Illogical reasons

Delhi's 'logical discrepancy' flags suggest a design that targets Muslims

That the ECI's SIR of electoral rolls has been flawed by design and tuned to exclude genuine electors rather than ensure their full enrolment is now well established. *The Hindu*'s investigation of Delhi's draft rolls and the names that the ECI flagged as "logical discrepancies" shows that the process is not only exclusionary but also insidious. The arbitrary nature of these "discrepancies", especially those relating to family size, suggests that they were chosen to target communities with higher, though declining, fertility rates, for exclusion. Muslims make up 13.6% of Delhi's draft rolls – in line with the 2011 Census – but accounted for 20.3% of those flagged for "logical discrepancies". This number goes up to 30% for those flagged under the five reasons linked to family size. None of these criteria bears on the eligibility of an elector, who should be an Indian citizen, at least 18, ordinarily resident in the constituency and should not be disqualified under the law. Following *Lal Babu Hussein* (1995), a name on an earlier electoral roll has probative value as evidence of citizenship and cannot be struck off without inquiry. The children an elector has, a parent's age at the elector's birth or name spelling are unconnected; neither the ECI's Manual on Electoral Rolls (2023) nor its SIR of 2002-03 provided for such checks.

When the ECI began the SIR in Bihar, the enrolment and claims and objections phases had their infirmities but there was no direct or indirect discrimination by religion. *The Hindu* estimated that 18.4% of those deleted from Bihar's pre-SIR rolls were Muslims, in line with their population share (17.7%, 2011 Census). But in the SIR's Phase 2 in West Bengal, the ECI introduced the "logical discrepancies" check midway. Electors already on draft rolls were flagged on unexplained criteria with ECINET software rather than the statutory Electoral Registration Officers deciding on who got flagged. The impact was severe – 27 lakh electors were deleted following adjudication by judicial officers, after being flagged overwhelmingly for "logical discrepancies"; 22 lakh appealed but just 1,607 electors were reinstated in time for the vote. By September, nearly 93% of the 1.26 lakh appeals that were decided had restored electors to the rolls – an indication of large-scale disenfranchisement before the vote. A sample-based analysis of those excluded after adjudication estimated a much higher share of Muslims than their population share. The same process has now been carried over to Phase 3, including Delhi, where *The Hindu*'s investigation shows a clear skew against Muslim electors. The Supreme Court must now halt the SIR, as a process built on arbitrary criteria with no basis in electoral law, and which discriminates against specific communities, should not be allowed to firm up electoral rolls.

Drugs and bullets

Punjab is seeing a rise in narcotrafficking and targeted killings

A chemist has been charged with killing anti-drug-trafficking activist Parvinder Singh Jhota after his allegedly illegal drug business came under threat. Separately, social media influencer Mad Sandhu was allegedly the victim of a premeditated, transnational syndicate hit that used interstate escape routes. Both events in Punjab involved digital platforms and both events expose a dire gap in public safety. While Mr. Jhota's alleged murderer was a local chemist, the macro-level drug trade in Punjab is intertwined with gangster networks, with the cross-border drug smuggling known to be a key source of illicit funds. Together with a string of targeted killings of police personnel and local politicians, the incidents depict a Punjab caught between local drug trafficking and citizens resorting to vigilantism and crime syndicates carrying out assassinations with disquieting ease. Some events have also raised suspicions of cross-border support and a demand to involve enforcement agencies. The AIIMS Magnitude of Substance Use in India survey estimated that in 2017-18 – the latest year for which it is available – 1.28% of Punjab's population aged 10-75 years had an opioid dependence, versus 0.26% nationally. NCRB data also recorded 106 drug overdose deaths in 2024 versus 89 in 2023, in Punjab, likely an undercount since attribution depends on medical certification and excludes long-term complications and unhygienic habits associated with drug use.

Punjab's geopolitical location renders it an important entry point and market, with the security apparatus hampered by smugglers using multiple transport modes. The Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime reported in June that India's pharmaceutical and chemicals industries also provide bad actors with ample opportunities to divert controlled substances or precursors for illicit use. The State's 'Yugh Nashian Virudh' campaign of 2025 has also claimed 68,850 arrests of alleged traffickers and the attachment or confiscation of assets valued ₹319 crore. However, cases registered differ from convictions and asset attachment differs from forfeiture. Mr. Jhota's hostile tactics also enjoyed public support, and authorities need to examine why the people are overlooking formal reporting channels. Under its narcotics policy, the State has to reduce the availability of harmful drugs, disrupt wholesale supply chains, identify corrupt facilitators, and expand access to rehabilitative care. Paralleling investigations into the coordination of targeted killings, an anti-trafficking strategy must also probe the financing and logistics of networks, to dismantle institutional collusion, and better protect threatened individuals.

A split verdict, faltering remedies and people's power

In *Dr. Jaya Thakur vs Union of India*, a two-judge Bench of the Supreme Court of India was faced with a challenge to the 2023 law governing the appointment of the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and Election Commissioners (ECs). On September 23, 2026, the Court delivered a split verdict. Justice Dipankar Datta held that, since a Constitution Bench in *Anoop Baranwal* (2023) had settled the constitutional position on the mechanism for selecting the CEC and the ECs, the challenge to the 2023 Act needed to be examined in light of the principles laid down in that judgment. The *Baranwal* approach is simple and straightforward: a committee with executive predominance cannot be entrusted with selecting impartial umpires such as the CEC and the ECs. A three-member committee comprising the Prime Minister and another Union Minister clearly demonstrates such executive predominance.

Therefore, the law governing the selection and appointment of the CEC and the ECs must consciously avoid these vices. Justice Satish Chandra Sharma, however, held that, given the importance of the issues involved, the case should be referred to a larger Constitution Bench. After delivering separate and divergent opinions, the judges also passed a common order expressing their desire for an expeditious hearing of the case by a Constitution Bench.



