest rates to soften, but it may be rash to expect RBI to cut rates. The inflation measured by CPI rose to 1.5% in September, compared with 2.1% in August and 5.5% a year ago. While the numbers stand out, the drop stems from a sharp fall in food prices and a base effect. The core inflation has surged to 4.6%, a 2-yr high, thanks to housing and gold inflation. These numbers may prove sticky. Some of the data that will go into the new housing inflation index, to be released next February, may have been incorporated to avoid an abrupt adjustment next year. However, inflation may further dip, with the next number, after factoring in the impact of GST cuts, expected to come in well below 1%.



Nonetheless, RBI, which has kept the interest rate unchanged since its unexpected 50 bps reduction in June, may consider food inflation somewhat transitory, take a forward-looking approach, and attach more significance to where it thinks inflation will be in the quarters ending March and June 2026.

Despite the impact of lower food inflation on rural income, it would be erroneous to compare the inflation numbers of September and October with the persistent deflation in China, which has been hit by slow consumption, a property slump, and a price war among local companies that is driving buyers to defer purchases. Though a case for a reduction in the benchmark rate cannot be ruled out, the extent, pace and timing may be slower. It would be unwise to raise hopes simply on current numbers.

JUST IN JEST

You know you're desperate when you go bonkers with table manners

Forking Madness of Fine Dining Etiquette

Somewhere between the third salad fork and ceremonial sniffing of the wine, occidentalist HNIs may have lost the plot. Extreme table manners have made dinner hostage out of linen napkins. Take from the left, drink from the right, and if you reach for the wrong glass, prepare to be hrrmphed by le hoity toity. Heaven forbid your elbows flirt with the table lest they summon the demons of Downton Abbey. Then there's the business of chewing. Not too loud, not too fast, and never with visible enthusiasm. Food must be consumed like a Victorian ghost: quietly, delicately, and with the emotional range of a tax audit. And let's not forget the sacred scroll of 'Don't slurp, don't burp, don't stab your dish like it owes you money.' We're not even going into trauma of watching someone eating with her hands.

These rules of the occidentally posh, handed down like mothballed hand-me-downs, serve one purpose: to ensure that those who don't comply are utilised to feel superior about oneself. Meanwhile, the French are dunking croissants in coffee, the Italians are slurping spaghetti with operatic gusto, and true blue-blood Indians are tearing into their puris like they're ripping Westphalian treaties. Frankly, if you're really aristocratic, you'll know that the true mark of civility isn't how you hold your fork — it's what sauce you dip your fries in.

India's Afghan outreach, tied to Central Asia and the Arab world, aims far beyond countering Pakistan

Op Dehyphenating Af-Pak



Saibal Dasgupta



Setting new goals

The ongoing tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan go beyond mere mutual resentment. More likely, they reflect Islamabad's attempt to undermine Afghanistan, which is striving to reduce its reliance on Pakistan and assert its independent role — a dynamic underscored by Afghan foreign minister Amir Khan Muttaqi's visit to New Delhi last week.

But what if Asim Munir's actions in Afghanistan are aimed at creating conditions that invite US intervention? This may not be far-fetched, considering Donald Trump's warning that 'bad things are going to happen' if Kabul did not hand over the Bagram airbase. Trump even called Pakistan's army chief his 'favourite Field Marshal' during Sunday's meeting on Gaza — though Munir had nothing to do with it.

Meanwhile, in a bold diplomatic move, India has decided to upgrade its technical mission in Kabul to a full-fledged embassy. Addressing Muttaqi, S Jaishankar highlighted that India and Afghanistan share a 'common commitment to growth and prosperity', and expressed concern that these values are 'threatened by the shared challenge of cross-border terrorism'. While he did not name Pakistan, Jaishankar urged Muttaqi to 'coordinate efforts' to counter the threat.



India aims to sever a key link in the terror networks of Pakistan-based LeT and JeM, which exploit Afghanistan's eastern provinces of Nangarhar and Kunar as safe havens. Muttaqi's assurance that Afghan soil will not be used to launch attacks on India will now face its true test.

'Pakistan treats Afghanistan as its jagir. …the Taliban has realised that Pakistan's possessive attitude is hurting them,' Gautam Mukhopadhaya, former Indian ambassador to Afghanistan, told ET.

India's diplomatic foray in Afghanistan is showing results. Along with a flurry of angry statements, Pakistan's foreign ministry has objected to the mention of Jammu and Kashmir in India-Afghanistan joint statement.

Putting Muttaqi's assurances into action is easier said than done. Afghanistan's Taliban comprises multiple factions, including tribal chieftains with their own militias and groups reportedly influenced by ISI. Yet, the recent border clashes, including Pakistani airstrikes on Kabul, are likely to erode ISI's sway.

India would reap substantial benefits if the Taliban shares intelligence on terrorist activity along the 2,600 km border with Pakistan. As May's conflict showed, timely intelligence is crucial to weaken terror networks, track their funding and enable precise airstrikes.

How far Kabul would cooperate would depend on its influence over different factions and its relations with Pakistan. The Taliban leadership has proved capable of disarming large sections of its own people who were working against Kabul's interests, Mukhopadhaya added.

These are volatile times in Pakistan, which is hedging between the US and receiving Chinese funding for various projects. Beijing has tolerated Pakistan's overtures to Washington, confident in the strength of its bilateral ties. The situation is now more delicate, however, as some of Pakistan's offers to the US could potentially undermine China's interests.



Munir has proposed that American investors could build a port at Pasni, near the Chinese-built Gwadar port. If realised, the project would allow the US to use China-constructed roads while undercutting Gwadar's commercial potential on the Arabian Sea. Meanwhile, Pakistan's Frontier Works Organisation has signed an MoU with US Strategic Metals to collaborate on a $550 mn polymetallic refinery project.

Rare earths lie at the heart of the US-China dispute. Trump recently imposed an additional 100% tariff on Chinese goods after Beijing restricted rare earth exports to the US. China has ample reason to feel betrayed by its 'iron brother' Pakistan, yet, Beijing is unlikely to voice its frustration openly, given the strategic benefits of maintaining a strong presence in the country.

Greater American business — and potentially intelligence — presence in Pakistan could leave China's Muslim-majority Xinjiang region exposed. A displeased China might refrain from backing Islamabad in a conflict with Afghanistan, and could even rethink its support for Pakistan in a future clash with India, especially if the Indian market offered greater opportunities. This strategic calculus underpins India's diplomatic push in Afghanistan.

To suggest that Pakistan is creating trouble in Afghanistan to hope the doors for US intervention may seem speculative. But such a possibility cannot be ruled out because Trump has forcefully claimed ownership of the Bagram air base. Besides, China is showing strong signs of investment fatigue due to delays in implementing projects in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), and a slowdown in its domestic economy.

In any case, Munir and other officials are trying to promote their personal agenda by getting close to the US instead of thinking about the country.

Expanding footprint in Afghanistan, with its connections to Central Asia and the Arab world, is a much larger goal than countering Pakistan. This is the reason behind India's investment in Iran's Chabahar port. Even Bollywood and Indian mining companies need to look at the business possibilities.

New Delhi may be reluctant to join Russia in recognising the Taliban, which is facing investigations on human rights issues at the UN. But it might consider this option if Pakistani rulers continue to create trouble and an actionable opportunity presents itself.

The writer is former ToI correspondent in Beijing

Why India Inc Lags GDP Sprint



Ananya Roy

India's headline growth — 7.8% y-o-y in the latest quarter — reads like a victory lap. However, when you factor in moderate inflation, the nominal backdrop (sub-9%) appears less favourable. Moreover, for anyone watching corporate earnings, the applause feels muted: revenue growth has been stuck in single digits for nine quarters, and profit growth has logged single digits for five straight quarters.

The obvious narrative is that GDP growth should translate into earnings growth. That, however, is too tidy.

▶ Capex focus India's GDP acceleration has been lopsided — driven principally by government capex and services-led expansion (GCCs, public investment, infra spend). Neither government capex nor captive GCCs map directly onto listed-company earnings. Government ownership of listed firms is roughly 12%, and GCC-led services boom largely resides off public markets.

The result: headline GDP can gallop while listed earnings lag because the engines powering GDP sit outside the profit pool that markets value.

▶ Sector composition Nearly half of Nifty 50 is banking and IT, with banks contributing about a third of index profits. Yet, both have faced headwinds.

▷ Banks are wrestling with stress pockets — microfinance NPAs — and margin compression from lagged passthrough to depositors as rates eased.

▷ IT is reporting low single-digit revenue growth as demand softness in the US and Europe compounds troubles from tariffs and visa-policy uncertainty.

▶ Export focus Elevated US tariffs and policy churn bite into textiles, gems and jewellery, pharma, and chemicals — sectors that are export-sensitive and often listed. To be sure, tariff impacts may touch a small slice of GDP, but they disproportionately hit margins and order books of listed exporters.

▶ Cyclicality and timing Q2 is likely to show consumer and auto demand being deferred ahead of GST 2.0 — a concrete example of when headline consumption numbers mask micro timing. That said, the pull-forward in demand after Sept 22 when GST 2.0 went into effect, and steady monsoon-led rural demand point toward a probable earnings uptick in Q3.

Likewise, sectors such as mining, cement and paints that were dented by an early monsoon in Q2 should recover. These oscillations create a 'news now, earnings later' pattern that can frustrate investors looking for immediate P&L confirmation.



Booming, but...

To be sure, offsetting forces exist. A potential recovery in China, fuelled by continued fiscal support, would lift commodity and crude prices — a double-edged sword: toplines for metals and cyclicals would expand, but margins could compress for commodity-intensive firms.

That said, stronger global demand would be a tailwind for export-oriented mid- and small-caps if tariffs and policy risks subside. Timing and composition of portfolios will draw the line between winners and losers.

What should investors do?

▶ Recognise structural mismatch GDP is necessary but not sufficient for listed earnings growth.

▶ Horizon matters Sectoral exposures and where profits reside matter more than headline GDP beats.

▶ Ripe for the picking Some cyclical pockets are on the cusp of a rebound (consumer discretionary, cement, select industrials), whereas others (parts of banking, large-cap IT) need evidence of improving asset quality and demand from the US/Europe respectively.

▶ Practical approach Re-weigh portfolios toward companies with domestic-demand moats, pricing power and visible margin recovery; trimming exposure to tariff-sensitive exporters unless valuations offer comfort; and avoiding blanket plays simply because GDP prints well.

India's macro story is healthier than it has been in years, but the path from GDP to India Inc's profit-and-loss is neither straight nor uniform. The current dichotomy is explainable — government-driven capex, GCC-led services growth, sectoral concentration of index profits, and policy/tariff shocks create lags and dispersion.

For discerning investors, the opportunity lies in mapping GDP narratives to index composition: bet where profits are likely to follow growth, not where growth merely headlines.

The writer is founder, Credibull Capital

Tech Be Empowering, Not Taxing



Ashish Karundia

India's tax administration has travelled a long way from physical ledgers and manual filings to a digital-first regime. Yet, as with any major transition, this digital evolution has also introduced new challenges.

▶ Tech disruptions Glitches often cause login failures, delayed acknowledgements, system timeouts and non-processing of payments, forcing valuable manpower to be diverted toward resolving system-related hurdles. Recent instances include retrieval issues on the I-T portal during the September deadline, prolonged outages on GST portals earlier this year, and errors requiring the filling of B2B HSN details despite no B2B supplies. These disruptions not only affect compliance timelines but also increase stress and uncertainty for businesses and tax professionals alike.

▶ Delay in release of forms & utilities Another recurring concern is the delay in the release of essential forms and utilities, despite legal provisions being in effect. This creates compliance uncertainty and adds an administrative burden for both taxpayers and professionals. It can also erode trust in the system, discouraging timely filings and careful adherence.

For example, utilities for filing ITRs, audit reports and GST annual returns have not yet been made available. Similarly, in the GST regime, invoice-wise reporting in GSTR-7 — introduced earlier this year — only became fully functional recently. The rectification mechanism notified last year was also made available just this year. These delays generate compliance backlogs but also increase the risk of unintended defaults, even when taxpayers intend to comply.

▶ Inconsistencies in auto-populated data Use of auto-populated data in departmental systems, such as Annual Information Statement (AIS) or Directorate General of Analytics and Risk Management (DGARM) reports, is a welcome step towards simplifying compliance and enhancing transparency. However, inconsistencies continue to arise. For instance, in AIS, the same immovable property transaction may appear twice, leading to inflated disclosures.



Gather more speed

Similarly, in capital markets, securities transactions reported by depositories do not always align with broker statements due to differences in reporting conventions. On the GST side, system-generated reports sometimes misclassify credit notes as debit notes, commit errors in data consolidation, or overlook nuances in composition and return filing schemes, impacting the accuracy of analytics.

India's digital tax platforms are essential for the future. But for tech to harness its potential, it must be adaptive, empathetic and responsive to human realities. While the intent behind digital governance is commendable, execution must be strengthened through robust infra, proactive testing and real-time support to ensure productivity is not compromised. Further, digital forms and utilities should be deployed in a timely manner to safeguard the system's integrity and reliability, foster greater confidence among taxpayers and professionals, and enhance productivity and effectiveness in tax administration.

To ensure this, the following steps are critical:

▶ Integration of human oversight and intervention Automated tools such as AIS or DGARM should act as preliminary filters, not final arbiters. A tiered review process should be implemented whereby potential anomalies, such as duplicate records, value mismatches or other similar inaccuracies, are mandatorily escalated for human examination, reducing the risk of mechanical errors.

▶ Periodic audits and accountability Just as companies are required to audit their financial systems, GoI should mandatorily review the accuracy and reliability of its digital tax infrastructure. The identified flaws, including those raised by users, must be rectified swiftly, and responsibility assigned where lapses are systemic.

A periodic report should also be released, highlighting the kinds of flaws identified and the solutions adopted. This process not only ensures that the system evolves continuously but also reassures taxpayers that corrective measures are not left to chance.

▶ Stakeholder engagement A mandatory engagement with stakeholders — taxpayer associations, legal experts and technology specialists — before rolling out new tools can help refine the systems. It would ensure that reforms are grounded in real-world needs rather than theoretical design.

Technology must empower, not intimidate. By having robust infrastructure, embedding oversight, enforcing accountability and listening to stakeholders, India can build a model of tax governance that is both technologically advanced and deeply humane.

The writer is a chartered accountant

THE SPEAKING TREE

Each Moment Is Passing

SUDHA DEVI NAYAK

In a world ruled by transience, there is no reason to mourn the passing of things but accepting each encounter as a revelation. Homer says in Iliad, 'Like generations of leaves, the lives of mortal men. The old leaves wither as new buds burst forth on trees. And so, with men, one generation comes to life, another dies away.'

Marcus Aurelius, philosopher emperor, asks, 'Canst thou take a bath unless the wood undergoes a change? Canst thou be nourished unless the food undergoes a change? Dost thou not see then that for thyself and to change is just the same and equally necessary for the universal nature?' We admire the beauty of a butterfly but rarely acknowledge the changes it has undergone to attain that beauty.

Giving full attention to each interaction allows us to experience the wide variety of people and occasions that come our way. Everyone has the power to bring value to our lives, even those we will not meet again. This is the philosophy of ichi-go ichi-e by Ii Naosuke, a Japanese tea master, who embraced impermanence of life.

The past is the most tragic of all tenses; if it was happy, it is gone; if unhappy, it cannot be amended. The present is all that matters, as all possibilities are alive. Each moment is passing; it is singular and unrepeatable. Therefore, we need to live every moment like children without anticipation or foreboding, with excited sense of not knowing what will happen, and undiluted joy.

PEAS IN A PODCAST

Got an AI Mentor?

In today's world, staying ahead of tech is more important than ever. The Radio Davos episode, **Do you need an AI mentor?**, hosted by Robin Pomeroy, features Kian Katanforoosh, founder and CEO of Workera, discussing the evolving landscape of AI-driven skills development. Sponsored by WEF, the podcast dives into the urgent need for individuals and organisations to become 'AI-ready' as the half-life of digital skills has shrunk dramatically — from over a decade 40 years ago to 2.5 years today.

Katanforoosh shares insights from his work with Workera, a skills intelligence platform. He explores practical approaches for non-technical learners, advocating 'vibe coding,' prompt engineering and building a growth mindset.

The conversation also touches on AI mentorship, with Katanforoosh describing how AI mentors, like his own system Sage, can assess skills, set ambitious goals and connect learners to resources, potentially outperforming humans in bias-free skills evaluation.

Listeners gain valuable guidance on staying competitive in a fast-changing job market, from integrating AI into daily workflows to curating reliable knowledge sources. The discussion is particularly important as young professionals navigate unprecedented career challenges, and enterprises grapple with reskilling dema- nds.



Chat Room

Don't Stop This Thing We Started

Apropos 'An Adventure of Ruptures' by T K Arun (Oct 14), this year's Nobel laureates for economics have pertinently pointed out that innovation-led economic growth is the result of technological progress driven by improvements in science and technology and continuous upgradation in skill sets. However, sustained innovation requires commercialisation of technology and its adoption on a large scale, which calls for entrepreneurship, creativity and the ability to build and manage organisations. It also explains the difference between invention and innovation: Thomas Edison was a technological wizard and a great inventor, but not an innovator. Developing countries like India must foster tech-driven innovation and entrepreneurship in universities, to turn them into agents of economic change.

Chander Shekhar Dogra
Jalandhar

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Uncertainty continues

IMF highlights risks beyond trade

Uncertainty related to the United States (US) trade policy continues to dominate the global economic discourse. The October edition of the World Economic Outlook (WEO), released on Tuesday by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), noted that the downside risks to global growth had reduced since April, but they remained elevated. The focus is now shifting to the impact of tariffs on prices, consumption, and investment. The IMF has increased the US growth projection by 10 basis points to 2 per cent for the current year compared to its July update. India's growth projection has also been revised up by 20 basis points to 6.6 per cent for the current year. Several other forecasters have also revised India's growth projection owing to the better than expected growth outcome in the first quarter.

However, given the uncertainty, minor revisions in growth projections may not matter much. The US has imposed a prohibitive 50 per cent tariff on its imports from India. Indian negotiators are reported to be heading to the US this week, and it is hoped that both countries will soon arrive at a mutually beneficial trade agreement. While US tariffs on India are comparatively high, it is not the only one dealing with the uncertainty. As the WEO noted, higher US tariffs are curtailing external demand with significant implications for large exporting economies. Uncertainty on trade policy is affecting investment appetite in firms. Evidence shows that one standard-deviation increase in uncertainty on policy results in a 2 per cent drop in investment, which peaks about two years after the shock. Firms tend to defer investment because of uncertainty.

It is worth noting that tariffs are not the only uncertainty. Policy changes related to immigration, for instance, will also affect growth in both advanced and low-income countries. According to estimates, about a quarter of international migrants in the workforce are in North America, largely in the US. Policy shifts on immigration in the US could have a material impact on output. Further, sectors dominated by migrant workers — such as construction, hospitality, and farming — may see relatively high inflation. The overall inflation rate in the US is expected to increase, which could be a risk for the expected easing of monetary policy by the Federal Reserve.

The global economy is projected to grow at an average annual rate of 3.2 per cent between 2027 and 2030, as against the pre-pandemic (2000-19) average of 3.7 per cent. A lot in the medium term will depend on how issues on global trade are settled. Trade tensions between the US and China, for instance, are again increasing. So far, most trading partners have decided not to retaliate against the US. However, given the unrealistic conditions in some of the agreements and shifts in the US stance, things could change quickly. Economists at the World Trade Organization recently increased the growth forecast on merchandise trade for 2025 to 2.4 per cent compared to 0.9 per cent in August, which was largely driven by the frontloading of imports in North America. However, the growth projection for 2026 has been lowered to 0.5 per cent, as against the earlier forecast of 1.8 per cent. Growth in exports of services is expected to slow to 4.4 per cent in 2026 from 6.8 per cent in 2024. The uncertainty and trade frictions introduced by the US will affect not only trade in goods but also services and investment. While India continues to engage with the US, it should also aim to quickly conclude other agreements, such as the one with the European Union.

A new beginning

Geopolitical shifts dictate the reset in Indo-Canadian ties

A year after Indo-Canadian ties touched rock bottom, collateral damage from the murder of a pro-Khalistani activist, Canadian Foreign Minister Anita Anand's visit signals a cautious turnaround. The exit of Justin Trudeau, whose dependence on Khalistani leaders to stay in power marred relations with India, and the accession of Mark Carney as Prime Minister in March this year significantly changed the dynamics of the relationship. For one, the poor performance of the pro-Khalistani party in the Canadian elections has removed a major political obstacle for closer Indo-Canadian relations. For another, as an economist and former central banker, Mr Carney was well aware of the need for smoother relations. The initial thaw, which began with a meeting between the two Prime Ministers on the sidelines of the G7 summit in Canada in June, has yielded a three-day visit by Ms Anand, the first to India by a Canadian foreign minister in over two years, and a warmly worded join statement that spoke of "respect for each other's concerns and sensitivities". Both countries' high commissioners, expelled just a year ago, have resumed their responsibilities in the capitals.

For all the visible diplomatic affability, hard geopolitical realities have dictated the swiftness with which both sides have worked to revive relations. Both countries have been at the receiving end of tariffs imposed by American President Donald Trump, and they are hurting both economies. Both are in the throes of tough negotiations with Washington for a trade deal. The agreement to re-establish bilateral mechanisms on trade, investment, and cooperation on science and technology reflects the impulse for both countries to strengthen mutually reinforcing activities. Again, China's recently imposed export controls on rare earths have added to both countries' economic challenges for their automobile and electric vehicle industries. The announcement of an annual dialogue on critical minerals is designed to explore ways of collaborating on energy security, and will include cooperation in civil nuclear energy. Ministerial-level discussion on bilateral trade and investment has been put in place. In this context, it is significant that Ms Anand's visit will include a trip to Mumbai to meet with chief executives of Indian corporations as a prelude to resuming the India-Canadian CEOs' Forum in 2026. Also consequential is the setting up of a joint working group on higher education, one of the biggest casualties of the strained relations between the two countries. Last year, Indian student enrolment in Canada fell nearly 41 per cent as Ottawa hardened visa regulations, which significantly raised fees and compliance costs.

Foreign Minister S Jaishankar referred to an "ambitious road map to advance cooperation". Its success, however, will depend on how India can take advantage of the reset to take forward the initiative. It is notable that Ms Anand will also be visiting China on this trip to explore closer economic ties and energy cooperation, suggesting that India is not the only big economy on Canada's radar as it looks to offset the impact of the US trade war. Meanwhile, the ongoing trial in a Manhattan court of the 2023 killing of Hardeep Singh Nijjar in British Columbia and the Indian government's alleged role in it remain an inconvenient element in the relationship. How both countries choose to address the challenges stemming from this case will test the strength of these renewed ties.