Kaleeswaram Raj
A lawyer who argued in support of the Petitioners in Anoop Baranwal (2023) and Dr. Jaya Thakur (2026)

Jaya Thakur underscores the limits of judicial intervention and the enduring power of people's movements to defend the Constitution

There will be a further delay

The net result of the present order is that a decision on the validity of the legislation governing the appointment of the CEC and the ECs will take further time. A statute that is, on the face of it, illegitimate and unconstitutional will have an extended lifespan solely because of the reference ordered on the basis of Justice Satish Chandra Sharma's opinion. This law, as it is now evident, envisages a Prime Minister's Committee to select the CEC and the ECs, with the Prime Minister and the Cabinet Minister chosen by him forming two-thirds of the Committee, making the Opposition leader's presence merely ornamental.

Had this Bench struck down the controversial law on its own, it would have radically altered India's electoral and judicial history, particularly at a time when people at large are sceptical of electoral institutions and the electoral process. That did not happen. The legitimacy of the 2023 law and the decisions of the Commission are now being questioned by Opposition parties and others, including the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP). Protests are mounting across the country, with many people calling for the resignation of the Chief Election Commissioner, Gyanesh Kumar.

The impact

This demand has a strong moral basis. However, replacing an individual alone cannot provide a permanent solution to systemic flaws. The Court has failed to take up the issue in time, and the present order referring the matter to a larger Bench in Dr. Jaya Thakur will, in effect, amount to an institutional confession of this failure. The statute that overturns the *Baranwal* principle and grants the CEC and the ECs lifelong immunity for their acts and words while in the office, needs to be repealed. A fresh law that incorporates the principle of a neutral body selecting the CEC and the ECs, thereby ensuring neutral umpires in the Commission, should be put in place. It is equally important to revisit the controversial revision of electoral rolls and undo its consequences.

The order in Dr. Jaya Thakur contains certain political and moral lessons. Although it does not decide the challenge, some of Justice Datta's observations are significant. The judge quoted Dr. B.R. Ambedkar's speech of October 28, 1951: "We also find that the Government servants are influencing the elections in favour of the party which is feeding them and their dependents. No less a personality than Dr. Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, at the inaugural session of the Bhartiya Jan Sangh at Delhi recently, openly charged the Government servants of helping the Congress and thereby nullifying the elections from being free and fair. ..... If Parliamentary Democracy fails in this country and it is bound to fail for the reasons mentioned by me, the only result will be rebellion, anarchy and Communism".

History magnifies and inverts reality, inviting the ruling dispensation, which claims the legacy of Shyama Prasad Mukherjee, to confront its own mirror image. Today, amid institutional capture and what is described as centrally orchestrated mass disenfranchisement, Dr. Ambedkar's warning is all the more relevant.

The split judgment has become controversial for another reason as well. The fact that Justice Satish Chandra Sharma's son has served as an empanelled standing counsel for the Election Commission before the Madhya Pradesh High Court raises the possibility of a conflict of interest.

The judge's failure to disclose this association at any point has invited speculation about the impartiality of the adjudicative process. This shatters the moral and even legal foundation of Justice Sharma's order referring the matter to a Constitution Bench, thereby further delaying a decision on the case. Recently, petitions have been filed in the Court for recalling and nullifying Justice Sharma's order. In *Rupa Ashok Hurra vs Ashok Hurra* (2002), a Constitution Bench had indicated that failure on the part of a judge to disclose his connection with the subject-matter or the parties would vitiate the judgment, warranting a revisit.

The Bangalore Principles of Judicial Conduct state that "a judge shall avoid impropriety and the appearance of impropriety in all of the judge's activities". They also stipulate that "a judge shall not participate in the determination of a case in which any member of the judge's family represents a litigant or is associated in any manner with the case". The Restatement of Values of Judicial Life, adopted by the Court in May 1997, contains similar prohibitions.

Beyond the courts

Now, back to the 2023 law. As the country's history has shown, political struggles can have a larger dimension than judicial proceedings. As regarding the draconian laws, the Terrorist and Disruptive Activities (Prevention) Act (TADA) was allowed to lapse and the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA) was repealed by the Centre, even though they had earlier received the Court's endorsement.

The National Emergency (1975-77) was upheld by the Court in judgments, including the infamous ADM Jabalpur case (1976), which upheld the suspension of fundamental rights. Ultimately, the people voted Mrs. Gandhi's regime out of power in the subsequent election. Likewise, the controversial farm laws were repealed by Parliament in 2021 following massive protests.

In short, a political and moral reading of the split verdict in *Dr. Jaya Thakur* takes us beyond the Court to recognise the Constitution's potential for survival through peaceful people's movements.

India's China+1 lessons lie within its own States

"Don't look at India – look at what's happening with specific States," a veteran investor told these writers in one of 50 interviews with senior industry executives, policymakers and experts for a 2026 study at the East Asian Institute on how global firms are reworking their China+1 plans.

However, the national conversation tends to run the other way. Every few months, someone advises India to study Vietnam's industrial parks, Mexico's nearshoring or Poland's supply chains. Meanwhile, two instructive case studies sit right at home – in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka. Global firms do not choose "India" as a homogenous monolithic edifice. They choose a State, and with it, the land, power supply, approvals, workers and suppliers.

Two States, their approaches

At Sriperumbudur, near Chennai, Foxconn employs tens of thousands of people assembling iPhones. Tata Electronics has expanded at Hosur. In January 2026, the Centre approved projects in Tamil Nadu under its Electronics Components Manufacturing Scheme (ECMS), including mobile-phone enclosure units by Yuzhan Technology, a Foxconn-linked firm, and Tata Electronics. These are commitments rather than finished factories, but they reflect the advantages of an industrial ecosystem that has taken decades to build.

None of this began with China+1. Tamil Nadu invested in technical education, built an automobile and components industry around Chennai, and developed the suppliers, skills and administrative experience that new manufacturers look for. Several investors told us that policy continuity is essential and that commitments must be honoured regardless of political turnover. That is now being tested following the change of government in Tamil Nadu in May 2026. One academic respondent argued that Tamil Nadu would have done well irrespective of China. Its industrial base took four or five decades to build; no announcement of an industrial park or round of subsidies can conjure that up. Karnataka followed a different path. Bengaluru began with software and engineering talent, and not Chennai's automobile base. Foxconn's 300-acre campus at Devanahalli, where women reportedly form about 80% of the workforce, aims to create around 50,000 jobs. Tata Electronics took over Wistron's iPhone plant at Narsapura, in a deal agreed in late 2023, and has grown rapidly since.



P.S. Srinivas
Visiting Research Professor at the East Asian Institute, National University of Singapore



Anisha Sircar
Non-Resident Fellow at the East Asian Institute, National University of Singapore

Karnataka and Tamil Nadu are leading examples of how industrial ecosystems attract global manufacturers

Tamil Nadu faces limits in land, power and labour, and relies on migrant workers from the northern and central States. It is now seeking to move beyond labour-intensive assembly towards more capital-intensive manufacturing and innovation-led exports.

National policy, State-level delivery

National incentives are integral, too. One manufacturer explained the combined effect of tariffs and production-linked incentives (PLI): "If the duty is 20 per cent and I get a PLI of 6 per cent, competitors cannot compete with me. This is working right here." The PLI scheme for large-scale electronics manufacturing ended on March 31, 2026, and the Cabinet approved a successor on July 15. In January, the Centre cleared 22 proposals under the ECMS, worth ₹41,863 crore and expected to create 33,791 direct jobs across eight States. The Centre describes this spread as "geographically balanced industrial growth". In March, the Cabinet approved easing Press Note 3, which introduced curbs in 2020 on investment from countries sharing a land border with India. These measures help attract investment, but whether that investment takes root depends on what individual States can offer. The factory still has to come up somewhere.

Still, Tamil Nadu ranks only fifth in the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade's (DPIIT) data on foreign direct investment (FDI) equity inflows for October 2019 to March 2026, accounting for about 6%. This is behind Maharashtra (31%), Karnataka (21%), Gujarat (15%) and Delhi (13%).

However, DPIIT records FDI against the State in which the receiving company has its head office, rather than where the money is spent. So, the figures tell us little about where factories are being built.

Assembly is only the first step. One electronics executive told us that "very few components are manufactured in India" and that there is still a "huge reliance on China for major parts and supply chains". Backward linkages remain thin. Another respondent said his firm had set a billion-dollar target for sourcing in India but, after two or three years, had managed to source "about 600 million out of that". Such ecosystems cannot be built in a hurry: "Value addition is a process which takes time – it is a four-to-five-year process."

Electronics exports touched about $48 billion in 2025-26, while imports stood at about $116 billion. Although export growth is impressive, the trade gap suggests that India still has considerable ground to cover in component manufacturing. One executive described the exports as "assembled products with 20 per cent inputs in India".

India's industrial divide

Concentration also carries risks. One respondent said growth is "largely happening in the southern and western parts, not in the most populous States such as Bihar, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand".

Spreading subsidies thinly will not, by itself, replicate Tamil Nadu's supplier networks or Karnataka's technical labour pool. The key questions are what these States did to prepare land, train workers, clear approvals, nurture suppliers and retain investors, and which of these measures can be replicated, and what rests on decades of accumulated capacity.

India's China+1 debate keeps looking abroad for a model, even as some of the most instructive factories have been coming up all along on the outskirts of Chennai and Bengaluru.

This article draws on 50 interviews for the EAI Special Report, "India, China, and the 'China+1' Strategies of Global Firms" (September 2026), and on P.S. Srinivas, Frank N. Pieke and Alfred Schipke, "India, China and the China+1 Strategy", Global Policy (2026)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Grand goals, ground reality

On completing 25 years in power, the Prime Minister has set ambitious goals: making India one of the world's three largest economies, venturing into space, achieving Atmanirbhar Bharat, turning India into a global manufacturing hub and hosting the Olympics. The new slogan is "We can do it". We certainly can. But these goals do little to address the immediate concerns of ordinary citizens. While economic growth has created billionaires and numerous multimillionaires, it has failed to ease the common man's daily struggles. With space opening up to private players, public resources could further enrich them, while the common man will have to be content watching rockets being launched. Atmanirbhar Bharat remains an aspiration, with India still dependent on China for critical imports. The ambition to become a global manufacturing hub is welcome, but industrial growth has yet to generate adequate employment or move decisively beyond assembly to domestic production. Hosting the Olympics, too, seems misplaced when millions struggle to access basic necessities. A leader's greatness should be measured not merely by years in office or grand ambitions, but by how many people are freed from material hardship.

A.G. Rajmohan,
Anantapur, Andhra Pradesh

Protest grounds

It is a calculated move to say citizens may protest anywhere, as long as nobody in power will hear them. Jantar Mantar mattered because it sat near Parliament, and its replacements are four, 13 and 15 kilometres away (October 13). Distance alone might be defended, but the details are worse. Ramlila Maidan, the nearest, reportedly has just three dates, all in the last week of December, with an initial booking cost of over ₹1.21 lakh. Jantar Mantar had no comparable fee. A right to protest that must be booked months ahead and paid for in lakhs is a right for the well-funded, not the aggrieved. Students, farmers and workers protest because they have little, and they cannot buy their way to a hearing. Call it an order on venues if you like. In effect, it prices dissent out of the capital, then points to the fine print to say nothing was banned.