ILLUSTRATION:BINAY SINHA



Don't relax MPS requirements

Lowering the minimum public shareholding mandate for listed companies neither benefits public investors nor improves corporate governance

The objective and rationale of the recent Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) decision to relax the minimum public shareholding (MPS) requirement at the time of listing and provide longer timelines for meeting the regulatory threshold for large issuers need to be examined from the point of view of public investors and corporate governance.

The regulator's stated objective is to facilitate initial public offerings (IPOs) by large companies. The rationale given includes that substantial dilution would be difficult for the market to absorb; companies may not need more funds; immediate dilution can lead to oversupply of shares in the market; and anticipation of further dilution may impact share prices.



AJAY TYAGI

The regulator has divided companies into different categories for giving this relaxation. For large companies, it goes to the extent of allowing a minimum public offer of only 2.5 per cent at the time of listing, and a long time period of 10 years to reach the MPS threshold of 25 per cent.

Now, which companies are likely to fall in this category? Apart from some government-owned companies, these would be those held by promoters with deep pockets, who are able to raise substantial funds from private equity investors and strategic partners through private placements. A public listing, besides giving better visibility to the company, provides an exit opportunity to such investors, which in turn would facilitate more pre-IPO private investments. Certainly, it is not with the purpose to raise fresh funds. A 2.5 per cent public offer, even if the whole of it were to be fresh issuance, would be a mere drop in the ocean for such a company.

How about the new investors buying equities through the IPO route? It could be argued that public investors joining the bandwagon via the public offering get an opportunity to share the pie and, therefore, benefit from the listing. This presumption needs a closer examination. Does the regulatory relaxation relating to MPS treat these stakeholders fairly, or is it even likely to result in any consequential improvement in the corporate governance of the entity?

Few would dispute that ideally, companies going for an IPO should be mandated to achieve the 25 per cent MPS requirement in one go, right at the time of listing. Imagine the difference in discovered price under two scenarios — a 25 per cent dilution at the time of listing versus a mere 2.5 per cent dilution with a 10-year horizon to reach 25 per cent.

The Indian capital market's growth has been truly impressive in recent times. Since 2019, the market cap-to-gross domestic product (GDP) ratio has increased from 81 per cent to 135 per cent. The number of demat accounts has risen from 36 million in April 2019 to over 207 million now. Reportedly, Indian markets have seen the fourth-largest fund-raise globally via IPOs in 2025 so far. While surely there is much scope to further deepen the market, is inadequate market depth a sufficient ground to allow this relaxation? Probably not.

The valuation of an unlisted company is a tedious and complex task, with the perception of institutional investors and merchant bankers playing a dominant role. Notwithstanding the unprecedented boom in the IPO market in recent years, a significant difference between the issue price and the listing price, especially in large issues, has often soured investor sentiment. The proposed timelines for further dilution to reach the ultimate MPS requirement would add to the dilemma and confusion of investors.

As for corporate governance, a public shareholding of just 2.5 per cent would be of little relevance. Passing resolutions at annual general meetings would be a joke. Even for corporate actions for which Sebi prescribes approval by the majority of minority shareholders, the overwhelming majority shareholding would have a psychological impact on the behaviour of the minority shareholders, refraining them from taking rational decisions.

Sebi should reconsider this policy decision. A 25 per cent MPS should be prescribed right at the time of listing. At best, it could perhaps be relaxed to 10 per cent at the time of listing, with two to three years to reach 25 per cent. At least on paper, shareholders holding 10 per cent collectively would have specific rights, including requisitioning an extraordinary general meeting and filing a petition with the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) if they are subject to oppression or mismanagement. No further relaxation in timelines should be allowed under any circumstance. If required, the large issuers may consider restructuring their business structures and models. For instance, they may consider hiving off activities into different subsidiaries, and then consider listing them. As for the inadequate market appetite argument, Sebi may conduct a credible study and, if needed, with a view to discourage bunching of issuances, think in terms of phasing them out over a period based on rational principles.

Staying with the discussion on passing resolutions by shareholders, the Companies Act, 2013, requires the assent of 50 per cent or more of shareholders, in value terms, to pass an ordinary resolution. For special resolutions, the threshold is 75 per cent. Thus, even the existing prescription of 25 per cent MPS may not be sufficient to contain any egregious behaviour on the part of promoter shareholders.

The 2019 Budget had suggested increasing the MPS to 35 per cent. However, free-market enthusiasts argued that a higher public shareholding will likely happen on its own as the market matures, and therefore there is no need for such a prescription. Unfortunately, as it happens with many such desirable objectives, relying on voluntary action seldom works in our country. Thus, there may be a need to revisit this proposal. The MPS requirement may be raised to at least 30 per cent. Alternatively, the threshold for passing special resolutions could be increased to 80 per cent under the Companies Act.

Another important aspect is that a higher public shareholding does not necessarily imply a higher number of shares available for secondary-market trading. Shares held by associate or group companies, entities having a nominee director on the company's board, directors of the company, central/state government, corporations having strategic interest, and other long-term investors (including some foreign direct investors), though falling within the definition of public shareholders, are not likely to be ordinarily available for trading.

The concept of MPS needs to be replaced by that of "free float" to have a fair assessment of the percentage of shares of a listed company that are likely to be freely available for trading. Though the stock exchanges and index providers use free float criteria, their definition of free float varies. The market regulator should build a consensus among stakeholders on the definition of "free float" to replace the MPS requirement.

Many would scoff at above suggestions and argue that they go against the "ease of doing business". But remember — protecting the interests of investors is the primary function of the regulator, as also stated in the preamble of the Sebi Act.

The author is a distinguished fellow at the Observer Research Foundation, former Sebi chairman, and a former IAS officer

The forex chest's valuation swell

DHARMAKIRTI JOSHI, ADHISH VERMA & MEERA MOHAN

India's foreign exchange reserves, at a sizeable $699.9 billion as of October 3, represent a healthy level, according to adequacy yardsticks such as import cover and external debt servicing requirements.

In times of lingering geopolitical uncertainties and market volatility, that fourth-biggest hoard in the world is a bulwark. The country's current account deficit (CAD) remains comfortable as well, coming in at 0.2 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) in the first quarter of the financial year.

But when capital flows are volatile, as has happened this financial year, even financing a low CAD can become challenging and put pressure on the currency. In the first half, for instance, foreign portfolio investment (FPI) recorded a net outflow of $3.9 billion, as opposed to a net inflow of $21.6 billion in the year-ago period.

Evolution of reserve management

Efficient forex management is crucial to ensure a reasonable level of confidence in the international financial and trading communities about the capacity of a country to honour its obligations and maintain trade and financial flows while minimising the liquidity risk.

India has come a long way both in terms of the quantum of reserves and the management practices thereof. Today, foreign exchange reserves account for nearly 17 per cent of India's GDP, compared with just 1.3 per cent in FY91 during the balance of payments crisis.

Reserve management practices, too, have evolved, starting with the recommendations of the 1992 High-Level Committee on Balance of Payments and the lessons from the 1997 East Asian crisis. The approach has broadened and now factors in the size, composition, and risk profiles of capital flows, as well as vulnerabilities to external shocks.

India's CAD conundrum

India has ranked fourth in terms of foreign exchange reserves for many years now. However, there is one big difference compared with the top three holders — China, Japan, and Switzerland: They all enjoy current account surpluses.

This makes it convenient for their central banks to build reserves that are stable in nature. With export income higher than the import bill, there is appreciating pressure on their currencies. So, the central banks keep buying dollars to check appreciation in their currencies and ensure competitive exports.

India, on the other hand, runs a current account deficit. Its foreign exchange reserve buildup depends on capital inflows, part of which is in the form of debt (external commercial borrowings and non-resident Indian deposits) and must be repaid at some point in time.

Foreign portfolio investment flows help but are relatively fickle. Foreign direct investment is the more stable form of capital flow, but here too, India has been experiencing some pressure on a net basis. The buildup of India's foreign exchange reserves, therefore, has been more opportunistic and requires active management.

Mint Road agility

Many factors impact reserves. One of these is the valuation effect, which refers to changes in the exchange rates of major reserve currencies, along with the fluctuation in the market prices of foreign securities — the mark-to-market math.

These impact the FCA, or foreign currency assets component — the largest — of the forex reserves. The other valuation impact comes from the movement in gold prices. The valuation effect has had a key role in raising the reserves at a time of tapering net capital inflows.

If not for the valuation effect in FY25 and in the first quarter of this financial year, the total foreign exchange reserves would have been $52.2 billion lower. According to the Reserve Bank of India, the valuation gain of FY25 reflected higher prices of gold and lower yields on international bonds. The RBI has shown laudable agility by increasing gold holdings by 58 metric tonne last financial year, prices of which have surged since.

Gains to continue

The valuation gains bode well for this financial year as well. Given lingering global uncertainties, India's current account would be a touch higher this financial year, while financial flows may remain volatile and inadequate.

The United States' move to impose high tariffs on India has also put considerable pressure on the rupee. Moreover, the RBI's net forward assets (payable), though down from the historic high of $88.75 billion at end-February 2025, remained elevated at $57.9 billion as of July. For a central bank to tackle the trifecta, a substantial foreign exchange kitty is essential.

Luckily, factors that lead to the valuation gain are still playing out favourably. Gold prices have caught fire, and the US dollar has depreciated against the pound and the euro, providing a favourable exchange rate movement to boost India's FCA. Yields on US Treasuries have softened. The 10-year yield has averaged 4.11 per cent in October so far, compared with 4.27 per cent in April 2025, and may fall further as the Federal Reserve has kickstarted its easing cycle.

Overall, the valuation gains are expected to continue playing a positive role in the movement of India's foreign exchange reserves this financial year.

The authors are, respectively, chief economist, senior economist, and economic analyst, CRISIL Ltd

Refugees: From asylum to 'management'

BOOK REVIEW

NEHA BHATT

By the end of April 2025, more than 122 million people were displaced around the world, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). *On the Margins of Protection*, edited by Paula Banerjee, aims to provide a fresh perspective to the long-standing crisis of displaced people, while challenging the ways in which we have understood the global problem.

The book's origins date back to 2015, called the "summer of migrations", when Europe experienced thousands of Syrian refugees attempting to make it across the sea to the continent. This crisis led to the re-evaluation of the refugee management paradigm and two Global Compacts, one for refugees and the other for migrants. This collection of essays is a response to the deliberations driven by the UNHCR on the Global Compact on Refugees.

The book examines in meticulous detail the hypocrisies of the developed world in how the flow of refugees is perceived and managed and are increasingly being repressed in different ways. The authors question how this mass movement of people was deemed a "crisis" in the first place: "The migration of these post-colonial people — who are racially different, several practising a different religion, and all without any tangible resources — created a perception of crisis in Europe. However, this crisis completely overlooked the fact that many more refugees had been accommodated within Africa and Asia in the last decades than anywhere else in the world...." The book highlights the fact that "often, crisis happens not when thousands are displaced from underdeveloped, post-colonial countries because of policies undertaken in the developed world, but when these same displaced individuals begin to appear on the borders of these developed countries for sheer survival."

The ground has shifted in recent years. Refugee protection is treated as a problem. With right-wing populism on the rise, refugees are seen as a constant threat. The book asks: How does the concept of protection operate in different contexts across the world, keeping in view history and evolving geopolitics?

The book attempts to answer this complex question by bringing together a range of essays by experts on the subject across three core areas through a post-colonial perspective: New technologies of protection, the fault-lines of race, religion and gender among displaced groups, and neo-liberalism and immigrant economies.

We operate in a time when society is "facing a perfect cacophony storm of populist leaders' voices in the Americas, EU, Asia and Africa, which attribute the ills of their societies to migrants". Accordingly, migration pathways to destination countries of choice that offer full citizenship and equal rights are shrinking globally, says Bandana Purkayastha in her essay "Distancing as Governance: Reflections on Migrants and Contemporary (in) Securities." She observes that states attempt to govern flows of people in an effort to tighten "security". Commercialisation of refugees, too, is on the rise. More alarmingly, the book points out, there is a progressive criminalisation of migrants.

Though global refugee flows have intensified in recent years, international responses remain inadequate. "In Population Flows, Refugees and the Responsibility to Protect" Shibashis Chatterjee highlights the plight of the Rohingya and Afghan refugees across Asia, while examining India's position on the issue as a non-signatory to the Refugee Convention. In "Reframing the Refugee Crisis: Resistances and Solidarities," Priya Singh digs deep into the movement of refugees through Europe in its specific political context, focusing on the larger framing of the "so-called summer of migration" in public discourse, that was marked by hundreds of drownings off a ship and the searing image of the drowned Syrian child, Alan Kurdi, that shocked the world.



On the Margins of Protection
Edited by Paula Banerjee
Published by Orient BlackSwan
279 pages ₹1020

Although many chapters in the book feature overlapping discussions on the subject, they are laid out with notable academic rigour. A compelling overarching argument unpacks the link between geopolitics in the Global North, asylum policies, and the resulting dislocations in the Global South. Another explores how migrants resist the inequalities and fractures within a protection regime shaped by race, religion, and gender.

Professor Banerjee highlights the forced displacement of women, challenging the "state-sanctioned narrative" that portrays refugee women as victims. She refers to value judgements that occur to minimise the importance of crimes committed against them as they are reduced to political non-subjects. Ilina Sen's essay on the experiences of Asian female migrants employed as domestic workers in the Gulf, and the gendered violence they routinely face, forms an equally important part of the book. Calling for an urgent look at reforms in region-specific refugee policies, the book is an important read on overlooked issues as it pushes the reader to re-examine long-held notions about the global refugee crisis.

The reviewer is a Delhi-based freelance journalist and author who reports on gender, policy, public health and culture

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OPERATION CONVICTION IN UP: FROM 'MAFIA RAJ' TO FAST-TRACK JUSTICE

The official metrics are eye-catching. In the first 13 months (July 2023–Aug 2024), UP authorities tallied 50,010 accused convicted in 36,705 cases. By mid-2025 that number swelled to 97,158 convictions since launch.

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

Uttar Pradesh has long struggled to "bring its hold over crime," as Nehru lamented in the 1950s. Indeed, UP politics earned a reputation for the "mafia raj" – a nexus of "bosses" and politicians that routinely "violated every single one of the 511 paragraphs in the criminal code," in Nehru's words. To this day, strongmen thrive: roughly one-third of Indian lawmakers have criminal backgrounds. Decades of "goonda raj" saw dacoits and gangsters embedded in local politics, protected by patronage. Against this background, successive UP governments have periodically tried draconian measures – from special anti-terror laws to fast-track courts – to showcase toughness. The newest incarnation is Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's *"Operation Conviction"*, launched July 1, 2023. It promises "swift justice" by aggressively prosecuting heinous crimes and publicly touting high conviction tallies. But tracing UP's policing history shows a cautionary tale: forced prosecutions and blockbuster numbers can win headlines – even while masking deeper problems.

POLICING IN UP

Uttar Pradesh's policing crises have political roots. By the 1990s, Bihar-style caste politics intertwined with crime in UP's countryside, and its cities harbored wealthy extortion mafias. Senior officers recall that political patronage once made it "near impossible to take action" against heavy gangsters. Many ordinary UP voters came to see petty crime fade once goonda godfathers were targeted. As ex-DG B. N. Rai noted, one positive of recent years is that "one good thing... The government has taken action across the board" – rather than selectively protecting certain groups. (To be sure, data experts caution that police-recorded crime can both understate and overstate the real situation, depending on reporting habits.)

Yet the methods under Yogi Adityanath's government have also been unusually forceful. The CM's early motto – *"Agar apradh karenge, toh thok diye jayenge"* (roughly, "commit a crime and you'll be shot down") – was no idle threat. Since 2017 the UP police began publicizing its use of encounters. By mid-2020, officials claimed nearly 140 alleged criminals killed in police encounters and over 3,300 wounded. In these reports, Muslims — about 20% of UP's population — comprised nearly 40% of those killed, sparking concerns of bias. Critics warn that the "trigger-happy" campaign (as one report put it) risks bending law in political directions. Indeed, legal scholars note that once a government treats crime control as a political strategy, it has "liberty to define anyone as a criminal".

FAST-TRACK DRIVE OR FLASH IN THE PAN?

Swift trials have been tried before. In the 1980s-90s, national laws like TADA (Terrorist and Disruptive Activities Prevention Act) gave police extraordinary powers against "terrorism" – an umbrella term sometimes used for organized crime and political agitation. But evidence suggests TADA was a fiasco. Amnesty International reported that of thousands arrested under TADA, less than 1% were ever convicted. In other words, police made sweeping arrests, but courts regularly acquitted. Victims of hasty legal dragnet often languished in jail or faced torture; only a handful ended up jailed. (For example, Amnesty quotes Home Ministry data showing a 0.8% conviction rate under early TADA provisions.)

Two decades ago, UP echoed this pattern under POTA (Prevention of Terrorism Act, 2002–2004). Ostensibly an anti-terror law, POTA was used in UP to pursue tribal villagers and political activists. One human rights report recounts how UP authorities *"withdrew POTA cases against 28 poor Dalits and tribals"* once media attention revealed flimsy charges. Many accused had only been bonded laborers who asserted their rights; they'd been branded "Naxalites" and arrested with little evidence. POTA cases in UP similarly yielded few convictions and were later abandoned under pressure.

Meanwhile, in the 2000s and 2010s the judiciary and legislature turned to fast-track courts for speed. In 2003 and 2008, India enacted tougher laws against rape and child sex abuse. The government pushed dozens of special courts to hear those cases. By 2013, states including Uttar Pradesh had dozens of fast-track courts for heinous crimes like sexual assault. UP's police-brass would later point proudly to U.P. 's leading national performance: year after year UP police noted that over 70% of registered cases of violence against women ended in conviction (against a 25% national average). And UP completed more trials of POCSO child-abuse cases than any other state. Yet, many analysts warned that these numbers hid real issues: victims who never even got cases filed, witnesses intimidated, and high acquittals too. (A Reuters investigation in 2020 reported that only ~300 of India's 32,000 reported rapes in 2019 resulted in conviction, roughly 1%. Uttar Pradesh was among the worst for delay and under-reporting.)



Uttar Pradesh Director General of Police Vijaya Kumar.



Representative image.

In short, fast-track courts in UP achieved mixed results. On the one hand, they cleared some backlog: at times police and courts would fast-track dozens of cases together. On the other, they functioned with normal court weaknesses. A 2015 study found that many so-called fast-track courts in India lacked extra resources and saw frequent acquittals by judges noting contradictory testimonies. UP's record was highlighted by critics: for instance, in a recent high-profile cow-protection case in neighboring Haryana, four Special Courts had convicted only 4 out of 69 cases (about 6%). That suggests that even focused judicial effort can be stymied by poor evidence gathering or lack of genuine harm.

OPERATION CONVICTION: NUMBERS AND NARRATIVES

In July 2023, Uttar Pradesh announced "Operation Conviction" as a police–prosecution drive to fix criminal justice outcomes. The initiative is broad: it targets violent or "heinous" offences (murder, rape, robbery) as well as politically sensitive crimes like cow-slaughter, religious conversion and child abuse. All district police were tasked with filing chargesheets in a "time-bound" manner and working closely with public prosecutors. The government even set up an online dashboard for weekly review of pending cases. In press releases, Yogi's team presented Operation Conviction as zero-tolerance justice. As one police spokesman put it, the aim is to "effectively represent cases in courts so that [offenders] are punished in the least amount of time".

The official metrics are eye-catching. In the first 13 months (July 2023–Aug 2024), UP authorities tallied 50,010 accused convicted in 36,705 cases. By mid-2025 that number swelled to 97,158 convictions since launch. Prosecutors highlight shocking tallies: between March 2017 and Dec 2024, nearly 80,000 criminals were convicted in Yogi's rule, including 8174 life terms and 68 death sentences. PoCSO (child sexual abuse) convictions alone exceeded 12,000, with 17 death penalties under the law. The latest year-long report (July 2024–'25) breaks it down: out of 47,149 serious cases identified, 19,584 were tried, yielding 15,641 convictions. Conviction rates by category are reported at 80–99% (murder 82%, robbery 86%, theft 99%).

Notably, Operation Conviction coincided with India's new criminal laws (July 2024). Uttar Pradesh officials credit the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, Sabiksha Adhiniyam, Sakshya Adhiniyam overhaul for helping. ADG Prosecution Deepesh Juneja says fast-tracking under the new laws led to 458 key cases resolved since July 2024: 4 death sentences, 10 life terms, 19 terms over 20 years, and 425 under-20-year sentences. The shift to digital tools is also lauded: e-prosecution portals, video depositions and cloud-based evidence have "saved [the] state approximately Rs 25 crore" by cutting court appearances. Indeed, by mid-2025 Juneja claimed UP had over 97,185 convictions in Operation Conviction, with Amit Shah calling it a national model. The numbers are presented as evidence that the long-promised "law and order breakthrough" has finally arrived in UP.



Atiq Ahmed and his brother's assassination while in police custody was broadcast live by media cameras. The incident drew national attention and raised questions about the rule of law in Uttar Pradesh.

CRIME CONTROL: WHAT WE SEE AND WHAT WE DON'T

Such figures can create a feel-good narrative. Tellingly, ruling party spokesmen frame Operation Conviction as restoring the "rule of law" in UP. They argue swift punishment deters criminals and boosts public confidence. If serious criminals are swiftly off the streets – in courts or cell blocks – everyday citizens might indeed feel safer. On the face of it, Pakistan's successes with fast-track courts for terror trials are cited, so why not repeat for rape or murder? Digital case-management and incentivizing prosecutors *should* speed justice, at least for clearly documented crimes.

But history warns that *quantitative success isn't justice*. High conviction totals can mask problems: weak evidence, coerced confessions, or even police tipping the scales. For instance, Operation Conviction claims a 98% conviction rate in theft and a 94% rate in robbery. That invites skepticism. In a fair trial, some acquittals are expected when evidence fails. Almost *never* do courts convict 7 out of 8 accused. (By comparison, in 2019 national figures only about 1 in 10 rape trials ended in conviction.) The UP figures suggest more is at play: possibly, police now meticulously build airtight cases, or they choose to charge only cases with guaranteed outcomes.