Yashvi Patel,
Anand, Gujarat

The gaps in health care

Modern medicine increasingly suffers from a "tunnel vision" approach. The result is fragmented care, where prescriptions are issued in isolation. Equally troubling is the growing reliance on lab reports, with doctors rarely examining patients. Strengthening primary health care, expanding geriatric medicine and fostering communication among specialists can restore trust and safety.

H.N. Ramakrishna,
Bengaluru

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

Satyagraha for Constitution-as-commons



Kalpana Kannabiran

Advanced Fellow, Vienna Centre for Advanced Studies, University of Vienna. Views expressed are personal

The events unfolding on the streets of India signal the emergence of a new language of citizenship and a new language of the Constitution. This has been in the making over the past decade and a half. It has taken its time as fashioning a new language and grammar of justice is a process that has to distil public anger against the criminal dispossession by this government. The public face of criminal dispossession brazenly glares down at us: from dwellings and homes, savings, education, and now voting rights.

This is the time when it all comes together – through the fearless confrontation of young protesters with a disproportionately weaponised police; when only those political leaders, who are out on the streets engaging with the armed state in the same manner in which these (extra)ordinary protestors are, retain public credibility and legitimacy; when lawyers preparing to defend resisters (and themselves) know that they will be huddled into vans and booked for practising their profession. This is the time when self-styled monarchs who took possession of their seats of power, grabbed through a daylight robbery of votes, can no longer sit on them, but instead hide behind them, cowering in fear.

This is also the time when judges repeat endless platitudes about how the only protests deserving of judicial attention are 'lawful protests', and assert meekly (within the enclosure of the court) that they are bound by 'judicial discipline' in considering the lawful right to bail for prisoners such as Umar Khalid and Sharjeel Imam. They make this assertion without stopping to reflect on the unlawful mayhem let loose by the 'rulers' against whom 'lawful protest' is an oxymoron. How does one 'lawfully' challenge the government's politics of maiming, when what has been maimed is the law and courts? To protest is unlawful under authoritarianism; it is lawful in a constitutional democracy. The ruling *diktat* has labelled the common citizen as an *andolanjeevi* – a new extra-statutory category of criminal – who stands accused of the crime of being a citizen who knows their rights. That judges and courts fail to redefine the fundamental meaning of 'judicial discipline' and 'lawful public action' at a time when the Constitution is under siege is tragic.

The resisters out on the streets today are those who hold Gandhi's talisman and Ambedkar's Preamble in their fight to restore to the people of this country control over their lives

Duty to the nation

This is the country where satyagraha was born and takes new forms at different times. We have now reached a turning point as a country. This fire in our belly must be quelled; not through the use of pellet guns, lathis, and courtly intimidations, but through peaceful protest. It is our birthright.

The Constitution is our commons. It provides the normative ethical framework for citizenship and shared humanity. It speaks to a just future that guarantees dignity, self-respect, autonomy and solidarity while being mindful of discrimination and structural violence, that must be eliminated. Dignity and shared humanity lie at its core – a guarantee of citizenship as birthright. This idea of the 'Constitution-as-commons' helps in bridging different pathways to imagine an idea of justice. In elaborating on this, we need to bring together popular imaginations of justice that we see opening out before us, predicated on the constitutional convivialities made possible by this popular uprising and its precursors.

Courts and judges need to understand this 'constitutional jurisprudence from the streets' and its interpretive methods through a welcoming acknowledgement of the pedagogic import of this collective constitutionalism. This shift in the country has been nothing short of a glimpse at a utopia; therefore, it is important, theoretically and politically, to trace the contours of this possibility – not just for India, but through the Indian experience for a more holistic, pluriversal understanding, without losing sight of the fact that justice is always spatially rooted. That space is now no longer the reductionist enclosure of the court, nor even the fortified monument that is Parliament, but the 'outside'. The streets, under the open skies, is where the Constitution resides today.

Conviviality and the cultural politics of care, as the conscientious resisters demonstrate to us today, can only be located in the context of civic resistance against state violence in India. This politics of care, of which protest and resistance is part, challenges crimes by the state. The resisters out on the streets today are those who hold Gandhi's talisman and Ambedkar's Preamble in their fight to restore to the people of this country control over their lives.

The myth of 'unskilled' labour



Vasudevan Mukunth

According to the Safe in India Foundation, unskilled workers earning under ₹8,000 a month in the automotive sector lost 2.27 fingers per accident on average in 2024 versus 1.54 fingers for skilled workers earning more than ₹20,000. Earlier this year, thousands of industrial workers protested their stagnant wages across Noida and New Delhi. The Uttar Pradesh government responded by giving 'unskilled' workers an interim hike of ₹13,690 a month and 'skilled' workers ₹16,868, despite both groups facing the same inflation.

Based on assessing migrant labourers in Keralam's construction and hospitality sectors, the International Institute of Migration and Development, Thiruvananthapuram, has estimated that 'unskilled' workers experienced 40% more wage theft than skilled workers. Factories often use the label 'unskilled' to justify withholding annual increments, health benefits, and safety training. The Safe in India Foundation report attributed the higher severe injury rate among 'unskilled' workers to employers often tasking such workers with operating dangerous power press machines without adequate training or safety measures. Contractors likewise deny construction workers personal protective equipment and often deny the final month's pay knowing labourers lack legal recourse, and exclude sanitation workers from safety protocols in hazardous occupations.

In fact, the 'unskilled' status is one the state sustains rather than what naturally arises in society. Across sectors, supposedly 'unskilled' workers are expected to have skills such as handling construction materials, coordinating physical work, identifying defects or irregularities in finished products, using hand and power tools effectively, aligning and placing materials accurately, maintaining tolerances during repetitive production, troubleshooting routine production issues, responding appropriately to process issues, carefully handling human waste, working safely in confined spaces, and recognising hazardous gases and other dangerous conditions, among many others.