Indeed, critics already question the data. Opposition leader Akhilesh Yadav has dismissed the Conviction stats as "false and fabricated," accusing the government of "misleading the public". Even neutral observers note that "better reporting" alone could raise a conviction rate; so could selectively drop marginal cases. In crisis, only a subset of cases may be flagged for Operation Conviction, ones where a quick win is likely. Others – e.g. politically sensitive ones – might languish. UP police say they identified 47,149 "serious" cases in one year, but only 19,584 were even sent to trial. What about the rest? Some may be stuck at investigation or withdrawn for technicalities.

The campaign's focus on numbers also sidesteps victims' perspectives. Success is measured by punishing perpetrators, but not by serving survivors or communities. The data tell us nothing about whether families got justice or compensation. They do not disclose how many cases fell apart for procedural lapses, or whether witnesses were intimidated. (Elsewhere, Uttar Pradesh has been criticized for failing rape victims: in 2020 a Thomson Reuters report detailed Dalit women being repeatedly turned away by police, pressured to withdraw cases, or shunned from courts.) It's possible that even as convictions rise, more victims drop out before trial, or crimes go unregistered altogether – distortions that raw numbers cannot reveal.

Furthermore, fast prosecutions can entail shortcuts. Under the new codes, witness statements may be video-recorded beforehand, which saves court time but also reduces cross-examination pressure. Curbing adjournments is laudable, but if a rushed trial means defense is denied due process, miscarriages of justice can occur. The state's own data hints at systemic anomalies: the HT report on crimes against women celebrated UP's 70.8% conviction rate, yet that same data implied 30% of cases still ended without punishment. What happened in those acquittals? Reports from other states suggest many victims simply give up or evidence goes missing. These are the "hidden" costs of the metrics.

Even targeted campaigns can foster new abuses. Fast-track drives against cow slaughter or conversion – crimes flagged in Operation Conviction – risk communal profiling. Haryana's experience is instructive: when that state set up special courts for its strict anti-cow laws, convictions were almost non-existent. Over 90% of cases went nowhere. In UP, "cow-related" clauses and anti-conversion cases carry a strong ideological charge. It is easy to imagine police pressuring weak suspects to confess, just to check boxes. The metrics (numbers of cases booked or convictions) say nothing about whether these were fair trials or simply a political performance.

Lastly, we should ask: How durable are these gains? Operation Conviction is sustained by manpower and political will. But history shows crackdowns often relax once the media spotlight moves on. After all, the previous Samajwadi government (2012–17) also tried its own initiatives: for example, MP Adityanath's (now CM) opponent Azam Khan launched raids on criminals, and the BSP had law-and-order drives in Purvanchal. Results ebbed and flowed with each regime. If Yogi's team falls out of office, will the convictions still hold up on appeal? Will future governments keep up the same intensity, or simply trot out the numbers to score points? The data alone can't tell us that.

WHAT WORKS – AND WHAT CAN BACKFIRE

Operation Conviction's defenders emphasize deterrence. The idea is that the state must *show* it means business: once even minor offenders see that trials are quick and penalties heavy, they will think twice. Some block-level officials report a chilling effect: gang informants say even local rowdies complain, "Who are we to mess with the police?" Indeed, UP's crime rate (per NCRB) has reportedly dipped slightly in recent years, and victims often cite more responsive police patrols. In that sense, fast-track convictions can help re-establish a baseline of safety.

Moreover, public confidence in the justice system can improve if trials do not drag on for years. A mother who has been awaiting closure after a violent crime may find relief if her case finally goes to court without endless adjournments. The emphasis on evidence (e.g. forensic collection teams at every major crime scene, another BNSS reform) could even raise overall case quality. The push for digital tools and e-judiciary, heralded by the new laws, might modernize a previously paper-heavy system. In Chandigarh – another state that moved early to the new criminal codes – an official said one local court's convictions jumped to 91% after adopting e-FIR and videography. So there is a silver lining: more accountability can come from scrutinized evidence chains and technology.

Yet the backfire risks loom large. First, obsessing over conviction numbers can encourage abuse of power. If police get promotions for racketing up convictions, innocents can get swept up. (Past experience with anti-Maoist laws shows that low-income tribal men were easy targets for bogus terrorism charges under pressure.) Fast trials combined with civilian support for "tough policing" might lower scrutiny: and what starts as deterring criminals could slide into punishing innocents or political dissenters.

Second, by focusing on post-crime prosecution, the state might neglect crime prevention. Policing is not just a scoreboard; it also needs community engagement, conflict resolution, and trust-building. If residents begin to fear the police as much as the criminals, they may stop reporting crimes at all. Already some minority rights groups allege increased harassment in the name of cow protection. Unchecked, Operation Conviction could erode the rule of law it claims to restore: a city where only certain communities fear sudden prosecution is no real victory.

Finally, the single-minded narrative of "conviction output = success" sidesteps root causes. Gang violence often stems from economic inequality, juvenile delinquency, or local political bargains. Rapid trials will not solve disputes over land, liquor, or caste. Without addressing why so many young men pick up guns or why women lack protection, even a spike in convictions may prove temporary. And in the courts of public opinion, any high-profile miscarriage (say, a later exoneration of a wrongfully tried accused) can swiftly turn tides.



A view of Allahabad High Court

The Tribune
ESTABLISHED IN 1881

AI impetus

India must make the most of Google hub

INDIA's ambition to become a global leader in artificial intelligence (AI) has received a major fillip. Tech powerhouse Google has announced an investment of $15 billion over the next five years to establish a one gigawatt-scale AI hub in Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh. This will be the company's largest AI hub outside the US. The decision underlines India's importance in Google's global scheme of things. Acknowledging that the country is witnessing a digital transformation "unparalleled in pace and scale", Google has said that it wants to work with the Indian government and industry leaders to realise the vision of an AI-first nation.

This promising chapter in India-US tech cooperation is unfolding amid resumption of talks to put the much-delayed trade deal back on track. Punitive tariffs and H-1B visa curbs imposed by US President Donald Trump have soured Delhi-Washington ties, but the initiative to build an AI hub shows that there is still some common ground. The US, which leads the global AI innovation race, can contribute immensely to India's fast-growing digital economy.

There is no doubt that AI is proving to be the most transformative technology of this century. India cannot afford to remain behind the curve. It must harness this awe-inspiring force so that the benefits of AI reach the last mile. What's needed is a robust ecosystem that accelerates AI-driven solutions for myriad sectors — healthcare, agriculture, education, finance, transport, etc. There should be no compromise on the development of AI that prioritises accountability, affordability and accessibility. A big task for India is to ensure that techno-legal safeguards don't stifle innovation and growth. The country has so far steered clear of overregulation, but the three-pronged menace of deepfakes, privacy risks and cybersecurity threats will require effective, long-term solutions. At the same time, it is imperative to engage pragmatically with Google, which is grappling with several antitrust challenges in India.

Accident insurance

Punjab must get its act together

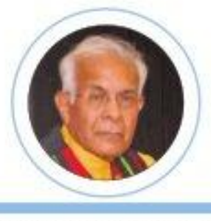
POLICE procedural delays holding up insurance claims of road accident victims in Punjab smack of abdication of duty and unprofessionalism. More than that, it shows a lack of empathy and sensitivity in those entrusted with ensuring the safety of citizens. For fatal accidents that took place between 2022 and 2024, claims exceeding Rs 700 crore are pending. Insurance money of Rs 35 crore is due in cases involving grievous injuries. Lapses in handling, investigating and submitting details have come to the fore. Given the emotional and financial stress that families of victims have to endure, the least that is expected is administrative support. The normalisation of a work culture that cares little for basic courtesies is despicable. There is an urgent need for the police department to sort out the glitches, clear the backlog of claims and ensure that the standard operating procedures are not violated.

The data on road accident-related FIRs in the state for 2024 puts the death toll at 3,148. The reaction to such shocking figures ought to be a societal pledge to make roads safer, a push by the government to strictly enforce traffic rules, and fixing accountability. Instead, there's a sense of bravado attached to disregarding traffic norms in Punjab. The lax enforcement encourages a free-for-all disposition, where those following the rules are often subjected to abuse and road rage. It's a matter of shame that even the large diasporic footprint has failed to effect an attitudinal change.

Initiatives such as setting up of the Sadak Suraksha Force and installation of CCTV cameras to check traffic violations have made a difference, but a lot more is required. Road safety has to be a 24x7 commitment of every stakeholder, the road user most of all.

Plug the gaps to bolster RTI Act

The people themselves should take the lead to make the 20-year-old law more effective



WAJAHAT HABIBULLAH
FORMER CHIEF INFORMATION COMMISSIONER OF INDIA



LANDMARK: The RTI Act seeks to make the governed prime partners in governance. REUTERS

INVITED as India's first Chief Information Commissioner to celebrations marking 20 years of the Right to Information Act (RTI) Act in Beawar (Rajasthan), the town where the first public demonstration in support of such a law was held in 1996, I began my address with lines of a song from Guru Dutt's classic film *Kaagaz Ke Phool*:

"*Waqt ne kiya kya haseen sitam*
Tum rahe na tum, hum rahe na hum..."

As the 2005 Act celebrates its coming, there has also been much heated discussion, often emotional, of the benefits that it has brought and the challenges as well. This can be said to have been among the causes for the discomfiture in the 2014 national elections of the very government that piloted the Act.

The government that has succeeded it has avowedly retained the credo of transparency and accountability and sought to distinguish governance from government. Narendra Modi's promise in his 2014 poll campaign was a maximum of the former with a minimum of the latter — a promise of increased participation of the people in governance through the slogan "*Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas*".

Yet, as former Delhi HC Chief Justice AP Shah mentioned in his address at the RTI Mela in Beawar, the independence of information commissions has been eroded by lowering the administrative stature of information commissioners through amendment of the law and with the passage of a new law for the protection of privacy. There has also been a consequent amendment to the RTI Act's Section 8 that had allowed for disclosure of deemed private information where public interest is established. The Act has, therefore, been transformative in terms of the nature of governance.

It is universally accepted that the essence of a government in a democracy must be transparency, with every organ — the executive, the judiciary and the legislature — being answerable to the citizen. But insofar as the bureaucratic credo in India was considered, the feudal concept of "*mai baap*" persisted long after the birth of the Republic.

The RTI Act declares that democracy requires an informed citizenry and transparency of information which are vital to its functioning, and also to contain corruption and hold governments and their instrumentalities accountable to the governed. So, the Act seeks to make the governed in democracy prime partners in governance. Seen in this light, the legislation is an instrument intended to strengthen governance immeasurably.

In their Report of the People's Assessment (2008), two eminent NGOs — Right to Information Assessment and Analysis Group (RaaG) and the National Campaign for People's Right to Information — had, based on an exhaustive analysis of feedback from 11 states, found that awareness levels regarding the RTI Act were high, compared to the awareness of any other law in its infancy. Over 40% of the urban respondents knew about the Act, although the figure was fewer than 20% for the rural ones.

> Although a beginning has been made by applying transparency to governance, it is only a beginning. And accountability has been even less forthcoming.

The sources of awareness in rural India were newspapers (35%), followed by television and radio, friends and relatives (10% each), and NGOs (5%). In urban areas, the main sources were newspapers (30%), NGOs (20%), TV (20%) friends and relatives (10%).

On the negative side was the finding that administrative problems continued to dog the filing of applications. This was exacerbated by the fact that there were 114 different sets of RTI rules to implement the Act across the country and no single place where they were all accessible. Some states even insisted on correspondence in the local language despite Section 4(4) of the Act that requires that information be disseminated in the "most effective method of communication in that local area".

These birth pangs have been largely overcome and today every Central ministry and departments in states can boast of websites as mandated under the Act. Rajasthan and Karnataka have Jan Soochna and Mahiti Kanaja portals, respectively, giving access to all government departments, obviating the need to apply formally for information that the law deems routine but is of much everyday use to the average consumer.

In the assessment of these findings on the impact of the RTI Act on public authorities, the 2006 report found that over 20% of rural and 45% of urban PIOs (public information officers) claimed that changes had been made in the functioning of their offices because of the legislation. Over 60% of these changes pertained to improving record maintenance, which had, as I myself had found while hearing cases from a cross-section of our most efficient offices, been a grossly neglected area.

Interestingly, even by then, in 10% of the rural offices and as many as 25% of the urban public authorities, what had resulted were adaptations in procedures of functioning and decision-making to bring them in line with the RTI. This figure would have grown considerably since then. Yet, the information shared is more likely to be a blandishment of government successes rather than the public's need, at least as far as the Union government is concerned.

There has been some progress in the Right to Information becoming real for India's people, but a great deal remains to be done. Most importantly, citizens of India need, through this instrument, to become a part of the system of governance, the degree of which alone is the best gauge of what is democracy or, in other words, governance by the people.

Although a beginning has been made by applying transparency to governance, it is only a beginning. And accountability has been even less forthcoming. What then do we need to do?

Quite clearly, the foremost requirement of all is not only universal awareness of their right among all citizens. A law can be of little use if it is not used, and it will not be used by those who do not know of it.

The time has come to look forward. The Act has become a part of governance. To make it more effective, the people themselves must take the lead as part of the government, through panchayats, through the judiciary, through the bureaucracy and through the legislatures whose members are owners of this Act.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

"The RTI Act has proved to be a powerful instrument of bringing transparency in governance. — Manmohan Singh"

Haggling leaves a bitter taste

RAVINDER KUMAR JAIN

HAGGLING is par for the course in India. People from all walks of life argue with shopkeepers or street vendors over prices — and they seem to have all the time in the world to do it. This habit is deeply ingrained in our society, and it's often most visible when rickshaw pullers or vegetable/fruit vendors are at the receiving end.

I remember an incident from the 1980s during my college days. I was on my way to visit my aunt, who lived in Mubarikpur village near Dera Bassi. As I arrived at Dera Bassi, I spotted a tonga; an old, frail man wearing a Nehru jacket was standing beside it. He was calling out loudly, "Mubarikpur, Mubarikpur!" I quickly made my way to his tonga and took a seat. Once it was filled to capacity, the old man climbed up and we set off.

About 15 minutes later, we reached Mubarikpur. I wasn't very familiar with the village at the time, so I waited for a bit after getting off, as the tonga driver was collecting fares and returning change to other passengers. Finally, he came to me. I asked him the fare, and in a tired, weak voice he replied, "75 paise".

I was stunned. The fare was so small — it felt like the ground beneath me had slipped away. I stood there, thinking about how little he was earning for that ride. After paying him, I walked towards my aunt's house, lost in thought. The image of that fragile old man kept coming back to my mind. I couldn't stop thinking about the deep-rooted social inequality.

This is the ground reality for millions in our country. People work tirelessly from morning till night, just to earn enough to feed their families two simple meals a day. Yet, it's disheartening to see even well-off persons bargaining with street vendors, autorickshaw drivers or rickshaw pullers. You will often hear them boast, "He asked for this much, and I told him I'd only pay that much. I said, 'Take it or leave it.'"

Please don't stoop so low. If a poor vendor or worker asks for a few rupees more, what dent does the amount really make in your monthly budget? Maybe Rs 500-1,000. But to them, that money matters greatly. It could make all the difference between going hungry all day and having a meal.

This small act of kindness could earn you a heartfelt blessing from someone who truly needs your compassion.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Will Gaza peace plan last?

Refer to 'Trump's gambit'; for now, the US President has managed to engineer an end to the two-year-old Gaza war. But, till now, nobody has been able to alter permanently the pattern of violence in the region. The return of the Israeli hostages, freed from the brutal captivity of one of the most murderous terrorist organisations in the world, may signal the end of one war, but mark the countdown to the next. The ceasefire is only the initial phase of the Trump plan. The question is whether these deliberations can bridge the gaps between Israel and Palestine, leading to lasting peace. Hamas must cede power in Gaza to a Palestinian authority, while Israel should be persuaded to vacate the area.

SANJAY CHOPRA, MOHALI

After Gaza, Ukraine war must end

Refer to 'Trump's gambit'; the end to brutalities in Gaza should be a matter of relief to all those who believe in the wellbeing of mankind. Let's hope that a solution to the Russia-Ukraine war is also found soon. Unfortunately, across the globe the ruling elite's ego and its own sense of insecurity fuel conflicts. With many countries armed with nuclear warheads, wars are a threat to the very existence of our planet and must be avoided. Sahir Ludhianvi has aptly said *'Is liye aye sharif insano, jang talti rahe toh behtar hai'*.

HIRA SHARMA, BY MAIL

Taming Netanyahu key to peace

Trump's peace plan in Gaza is viable but will it sustain till peace is established permanently in the region. Israel PM Netanyahu has been at the receiving end of mounting domestic anger. He believes that he can withstand any backlash even if his far-right allies threaten to quit his government over the agreement. Both the warring sides must rationally contemplate that they gain more from the deal than from continuing hostilities. But for any ceasefire to hold, Trump will need to lay down terms for Netanyahu, who has often acted disruptor.

PL SINGH, BY MAIL

Commerce sans ethics sinful

It refers to 'A new blot on Indian pharma'; it is not only about cough syrups, but all counterfeit drugs that keep flooding markets. Can the pharma companies undermine public health by not enforcing Good Manufacturing Practices? Commerce without ethics is a sin and a crime. Drug manufacturing companies must act as trustees of the faith of the people. Regulators, too, should inspire the trust of the common man by conducting strict quality checks of drugs. Strong enforcement of laws and zero tolerance for wrongdoers is a must.

KR BHARTI, SHIMLA

Suicide is no solution

Refer to 'Why did The System let Puran Kumar down'; suicide was not the only solution for such a well-placed officer. He had many options instead of taking his life. Only Dalits don't face such trauma. Across the world, differences exist in workplaces, religion, caste or any other matter. Most people find a way out to sail through such storms. How long will the Dalit tag be valid? Even after 75 years of freedom, placed in the highest echelons of power, the IAS/IPS/judicial officers, MPs/MLAs, etc cannot play the Dalit card. There are many other serious problems people are struggling with every day.

ASHOK KUMAR GOEL, PANCHKULA

Towards climate-smart farming

Refer to 'Rain shock'; erratic rainfall patterns and extreme weather conditions demand climate-resilient crops, robust insurance and smarter water management. As an agrarian nation, we cannot afford a repeat of this year's devastation. It is time to go beyond merely adapting to current disruptions. We must begin to anticipate emerging threats such as shifting pest cycles, soil exhaustion and rising salinity that could redefine agriculture in future. Policies must integrate long-range climate modelling, region-specific research and predictive data tools. A dedicated Agricultural Foresight Mission, which will blend scientific expertise with grassroots farming knowledge, can take us from reactive responses to preparedness.

K KUMAR, PANCHKULA

Letters to the Editor, typed in double space, should not exceed the 200-word limit.
These should be cogently written and can be sent by **e-mail to: Letters@tribunemail.com**

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

LAHORE, THURSDAY, OCTOBER 15, 1925

Bombay govt and excise duty

READING between the lines of his reply to the deputation from the Bombay Mill Workers' Association, which waited upon the Governor on Monday, it is easy to see that His Excellency is not only in sympathy with the demand for the repeal of the cotton excise duty, but is in favour of the immediate withdrawal of that duty. "If the Bombay government", said His Excellency, "was in a position to say to the mill owners that the excise duty would be withdrawn, provided they are prepared to agree to an enquiry into the management of the mills and accept the recommendation of such a committee, then I certainly consider that the government would be in a position to set up such a committee of enquiry as they suggested. Unfortunately, the decision with regard to the excise duty or any assistance to the mill industry in some other way such as by protection against dumping or unfair foreign competition did not rest with my government." These words mean that the Bombay mill owners are not the set of unreasonable, irreconcilable people that the Viceroy virtually sought to make them out to be in his reply to the deputation that waited upon him at Simla to urge the repeal of the cotton excise duty. Sir Leslie Wilson made it perfectly clear that the mill owners would be prepared to meet the government and the workers half way if the government were ready to abolish the iniquitous duty on production. This statement on the part of the highest official in the province cuts the ground from under the feet of those officials who affect to believe that the repeal of the cotton excise duty would do nothing to solve the present problem or prevent the arising of similar problems in future.

From Beirut to Gaza, compassion as currency



SHYAM BHATIA
LONDON CORRESPONDENT, *THE TRIBUNE*

THE kidnapping of Terry Waite, the Archbishop of Canterbury's envoy, in Beirut back in 1987 signalled a turning point. Reporting from the city then, I watched hostage-taking transform from isolated outrage to organised strategy, a shadow form of negotiation that still shapes the region's conflicts today.

Nearly four decades later, that system has re-emerged in Gaza. The latest hostage releases have brought brief relief and international applause, yet they also revive an old question: how far can humanitarian negotiation go before it begins to endanger security? Each exchange saves lives, but each also risks creating the expectation that more hostages will be taken once the guns start again.

In Beirut during the 1980s, Hezbollah turned abductions into a disciplined system of leverage. Diplomats, journalists and aid workers were seized according to their symbolic value, dispersed among proxy groups, and traded when the political temperature was right.

Western intelligence services treated each case as both tragedy and test, of resolve, secrecy and political nerve. Waite's captivity, which lasted almost five years, became emblematic of a conflict in which human lives were currency and negotiation itself the battlefield.

Hamas, though different in ideology and environment, appears to have absorbed lessons from that period. Its management of hostages since 2023 shows the same operational logic: compartmentalising captives by value, negotiating indirectly through intermediaries, and timing releases to extract temporary ceasefires or humanitarian concessions. These are not spontaneous acts of mercy; they are calibrated exchanges conducted with military precision.

But behind every exchange are human stories rarely told. Some of the Israelis who returned home after earlier deals never truly escaped captivity; several have since taken their own lives, overwhelmed by trauma and what one survivor described to Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* as "the unbearable quiet after captivity."

Among freed Palestinian prisoners, some were released only to find themselves expelled to Gaza or abroad, their homes destroyed or families scattered, a form of freedom that one former detainee told news agencies "felt like another kind of prison." Liberation, in such cases, becomes another form of loss — proof that the politics of mercy can wound as deeply as the violence it ends.



RISK: How far can humanitarian negotiation go before it begins to endanger security? REUTERS/ANI

The parallel with Hezbollah is analytical, not moral. It underlines a recurring feature of asymmetric warfare: when one side cannot match its opponent's military power, it turns to psychological instruments, including hostages, propaganda and the manipulation of global opinion. For the stronger power, the dilemma is perennial: how to rescue its citizens without confirming the utility of abduction as a political weapon.

Security planners understand that every negotiation sets a precedent. Each name on a release list is weighed against the risk that a freed prisoner might re-emerge in the field or that a new kidnapping will follow. Intelligence analysts parse every gesture, who speaks to whom, what channels are trusted, which intermediaries gain influence. In the 1980s it was Syria and Iran; today it is Qatar and Egypt. The choreography changes, the structure endures.

> For mediators, each successful release reinforces their indispensability. For armed movements, it restores a measure of legitimacy.

In Beirut, even the most seasoned diplomats admitted privately that hostage exchanges had become the only functioning diplomacy left. When political dialogue collapsed, negotiation over captives filled the void. Something similar is happening now.

The region's formal peace processes are paralysed; what remains viable is an improvised diplomacy of bodies, lives traded to buy time, pauses or recognition.

Today's hostage negotiations unfold in a far more connected world, where every image and rumour travels instantly. Social media magnifies both grief and propaganda, turning each release or execution into global theatre. Governments must respond not only to the captors but to their own publics, whose outrage or relief can swing policy overnight. This constant visibility has changed the tempo of diplomacy, forcing mediators to perform in real time.

Yet the underlying logic remains medieval — bargaining with human lives as tokens of power. What is new is the audience: millions who watch, comment and amplify, ensuring that no negotiation can ever be purely secret again. The moral noise of the digital age has made clarity harder, empathy thinner, and political courage rarer.

One Western intelligence official quoted in the British media last year said, "Hostage diplomacy is the only diplomacy still functioning in parts of the Middle East." The remark could have been made in Beirut in 1987 as easily as in Gaza today.

For mediators, each successful release reinforces their indispensability. For armed movements, it restores a measure of legitimacy. For states, it complicates deterrence. The result is a cycle that rewards patience and punishes transparency. Hostage diplomacy thrives in the shadows, where back-channel deals are deniable and the optics of compassion mask deeper calculations.

The humanitarian dimension must never be dismissed. Hostages are human beings, not abstractions. But the security dimension cannot be ignored. The very act of negotiation acknowledges that abduction works. Unless governments find collective mechanisms — perhaps through the UN or regional security pacts — to delegitimise this form of bargaining, each new release will invite another round of capture.

And there will be another. Every lull in the region's long wars is temporary, every pause an intermission before the next crisis. As UN envoy Tor Wennesland warned two years ago, 'The lack of progress towards a political horizon ... has left a dangerous and volatile vacuum.'

From Beirut to Gaza, the setting has changed but the logic has not. Every life saved is a moral victory; every repetition of the method is a strategic defeat. The challenge for policymakers is to achieve the first without inviting the second — to build a diplomacy that no longer relies on the language of captivity.

Nobel for trio honours economic creation and destruction



JOHN HAWKINS
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, UNIVERSITY OF CANBERRA

THREE economists working in the area of "innovation-driven economic growth" have won this year's Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences.

Half of the 11 million Swedish kronor (about $1.2 million) prize was awarded to Joel Mokyr, a Dutch-born economic historian at Northwestern University.

The other half was jointly awarded to Philippe Aghion, a French economist at Collège de France and INSEAD (*Institut Européen d'administration des Affaires*), and Peter Howitt, a Canadian economist at Brown University.

Collectively, the trio's work has examined the importance of innovation in driving sustainable economic growth. It has also highlighted that in dynamic economies, old firms die as new firms are being born.

As noted by the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, economic growth has lifted billions of people out of poverty over the past two centuries. While we take this as normal, it is actually very unusual in the broad sweep of history.

The period since around 1800 is the first in human history when there has been sustained economic growth. This warns us we should not be complacent. Poor policy could see economies stagnate again.

One of the Nobel judges gave the example that in Sweden and the United Kingdom, there was little improvement in living standards in the four centuries between 1300 and 1700.

Mokyr's work showed that prior to the Industrial Revolution, innovations were more a matter of trial and error than being based on scientific understanding. He has argued that sustained economic growth would not emerge in "a world of engineering without mechanics, iron-making without metallurgy, farming without soil science, mining without geology, water-power without hydraulics, dyemaking without organic chemistry, and medical practice without microbiology and immunology."

Mokyr gives the example of sterilising surgical instruments. This had been advocated in the 1840s or earlier. But surgeons were offended by the suggestion they might be transmitting diseases. It was only after the work of Louis Pasteur and Joseph Lister in the 1860s that the role of germs was understood and sterilisation became common.



DYNAMICS: Economic growth has lifted billions of people out of poverty over the past two centuries. REUTERS

Mokyr emphasised the importance of society being open to new ideas. As the Nobel committee put it, "practitioners, ready to engage with science, along with a societal climate embracing change, were, according to Mokyr, key reasons why the Industrial Revolution started in Britain."

> One of their models implies governments need to be careful how they design subsidies to encourage innovation.

This year's other two laureates, Aghion and Howitt, recognised that innovations create both winning and losing firms. In the US, about 10 per cent of firms enter and 10 per cent leave the market each year. Promoting economic growth requires an understanding of both processes.

Their 1992 article built on earlier work on the concept of "endogenous growth" — the idea that economic growth is generated by factors inside an economic system, not the result of forces that impinge from outside. This earned a Nobel prize for Paul Romer in 2018. It also drew on earlier work on "creative destruction" by Joseph Schumpeter.

The model created by Aghion and Howitt implies governments need to be careful how they design subsidies to encourage innovation.

If companies think that any innovation they invest in is just going to be overtaken (meaning they would lose their advantage), they won't invest as much in innovation.

Their work also supports the idea governments have a role in supporting and retraining those workers who lose their jobs in firms that are displaced by more innovative competitors. This will build political support for policies that encourage economic growth, as well. The three laureates favour economic growth, in contrast to growing concerns about the impact of endless growth on the planet.

In an interview after the announcement, however, Aghion called for carbon pricing to make economic growth consistent with reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

He also warned about the gathering "dark clouds" of tariffs; that creating barriers to trade could reduce economic growth. And he said we need to ensure today's innovators do not stifle future innovators through anti-competitive practices.

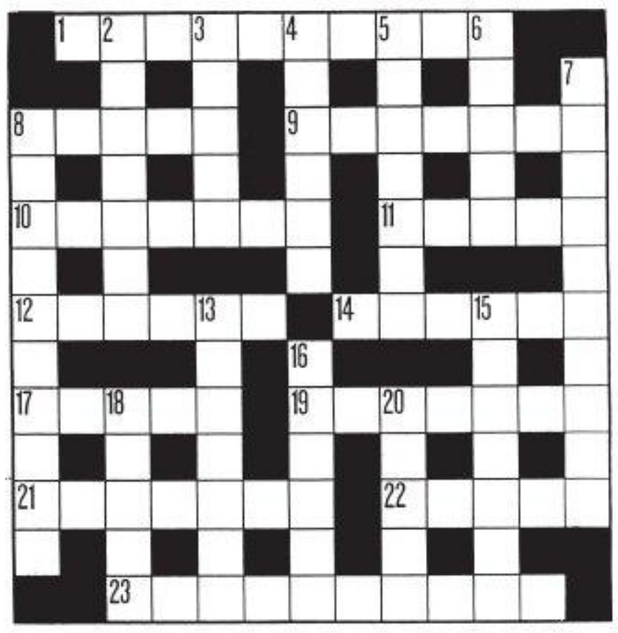
The economics prize was not one of the five originally nominated in Swedish chemist Alfred Nobel's will in 1895. It is formally called the Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel. It was first awarded in 1969.

The awards to Mokyr and Howitt continue the pattern of the economics prize being dominated by researchers working at American universities. It also continues the pattern of over-representation of men. Only three of the 99 economics laureates have been women.

Arguably, economics professor Rachel Griffith, rather than Mokyr, could have shared the prize with Aghion and Howitt this year. She co-authored the book Competition and Growth with Aghion, and co-wrote an article on competition with both of them.

Courtesy: The Conversation

QUICK CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1 Keep entirely away (5,5)
8 17th century English diarist (5)
9 Bad government (7)
10 Of long ago (7)
11 Reach a state eventually (3,2)
12 Course of action adopted (6)
14 Riddle (6)
17 Paid out (5)
19 Navigational aid (7)
21 Ignorant (7)
22 Trembling poplar (5)
23 To reprimand (4,2,4)

DOWN

2 Representative (7)
3 Happen afterwards (5)
4 Regain consciousness (4,2)
5 Oriental (7)
6 Approximately correct (5)
7 Have under observation (4,4,2)
8 Pretend to be asleep (4,6)
13 Reduction (7)
15 Killer whale (7)
16 Treat as welcome (6)
18 Insist on (5)
20 Signified (5)

Yesterday's solution

Across: 1 Shrewd, 4 Catnap, 9 Infidel, 10 Error, 11 Credo, 12 Actuate, 13 Rock the boat, 18 Bravura, 20 Level, 22 Adopt, 23 Envelop, 24 Nature, 25 Vagary.

Down: 1 Switch, 2 Rifle, 3 Wedlock, 5 Adept, 6 Nirvana, 7 Parley, 8 Clear-headed, 14 Of a sort, 15 Bolivia, 16 Obtain, 17 Sloppy, 19 Utter, 21 Villa.

SU DO KU

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

V. EASY

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

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

CALENDAR

OCTOBER 15, 2025, WEDNESDAY

- Shaka Samvat 1947
- Aashwin Shaka 23
- Aashwin Parvishte 30
- Hijari 1447
- Krishna Paksha Tithi 9, up to 10:34 am
- Sadhya Yoga up to 2:57 am
- Pushya Nakshatra up to 12:00 pm
- Moon in Cancer sign
- Gandmoola start 12.00 pm

FORECAST

SUNSET: WEDNESDAY 17:52 HRS
SUNRISE: THURSDAY 06:25 HRS

CITY	MAX	MIN
Chandigarh	31	20
New Delhi	33	19
Amritsar	30	20
Bathinda	33	15
Jalandhar	30	20
Ludhiana	30	20
Bhiwani	30	17
Hisar	30	16
Sirsa	30	17
Dharamsala	28	14
Manali	23	07
Shimla	24	12
Srinagar	26	07
Jammu	32	19
Kargil	19	01
Leh	14	0
Dehradun	30	16
Mussoorie	22	12

TEMPERATURE IN °C

EDITORIAL



I am not one to flatter the compulsory ethics of poverty. It is necessary to eradicate poverty

Ram Manohar Lohia

INDIAN EXPRESS IS NOT AN INDUSTRY. IT IS A MISSION.

— Ramnath Goenka

PEACE OR PAUSE: GAZA DESERVES A FUTURE BUILT ON JUSTICE

THE ceasefire in Gaza, brokered after two years of devastating war, has brought much-needed relief. The release of 20 Israeli and over 2,000 Palestinian detainees, followed by a partial Israeli troop withdrawal, marked a moment of respite. Yet peace built on optics is not justice. The Sharm el-Sheikh summit, convened soon after, formalised Donald Trump's 20-point Gaza plan. Projected as a diplomatic breakthrough and a multilateral stride toward regional stability, it already shows deep cracks under the strain of mistrust and unequal terms.

Trump called it "one of the most significant peace efforts" in Middle East history, flaunting the presence of 20-odd world leaders in the Egyptian city. But the plan's flaws—its vagueness, top-down imposition, and exclusion of Palestinian voices—are glaring. It removes Hamas from political life by decree, ties aid and reconstruction to Israeli security metrics, and hands Gaza's future to an international 'Board of Peace' chaired by Trump himself. There are no timelines for demilitarisation, no assurance of Palestinian sovereignty, and no commitment to end the occupation. For all its lofty rhetoric, this looks less like a peace blueprint and more like a containment strategy.

Trump declared it "a beautiful day" for the region. The reality is far harsher. Gaza's humanitarian collapse cannot be reversed with speeches and aid convoys. Violence has already resurfaced. As even summit leaders admitted, peace cannot be built on concrete alone—it demands political reconciliation and institutional renewal. The agreement's fate will depend not on diplomacy's theatre, but on sustained political will, financial backing, and genuine inclusion of those whose lives lie in the rubble. That means confronting the unresolved fundamentals: borders, refugees, dignity, and the two-state vision.

India, which welcomed the ceasefire, has the chance to move from a cautious observer to a credible actor. With its historic ties to Palestine and growing goodwill with Israel, New Delhi could help shape a just and lasting peace. For now, this ceasefire is a pause, not peace. The world must demand more than managed calm—it must insist on a future that Palestinians, too, help define.

NUAPADA BYPOLL: QUIET SEAT, HIGH-STAKES FIGHT

COME November 11, all eyes will be on the assembly election winding up in Bihar. However, several hundred kilometres away, a quiet and small assembly constituency along Odisha's western corridor—Nuapada—will also have gone to the polls. Although it's a byelection—necessitated by the untimely demise of its MLA and Biju Janata Dal leader Rajendra Dholakia—it will be of significant political interest for various reasons. For the BJP, it presents the first electoral challenge after coming to power in the state last year. For the BJD, it's a matter of prestige as its first electoral test in the opposition. The national party has already gone for the jugular by poaching the sitting legislator's son, Jay Dholakia, last week. This upset the plans of the regional party, which was looking to cash in on the sympathy wave by fielding Jay. It had even planned to field party chief Naveen Patnaik as the star campaigner. However, Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi managed to get Dholakia Junior on his side, tilting the scales.

The Congress, too, has a stake in this seemingly triangular contest because the 2.53-lakh-elector assembly segment falls in the home constituency of its state committee chief and former Lok Sabha member, Bhakta Charan Das, who will have a few points to prove.

Nuapada has chosen between Dholakia Senior and the BJP's former state president, Basanta Panda, at the last six elections. This time, Panda's son was in the running for re-nomination despite his loss the last time. However, Jay's induction has changed the equation and made it more unpredictable. To this poll pitch add Ghasiram Majhi, a former Congressman whose stock has grown over the last three elections—so much so that he claimed the second spot in 2024 despite contesting as an independent. Amid all this, the BJP will perhaps go into the election with a sense of trepidation. With murmurs of disquiet surfacing within the party, it will be required to present a cohesive face. For the Majhi government, this bypoll is going to be a huge test of popularity and credibility.

QUICK TAKE

EXPAND POTHOLE PENALTIES

THE Bombay High Court's decision to award compensation for deaths caused by potholes and open manholes is a pathbreaking attempt at fixing accountability. Justices Revati Mohite Dere and Sandesh D Patil set the solatium at ₹6 lakh for the kin of those who died and ₹50,000-2,50,000 for those injured. The bench instructed civic authorities to form committees to address complaints and pay those eligible within two months. Just this monsoon, Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation pledged to spend ₹154 crore on pothole repairs. However, road-building and repair is such a corrupt practice across the country that no work seems adequate. More than 9,000 deaths across India during 2019-23 were attributed to pothole-related accidents. There is an urgent need to expand such penalties to all states.

Nitish Kumar has tried to shift Bihar's political focus from identity affiliations to social deliverance. Good governance needs to take the BIMARU tag off one of India's most backward states

WHY THE ONLY WAY AHEAD IS DEVELOPMENT

VINAY SAHASRABUDDHE



Senior BJP leader



MANDAR PARDIKAR

THIS November's assembly election will be the first in Bihar after the untimely demise of two Biharis who, in their respective fields, significantly contributed in taking the discourse around *viksit* or developed Bihar to a different level. One is Sushil Kumar Modi and the other is Shaibal Gupta, founder and member-secretary of the Asian Development Research Institute in Patna. While Gupta was an economist, Modi took the practitioner's track as one of the state's longest serving finance ministers.

The question today is whether Bihar will continue down the development politics path, or go back to identity politics of castes and communities. What Gupta, a visionary scholar, had said about a quarter century ago is worth recalling even today. Venting his agony, he wrote in a monograph: "Let the Bihari sub-nationalism write a new script. It will be mediated with an eye for the national and global markets. This is only possible by forging a new identity in an atmosphere of a resurgent Bihar, wherein we can give befitting reply to all the existing clichés about Bihar's identity, which generally conceptualises corruption and misrule as being synonymous to the state."

Striving for all-encompassing development was the only way to liberate Bihar from corruption and misrule. It followed that Nitish Kumar made good governance a political plank and, over the years, people identified him as '*Sushasan babu*'. His approach reflected what a World Bank report titled '*Bihar: Towards a Development Strategy*' had advocated. The 2006 report suggested 'strategic efforts' in five areas: improving the state's investment climate; administration and procedural reforms; better design and delivery of core social services; budget management and fiscal reforms; and prioritising law and order.

On almost all the points stressed in the report, Bihar appears to have made a difference. An annual global investors' summit that started in 2023 attracted proposals worth over ₹1.80 lakh crore last year. The state government signed investment commitments with 423 companies during the two-day summit in 2024. It kept up the effort of attracting foreign direct investment by integrating into the Union commerce and industry ministry's Foreign Investment Facilitation Portal, a single-point interface.

Showing a sense of urgency, Bihar also took several initiatives to enhance the ease of doing business. Among the noteworthy ones is the Udyog Samwad portal, which aims to be a one-stop platform for investors to access information on laws, rules, policies, circulars, and notifications affecting their business. Taking a business-like approach, the portal provides online guides to make investors understand the procedures with step-by-step instructions. In addition, the Bihar Single Window Clearance System has smoothened the functioning of all approvals required for doing business in the state.

Then there is the delivery of core social services in particular and social development in general. Today, many Bihar watchers agree that, thanks to the state government's Jeevika rural livelihood programme to empower women self-help groups and the recently-launched Mukhyamantri Mahila Rozgar Yojna, women as voters have tended to go for development rather than caste considerations. In addition, one must note remarkable increases in the budgetary allocations for social sectors—as a share of the state GDP—in the current financial year in comparison to the average allocation by all states last year. While the allocation for education is higher by a sharp 15 percent, those for rural development and health are higher by 5 percent and 6 percent, respectively.

The most noteworthy aspect is a remarkable improvement in the state's law and order situation—in a way, institutionalising the end of '*jungle raj*'. Remember the heinous murder of young IIT graduate Satyendra Dubey (2003, Gaya), or of Dalit IAS officer G Krishnaiah (1994, Muzaffarpur), or of Shilpi Jain and Gautam Singh (1999)? They were just a few among many such innocent individuals who perished.

No wonder journalist Arun Sinha, in his book *Nitish Kumar and the Rise of Bihar*, described Lalu Prasad Yadav's regime as one that "represented a culture of loot and larceny with open patronage to miscreants and roughnecks, whose premier symbols were Sadhu and Subhash (Lalu's brothers-in-law)". Compare this with the fact that the number of murders in Bihar saw a significant dip in 2023, as did cases of kidnapping for ransom and violent attacks by Maoists.

All this presents the case before Bihar's voters that the NDA, guided by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and led in the state by Nitish, is the only way to go. The TINA (there is no alternative) factor is the sharpest arrow in the NDA's quiver. A journalist commented that the political fixed deposit (of goodwill) cultivated by NDA leaders will help them gain interest. It underlines how hope and aspiration have replaced cynicism and frustration. With flyovers and bypasses liberating cities from endless traffic jams, Bihar voters want this infrastructure metamorphosis to continue.

Add to this three important factors that have enhanced the confidence of NDA leaders. Firstly, Rahul Gandhi's attempt to stir the pot by levelling allegations at the Election Commission about its Special Intensive Revision of voter rolls has fallen flat. Secondly, compared to the Mahagathbandhan, the NDA partners have shown maturity and alacrity in finalising their seat sharing fairly smoothly. Thirdly, with the emergence of Asaduddin Owaisi's All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen, which is set to gain from the rift between Muslims originally from Bihar and those from Bangladesh, cracks are seen in the much talked about Muslim-Yadav vote bank.

The message is reflected in a comment by a Delhi-based academic from Bihar: "If Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh can liberate themselves from the BIMARU tag, why can't Bihar? And for that, we don't want to upset the applecart." The expectation is that this appetite for development would make Bihar's Gen Next want to continue with the *status quo*.

(Views are personal)
(vinays57@gmail.com)

DRIVING ON THE WRONG FUEL

K N NINAN



Former Professor, ISEC, Bengaluru and Lead Author, GEO-7, UNEP Nairobi

TO hasten India's energy transition and realise the ambitious goal of net zero emissions by 2070, the government of India has directed the use of 20 percent ethanol-blended fuels (E20) in vehicles. This poses a great challenge to ethanol-producing companies, vehicle makers, car owners, and service providers.

India's 2018 biofuel policy had envisaged enhancing the ethanol blending of petrol to 20 percent by 2030, a deadline that was later advanced to 2025. Apart from ensuring energy security and enabling the transit to a low-carbon economy, the E20 rollout is estimated to save $4 billion in fuel imports a year, according to the Niti Aayog.

However, there are various concerns about the decision. The sustainability of the ethanol policy depends on guaranteed, stable prices of ethanol, ready availability of feedstock such as molasses and grains, capacity utilisation (80 percent) of the ethanol industry, and the projected demand. Vehicle buyers consider many parameters in their purchase decision—affordability, ease of driving, vehicle functions, fuel efficiency and maintenance costs among them.

When these concerns were raised, a government press release claimed that over 11 years of ethanol supply, from 2014-15 to 2024-25, the programme saved the country ₹1.4 lakh crore in foreign exchange and 736 lakh metric tonnes in carbon dioxide emissions.

It brushed aside the concerns expressed about lower fuel efficiency and corrosion of rubber and plastic components in vehicle engines using E20. The Niti Aayog report clearly states that the use of E20 will lead to a 6-7 percent drop in fuel efficiency of four-wheelers and 3-4 percent drop for two-wheelers, when compared to vehicles using unblended fuel.

On the other hand, there is a dearth of studies evaluating the social costs and benefits of ethanol production in India. Such an analysis would shed light on the social benefits and costs of ethanol production, including its potential to increase farmers' incomes, employment opportunities, using up surplus grains, reducing greenhouse gases and pollution. The social cost of incentivising the production of water-guzzling crops like paddy and sugarcane in a water-stressed country like India should also be evaluated. Moreover, diverting foodgrains for ethanol production can imperil food security and increase food prices with sharply negative impacts on those already disadvantaged.

At the same time, there are no studies assessing the lifecycle costs of the ethanol policy. India's population is projected to rise to around 1.7 billion by 2050. To meet the food needs of the world's largest population, India needs to step up food production several fold—from 354 million tonnes in 2024-25 to around 480 million tonnes by 2050. The question is whether India will continue to have surplus foodgrains in the future to sustain its ethanol production too.



AP

> The studies guiding India's new ethanol blending policy are flawed. For one, they do not calculate the social costs of higher ethanol production in a fast-growing, water-scarce country. They do not even consider the demand-supply possibilities in the transport sector at depth

Equally importantly, has the government made a robust assessment of the economics and sustainability of ethanol production in the light of emerging transport technologies such as the potential use of hydrogen and other cleaner fuel alternatives such as electric vehicles? If obsolescence is nigh, the infrastructure for ethanol production runs the risk of becoming stranded assets in the not-too-distant future. The disposal of millions of old vehicles rendered redundant to shift to ethanol-blended fuels poses a great environmental challenge, too.