The 'unskilled' status is one the state sustains rather than what naturally arises in society

Stratified labour market

'Skill' in India has become an occupational as well as a social category: workers may acquire a considerable amount of embodied knowledge through experience yet remain 'unskilled' in the eyes of institutions because they lack the formal credentials used to recognise, and pay for, skill. India's labour market also remains stratified along caste, class, gender, and, increasingly, migration lines, influencing which forms of labour are considered 'skilled', and so remunerative. The informalisation of jobs – such as municipal corporations hiring contractors to hire sanitation workers on contracts – has also weakened the relationship between competence and occupational status. Ultimately, economic production is sustained on the engagement of millions of workers whose job security it fails to improve.

The Code on Wages requires governments to account for a worker's skill level when fixing minimum wages, together with geographical area, whether the work is arduous or hazardous, and so on. The wage schedules of the Union government then assign floors for workers performing otherwise comparable work. In agriculture, thus, the daily rates in September were ₹528 for unskilled work, ₹578 for semi-skilled work, ₹627 for skilled work, and ₹694 for highly skilled work (in urban centres with the highest costs of living).

Per the government, 'unskilled' agricultural work encompasses weeding and manually watering crops and requires 'only' physical effort and no training or judgment. 'Highly skilled' work, however, demands advanced technical expertise, like calibrating a combine harvester or managing pest outbreaks. But weeding and irrigation also involve learned techniques such as identifying weeds, assessing soil conditions, using tools without damaging plants, and planning work according to weather conditions.

Yet the way India classifies skills, compounded by its preference for institutional recognition, disproportionately concentrates 'unskilled' workers in informal jobs. And the classification is self-reinforcing: lower wages reduce workers' ability to obtain institutional qualifications or avoid precarious employment while precarious employment makes employers less inclined to invest in their workers' training and safety.

mukunth.v@thehindu.co.in

What 107 innings reveal about the Smriti-Shafali opening pair

In their last 15 innings, Shafali's strike rate exceeded 170 and Mandhana's 150, career highs over any 15-innings stretch

DATA POINT

Kapil Gupta

India's new T20I captain Smriti Mandhana and vice-captain Shafali Verma have added 4,080 runs together as openers, 50% more than any other pair in women's T20Is.

On October 6, Smriti was named India's white-ball captain and Shafali her deputy in T20 Internationals (T20Is). India's two leaders are also its openers.

When India meets Zimbabwe in Raipur from October 16, they will face the first ball together. Their partnership is already the most productive in the format. Ball-by-ball data for every women's T20I till October 7 show that in 107 innings since 2019, the two have added 4,080 runs for the first wicket, averaging 39.2 runs per dismissal at 8.34 runs an over.

Australia's Alyssa Healy and Beth Mooney are second with 2,715 runs in 84 innings; the UAE's Esha Oza and Theertha Satish third with 2,588.

The Indian pair also has 32 stands of 50 or more, 12 more than any other pair, and a shared-record six century stands.

The lead is recent: the Indian line steepens from 2025, just as the Australian one stops **(Chart 1)**.

Quick and reliable

Chart 2 compares the 31 opening pairs with at least 20 innings together. A typical pair averages 26 runs per dismissal at under seven an over.

Among the 10 pairs with 1,000-plus runs, none scores faster. England's Danni Wyatt and Sophia Dunkley come closest (8.23 an over) but average 28; South Africa's Laura Wolvaardt and Tazmin Brits average 44.4 but score at 6.85. Only Oman's pair, over just 20 innings, is ahead on both counts. The pairing has changed Smriti too: with Mithali Raj, she opened at 7.07 an over; with Shafali, 8.34.

A pair can average more by surviving longer or by scoring faster. The Indian pair lasts 28 balls per wicket against 25 for other established pairs, but scores over one and a half runs an over faster **(Table 1)**. Of their 11 extra runs per wicket, about seven come from speed and four from staying in longer.

The gap is sharpest in the powerplay: 8.4 an over against 5.8 for other openers, about 15 extra runs in six overs, with boundaries off 22.7% of balls, twice the rate of others. Survival barely differs: 26% of their stands last six overs, against 23%. Bowlers dismiss them as often as any good pair; they just cannot stop the runs first.

After a dip in 2023, when they scored at 7.04 an over, the pair has averaged 48 runs an innings at 9.27 an over since January 2025, against 34 at 7.91 before **(Chart 3)**. Their 973 runs in 2026 are the most in any year.

India won 60 of the 100 completed matches in which this pair opened, but their results varied sharply with the size of the opening stand. When the pair added fewer than 20 runs, India won 51% of matches; for stands of 20-49, the figure was 50%. But once they crossed 50, India won 24 of 29 matches (83%). Until the stand reaches 50, India's win rate barely shifts; beyond it, their chances improve sharply.

Added responsibilities

The appointment puts India's most crucial phase in the hands of its leaders, but carries a risk. In 18% of their innings together, both fell for under 15, leaving India without its captain and vice-captain early. Yet in 65% of innings, at least one scored 30 or more.

Both are currently scoring faster than ever. In their last 15 innings, Shafali's strike rate exceeded 170 and Mandhana's 150, career highs over any 15-innings stretch. The Zimbabwe series will show whether leadership changes their tempo.

Partnership goals

The data for the charts were sourced from Cricsheet (cricsheet.org) ball-by-ball records of women's T20 Internationals till October 7. Run rates use legal deliveries. Win figures exclude ties and no-results

Kapil Gupta is an Assistant Professor of Decision Sciences and Operations Management at IIM Kozhikode



CHART 1: Cumulative opening partnership runs over time for the six most prolific pairs in women's T20Is. Each step represents a partnership

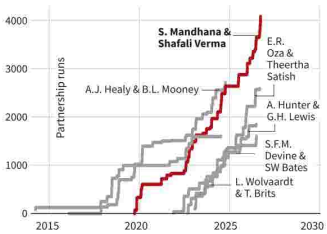


CHART 3: Opening-partnership runs by calendar year, alongside the scoring rate and number of innings. Blue bars represent 2025 and 2026 (through October 7)

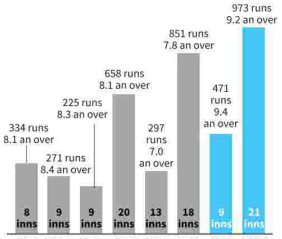


CHART 2: Runs per dismissal versus runs per over. Each circle represents an opening pair with at least 20 innings together. Circle size indicates total runs, while the axes show average runs per dismissal and runs per over. Dashed lines mark the typical pair

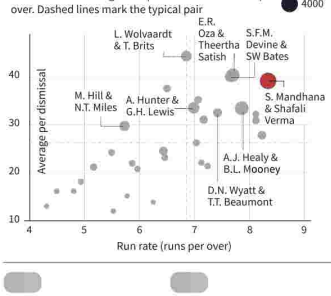


TABLE 1: Comparison of the Smriti-Shafali partnership with other established opening pairs, covering balls faced per wicket, scoring rate and runs per dismissal

Measure	Smriti-Shafali	Other openers
Whole partnership		
Balls faced per wicket	28.2	25.2
Runs per over	8.34	6.79
Runs per dismissal	39.2	28.5
Powerplay (first six overs)		
Powerplay runs per over	8.4	5.8
Powerplay balls hit for four or six	22.7%	11.3%
Powerplay dot balls	46.5%	56.7%
Stands still unbroken after six overs	26%	23%

Note: Powerplay figures count only balls bowled while the opening stand was intact. "Other openers" refers to the other 30 pairs with at least 20 innings together for whole-partnership figures, and all other opening pairs for powerplay figures

FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindu.

FIFTY YEARS AGO OCTOBER 15, 1976

'Nobody for President' campaign in U.S.

San Francisco, October 14: The 1976 U.S. Presidential campaign is not all Jimmy Carter, Gerry Ford, television debates and fundraising dinners. There's another candidate nobody has yet seen, not even his supporters.

Confetti and tickertape rain down on an open car as it arrives with nobody in the back seat. Nobody is the evening's speaker. Nobody is introduced.

When the cheering dies away, a set of chattering clockwork teeth is placed on the speaker's lectern and clatters on for three minutes.

This is the "Nobody for President" campaign now going into its final weeks with a coast-to-coast tour starting here and ending up in New York on election day, November 2.

Who is behind it? "Nobody" answers campaign organiser Huge Romney, a former poet who calls himself Wavy Gravy.

"We think the office (of President) is ridiculous", he explained in an interview. "I think nobody should have that much power and I want nobody to run my life."

Mr. Gravy claims that Democratic candidate Jimmy Carter may be a tacit supporter of the "Nobody for President" movement.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO OCTOBER 15, 1926

Imperial Indian mail

As there was no issue dated October 15, 1926, from the issue dated October 14, 1926

The following is from "The Statesman" of the 13th: A new era as regards comfortable and expedient long-distance railway travelling in India will commence next month, when the East Indian Railway Overland mail train will be replaced by a magnificent train, the Imperial Indian Mail, which, with its handsome colour design of Royal blue and gold, will undoubtedly attract admiring attention throughout its journey from Calcutta to Bombay and vice versa.

Two trains, embodying the latest ideas in luxury travel, are being constructed – one by the East Indian Railway in their Carriage and Wagon Workshops at Lillooah, and the other by the Great Indian Peninsula Railway at Matunga.

'The Statesman' understands that the first train will be sent to Bombay in time to convey to Calcutta.

Text&Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Number of households in Rajasthan awaiting tap connections

44 in lakh. Former Rajasthan CM Ashok Gehlot accused the BJP government of failing to implement Jal Jeevan Mission effectively, claiming that 44 lakh households were still awaiting tap water connections. He said work on 90% of drinking water projects had come to a standstill. PTI

India's trade deficit with China from January to Sept.

105.93 in $ billion. India's trade deficit with China crossed $100 billion in the first nine months of this year, even as Indian exports grew by 40%, sustaining their upward momentum amid a continued surge in Chinese exports. PTI

Railway employees for whom bonuses were approved by Cabinet

11 in lakh. Payment of productivity-linked bonus (PLB) to eligible railway employees is made each year before the Durga Puja/Dusshera holidays. "This year also, PLB amount equivalent to 78 days' wages is being paid to about 11.40 lakh non-gazetted Railway employees," the government said. PTI

Amount mobilised by the World Bank for job creation in India

36 in $ billion. The World Bank Group said it has helped mobilise $36 billion over the last four years for development across sectors and to support efforts to boost investment and create jobs. Of this, $9.6 billion was channelled towards micro, small and medium enterprises. PTI

Share of people who lived with mental health struggles

53 in per cent. More than 50% of people waited over a year to seek professional mental health care, while 56.2% reported thoughts of self-harm before accessing care, according to mental healthcare provider Amaya's 'Mental Health Report 2026'. PTI

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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

Why is Spain facing a housing crisis?

How are tourism and investment funds worsening the crisis? Why is Spain struggling to provide affordable housing? How has the housing crisis affected Sánchez's government? What measures has the government proposed to tackle the crisis? What is at stake in Spain's snap election?