A scenario analysis up to 2050 can not only shed light on the probability of the aspects listed above, but also factor in other possible shocks. For instance, the unexpected disruption in the supply of rare metals by China, which enjoys a global near-monopoly, has jeopardised India's plans to promote electric vehicles. Similarly, wars such as that between Russia and Ukraine have put strains on the global supply of fossil fuels. India's import of cheap oil from Russia has irked the US, which has imposed unprecedented 50 percent tariffs on Indian goods.

There is need for an integrated assessment of demand and supply in the transport sector considering the emerging technologies, energy demand and supply including the development of energy substitutes, economics of alternative energy sources, and consumer preferences.

The terms of reference for the expert committee appointed by Niti Aayog to provide a roadmap for the gradual rollout of ethanol-blended fuels is flawed, since it has not made any social cost-benefit analysis and estimated the lifecycle costs to help in policy decision. It has made a conservative estimate of the demand for ethanol-blended fuels in India, at 1,016 crore litres by 2025, based on a single parameter of growth in vehicle population, ignoring other important variables. There is no sensitivity analysis of the demand and supply estimates to inform us as to what happens if price, demand and supply expectations are not realised.

India can learn from the experience of Brazil, which is a world leader in the use of ethanol-blended fuels. The South American country and the US together account for around 80 percent of ethanol production in the world. Brazil took almost five decades to develop its ethanol sector and, today, around 75 percent of the country's light vehicles use blended fuel. There are many lessons for India from the world's most remarkable success on this front.

(Views are personal)
(ninankn@yahoo.co.in)

MAILBAG

WRITE TO: letters@newindianexpress.com

Policy reach

Ref: *Digital job matching must face real-world labour challenges* (Oct 14). The government must invest in primary indicators of growth, leveraging technology as a tool instead of a mere replacement. Ultimately, the policy's success will be determined by how deeply it transforms conditions for the most vulnerable.
Aditya Kamble, Kalaburagi

Neighbourly peace

Ref: *Gaza conundrum* (Oct 14). The author's analysis is balanced and objective. It's only hoped that the debris of the war neutralises the congenital hatred in the neighbouring countries and their allies against Israel, a small country and the only home to the Jewish community.
U Atreya Sarma, Hyderabad

Aligning courts

Ref: *The queer history of 'queer'* (Oct 14). It is time the courts shift from stigmatising expressions to embracing identity affirmation in rulings related to the LGBTQIA+ community. The transition from cautious references to more open acknowledgment can surely abet the large section of people in their fight for rights.
N R Jagannath, Chennai

Close conflict

Ref: *Don, leaders sign declaration* (Oct 14). The Gaza declaration leaves far too many key issues unresolved to have any hope of establishing a lasting peace. What it does do is build up a foundation for constructive talks that could pave the way for further agreements aimed at resolving a conflict which has cost thousands of lives.
Pranay Vatsa, Dhenkanal

Aviation vigilance

Ref: *Flight windshield cracks* (Oct 14). Indian airlines appear on headlines for all the wrong reasons. Maintenance and supervising crews of almost all airlines need to be revamped, with a possibility of former military technicians being inducted who could teach the regulatory body a thing or two about vigilance.
M Sureshkumar, Chennai

Accept diversity

Ref: *Dindigul youth hacked to death* (Oct 14). Society must learn to respect individual choices and stop judging relationships based on caste or community. Families should guide with love. True social responsibility lies in accepting diversity and allowing everyone the freedom to live with dignity.
Sherin J, Vellore

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India's global reset: Rebuilding ties with Canada, US and the West

INDIA and Canada have agreed on an "ambitious roadmap" to restore and rebuild bilateral relations, which sharply deteriorated following the killing of a Khalistani Sikh extremist in the North American country in 2023. This is a pleasant surprise, as the then prime minister, Justin Trudeau's party, the Liberal Party, returned to power this year. It may be recalled that Trudeau played a pivotal role in souring Indo-Canadian relations. The objective of the new roadmap is to advance "cooperation in various domains, including trade, investment, agriculture, science and technology, civil nuclear collaboration, artificial intelligence, critical minerals, and energy," said External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar after meeting his Canadian counterpart Anita Anand in New Delhi. This should be seen as part of a major reset in India's engagement with the world: there is new urgency in boosting relations with other countries, especially the West. After months of bitterness over US President Donald Trump's peevish remarks about India, the two countries have also decided to hold trade negotiations this week. India has reportedly promised to import US energy and gas as it aims to placate Washington's concerns over the issue of Russian oil purchases.

Trump's conciliatory tone in his statements has played a part in ensuring this. British Prime Minister Keir Starmer's recent visit should also be viewed in the same light. It has helped widen engagements between the two nations in critical areas such as trade, technology, defence, and security. His trip was preceded by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to London in July, when the two countries signed a crucial comprehensive economic & trade agreement (CETA) that is currently awaiting ratification. Around the same time, the Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA), which India signed with the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) in March 2024, came into effect. The EFTA, comprising Switzerland, Norway, Iceland, and Liechtenstein, is a vital bloc for India's export diversification strategy. EFTA nations have pledged substantial long-term investments in India's manufacturing and services sectors in return for tariff concessions, establishing a new model for future trade negotiations. India is also actively negotiating a broader free trade agreement (FTA) with the European Union, its largest trading partner in goods. The growing economic interdependence, catalysed by Trump's aggressive tariffs, has created strong momentum for an ambitious FTA that could remove regulatory barriers, liberalise services, and enhance investment protections.

With more than 6,000 EU companies already operating in India, both sides see immense potential in expanding cooperation in sectors such as digital technologies, renewable energy, pharmaceuticals, and green mobility. These developments have also effected a shift in India's external engagement—from reactive diplomacy to a proactive and strategic recalibration of partnerships. The emphasis is on diversification, resilience, and technological collaboration. Whether it is through rebuilding trust with Canada, reviving trade talks with the US, strengthening strategic ties with the UK, or pursuing ambitious economic integration with Europe, India's foreign policy today reflects a confident, globally oriented vision. This transformation is being driven by both geopolitical and economic imperatives. In an era of fragmented global supply chains, energy insecurity, and technological competition, India's ability to maintain balanced relations with major powers while pursuing its developmental priorities is becoming its most valuable diplomatic asset. The new roadmap with Canada, therefore, is not an isolated event but part of a larger narrative.

Our future is in our own hands and right here



RAVULAPATI SEETARAMARAO



The old proverb about distant mountains being shiny is finally making sense to Indians. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's remarks after the visa incident must be taken seriously. His pointed comments—stressing that we must stand on our own feet—are something Indians, especially those who pin their hopes on overseas jobs, should take particular note of. We don't have to idolize America.

THE idea that "a job is a man's defining characteristic" belongs to an older era. In today's modern age there's no need to give that saying any weight. What matters now is whether jobs are available to everyone — are people with education actually getting work?

That is the question we need to ask. Are jobs meant only for the educated lot? No. Eligibility should be judged only by job-related requirements — physical fitness, education and skills, among others, must be taken into account. This piece is not meant to analyse job availability across the whole world. It is limited to understanding what the employment situation is like in India.

Health and education are inseparable. You can learn only if you are healthy. In the past, rural areas had more people in good health. Today, there is not much difference between villages and towns when it comes to protecting people's health. Previously there was less need for people in villages to search for jobs. Formal schooling was not a requirement for most village work. Agricultural labour, farm tasks and various trades were plentiful; people earned their livelihoods and did not struggle to put food on the table on an everyday basis. Simply put, illiteracy did not prevent people in villages from getting work and the migration to towns was much lower.

In the past, resources for education in villages were extremely limited. Village life revolved around temple scholars teaching basic lessons; there were only a few schools and no higher education institutions. Most village students studied only up to about the fifth grade. To study beyond that, they had to go to nearby towns or cities. Those engaged in farming and trade had only minimal financial resources, so higher education was virtually inaccessible to them.

Times have changed! The value of education is finally understood! The determination to study no matter what—regardless of being poor or rich—has become widespread. That is why village elders now routinely work hard to send their children to towns for higher education. The belief that "higher education means studying in America" has taken hold.

In the 1980s and '90s, going abroad became easier for students who had reached a certain level in life. Education loans were readily available in banks and villagers mortgaged their fields and property and sent their children overseas for further studies. While studying and working there, many sent their earnings back to their parents, which improved the financial standing of their respective families. When villagers became better off, they migrated to towns seeking a more comfortable life. Their children, who would visit occasionally, also preferred town life.

With the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act assuring at least 100 days of work (some kind of employment) for every adult in each village, a regular cash flow began to reach people alongside their livelihood. As a result, traditional manual and agricultural labour that young people used to do in the villages appeared burdensome.

The quest for urban life and luxury and people heading to the city, rang in drastic changes in village life. Agricultural work and field-level labour declined, as a result of which the rural agricultural system began to suffer. Unemployment figures began to increase in villages, while government schemes and welfare programs remained only on paper.

In fact, the culture of doing hard work for a livelihood disappeared from the rural fabric. In this situation, ordinary B.A. and M.A. graduates and young people were subject to unemployment woes even in towns. Jobs matching their education were hard to find, and hiring of such people for low-level work steadily declined.

Every incumbent government promises job calendars before elections, but those promises are just for namesake — there's no evidence of actual follow up. Outsourcing practices that treat workers like expendable pieces have created an unstable, uncertain life for youth. Under the guise of welfare schemes, governments are trying to buy votes in villages and towns — especially by pacifying young people — but it's unfortunate that they haven't been able to create government jobs and meaningfully address the unemployment issue. It's true that the recent policies announced by US President Donald Trump are hitting India hard. For new applicants (skilled non immigrants) the H 1B visa fee has surged to nearly six times the current fee — making it much harder for those hoping to go to the U S for work.

Moreover, this approach will severely affect many long standing software companies in the United States in the coming years. Bringing in new workers under this visa has become risky. Under the lottery system, until now roughly 85,000 people went each year; that number has reportedly plunged dramatically recently. There could be many difficulties ahead in hiring specialised workers.

The old proverb about distant mountains being shiny is finally making sense to Indians. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's remarks after the visa incident must be taken seriously. His pointed comments—stressing that we must stand on our own feet—are something Indians, especially those who pin their hopes on overseas jobs, should take particular note of. We don't have to idolize America.

In fact, we must not forget that for many years India's youth-driven economic growth was largely due to progressive policies followed in the US. That said, given the current situation, Trump and others are firmly convinced that America's economic rebound is the result of its lighter, more permissive policies. Other countries don't have the right to dismiss that belief.

If we can develop our own products, jobs and skills without being intimidated by tariffs, even if the benefits don't come today, we can achieve the results we hope for tomorrow.

(The writer is a retired IPS officer, who has served as an Additional DGP of Andhra Pradesh)

The voice within and the need for poetry

Every individual needs poetry in life- not just as written verses, but as the inner rhythm of thought



DR MYLAVARAM CHANDRA SHEKAR

A human being speaks — but not always from the heart. In today's ultra-connected world, dominated by artificial intelligence (AI) and instant messaging, our communications are often filtered through screens, algorithms, and trending narratives.

When the heart wants to speak in its own rhythm, it takes the form of poetry.

A poem is born out of the urge to express what we truly feel. When we fail to convey our emotions directly — whether silenced by power imbalances in geopolitics or the high-pressure environments of business boardrooms — those emotions find their way through words.

Gentle, honest and rhythmic, poetry becomes not an ornament of language, but the purest reflection of the human mind, able to cut through the noise of propaganda, market sensationalism, and technological overload. Poetry is not just an emotional flow; it is also a courageous voice that seeks to unveil truth. In an era where deepfakes and misinformation shape public perception, poetry helps us distinguish between reality and illusion, allowing us to see things more clearly. Where news reveals facts, a poem adds a heartbeat to those facts, humanising headlines about conflict, recession, innovation, or migration. It is this pulse that links the lived experiences of people to unfolding events — and serves as a reminder to people in power of the human consequences beneath the statistics.



In today's rapidly shifting geopolitical and economic landscape — where policy reversals, technological advances, and business disruptions are the norm — poetry teaches us that balance. It reminds us that victory is not about defeating others, but about overcoming the confusion within ourselves, and leading with vision and compassion

Over time, poetry has evolved:

Today's poet is not confined to flowers, the moon, rivers or nature. The modern poet writes about computer screens, smartphones, supply chains disrupted by conflict, and the human mind caught between economic volatility and the rapid pace of technological change. The poet observes how technology — from AI to blockchain — changes not only our surroundings but also our inner world, bringing with it questions of privacy, autonomy, and identity.

Poetry acts like a mirror — one that reflects our weaknesses, hopes, fears, and the most profound aspects of our consciousness. On the global stage, this mirror reflects the anxieties of societies facing job displacement due to automation or the divisiveness fuelled by social media echo chambers. Once we begin to see ourselves through this mirror, change starts within.

Every true poem asks a question: "Who are you really?" The search for this answer becomes a journey toward self-understanding, an inner resilience that is much needed in a time of rapid political, economic, and technological flux.

The fact is that poetry is also a form of knowledge sharing. In business education, a lesson may fade from one's memory, but a poem about a leader's vision, an entrepreneur's struggle, or a worker's dream stays in the heart. Poetry teaches not just about what to think, but how to think — with empathy, with creativity and with an appreciation for complexity.

Through simple words, poetry sparks imagination and keeps erudition alive across generations, bridging the knowledge gap that often exists in the pursuit of innovation, policy and enterprise.

In society, differences of opinion are natural — whether over trade policy, climate action or regulation of new technologies. Poetry builds bridges of understanding across those divides.

A poet brings different perspectives onto the same page and encourages respect for each of them, much as successful global businesses and diplomatic initiatives navigate diverse viewpoints to reach a consensus. Poetry is not a voice of division; it is a song of connection, essential for collaboration and peaceful progress in our interconnected world.

Every individual needs poetry in life — not just as written verses, but as the inner rhythm of thought. A poem can offer courage when words fail, comfort when silence feels heavy, and clarity when the mind is restless, whether one is a policymaker, entrepreneur, student, or citizen seeking direction amid uncertainty.

Life is like a pair of horses pulling a chariot — it needs balance, patience, and direction to reach its destination.

In today's rapidly shifting geopolitical and economic landscape — where policy reversals, technological advances, and business disruptions are the norm — poetry teaches us that balance. It reminds us that victory is not about defeating others, but about overcoming the confusion within ourselves, and leading with vision and compassion.

The question "Why poetry?" may sound simple, but its answer is infinite. For every heart that feels deeply — especially in a world transformed by geopolitics, business cycles, and technology — a poem is already being written within. Poetry is the voice of that inner self — a bridge between the silent heart and the speaking mind. It guides us gently toward understanding ourselves, and through that, understanding the world. This version weaves in the roles that policy, business, and technology play in shaping today's emotional and cultural landscapes, and highlights poetry's power as a counterbalance and guide in a complex, rapidly changing world.

Summary:

In a world of constant noise — from news feeds about global summits to the buzz of financial markets and relentless social media updates — poetry brings back silence. This silence helps us listen to our own hearts and regain perspective amid the turbulence of geopolitics and economic uncertainty.

(The writer is Program Head – PGDM BFS, Institute of Public Enterprise, Hyderabad)

LETTERS

Remembering Dr Kalam, the 'people's president'

THE 'World Students Day', instituted by the UN, is celebrated annually on October 15 to commemorate the birth anniversary of out former president Dr Avul Pakir Jainulabdeen Abdul Kalam. The day celebrates his extraordinary efforts in science, education and the military. Hailed as the "Missile Man of India" for his outstanding achievements in developing ballistic missiles and launch vehicle technology, and his commitment to education and his rapport with students led to the inception of this day. The 'World Students Day' focuses on encouraging students to become leaders and innovators and about how education can transform the mindset of individuals and help them shape a better future for all. India's 11th president had embarked on his avowed mission to transform India into a fully developed country by 2020, through the 'Lead India' campaign. Dr Kalam always spoke of a good society that can be built when students have knowledge and are proficient in their subjects, thanks to the pioneering role of teachers. The life of Bharat Ratna, popularly hailed as the 'people's president', stands as an inspiration to students and the global youth.

Dr Burra Madhusudhan Reddy, Karimnagar

Kalam's life an inspiration to Gen Z

MANY great Indian personalities have been born in October, including Mahatma Gandhi, Lal Bahadur Shastri and Dr Homi Bhabha. We remember with reverence Dr APJ Abdul Kalam-scientist, 'Missile Man', Bharat Ratna and 'people's president'-every October 15, marking his birth anniversary. I recently reread Wings of Fire (Expanded Edition), which has sold over two million copies since its publication in 1999. The edition features a moving foreword by his private secretary, Harry Sheridan, and around 50 new photographs that bring alive his inspiring journey. In 2002, when persuaded to contest the presidential election, BJP's Pramod Mahajan asked him for an auspicious time to file his nomination. Kalam replied, "Any time is auspicious for me," explaining that for as long as the Earth rotates and orbits the Sun, every moment is blessed by science, not astrology. Whether politicians have honed scientific thinking or not, his words remain a timeless lesson in scientific thinking for Gen Z and generations beyond.

N Nagarajan, Hyderabad

Educate girls for their safety

THIS has reference to the article ' Didi shocks the nation'. Everyone knows the ground realities. As per the 2022 NCRB report, approximately 31,516 rape cases reported across the country. On an average 86 such cases are reported each day. Many girls stay in hostels to be safe when away from their family. Hostels and colleges are like home away from home. It is the responsibility of the principals to create rules that no inmate leaves the campus late evenings without permission. They must mention the reason for going out, the location and when they are likely to return. The security staff must call the girl's parents and inform them that their daughter is going out late evenings. Every girl must be educated about aspects needed to ensure their safety. Meanwhile, police and legal authorities need to punish culprits responsible for heinous crimes almost immediately. That is the only solution to deter the culprits from indulging in macabre crimes.

G Murali Mohana Rao, Secunderabad-11

Mamata must prioritise safety of girls

The recent incident of gang-rape of a medical student in Durgapur has sparked nationwide outrage. This reflects the deteriorating law and order situation in West Bengal. It is shocking that Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has shifted the blame on the college authorities wondering how the girl had come out of the campus at midnight. Despite systematic sexual exploitation and reign of terror by the ruling party hooligans, the silence on the part of the government and police inaction against the perpetrators are a clear pointer that saving the goons was more important than rendering justice to victims. Even as the incident highlights the vulnerability and safety of women due to state's negligence, it is time the court intervenes and ensures the harshest retribution to the perpetrators.

K R Srinivasan, Secunderabad-3

thehansreader@gmail.com

BENGALURU ONLINE

TN man 'sends hoax bomb threat' to residences of CM, Dy CM

BENGALURU: A probe has been launched to trace a man from Tamil Nadu who allegedly sent a hoax email recently threatening to blow up the residences of Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar, police said on Tuesday.

The emails were sent from a particular ID to the Tamil Nadu DGP on October 11, following which officials of the Karnataka police were immediately alerted and necessary precautionary measures were taken, they said.

The purported email from aarna.ashwinshekher@outlook.com claimed that "four RDX devices and several IEDs" had been planted at the residences of both the Chief Minister and the Deputy Chief Minister and would be "detonated remotely."

As per protocol, precautionary measures were initiated, and the Bengaluru police carried out combing operations at both residences with the bomb detection and disposal squad. However, after thorough checks, the emails were declared a hoax, a senior police officer said. A case was registered by the police on their own against the sender of the purported email at Halasuru Gate police station under sections 351(4) (criminal intimidation) and 353(1)(b) (statements conducing to public mischief) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), the officer said. "The particular email ID has been tracked to a man from Tamil Nadu and efforts are on to nab the culprit.

Read more at https://epaper.thehansindia.com

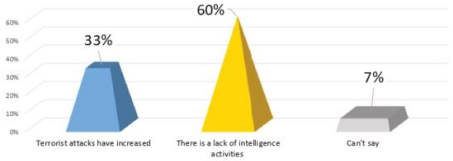
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THE DAILY GUARDIAN SURVEY ON TERRORISM IN J&K AFTER ABROGATION OF ART 370

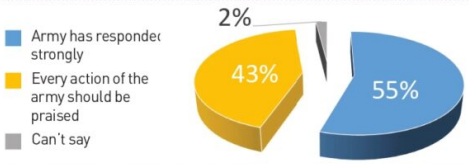
52% respondents said that government is working hard to gather intelligence and strengthen security arrangements in J&K.

The survey shows that most participants believe intelligence activities need improvement and recent government steps on anti-terrorism are insufficient. People see increased terrorist activity, but express support for the army's response and recommend stronger intelligence and diplomatic efforts.

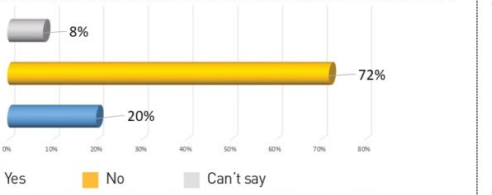
Q1. Has terrorism increased in Jammu after the abrogation of Article 370?



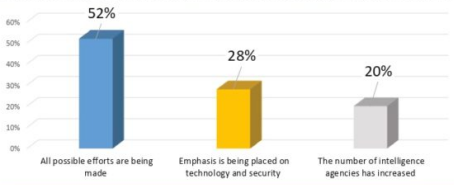
Q2. Do you believe the Indian Army has been able to respond effectively to terrorist attacks?



Q3. What is your opinion on the Indian government's anti-terrorism policy?



Q4. Do you think the government is working hard to gather intelligence and strengthen security arrangements?

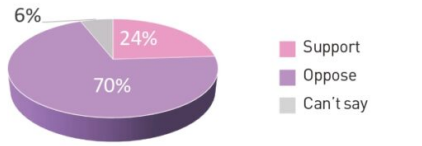


THE DAILY GUARDIAN SURVEY ON ECI ORDER ON BURQA

72% of people believe that identification of burqa-clad women voters help curb fake voting

Most respondents supported the EC's order to identify burqa-clad women voters, viewing it as fair and in the national interest. Around 70–74% believed the move would help curb fake voting and improve identification. Opposition from the Samajwadi Party was largely seen as politically motivated or driven by fear of losing votes.

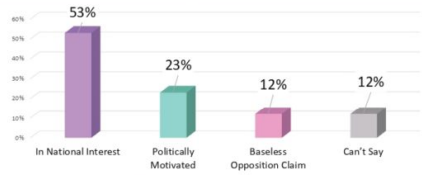
Q1. Do you think Samajwadi Party's objection to ECI's new order identifying burqa-clad women voters is justified?