EXPLAINER

Sonikka Loganathan

The story so far:

Last month, 87-year-old María del Carmen Abascal was evicted from her home of over seven decades. Her father first rented Abascal's apartment in Madrid's upscale Retiro neighbourhood in 1956. She stayed there under rent control after her parents died. The building changed ownership in 2018, and Abascal was offered the option to buy the unit. Since she couldn't afford it, investment fund Urbagestión bought the unit and raised the rent from 500 euros to 2,650 euros. The fund then lowered the rent to 1,650 euros, but Abascal, who was living on pension funds, still could not afford it.



Voicing concerns: People take part in a protest demanding action to alleviate Spain's housing crisis in Barcelona on October 9. REUTERS

How severe is Spain's housing crisis?

Her eviction sparked tens of thousands of people to protest nationwide over a housing crisis that is crippling the European nation. Hundreds of people set up tents in Madrid's Puerta del Sol plaza, with some camping out there for over a week. They are demanding stronger protections for tenants, lower rents and a ban on investment funds buying property. Protesters say the problem is one of supply and demand – there simply are not enough affordable homes. Rental costs have risen by an average of 84% over the last 10 years, according to property outlet Idealista. The southern city of Malaga has seen an increase of 113%, while Marbella's increase was just under 150%. Average incomes in recent years have failed to keep up with rising costs. According to the National Statistics Institute, the average gross monthly salary in Spain is around 2,460 euros. According to Idealista, in September, a 50-square-metre apartment in Madrid cost about 1,170 euros a month – about half the average income.

The Bank of Spain's latest reports also estimate that the country has a housing shortfall of about 750,000 homes. The bank's deputy governor, Soledad Núñez, said the housing deficit could increase by another 300,000 homes between 2026 and 2028, crossing the one-million mark.

Why is this happening?

Three key issues are worsening the crisis. First, household construction has not been able to keep up with Spain's demographic boom. About 1.2 million new households came about between 2021 and 2025, driven by an increase in migration. But that same period saw fewer than half a million new homes being constructed. The 2009 Eurozone crisis, which followed the 2008 Global Financial Crisis, caused Spain's construction industry to shrink. The COVID-19 pandemic pushed up material costs, and political differences continued to restrict construction initiatives.

Tourism is worsening the problem, as more houses are being used as short-term rentals. Madrid's tenants' union, Sindicato de Inquilinas de Madrid, estimates that over 4 million homes and 400,000 vacation rentals are currently empty.

Spain's Ministry for Consumer Rights ordered the short-term rental platform Airbnb to remove about 66,000 unlicensed listings, but locals say it isn't enough. Limited public housing is also worsening the situation, forcing many young adults to leave their parents' homes only after turning 30 – far older than in other European countries. Spain ranks towards the bottom among countries in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development in terms of government-owned rental properties, which account for less than 2% of the total housing stock. Madrid has only around 10,000 public housing units for its 3.5 million residents.

Investment funds are further exploiting the problem by buying whatever homes and units are available and hiking rents dramatically. Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez's government calls them "vulture funds".

How has the crisis shaken Sánchez's government?

As protests continue to swell, Sánchez presented two emergency measures to tackle the housing crisis, largely aimed at providing tenants with more protections. On October 1, Spain's Congress rejected both proposed decrees, prompting further protests. The defeat showed that Sánchez's socialist government does not have congressional backing. Following the blow, Sánchez called for a snap general election on November 29. The next general election was meant to be held before the end of next summer. Sánchez is hoping to capitalise on public anger over the housing crisis to win votes and maintain his position. His Spanish Socialist Workers' Party is up against the far-right Vox party, the conservative People's Party and the pro-independence Catalan party Junts. If Vox wins, it would be the first time a far-right party has governed Spain since the death of dictator Francisco Franco in 1975.

THE GIST

- Rents in Spain have risen by an average of 84% over the past decade, while the country faces a housing shortfall of about 7,50,000 homes
- A shortage of new homes, the growth of short-term tourist rentals, limited public housing and investment funds driving up rents have worsened the crisis
- After Congress rejected his proposed housing measures, Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez called a snap general election for November 29, hoping to capitalise on public anger over housing

How has the SC strengthened arrest safeguards?

What makes written grounds of arrest mandatory, and what happens if they are not provided?

R.K.Vij

The story so far:

The Supreme Court recently, in *Jaskaran Jeet Singh Deol v. State of Punjab* (September 2026), held that the investigating agency would require permission of the magistrate to re-arrest the accused after his previous arrest was held illegal for the non-supply of the grounds of arrest in writing. It also recommended departmental action for the negligent investigating officer (IO) and change of the IO in the case.

What governs the communication of grounds of arrest?

The genesis of informing the grounds of arrest to a person flows from the Constitutional safeguard provided in Article 21 that no person shall be deprived of his life and personal liberty except according to procedure established by law. Article 22(2) says that every person who is arrested and detained in custody shall be produced before the nearest magistrate within a period of 24 hours of such arrest, excluding the time necessary for the journey from the place of arrest to the court of the magistrate, and no such person shall be detained in custody beyond the said period without the authority of a magistrate.

The Constitutional safeguard is incorporated in Section 50 of the CrPC (now Section 47 of BNSS). Section 47 of BNSS casts a duty on the police officer to communicate the grounds of arrest to an accused person arrested without a warrant. However, neither Article 22(2) of the Constitution nor Section 47 of BNSS specifies the mode of communicating the grounds of arrest to an accused person.

How has the law evolved?

In *Pankaj Bansal v. Union of India & Ors.* (2023), the Supreme Court while dealing with a case of Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002 (PMLA) held that there was no valid reason as to why a written copy of the grounds of arrest could not be provided to the arrestee as a standard procedure without any exception. The court cited two reasons for it. First, in case the grounds of arrest are orally read out to an accused person, those orally stated facts could be disputed in a given case. Second, the accused person may seek legal counsel to avail bail. The court therefore held that furnishing a copy of written grounds of arrest to an accused was mandatory without exception.