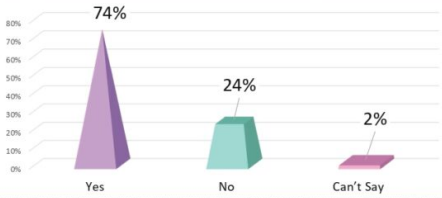
Q2. Do you agree that ECI's order identifying burqa-clad women voters through Anganwadi workers is a fair decision?



Q3. Considering the upcoming Assembly elections, how do you view ECI's recent decision?



Q4. Will ECI's burqa identification decision help improve voter identification in upcoming elections?



BJP unveils first list, signals shift

CONTINUED FROM P1

(Jale), Krishna Kumar Rishi (Banmankhi), Nitish Mishra (Jhanjharpur) and Dr Sunil Kumar (Biharsharif).

In a notable shake-up, veterans Arun Kumar Sinha (Kumhrar) and Nand Kishore Yadav (Patna Sahib) have been dropped, reflecting the BJP's stand against hereditary succession. Newcomers such as Sanjay Kumar Gupta (Kumhrar), Ratnesh Kushwaha (Patna Sahib) and Trivikram Singh (Aurangabad) make their debut. The list features nine women and no "parachute entrants", signalling preference for long-serving karyakartas over outsiders. Despite intense last-minute lobbying in Delhi by senior functionaries and former ministers, many aspirants were left disappointed after the Central Election Committee — chaired by J.P. Nadda and attended by top leaders — finalised the names.

The BJP has not announced a candidate from Alinagar (Darbhanga), where speculation around fielding folk singer Maithili Thakur has faced local resistance. Thakur joined the party in Patna on Tuesday in the presence of state president Dilip Jaiswal, praising Mr Modi and Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, and saying she would follow the party's decision on contesting.

The announcement follows the NDA's seat-sharing deal: BJP and JD(U) will contest 101 seats each, LJP (Ram Vilas) 29, and the Rashtriya Lok Morcha and Hindustani Awam Morcha (Secular) six each. JD(U) leader Sanjay Kumar Jha accused the opposition of "spreading rumours" about rifts in the alliance and affirmed that Mr Kumar was "fully engaged". Yet disquiet persists — JD(U) MP Ajay Kumar Mandal has written to Nitish Kumar expressing dismay over not being consulted on ticket distribution in his Bhagalpur constituency, while HAM(S) chief Jitan Ram Manjhi, though unhappy over seat allotment, has toed the alliance line and announced his six candidates.

Across the aisle, the Mahagathbandhan remains mired in negotiations. RJD's Tejashwi Yadav — who will file his nomination on Wednesday — met Congress general secretary (organisation) K.C. Venugopal in Delhi. Sources say a tentative understanding — RJD about 135 seats, Congress 60–61 — has been reached, though no formal pact is in place. The exchanges spilled onto social media after RJD MP Manoj Jha and Congress MP Imran Pratapgarhi traded couplets, reflecting the tension in talks. Congress leaders insist they will not yield traditional strongholds and may even go solo in some seats if talks collapse, a view Lalu Prasad Yadav is resisting.

Meanwhile, Prashant Kishor's Jan Suraaj and the Left parties of the INDIA bloc have released their candidate lists, giving partial momentum to the opposition camp. VIP chief Mukesh Sahani has demanded 30 seats and a deputy CM post, further complicating the Mahagathbandhan's arithmetic.

Bihar votes on 6 and 11 November, with counting on 14 November. The BJP's first list — stressing loyalty, discipline and generational change — sets the tone for what promises to be one of the state's fiercest political contests in years.

20 dead as moving bus bursts into flames

CONTINUED FROM P1

nel arrived with a JCB to break open the bus door and rescue trapped passengers. Locals assisted by using private tankers to douse the flames. Jaisalmer Collector Pratap Singh confirmed that the bus was reduced to ashes, and several victims were burnt beyond recognition. Fifteen others, including women and children, suffered serious burns—many over 70 percent. The injured were rushed to Jawahir Hospital in Jaisalmer and later shifted via a 275-km green corridor to MDM Hospital in Jodhpur. Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma reached Jaisalmer late in the night, inspecting the charred remains of the bus before visiting the injured in Jodhpur's MGH Hospital. Expressing grief, he said, "The bus fire tragedy in Jaisalmer is heartwrenching. I extend my deepest condolences to the affected families. Directions have been issued for proper treatment of the injured and all possible assistance to the victims." The Chief Minister later canceled his scheduled visit to Patna due to the tragedy. Meanwhile, the Forensic Science Laboratory (FSL) team led by Director Dr Ajay Sharma has begun investigating the cause of the fire. DNA testing will be conducted to identify the charred bodies. Police have detained Laxman, a booking agent from Swagat Travels, to verify passenger details, as several tickets were reportedly issued onboard. The district administration has also released helpline numbers—9414801400, 8003101400, 02992-252201, and 02992-255055—for families seeking information.

Rahul Gandhi seeks action in IPS officer's death

CONTINUED FROM P1

personally committed to taking action and conducting a free and fair inquiry three days ago. That commitment has not been fulfilled. His daughters and mother are under immense stress and pressure."

Calling it a case of "systematic caste-based discrimination," Gandhi alleged that other officers had been working to "demoralise and damage" Kumar's career and reputation.

"This is not about one family — the wrong message is being sent to millions of Dalits across the country," he said. "No matter how intelligent or capable you are, if you are a Dalit, you can be suppressed — this is unacceptable."

He urged the Prime Minister and Haryana CM to "take immediate action against the officers responsible" and to allow the family to perform the last rites. "Stop this spectacle now," he said.

Gandhi also claimed that a "false case" had been filed against Kumar and demanded arrests of the accused named in the suicide note.

"The family has only one demand — respect. Their husband and father was disrespected in life; do not deny him dignity in death," he said, adding that the issue symbolised "the respect and dignity of Dalits across India."

Paan-group party set to join MGB

CONTINUED FROM P1

entrant — the IP Gupta-led India Inclusive Party (IIP) — which is likely to get at least one seat in the final formula expected to be announced in Patna on Thursday.

RJD insiders said the main tussle remains over the number of seats both RJD and Congress must cede to smaller partners. However, both parties realise that compromises are essential to prevent rebellion within the alliance. As of Wednesday night, discussions were still on over three key Assembly seats — Sugauli, Vaishali and Barhara.

"These were part of an earlier five-seat deadlock that included Baisi, Bahadurganj, Saharsa, Kahalgaon and Raniganj. The RJD is sacrificing for the smaller allies, and Congress too needs to follow suit," an RJD leader told TDG.

According to senior RJD sources, while the three Left parties will together get around 30 seats, the IIP — the latest entrant — will be allotted one. "Tejashwi ji met IP Gupta on Saturday to finalise his entry. The Congress wasn't keen to give up seats from its quota, so Gupta may contest on the Congress symbol," an RJD leader said.

Gupta, a former Congress leader who unsuccessfully sought a ticket from Samastipur in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, later floated his own outfit and drew attention with a well-attended rally at Patna's Gandhi Maidan in April — two days after Prashant Kishor's event at the same venue.

Who is IP Gupta? Gupta heads the Akhil Bharatiya Paan Mahasangh, representing Paan, Tanti, Tatva and Chaupal caste groups in Bihar. His rally showcased the community's influence across Madhubani, Saharsa, Munger and Bhagalpur. While Gupta initially demanded five to six seats, he is now set to receive one. The Paan community is believed to command a two to three percent vote share — a factor seen as electorally useful for the Mahagathbandhan.

RLJP Keeps Pressure On

Even as talks continue, the RLJP has warned it may contest 121 seats independently if its demands are ignored. "Discussions went on till 2:30 am Wednesday and are expected to resume tonight. We had sought six seats, but the final decision should come by tomorrow," RLJP spokesperson Chandan Kumar told TDG. "We're in wait-and-watch mode but ready to go solo if needed."

Meanwhile, the inclusion of the Vikassheel Insan Party (VIP) remains another sticking point. The Congress wants to cap the VIP's share at 18 seats, while the party is pushing for 25–30 and a deputy CM post for its chief Mukesh Sahani.

"The key issue is Mukesh Sahani's demand for 25-plus seats and the deputy CM post. If agreed, Congress will be left with fewer than 60 seats — which is unacceptable. Moreover, Sahani keeps echoing RJD's line that Tejashwi should be declared CM candidate, which we oppose before the polls," a senior Congress leader said.

Assam: Man sentenced to 20 years for raping 14-year-old girl

CONTINUED FROM P1

was chargesheeted within 90 days and taken up for hearing in a fast-track court.

After multiple hearings, the Special POCSO Court of Cachar, presided over by Judge Narayan Kuri, delivered the verdict on Monday.

Enamul Haque Laskar was sentenced to 20 years of rigorous imprisonment and fined Rs 20,000 under the POCSO Act. Additionally, he was awarded three years' imprisonment under Section 363 of the IPC along with a fine of Rs 5,000. Failure to pay the fines would extend his sentence by another seven months, the court ruled.

The victim's family expressed relief and satisfaction after the verdict, saying they were grateful for timely justice.

"We are poor tea garden workers and don't have the means to fight long cases. The way police and the court handled this matter seriously and delivered justice on time, we consider this true justice," a family member said.

In August 2024, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma had urged lawyers not to defend the accused in crimes against women, especially under the POCSO Act. He said that delays in trials often erode public faith in the judiciary and lead to rising instances of mob justice.

On September 25 this year, a 35-year-old man, one of four accused in the alleged rape and murder of a nine-year-old girl, was allegedly beaten to death by a mob in Dibrugarh district, underscoring growing anger over crimes against minors in the state.



Representative image.

Cabinet rvamp on cards as BJP resets Gujarat

CONTINUED FROM P1

tation from Patidar, OBC, tribal and women leaders across Saurashtra, South and North Gujarat — and introduce younger faces to refresh the leadership.

The upcoming visit of RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat has added weight to the developments, suggesting coordination between the party and its ideological base.

Political circles are abuzz with speculation following Patel's recent Delhi meetings. While the AAP has hinted at internal unease, BJP leaders insist the reshuffle is a planned governance exercise.

For Gujarat, this overhaul marks an effort to blend continuity with change — rejuvenating the leadership and consolidating the BJP's hold on its strongest political bastion ahead of 2027.

TRUMP'S ENVOY, NOT AMERICA'S AMBASSADOR

OPINION

RAKESH K. CHITKARA



When Sergio Gor landed in New Delhi last week, the optics spoke louder than his words. Barely 38, visibly nervous, and calling himself "Trump's ambassador", he arrived not as a diplomat but as an emissary of loyalty. India has hosted seasoned strategists, scholars, business leaders, and senior political figures from Washington. Never before has it received someone so young, so politically raw, and so personally tethered to a U.S. President whose worldview is defined by deal-making and disruption.

This appointment seems less about diplomacy and more about being Trump's eyes and ears in a region where power is visibly shifting from West to East. His posting tells us what the new Washington wants—not nuanced partnerships, but personal control. Until recently, he was a political operative running the White House Presidential Personnel Office—the machinery that decides who gets jobs and who gets fired. The Washington Post profiled him last year as "the most powerful man you've never heard of"—a gatekeeper whose loyalty to Trump was total and whose reach extended through every department. Efficient, ambitious, and feared, he was said to blend charm with ruthlessness.

That résumé makes him a formidable political soldier—but hardly a diplomat. His career is steeped in domestic trench warfare, not global diplomacy. Reports have questioned even the basics of his public biography: born in Soviet Tashkent as Sergio Gorokhovsky, not Malta as once claimed; late to file a security clearance while vetting others; and accused by colleagues of mixing power with paranoia. In short, he is the quintessential Trump man—devoted, daring, and dangerously inexperienced in the delicate craft of international statecraft.

Yet that, precisely, may be why Trump chose him. This is not a man sent to understand India; this is a man sent to report India.

India matters now more than ever. It anchors the Indo-Pacific strategy, hosts global supply-chain shifts, and has become Washington's only plausible counterweight to Beijing. For such a crucial ally, a Gor as an ambassador is not a great choice.

But Trump's method has never been conventional. He trusts loyalty over learning, intuition over expertise. Gor's appointment ensures that New Delhi can be monitored directly from Mar-a-Lago—Trump's private estate and political command center in Florida. In that sense, Gor's mission is both symbolic and strategic. Symbolic, because it declares Trump's disdain for the diplomatic establishment. Strategic, because it places his confidant at the hinge of the world's next power axis. His task is to gauge India's mood, Modi's manoeuvres, and the shifting loyalties of Asia's capitals as America's old order weakens.

Even if it is a clever move, it is also a fragile one. Diplomacy is not data collection. It requires empathy, context, and patience. Gor's political instincts—quick judgments, binary loyalties—will clash with India's complex political reality.

Gor arrives amid the sharpest U.S.–India economic rupture in years. Trump's sudden 50 per cent tariffs on Indian exports—from shrimp and garments to jewellery—have drawn outrage here. Indian exporters see betrayal; policymakers see bullying.

For India, this is not only about trade—it's about trust. If the United States can upend years of market integration overnight, what confidence remains in the "strategic partnership"



rhetoric?

That's the storm Gor inherits. His first real test will not be photo-ops with the Prime Minister, but whether he can broker credible tariff de-escalation. And he must do it fast. Each month of delay hardens resentment across India's industry.

To rebuild goodwill, he will need more than White House access. He will need humility—a quality rarely rewarded in Trump's circles. He will also need a credible advisory circle outside the routine economic, commercial, and political wings of the Embassy.

A NERVOUS DEBUT

In his first public remarks, Gor promised to "advance trade, defence, and technology cooperation" and spoke of a "free and open Indo-Pacific." The words were right; the delivery wasn't. His speech was halting, his body language uncertain, his gaze seeking cues. To the Indian audience, this was not confidence—it was improvisation.

Every envoy gets nervous on day one. But when one arrives carrying the weight of a superpower's reputation and a leader's personal brand, such missteps are magnified. I noted this, and surely Indian officials noted his repeated reference to being "Trump's ambassador." It may please Florida, but it will alarm Delhi.

India may neither antagonise nor indulge him. It will test him quietly. Foreign Minister Jaishankar's phrase—"landing ground, not capitulation"—applies perfectly here. The bureaucracy will engage, but watch. The Prime Minister's Office will smile, but measure. Gor will quickly discover that India does not respond to diktats. It negotiates through layers—ministries, committees, coalitions, and subtext. A culture that survived empires does not bend to emissaries.

To succeed, he must learn India's rhythm: slow consensus, fast symbolism. He must grasp that policy here is shaped as much by history as by hierarchy. And he must avoid making the mistake of reading courtesy as compliance.

WHAT INDIAN INDUSTRY SHOULD DO

Indian industry should not be sceptical of this appointment—it should exploit it. A politically connected ambassador offers direct access to Washington's most transactional mind. Business chambers like CII, FICCI, USIBC, and USISPF should engage him swiftly and surgically: bring proposals with quantifiable wins for both sides.

Speak his language—deliverables, jobs, investment figures. Let him carry success stories back to the White House, but keep policymaking anchored in Delhi. Use his proximity to Trump, not his inexperience, to India's advantage.

In short, treat him as a messenger, not a mentor.

Gor's tenure will test whether personal loyalty can coexist with professional diplomacy. His posting reveals more about Washington than about Delhi. It marks the personalisation of U.S. diplomacy—the belief that presidential loyalty can substitute for institutional credibility. For Trump, the world is not a system of alliances but a map of transactions. Sending Gor to India fits that worldview.

If Gor proves capable of empathy and learning, he could surprise his critics and evolve into a genuine bridge. If not, he will merely amplify what many already suspect—that Washington sees India not as a partner of parity, but as a project of persuasion.

Either way, this appointment is a mirror moment. It shows us how far the United States has drifted from the art of diplomacy—and how much India must rely on its own maturity to steady the partnership.

Trump has sent his envoy. India must decide whether to see him as a channel—or as a challenge.

Rakesh K. Chitkara is a public policy advisor and former senior executive with global US corporations. He writes on global trade, infrastructure, healthcare, and geopolitics. Rakesh can be reached at rakesh@cbitkaras.com.

If women must stay in, should men stay home? A question Bengal must face

OPINION

DR. PYALI CHATTERJEE



Till now, no one has forgotten the shocking rape and murder of a medical student from R.G. Kar Medical College in Kolkata last year — a crime that left Bengal and the entire nation horrified. Now, another disturbing case has surfaced, involving a second-year medical student from a private medical college in Durgapur, again raising urgent questions about the safety of women in educational institutions. The victim, originally from Odisha, was allegedly gang-raped after leaving her hostel premises late at night.

According to the police, an initial probe revealed that the survivor went outside the campus with her friend between 8 and 8:30 p.m. The friend reportedly left her alone when three unidentified men arrived. "The men snatched her phone and took her to a jungle outside the campus, where they raped her. She was threatened with dire consequences if she told anyone about the incident," said an officer on condition of anonymity. The accused also demanded Rs 5,000 from the survivor to return her mobile phone. Her statement has since been recorded, and within 36 hours of the incident, three suspects were arrested.

The case drew immediate political and public attention — not only because of the brutality of the crime but also due to the remarks made by West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee. While condemning the incident and promising strict punishment for the accused, Banerjee stated, "A girl shouldn't be allowed to come outside at night-time. They also have to protect themselves," while calling the incident "shocking". She further added, "No one will be excused." The Chief Minister also questioned how the student was allowed to leave the campus so late at night and emphasised that private medical colleges must take responsibility for ensuring the safety of their students, especially girls, particularly when campuses are located in isolated or forested areas. Her remarks were widely criticised as victim-blaming, implying that the student's movement at night contributed to the crime.

Following strong public backlash, Banerjee later clarified that her comments had been "deliberately distorted" by the media, insisting that her intention was to highlight institutional lapses rather than blame the survivor. The incident has reignited deep concerns about women's safety, institutional accountability, and gendered societal norms.

Critics argue that remarks like these from a woman Chief Minister risk reinforcing patriarchal narratives that restrict women's freedom and autonomy instead of addressing systemic failures that perpetuate gender-based violence. From a gender studies and educational perspective, the Durgapur case underscores the intersections between campus safety, governance, and women's mobility.

The statement made by Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee in this case once again brings to light a crucial question that continues to haunt our society — should the victim be blamed for sexual offences, or should the focus remain on holding the accused accountable for their actions? Her remark that "a girl shouldn't be allowed to come outside at night-time" reflects a troubling mindset that shifts responsibility from perpetrators to victims, reinforcing long-standing patriarchal beliefs about how women should behave to "avoid" violence.

It is worth asking: what if, instead of restricting women's movements, we imposed similar limitations on men — asking them to stay at home after a certain hour to prevent such crimes? What if, for women's safety, men were prohibited from working at night? Would such restrictions ever be considered acceptable? If not, why should they be acceptable when applied to women? These rhetorical questions expose the deep-seated gender bias embedded in social and political narratives surrounding sexual violence.

As women, we must reflect on where we stand in our own country when our political leaders imply, directly or indirectly, that a woman's presence outside her campus at night makes her responsible for the violence committed against her. Such statements not only trivialize the trauma of survivors but also normalize a culture of control over women's mobility, freedom, and autonomy. Instead of questioning why a woman was out late at night, our focus must shift to why the environment remains unsafe for her to do so — and why men continue to commit such crimes with impunity.

Another serious issue that emerges from this case is the assumption that only private institutions bear the responsibility for ensuring the safety of their students and staff. Banerjee's remarks placed the onus on the private medical college, but last year's brutal rape and murder of a medical student at R.G. Kar Medical College — a government-run institution — clearly demonstrates that sexual violence is not confined to private campuses.

Whether an institution is private or government-operated should not matter when it comes to the safety and security of women. Every educational institution, regardless of its management, must be held to the same standard of accountability.

It should also be the responsibility of political leaders and state authorities to ensure that robust mechanisms are in place to safeguard students across all campuses. The safety of young women pursuing education is not merely an institutional concern — it is a societal and governance issue. The Durgapur and R.G. Kar cases together serve as grim reminders that safety cannot depend on institutional ownership but must be a collective priority, monitored and enforced by the state.

Yes, for the safety of students, it is important that institutions implement reasonable measures — such as restricting movement outside the campus after a certain time — irrespective of gender.

The management should take precautionary steps to ensure that all students are protected. However, such measures must never target only women, as restricting the mobility of female students alone sends a wrong and discriminatory message. We should condemn the wrongs happening around us without blaming or targeting any particular gender.

In a nation that prides itself on progress and equality, it is deeply disheartening that women still face blame, scrutiny, and restrictions instead of protection, justice, and empathy.

The author is Associate Professor and HOD, Faculty of Law, ICFAI University, Raipur, Chhattisgarh, India

PERSPECTIVE

A HIGH VOLTAGE BATTLE

The Opposition was the first off the block in Bihar with its campaign against Vote Chori. The campaign was a high profile one led by the Leader of Opposition, Rahul Gandhi and saw almost the entire INDIA bloc dropping in for support. Indeed it was a remarkable show of strength with Tejashwi Yadav, Akhilesh Yadav, MK Stalin making an appearance while other parties from the INDIA bloc sent representatives.

It set the narrative for the Bihar polls going, but the problem with that was that the entire tamasha (show) ended with the disappearance of Rahul Gandhi. For the entire duration of the yatra, as long as Rahul Gandhi was present the campaign retained its momentum. But it lost steam post his return to Delhi. After that talks about cracks within the Mahagathbandhan over seat sharing began to surface.

Tejashwi carried on with his own campaign but his narrative gave more prominence to local issues, development and unemployment than to the voter revision exercise. Soon after, the NDA has launched its campaign turning the entire voter revision (SIR) exercise into an attempt to weed out infiltrators, raising the old bogey about ghuspaith once again, making the entire revision exercise as an attempt to weed out usurpers. And with Prashant Kishor



and Tejashwi Yadav focusing on the youth, the debate has shifted to development and jobs, with the RJD and the JD(U) trading charges. That the entire initial phase of the Bihar campaign that was launched by the Congress now seems like a distant memory. Unfortunately has become the norm for most state level campaigns. The Congress is usually first off the block and picks up a narrative that is more centre driven than local. However as elections approach it loses steam and that is the time when the NDA specially the BJP and more specifically the Prime Minister pick up momentum.

We have seen how time and again the Modi Blitzkrieg of rallies changes the narrative at the last phase of the campaign. That is because the BJP runs a very calibrated campaign. It lets the Congress take the lead in the initial stage, and fields a spokesperson level response. But, closer to the election date it steps up its engagement both in terms of leadership and narrative building. And usually it is the last mile connectivity that works, such as the Bihar Mukhyamantri Mahila Rojgar Yojana that has recently been announced.

This is not unlike the Ladli Behna schemes in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra that wooed the women vote for the NDA/ The Congress needs to be more consistent and has to keep up the engagement at a more consistent level if it wants to make a dent. The voters want an on ground presence to reassure them and once Rahul Gandhi has done his bit, set the narrative and the agenda he needs to ensure that the local leadership takes his message forward. Otherwise his presence will end up being a one stop event in the entire campaign. In fact as seat sharing talks commence on both sides, some say that the one reason why the Congress started its campaign in August was also to send a message to its own ally not to take it for granted during the seat sharing talks. Both Tejashwi and Rahul Gandhi are clear that the end game is to defeat the NDA. However the Congress also wants to revive its own party instead of going piggy back on the RJD. Tejashwi has his own views on the matter as for him this is a crucial make or break election. Given Nitish Kumar's health and advanced age, a leadership vacuum is coming up/ There are many contenders for this, from Samrat Choudhary , Chirag Paswan and Prashant Kishore.

In fact this is one reason why Chirag Paswan seems miffed with the BJP over seat sharing talks for he senses the same opportunity in a Post Nitish scenario and wants to ensure that he is well placed to step into that vacuum. Tejashwi, being the tallest leader from the Opposition (at the local level) is best placed to be the face of the challenge to the NDA. Prashant kishor being the seasoned strategist that he is, knows that this is his first election so he can at best play the role of a spoiler or a kingmaker.

The Congress just wants to stand up and be counted. For the BJP, the stakes are equally high. Despite being a party of the Hindi heartland, this is one state in North India that has eluded them. Now they sense an opening and given the way the Modi-Shah duo operate, they are going full steam ahead to use this opportunity to set a record. All in all, this is going to be one high voltage election in the state of Bihar.

PRIYA SAHGAL

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OPERATION CONVICTION IN UP: FROM 'MAFIA RAJ' TO FAST-TRACK JUSTICE

The official metrics are eye-catching. In the first 13 months (July 2023–Aug 2024), UP authorities tallied 50,010 accused convicted in 36,705 cases. By mid-2025 that number swelled to 97,158 convictions since launch.

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

Uttar Pradesh has long struggled to "bring its hold over crime," as Nehru lamented in the 1950s. Indeed, UP politics earned a reputation for the "mafia raj" – a nexus of "bosses" and politicians that routinely "violated every single one of the 511 paragraphs in the criminal code," in Nehru's words. To this day, strongmen thrive: roughly one-third of Indian lawmakers have criminal backgrounds. Decades of "goonda raj" saw dacoits and gangsters embedded in local politics, protected by patronage. Against this background, successive UP governments have periodically tried draconian measures – from special anti-terror laws to fast-track courts – to showcase toughness. The newest incarnation is Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's *"Operation Conviction"*, launched July 1, 2023. It promises "swift justice" by aggressively prosecuting heinous crimes and publicly touting high conviction tallies. But tracing UP's policing history shows a cautionary tale: forced prosecutions and blockbuster numbers can win headlines – even while masking deeper problems.

POLICING IN UP

Uttar Pradesh's policing crises have political roots. By the 1990s, Bihar-style caste politics intertwined with crime in UP's countryside, and its cities harbored wealthy extortion mafias. Senior officers recall that political patronage once made it "near impossible to take action" against heavy gangsters. Many ordinary UP voters came to see petty crime fade once goonda godfathers were targeted. As ex-DG B. N. Rai noted, one positive of recent years is that "one good thing... The government has taken action across the board" – rather than selectively protecting certain groups. (To be sure, data experts caution that police-recorded crime can both understate and overstate the real situation, depending on reporting habits.)

Yet the methods under Yogi Adityanath's government have also been unusually forceful. The CM's early motto – *"Agar apradh karenge, toh thok diye jayenge"* (roughly, "commit a crime and you'll be shot down") – was no idle threat. Since 2017 the UP police began publicizing its use of encounters. By mid-2020, officials claimed nearly 140 alleged criminals killed in police encounters and over 3,300 wounded. In these reports, Muslims — about 20% of UP's population — comprised nearly 40% of those killed, sparking concerns of bias. Critics warn that the "trigger-happy" campaign (as one report put it) risks bending law in political directions. Indeed, legal scholars note that once a government treats crime control as a political strategy, it has "liberty to define anyone as a criminal".

FAST-TRACK DRIVE OR FLASH IN THE PAN?

Swift trials have been tried before. In the 1980s-90s, national laws like TADA (Terrorist and Disruptive Activities Prevention Act) gave police extraordinary powers against "terrorism" – an umbrella term sometimes used for organized crime and political agitation. But evidence suggests TADA was a fiasco. Amnesty International reported that of thousands arrested under TADA, less than 1% were ever convicted. In other words, police made sweeping arrests, but courts regularly acquitted. Victims of hasty legal dragnet often languished in jail or faced torture; only a handful ended up jailed. (For example, Amnesty quotes Home Ministry data showing a 0.8% conviction rate under early TADA provisions.)

Two decades ago, UP echoed this pattern under POTA (Prevention of Terrorism Act, 2002–2004). Ostensibly an anti-terror law, POTA was used in UP to pursue tribal villagers and political activists. One human rights report recounts how UP authorities *"withdrew POTA cases against 28 poor Dalits and tribals"* once media attention revealed flimsy charges. Many accused had only been bonded laborers who asserted their rights; they'd been branded "Naxalites" and arrested with little evidence. POTA cases in UP similarly yielded few convictions and were later abandoned under pressure.

Meanwhile, in the 2000s and 2010s the judiciary and legislature turned to fast-track courts for speed. In 2003 and 2008, India enacted tougher laws against rape and child sex abuse. The government pushed dozens of special courts to hear those cases. By 2013, states including Uttar Pradesh had dozens of fast-track courts for heinous crimes like sexual assault. UP's police-brass would later point proudly to U.P.'s leading national performance: year after year UP police noted that over 70% of registered cases of violence against women ended in conviction (against a 25% national average). And UP completed more trials of POCSO child-abuse cases than any other state. Yet, many analysts warned that these numbers hid real issues: victims who never even got cases filed, witnesses intimidated, and high acquittals too. (A Reuters investigation in 2020 reported that only ~300 of India's 32,000 reported rapes in 2019 resulted in conviction, roughly 1%. Uttar Pradesh was among the worst for delay and underreporting.)

In short, fast-track courts in UP achieved mixed results. On the one hand, they cleared some backlog: at times police and courts would fast-track dozens of cases together. On the other, they functioned with normal court weaknesses. A 2015 study found that many so-called fast-track courts in India lacked extra resources and saw frequent acquittals by judges noting contradictory testimonies. UP's record was highlighted by critics: for instance, in a recent high-profile cow-protection case in neighboring Haryana, four Special Courts had convicted only 4 out of 69 cases (about 6%). That suggests that even focused judicial effort can be stymied by poor evidence gathering or lack of genuine harm.



Uttar Pradesh Director General of Police Vijaya Kumar.



Representative image.

OPERATION CONVICTION: NUMBERS AND NARRATIVES

In July 2023, Uttar Pradesh announced "Operation Conviction" as a police–prosecution drive to fix criminal justice outcomes. The initiative is broad: it targets violent or "heinous" offences (murder, rape, robbery) as well as politically sensitive crimes like cow-slaughter, religious conversion and child abuse. All district police were tasked with filing chargesheets in a "time-bound" manner and working closely with public prosecutors. The government even set up an online dashboard for weekly review of pending cases. In press releases, Yogi's team presented Operation Conviction as zero-tolerance justice. As one police spokesman put it, the aim is to "effectively represent cases in courts so that [offenders] are punished in the least amount of time".

The official metrics are eye-catching. In the first 13 months (July 2023–Aug 2024), UP authorities tallied 50,010 accused convicted in 36,705 cases. By mid-2025 that number swelled to 97,158 convictions since launch. Prosecutors highlight shocking tallies: between March 2017 and Dec 2024, nearly 80,000 criminals were convicted in Yogi's rule, including 8174 life terms and 68 death sentences. PoCSO (child sexual abuse) convictions alone exceeded 12,000, with 17 death penalties under the law. The latest year-long report (July 2024–'25) breaks it down: out of 47,149 serious cases identified, 19,584 were tried, yielding 15,641 convictions. Conviction rates by category are reported at 80–99% (murder 82%, robbery 86%, theft 99%).

Notably, Operation Conviction coincided with India's new criminal laws (July 2024). Uttar Pradesh officials credit the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, Sabiksha Adhiniyam, Sakshya Adhiniyam overhaul for helping. ADG Prosecution Deepesh Juneja says fast-tracking under the new laws led to 458 key cases resolved since July 2024: 4 death sentences, 10 life terms, 19 terms over 20 years, and 425 under-20-year sentences. The shift to digital tools is also lauded: e-prosecution portals, video depositions and cloud-based evidence have "saved [the] state approximately Rs 25 crore" by cutting court appearances. Indeed, by mid-2025 Juneja claimed UP had over 97,185 convictions in Operation Conviction, with Amit Shah calling it a national model. The numbers are presented as evidence that the long-promised "law and order breakthrough" has finally arrived in UP.



Atiq Ahmed and his brother's assassination while in police custody was broadcast live by media cameras. The incident drew national attention and raised questions about the rule of law in Uttar Pradesh.

CRIME CONTROL: WHAT WE SEE AND WHAT WE DON'T

Such figures can create a feel-good narrative. Tellingly, ruling party spokesmen frame Operation Conviction as restoring the "rule of law" in UP. They argue swift punishment deters criminals and boosts public confidence. If serious criminals are swiftly off the streets – in courts or cell blocks – everyday citizens might indeed feel safer. On the face of it, Pakistan's successes with fast-track courts for terror trials are cited, so why not repeat for rape or murder? Digital case-management and incentivizing prosecutors *should* speed justice, at least for clearly documented crimes.

But history warns that *quantitative success isn't justice*. High conviction totals can mask problems: weak evidence, coerced confessions, or even police tipping the scales. For instance, Operation Conviction claims a 98% conviction rate in theft and a 94% rate in robbery. That invites skepticism. In a fair trial, some acquittals are expected when evidence fails. Almost *never* do courts convict 7 out of 8 accused. (By comparison, in 2019 national figures only about 1 in 10 rape trials ended in conviction.) The UP figures suggest more is at play: possibly, police now meticulously build airtight cases, or they choose to charge only cases with guaranteed outcomes.

Indeed, critics already question the data. Opposition leader Akhilesh Yadav has dismissed the Conviction stats as "false and fabricated," accusing the government of "misleading the public". Even neutral observers note that "better reporting" alone could raise a conviction rate; so could selectively drop marginal cases. In crisis, only a subset of cases may be flagged for Operation Conviction, ones where a quick win is likely. Others – e.g. politically sensitive ones – might languish. UP police say they identified 47,149 "serious" cases in one year, but only 19,584 were even sent to trial. What about the rest? Some may be stuck at investigation or withdrawn for technicalities.

The campaign's focus on numbers also sidesteps victims' perspectives. Success is measured by punishing perpetrators, but not by serving survivors or communities. The data tell us nothing about whether families got justice or compensation. They do not disclose how many cases fell apart for procedural lapses, or whether witnesses were intimidated. (Elsewhere, Uttar Pradesh has been criticized for failing rape victims: in 2020 a Thomson Reuters report detailed Dalit women being repeatedly turned away by police, pressured to withdraw cases, or shunned from courts.) It's possible that even as convictions rise, more victims drop out before trial, or crimes go unregistered altogether – distortions that raw numbers cannot reveal.

Furthermore, fast prosecutions can entail shortcuts. Under the new codes, witness statements may be video-recorded beforehand, which saves court time but also reduces cross-examination pressure. Curbing adjournments is laudable, but if a rushed trial means defense is denied due process, miscarriages of justice can occur. The state's own data hints at systemic anomalies: the HT report on crimes against women celebrated UP's 70.8% conviction rate, yet that same data implied 30% of cases still ended without punishment. What happened in those acquittals? Reports from other states suggest many victims simply give up or evidence goes missing. These are the "hidden" costs of the metrics.

Even targeted campaigns can foster new abuses. Fast-track drives against cow slaughter or conversion – crimes flagged in Operation Conviction – risk communal profiling. Haryana's experience is instructive: when that state set up special courts for its strict anti-cow laws, convictions were almost non-existent. Over 90% of cases went nowhere. In UP, "cow-related" clauses and anti-conversion cases carry a strong ideological charge. It is easy to imagine police pressuring weak suspects to confess, just to check boxes. The metrics (numbers of cases booked or convictions) say nothing about whether these were fair trials or simply a political performance.

Lastly, we should ask: How durable are these gains? Operation Conviction is sustained by manpower and political will. But history shows crackdowns often relax once the media spotlight moves on. After all, the previous Samajwadi government (2012–17) also tried its own initiatives: for example, MP Adityanath's (now CM) opponent Azam Khan launched raids on criminals, and the BSP had law-and-order drives in Purvanchal. Results ebbed and flowed with each regime. If Yogi's team falls out of office, will the convictions still hold up on appeal? Will future governments keep up the same intensity, or simply trot out the numbers to score points? The data alone can't tell us that.

WHAT WORKS – AND WHAT CAN BACKFIRE

Operation Conviction's defenders emphasize deterrence. The idea is that the state must *show* it means business: once even minor offenders see that trials are quick and penalties heavy, they will think twice. Some block-level officials report a chilling effect: gang informants say even local rowdies complain, "Who are we to mess with the police?" Indeed, UP's crime rate (per NCRB) has reportedly dipped slightly in recent years, and victims often cite more responsive police patrols. In that sense, fast-track convictions can help re-establish a baseline of safety.

Moreover, public confidence in the justice system can improve if trials do not drag on for years. A mother who has been awaiting closure after a violent crime may find relief if her case finally goes to court without endless adjournments. The emphasis on evidence (e.g. forensic collection teams at every major crime scene, another BNSS reform) could even raise overall case quality. The push for digital tools and e-judiciary, heralded by the new laws, might modernize a previously paper-heavy system. In Chandigarh – another state that moved early to the new criminal codes – an official said one local court's convictions jumped to 91% after adopting e-FIR and videography. So there is a silver lining: more accountability can come from scrutinized evidence chains and technology.

Yet the backfire risks loom large. First, obsessing over conviction numbers can encourage abuse of power. If police get promotions for racketing up convictions, innocents can get swept up. (Past experience with anti-Maoist laws shows that low-income tribal men were easy targets for bogus terrorism charges under pressure.) Fast trials combined with civilian support for "tough policing" might lower scrutiny: and what starts as deterring criminals could slide into punishing innocents or political dissenters.

Second, by focusing on post-crime prosecution, the state might neglect crime prevention. Policing is not just a scoreboard; it also needs community engagement, conflict resolution, and trust-building. If residents begin to fear the police as much as the criminals, they may stop reporting crimes at all. Already some minority rights groups allege increased harassment in the name of cow protection. Unchecked, Operation Conviction could erode the rule of law it claims to restore: a city where only certain communities fear sudden prosecution is no real victory.

Finally, the single-minded narrative of "conviction output = success" sidesteps root causes. Gang violence often stems from economic inequality, juvenile delinquency, or local political bargains. Rapid trials will not solve disputes over land, liquor, or caste. Without addressing why so many young men pick up guns or why women lack protection, even a spike in convictions may prove temporary. And in the courts of public opinion, any high-profile miscarriage (say, a later exoneration of a wrongfully tried accused) can swiftly turn tides.



A view of Allahabad High Court

THE GOAN EVERYDAY

But he that dares not grasp the thorn should never crave the rose.
Anne Bronte

Tourism's shallow dive into Morjim conservation

In what should be another major embarrassment to the Tourism Department, the Goa Coastal Zone Management Authority (GCZMA) pulled up the Goa Tourism Development Corporation (GTDC) for undertaking excavation, destruction of beach vegetation, and changing the coastal morphology while undertaking its beautification project, which is very close to the Morjim turtle nesting site, and in violation of the CRZ norms. The coastal authority, while stating that a major damage has been caused to the protected area, sought the deployment of coastal police for regular patrolling to prevent the recurrence of such illegality.

Earlier in July this year, the High Court of Bombay at Goa had ordered an immediate stay on the development and beautification works at the beach after it took cognisance of the damage caused to the entire ancient sand dune bank. It was then that even the GCZMA was criticised for entertaining GTDC's beach beautification project using cement concrete at the entrance, one that required the demolition of the entire sand dune bank.

Morjim beach faces the wrath of sound pollution too, with clubs belting out loud music in sheer disregard to High Court directives. The police and district authorities have largely been mute to the complaints of locals, with high-decibel music being played within metres of the protected area.

The lip service paid by the government towards coastal conservation is glaringly evident in its handling of Morjim beach, a crucial nesting site for Olive Ridley turtles and a known ecological jewel. It is unfortunate that authorities choose to look the other way when it comes to ecological preservation, exposing a troubling disconnect between conservation commitments and actual on-ground action. This is where the question surfaces — tourism, at what cost?

Goa cannot sell its soul for tourism. Protecting its sensitive ecology becomes a bounden duty of not just the government, or the coastal police. It is a priority of every Goan. The recent excavation activities undertaken by the GTDC, ostensibly for beautification, exemplify a blatant disregard and mockery of systems.

The GCZMA rightly pulled up GTDC, citing that the work was in direct violation of CRZ guidelines. However, it remains to be seen if their orders to halt all excavation and assess the damage, along with recommendations for environmental restoration, have any effect on a department that is ruthlessly going for the kill. We say this because procedural steps in a process have repeatedly been ignored. The fact that little attention was paid to grassroots voices and environmental watchdogs says a lot. The periodic announcements of turtle nesting habitat plans, new regulations, or environmental notifications prove to be a farce in the wake of illegal activities.

Development projects should be subjected to comprehensive environmental impact assessments, with turtle nesting and sand dune vegetation protection as non-negotiable conditions. The government should also establish a dedicated ecological protection zone around nesting sites, with no construction or excavation allowed. Communities, local residents, and eco-activists must be empowered to act as custodians of their coastline. Transparent mechanisms for reporting violations and holding violators accountable are essential to shift the narrative from exploitation to conservation.

Morjim Beach's ecological vulnerability is a mirror reflecting the tourism department's superficial commitment to environmental protection. The need of the hour is sustained action and genuine enforcement; otherwise, the fragile nesting site will continue to be sacrificed at the altar of tourism. The question is whether, at some point, the priority would shift to preservation of natural heritage.

OPEN SPACE ››

Rethinking Goa's tourism approach need of hour

Two incidents reported in the news yesterday highlighted the issue with some tourists: a drunk tourist assaulted police in Calangute, and tourists created a mess at an out-of-station bus depot. Repeated drunk driving accidents involving out-of-state and rented vehicles are also a concern. Meanwhile, the tourism department is damaging sensitive ecosystems with projects like the Morjim Beach beautification, catering to such tourists. Goa's popularity is slipping. Domestic tourists complain about unaffordability, but international tourists are willing to pay premium prices. However, they're put off by overcrowding and unruly behaviour from many domestic tourists. The tourism department should focus on hiking prices for domestic tourists to maintain destinations and improve tourism quality, rather than pushing beautification projects that harm ecosystems. The state's natural beauty is its charm, but unwanted beautification projects and tourists with poor civic sense are spoiling it. Keeping places clean and managing tourist numbers would have preserved Goa's beauty better.

ALWYN FERNANDES, *Benaulim*

Traffic redirection gone wrong

There must be adequate public consultation, timely notification, and clear visual guidance through maps and signages at all entry points



›The writer is a Doctoral Researcher working under the Alliance of European Universities and has presented his research works at various Academic Conferences.

ADV MOSES PINTO



The Monday morning trial run for traffic diversion along the Porvorim stretch of National Highway 66 between the O'Coqueiro Junction and the Socorro-Aradi Junction was intended to test the feasibility of partial road closures necessitated by the upcoming elevated corridor project. Instead, it tested the patience of hundreds of motorists. Within minutes of the closure taking effect, vehicles were seen inching forward in long queues beneath the scorching October sun. The gridlock extended through arterial side lanes and residential roads as commuters struggled to navigate unfamiliar detours.

For many, what should have been a fifteen-minute drive became an hour-long ordeal. School buses, ambulances, and two-wheelers were caught in the same bottleneck, with few visible indicators explaining alternative routes. The trial, intended as an administrative rehearsal, became a practical demonstration of what happens when execution precedes coordination. Yet, to be fair, the purpose of the trial was legitimate, testing traffic flow before a major infrastructural intervention, but the absence of timely information and guiding personnel transformed it into a public inconvenience.

It is in this backdrop that a continuing Public Interest Litigation PILWP No. 2656 of 2024 (F) before the High Court of Bombay at Goa assumes renewed relevance. The Court, acknowledging the gravity of the situation, issued a detailed order on December 18, 2024, recording undertakings and imposing directions upon the State authorities and the contractor.

The Farad Order and its binding directives

The Farad Order of December 18, 2024 stands as a living instrument of accountability. It directed that no further work on the elevated corridor should commence unless the adjoining service roads were properly hot-mixed, that traffic signages and illumination were to be installed for the visibility and safety of motorists, and that 108 ambulances and motorcycle ambulances should be stationed at strategic points along the Porvorim stretch. The Court further required the display of emergency contact numbers of the police and health services, and mandated the deployment of traffic marshals to assist law enforcement personnel. Importantly, it prohibited the contractor from initiating any new diversion or barricading without prior intimation to the Traffic Police.

Each of these directions was designed to prevent precisely the type of confusion and hazard that occurred during Monday's trial run. They remain valid, operative, and binding upon all respondents: the State of Goa, the Public Works Department, and the contractor entrusted with the project.

"The chaos witnessed during the Porvorim trial run should serve as a reminder that compliance with judicial directions is not optional, and that public safety cannot be treated as a collateral casualty of construction schedules

When directives are ignored

Despite these clear judicial safeguards, the trial run revealed a stark departure from compliance. None of the signages indicating diversions were prominently displayed. Illumination remained inconsistent, particularly near junctions where heavy machinery and barricades reduced visibility. No traffic marshals were discernibly deployed to guide motorists, and the temporary route maps that were meant to be circulated were absent from public view.These lapses were not unforeseen. They were, in fact, anticipated and explicitly addressed in the December 2024 order. The High Court had recognised the risks inherent in uncoordinated diversions and sought to pre-empt them through its directives. The events of the trial run therefore highlight not a new problem, but the resurfacing of an old one: institutional disregard for continuing judicial oversight.

Duty of the State and the contractor

Public infrastructure is, by definition, a collective trust. When the State undertakes such projects, its duties extend beyond engineering execution to ensuring safety, communication, and transparency. The Public Works Department's apparent leniency in enforcing its own directions, and the contractor's procedural shortcuts, both reflect a lapse in that trust. This is not a matter of apportioning blame but of recognising responsibility. The project is being executed on a public highway, not on private land. Hence, every decision to redirect or close a section of road affects the daily life of thousands. Where private contractors perform functions of public importance, they act as agents of the State, bound by the same constitutional duties that constrain public authorities.

Supreme Court's clarion call

This principle has now received authoritative affirmation in the Supreme Court's judgment in Umri Pooph Pratappur (UPP) Tollways Pvt. Ltd. v. M.P. Road Development Corporation and Another, delivered on July 30, 2025. The Court unequivocally held that the right to safe, well-maintained, and motorable roads is part of the right to life under Article 21 of the Constitution, and that the State cannot abdicate this responsibility by outsourcing it.

Whether roads are maintained by a government agency or a private concessionaire, the duty to ensure safety remains non-delegable.

Applied to Goa's elevated corridor context, this precedent reinforces that every pothole, unmarked diversion, or unlit barricade is not merely an administrative lapse but a potential infringement of a fundamental right.

Infrastructure development, however ambitious, cannot override public participation. Before any redirection or closure is implemented, there must be adequate public consultation, timely notification, and clear visual guidance through maps and signages at all entry points. Sudden closures without explanation erode trust and invite avoidable risk.

What the Porvorim trial run demonstrates is that road safety is not an afterthought but an inseparable component of planning. A truly responsible administration would have displayed schematic charts at major junctions, deployed marshals to guide commuters, and circulated diversion plans through public media well in advance. These are not gestures of goodwill; they are obligations stemming from the constitutional promise of transparency and accountability.

The road ahead

The chaos witnessed during the Porvorim trial run should serve as a reminder that compliance with judicial directions is not optional, and that public safety cannot be treated as a collateral casualty of construction schedules.

For the ordinary road user, Article 21 is not an abstract constitutional text. It is the difference between safety and peril. Ensuring its observance on the road is the true measure of administrative integrity.

THE INBOX ››

Chandor's cry -- A village fights for its soul

Close on the heels of the rally at Guirdolim opposing double tracking, now Chandor — Goa's historic gem and once the capital of the Kadamba dynasty — faces a deeper threat: a sprawling 21,000 square metre mega housing project that could irreversibly alter its identity. This isn't just about buildings. It's about the soul of a village. The proposed Rs 3 crore units are priced far beyond the reach of locals, clearly designed to attract outside buyers. It's criminal to destroy villages under the guise of development. Chandor today finds itself at the crossroads. Beneath its serene surface, the pressures of speculative development and political neglect threaten to unravel its social fabric. Residents must now channel that same resilience. A united legal challenge, grounded in the principle of carrying capacity, could be a powerful step forward. This fight must not remain isolated. It should spark a wider Goan movement, where villages across the state join hands to protect their heritage, environment, and way of life.

EVERETTE ASSIS TELLES, *Margao*

Majhe Ghar forms must be available on govt website

The Pramod Sawant government's 'Majhe Ghar' scheme is revolutionary even though one may have reservations about it. It is more of a realistic scheme which aims to resolve the long pending issues by giving a legal solution. That is perhaps why the critics of this scheme in the Assembly also chose to share the dais with the Chief Minister of Goa during the scheme launch. It is learnt that the forms are numbered and are being distributed through Collector's offices. The government should ensure that the scheme reaches all in a democratic manner and does not restrict itself to those close to politicians. Therefore, the government should make the forms available online on the Goa State Government website and also the websites of both District Collectorates.

SADANAND RAIKAR, *Colva*

Unruly tourists must face the wrath of law

This is with reference to the report, "Drunk tourists assault police in Calangute - The Goan Everyday - October 14, 2025." This is certainly very disturbing news. Goa is indeed a tourist paradise but unruly tourists are turning it into hell. This instance of two Jaipur tourists creating a drunken ruckus in Calangute, assaulting police personnel is cause for concern and must be taken up seriously. Tourists anywhere must respect the land where they set foot. They must understand their responsibility or else face the wrath of the law. These same tourists wouldn't dare to resort to such behaviour in western countries, would they? This quote says it all: Wherever you go, go with all your heart, but also with respect for the place and its people.

MELVILLE X D'SOUZA, *Mumbai*

Govt liquor policy needed to discipline tourists

Two men from Rajasthan, allegedly inebriated, were arrested late Sunday night for verbally abusing, threatening, and assaulting police personnel during a drunken brawl at Baga, which disrupted traffic along the busy Calangute–Baga road.Well, the root cause for the rise in such type of ugly incidents (especially in the night) is due to the free availability of alcohol every few metres in the state.I think that until and unless we don't bother to address this serious nuisance creating problem of alcohol first, do not pressurise the government of the day to come out with its own liquor policy and stop it from decorating the state with more liquor outlets every few metres to woo domestic tourists, we should not dream of bringing any improvement but get ready to witness many more such horrible incidents of drunken brawls everywhere & attacks on police personnel in the days to come in Goa.

JERRY FERNANDES, *Saligao*

Women's reservation in politics – delayed dream

On the eve of elections, women's groups awaken—often guided by political motives—to voice their aspirations. Yet, the long-pending Women's Reservation Bill (106th Constitutional Amendment, 2023) remains unimplemented, reflecting political hesitation and deep-rooted misogyny. While women form 50 per cent of India's electorate, their representation stands at only 15 per cent in the Lok Sabha and a mere 9 per cent in State Assemblies. Contrast this with the Panchayati Raj system, where one-third—and in some states, over half—of leadership positions are held by women, proving their competence and integrity. Token gestures like free education or welfare schemes cannot substitute genuine empowerment. The true test of 'Nari Shakti' lies in granting women one-third reservation in politics.

NELSON LOPES, *Chinchinim*

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Lalu's tryst with the law

The timing could not have been more curious. On the very day the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), the Congress and their allies sealed their seat-sharing deal for the ongoing Bihar Assembly elections, a Delhi court framed charges of corruption and conspiracy against Lalu Prasad Yadav, his wife Rabri Devi, and son Tejashwi Yadav. That coincidence alone raises eyebrows. It is difficult to believe that this case—rooted in allegations made nearly two decades ago—has reached this stage now by mere happenstance. The case concerns the award of contracts for two IRCTC hotels during Lalu's tenure as railway minister between 2004 and 2009. The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) claims that the contracts were granted in exchange for three acres of land allegedly received by Lalu's family through a benami company. The CBI registered the case in 2017, when the political climate had already turned hostile for the RJD. Eight years later, the charges are being framed—just as Bihar's electoral battle heats up and Tejashwi Yadav emerges as the Opposition's chief ministerial face.

Lalu's time as railway minister had, in fact, earned him national and international acclaim. He had transformed the railways from a loss-making enterprise into a model of turnaround management, drawing praise even from institutions like Harvard. His innovations, such as automatic berth upgrades and better utilisation of rolling stock, became case studies in governance. The CBI probe, therefore, was not triggered by any glaring irregularity, but by political winds that were turning against him. Lalu Yadav is no stranger to legal battles. Ironically, it was during his tenure as Bihar's chief minister in the nineties that the infamous fodder scam was first unearthed—only for him to later be accused of benefitting from it. He paid a heavy political price, spending years in prison and effectively ceding power to others. Yet, his popularity among the state's underprivileged and backward classes has endured. His uncompromising stand against the BJP—particularly his decision to arrest L.K. Advani during the 1990 Rath Yatra—still rankles the ruling party.

> *The RJD leadership has chosen the correct course by deciding to face trial, rather than cry foul from the sidelines*

The new case gives the BJP yet another stick to beat the RJD with. The contrast with other politicians, who were swiftly absolved of corruption charges after joining the BJP, is striking. That said, the RJD leadership has chosen the correct course by deciding to face trial, rather than cry foul from the sidelines. If they are indeed innocent, the courts are the best forum to prove it. Ultimately, the people of Bihar—who have seen both Lalu's warts and his wisdom—will make their own judgement. The law must take its course, but justice should not be seen to follow the election calendar.

After the guns fall silent

With Hamas releasing all the remaining 20 living Israeli hostages, the first part of the peace accord has successfully concluded. What stands out is that despite the unimaginable suffering in Gaza—where people have died from bombings, hunger and disease—the hostages were reportedly and manifestly treated with a measure of care during their two years of captivity. That fact alone is a faint reminder that even amid conflict, a spark of humanity can survive. The accord itself has been hailed as a triumph of diplomacy. US President Donald Trump, its chief architect, has proclaimed that the Israel–Hamas war is over. The question, however, is what comes next. The world watches with cautious hope, aware that peace built on pain can crumble overnight. To their credit, Egypt, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and several other regional powers also played constructive roles in securing this fragile peace. Yet the challenges that lie ahead are monumental.

Over the last two years, Gaza has unfortunately been reduced to rubble. More than 65,000 civilians, many of them children, have been killed, and almost every hospital, school, and power line has been destroyed. The people of Gaza are struggling to find food, medicines, and shelter. Even today, Israeli forces have been accused of obstructing convoys carrying relief materials into the enclave on one pretext or another. Unless this blockade is lifted forthwith and humanitarian agencies are given unhindered access, peace will remain an empty phrase. Immediate relief must be followed by sustained rehabilitation. Estimates suggest that at least 20 billion US dollars will be required to rebuild Gaza—a figure that underscores both the enormity of the devastation and the need for international cooperation. The United Nations must take the lead in coordinating this effort, ensuring that reconstruction does not become another political bargaining chip. The world owes it to the people of Gaza to help them rebuild a life of dignity in their own homeland.

But the harder task lies in rebuilding trust. The second phase of the accord must focus on winning back the confidence of ordinary Palestinians and Israelis. The world has seen this story before: the Oslo Accord, brokered by President Bill Clinton, ended in tragedy with the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and the collapse of hope. Even today, hardliners on both sides remain capable of derailing peace. In Israel, there are voices that openly advocate the elimination of Palestinians. Among Hamas, there are extremists who refuse to coexist with Israel. Both are enemies of reconciliation. True, Trump's family and advisers worked tirelessly behind the scenes. But peace will endure only if Gaza is not treated as a real estate project but as a homeland for a people who have suffered enough.



Guest Column

RAJIV DOGRA

Durand's Curse and the long wait for Pakhtoonistan

Afghans would like to live life on their own terms but will Pak allow them to live by their code? Sadly, Pak has never made that effort

Monsters do not get reflected in mirrors. But if by some miracle they did, Afghans would see in their mirror a whole line-up of tormentors. From Alexander to the Soviets, Americans and Pakistanis, each one of them has treated Afghanistan and its people shabbily. In every case, Afghans have fought them stoically. And from each invading force, they have earned the greatest praise for their grit.

A Russian general said in 1987, "Pashtuns are the bravest people ever born on the earth; these people can't be defeated by force." An American general echoed this sentiment in 2004: "We are fighting a meaningless war against rocks."

Such praise may sound heroic, but it has condemned Afghans to a near-constant state of war even in the few moments they are at peace. The result is one long carnival of blood.

Among the many reasons for their misfortunes in the previous centuries was their strategic location as a passage for invading armies on their way to loot India. In a reverse defence of sorts, British India fought three futile wars with Afghans in the 19th century to keep the disinterested Russians away from Afghanistan. The first two Anglo-Afghan wars bankrupted the East India Company, making it convenient for Britain to begin its direct rule of India. This marked the beginning of the many Afghan troubles that continue to hound it. Some wars followed, but it wasn't just violence that stalked Afghans; they were tricked too by the British.

In 1893, Mortimer Durand, the foreign secretary of British India, arrived in Kabul to mesmerise the Afghan Amir, Abdur Rahman, into signing a short, seven-paragraph document written on a single sheet of paper. Its script was in English, a language that the Afghan Amir could neither read nor speak. The result of Amir's signature on it was the illegal transfer of 40000 sq miles of Afghan and Baloch lands to what was termed as British India's area of influence.

Once he had the signed document in his hand, Mortimer Durand did not linger in Kabul. Upon returning to India, he said, "The (Pathan) tribes on the Indian side are not to be considered as within British territory."

Later, on Feb 13, 1898, the secretary of state for India, Lord George Hamilton, informed the British House of Commons, "The main object of the Durand Agreement... was to fix the limits of the respective spheres of influence of the two governments."

So, both the principals concerned, Durand in India and Hamilton in Britain, asserted that it was not a border between British India and Afghanistan.

This is how it remained till close to the decision that the British were to take about India's partition and its independence. That's when the British, by another sleight of hand, turned it from the area of influence to the Durand Line. The British intention was to transform it into a border as a gift to Pakistan—the newly carved country it hoped would become Britain's long-term strategic ally in the region. Ever since, no Afghan government has agreed to this arbitrary change.

If Pakistan claims the Durand Line constitutes a natural border, Afghanistan sees it as an illegitimate colonial imposition. Given these two diametrically opposite positions, what does the future hold for Afghanistan, and more particularly for the Pashtuns? Will the scrapping of the Durand Line remain the unfinished agenda of the Pathan complaint against Pakistan?

This is how it might remain. Consequently, the chance of peace or some form of normality coming to the region is slim.

Is there any other way of arranging the dynamics in this region that makes it secure? The chance of that happening seems bleak, but one way of strengthening Afghanistan will be to correct the historical wrong and restore the frontier areas to it. A reduced Pakistan will not be the global menace that it is now. That changed picture is the only hope for tranquillity in the region. Once again, this too is unlikely to happen, and this region will continue to see strife for one reason or another. Unfortunately, this state of instability has led to many migrations out of Afghanistan. Over the course of the last forty years, Afghans have scattered like autumn leaves wherever they were granted refuge. As a result, Afghans have been dispersed so far and wide that they belong everywhere and nowhere. They live there indifferently and uncertainly at the whims of their local hosts. The great majority have migrated to different parts of Pakistan. There they live in slums where they are increasingly being racially profiled and hounded by the security agencies.

This, alas, is the present fate of a proud people.

Otherwise, historically viewed, Pashtuns have lived on their lands without interruption or major migration for about 20,000 years. They know their neighbourhood very well, and their men have been armed to the teeth since the first bow was strung. Their ancient code involves a commitment to hospitality, revenge and the honour of their tribe. The Afghans would like to live life on their own terms, but will Pakistan allow them to live by their code? Unfortunately, Pakistan has never made that effort, ensuring thereby that Afghans continue to tread daily on tricky paths. Pakistan's motivation is land, a piece of Afghanistan that Afghans vow is theirs. This is how it has been since Pakistan came into being, and this is how it may remain.

A point in support is the exchange between Pakistan's first prime minister and the man known as Frontier Gandhi.

On March 5, 1948, Pakistan's prime minister, Liaquat Ali Khan, asked this question in its Constituent Assembly, "Is Pathan the name of a country or that of a community?" Liaquat Ali's question had considerable political significance because it was directed at the great Pakhtoon leader, Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan.

The reply given by Ghaffar Khan was an echo from every Pathan heart: "Pathan is the name of the community, and we will name the country as Pakhtoonistan."

He went on to add, "I may also explain that the people of India used to call us Pathans, and we are called Afghans by the Persians. Our real name is Pakhtoon. We want Pakhtoonistan and want to see all the Pathans on this side of the Durand Line joined and united together in Pakhtoonistan."

That quest for Pakhtoonistan continues.

Former diplomat Rajiv Dogra is an author and frequent public speaker on foreign policy.



Guest Column

DEEPAK SANCHETY

Securities Transactions Tax: An urgent need for reform

The STT was introduced on exchange transactions in securities in 2004. Now, is this tax past its prime, or is there a case for reform?

When the STT was introduced in India through the Finance Act, 2004, it was hailed as a pragmatic solution to enhance compliance and traceability in securities transactions. The stated object was "to simplify tax collection, curb evasion, and streamline the taxation of capital gains". By levying a small tax on transactions executed on recognised stock exchanges, the STT aimed to replace the cumbersome process of tracking capital gains, particularly long-term capital gains (LTCG), which were exempted under the Income Tax Act for STT-paid transactions. A rebate under Section 88E further ensured that the STT did not burden traders excessively, aligning with the parliamentary intent to avoid additional taxation.

Fast forward to 2025, and the landscape of Indian financial markets has transformed dramatically. Digitisation has revolutionised record-keeping, with stock exchanges, brokers, and depositories implementing robust systems for transaction tracking. The mandatory use of PAN, KYC compliance, and dematerialised securities, coupled with Annual Information Returns (AIR) filed by exchanges and brokers, have virtually eliminated concerns about traceability. Every trade is now electronically recorded, leaving an indelible digital footprint.

This begs the question: does the STT still serve its original purpose, or has it become an outdated levy in a modern trading ecosystem? The case against the STT is gaining traction, notably through a recent Special Leave Petition (SLP) filed by a trader, Aseem Juneja, in the Supreme Court, challenging its constitutional validity. The STT, which contributes a mere 2% to the Income Tax Department's collections, imposes a disproportionate compliance burden on exchanges, brokers, and traders. Unlike taxes tied to income or profit, the STT is levied on the transaction value, regardless of whether a trader makes a profit or incurs a loss. This feature, critics argue, makes it punitive and arbitrary, potentially violating constitutional guarantees, particularly under Articles 14, 19, and 21. The removal of the Section 88E rebate in 2008 and recent increases in capital gains tax rates have further eroded the original intent of the STT as a non-additive tax. Initially, the rebate ensured that the STT paid could offset income tax liability for traaders, and the exemption of LTCG for the STT-paid transactions softened its impact. However, with the rebate discontinued and capital gains tax rates hiked (notably in Budget 2024), traders and investors now face a dual tax burden: the STT on every transaction and capital gains tax or business income tax on profits. This perceived double taxation has fuelled arguments that the STT unfairly penalises market participation, especially for loss-making trades.

Beyond compliance and fairness, the STT's economic impact on markets is significant. By increasing the cost of transactions, the STT forces traders to operate on higher margins, reducing liquidity and increasing the impact cost of trades. In a highly competitive global financial market, where liquidity is a key driver of efficiency, this additional cost can deter participation, particularly in high-frequency trading and derivatives markets. For a country aiming to position itself as a global financial hub, such frictions could undermine market competitiveness. The government, however, may defend the STT as a legitimate transaction-based tax, distinct from income-based taxes like capital gains. It is likely to argue that Parliament has the authority to impose such levies to ensure market integrity and prevent tax evasion. Yet, with modern surveillance and reporting systems rendering evasion nearly impossible, this justification appears increasingly tenuous. The Supreme Court's response to Juneja's petition could set a precedent, potentially leading to reforms such as reinstating a rebate mechanism or even phasing out the tax entirely (extremely unlikely).

As India's financial markets evolve, the relevance of the STT must be re-evaluated. Its original goals—traceability and compliance—are now adequately addressed by digital infrastructure promoted by the Modi government.

The compliance burden, economic costs, and perceived unfairness outweigh its modest revenue contribution and are squarely against the Ease of Doing Business, so painstakingly promoted by the central government. While the Supreme Court will determine the STT's constitutional validity, policymakers should consider whether this 20-year-old tax today aligns with India's vision of a dynamic, investor-friendly market. Reforming or replacing the STT could enhance market efficiency, boost liquidity, and signal a forward-thinking approach to financial taxation.

The writer is a etired IRS officer and Ex-Chief of Surveillance at SEBI. Advisor to corporates, market participants and tech entrepreneurs.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Entertainment vs Environment

The Bidadi amusement park closure by KSPCB highlights the entertainment industry's environmental impact. Fame cannot justify water wastage or pollution. TV productions must implement eco-friendly measures, proper waste management, and water recycling. Regulatory oversight should be proactive, ensuring compliance. Creative expression should harmonize with ecological responsibility, protecting the planet while entertaining millions.

Gagan Prasad, Tumakuru

UP Bullet Blitz

Operations Langda and Khallas in UP highlight the dangers of policing with excessive force. Twenty encounters in 48 hours, some lethal, risk bypassing due process. Law enforcement must balance action with constitutional rights, ensuring justice without turning police stations into film sets. Quick, dramatic results should not replace measured, lawful policing that respects democracy and human rights.

K. Chidanand Kumar, Bengaluru

Investment Boost

Eli Lilly's $1 billion investment in India, including a Hyderabad center for technology and innovation, promises thousands of jobs. Following the launch of "Monzaro," India is a key market. Such foreign investments strengthen the economy, foster technological growth, and position India globally. With proper support, this initiative can enhance employment opportunities, drive innovation, and consolidate India's role in high-tech pharmaceuticals and research.

Darshan B N, Tumkur University

Unpatriotic Rhetoric

Rahul Gandhi's habit of attacking India overseas shows disregard for national dignity. Internal issues should not be paraded before foreigners. By spreading falsehoods abroad, he insults the very people he seeks to lead.

Sunil Okhade, Indore

Studio Shutdown Needed

KSPCB's closure of Bigg Boss Kannada in Bidadi is justified. Television productions consume massive water and produce tons of waste, often violating environmental laws. Entertainment cannot come at the cost of nature or public health. Production houses must adopt eco-friendly practices, water recycling, and proper waste management, while authorities should enforce regular inspections. Creativity must thrive responsibly, ensuring the planet and civic duty are not compromised.

Bhoomika Shankar, Tumakuru

Bihar Elections

The upcoming elections will be crucial in determining the impact of Prashant Kishor's entry into Bihar politics. When Bihar goes to polls, then that means the eleventh most populous region in the world takes part in an election, as there are more people in Bihar than in Mexico. The Mahagathbandhan is carrying weight but in the wrong direction. In the humdinger, a great amount of transparency is needed. The AIMIM, headed by Asaduddin Owaisi, contesting 100 seats may prove to be a B team of the BJP.

Jayanthi Subramaniam, Mumbai



HASAN ZAIDI

Child Safety Crisis

The Bhiwandi case highlights grave failures in protecting children. NCRB data shows 1,77,335 crimes against children in 2023; many involve close acquaintances. Legal measures like POCSO are insufficiently enforced. Silence and delay allow repeated tragedies. Society must raise its voice and demand strict punishment for offenders, ensuring children can grow safely and courageously. Preventing abuse requires vigilance, accountability, and immediate action.

Kavya K, Tumakuru

Judicial Respect Vital

The attack on CJI B.R. Gavai underscores the dangers of using religion to justify disrespecting institutions. Hinduism's tolerance cannot excuse assaults on constitutional authority. The Prime Minister's condemnation and the Bar Council's suspension of the advocate reflect professional and national repudiation. Citizens must understand that safeguarding religion and upholding constitutional order are not mutually exclusive. Respect for faith must never compromise judicial dignity.

Rajakumar Arulanandham, Tirunelveli