This principle was reiterated by the court in *Prabir Purkayastha v. State (NCT of Delhi)* (May 2024) while dealing with a case under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967. It held that communicating the grounds of arrest was not merely a procedural formality but a vital safeguard with the ultimate objective of enabling the arrested person to effectively consult legal aid and be prepared to raise objections in the remand hearing and apply for his/her bail. Also, any breach of Article 22(2) would vitiate the lawfulness of arrest and subsequent remand, and entitle the person to be set at liberty.

However, in *Vihaan Kumar v. State of Haryana and Another* (2025), the court observed that although the ideal mode of communication of grounds of arrest is to provide such grounds in writing, there is no such statutory requirement to do so.

What did the court rule in the Rajesh Mihir Shah case?

The Supreme Court in *Rajesh Mihir Shah v. State of Maharashtra and Another* (2025) held that the constitutional mandate of informing the arrestee of the grounds of arrest is mandatory in all offences under all statutes, including offences under the IPC (now BNS). Second, the grounds of arrest must be communicated in writing to the arrestee in the language he/she understands. Third, in cases where the arresting officer is unable to communicate the grounds of arrest in writing on or soon after arrest, it needs to be done orally. The said grounds of arrest are to be communicated in writing within a reasonable time and in any case at least two hours prior to production of the arrestee for remand proceedings before the magistrate. Fourth, in case of non-compliance, the arrest and subsequent remand would be rendered illegal.

What are the consequences?

The court in the *Jaskaran Jeet Singh Deol* (supra) case said that if the IO still needs to re-arrest an accused for custodial interrogation during investigation, the IO has to file an application before the concerned magistrate for custody, stating the reasons.

The IO would also need to explain the reasons for non-supply of the grounds of arrest to the accused. However, the application could be filed only after furnishing the grounds of arrest to the accused. Also, the application must have the endorsement of the immediate superior authority. It is only after the receipt of such application that the magistrate shall decide the same expeditiously.

Second, the investigation of the case shall be handed over to another officer by the superior authority, and he shall also direct departmental enquiry for the serious lapse of not providing the grounds of arrest in writing to the accused.

Additionally, the High Court may direct payment of compensation as part of the public law remedy for the violation of Article 22(2) of the Constitution, with liberty to the accused to avail his remedy under the private civil law.

(R.K. Vij is a former IPS officer)

THE GIST

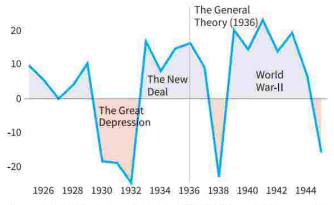
- The Supreme Court ruled that grounds of arrest must be communicated in writing, in a language the accused understands, at least two hours before remand proceedings
- If this safeguard is violated, re-arrest requires the magistrate's permission. The court also called for a change of investigating officer and a departmental inquiry into the lapse

KEYWORD

Economics of growth

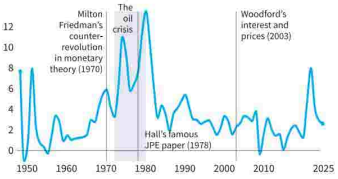
From business cycles to long-run growth, Keynes-Kalecki and orthodox economists differ on the role of demand

Chart 1 (a): The Great Depression and the rise of Keynes-Kalecki
(CAGR of U.S. industrial production, 1925–1945)



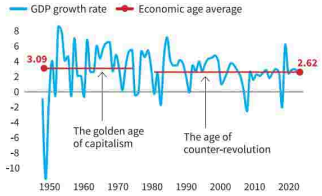
Source: Industrial Production – Total Index (IPB50001SQ), Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System (U.S.) via FRED

Chart 1 (b): Inflation and a monetarist counter-revolution in the U.S.
(1948-2025, CPI annual per cent change from year ago)



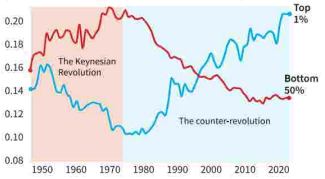
Source: Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers: all items in the U.S. city average, index 1982-1984=100, seasonally adjusted

Chart 2: Long-run trend and business cycles in the U.S.
(Annual growth rates of real GDP, 1945-2025, in %)

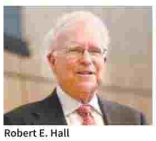


The red lines: CAGR = geometric average, i.e., the constant annual rate that compounds to the same cumulative real GDP change over the phase: 1945-1973 (3.09%) and 1980-2025 (2.62%).
Source: Authors' calculations. Federal Reserve Economic Data, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis

Chart 3: Economic ideas are not class agnostic
(Ratio of class-wise pre-tax income to total income)



Source: World Inequality Database

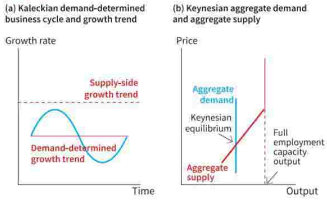

Robert E. Hall


Michael Woodford

Graph 1: Schematic representation of the orthodox framework



Graph 2: Schematic representation of the Keynes-Kalecki framework



Why the debate between Keynesian and orthodox economics matters

Keynes-Kalecki framework holds that demand, particularly private investment, shapes short-term fluctuations and long-term growth, unlike orthodox supply-led approaches; the shift towards inflation targeting coincided with falling wage shares and a greater burden on workers

Rohit Azad
Indranil Chowdhury

Professors Robert E. Hall and Michael Woodford have been awarded the Nobel Prize in Economics this year "for microeconomic foundations of macroeconomic stabilisation". In this piece, we take a longue durée view of macroeconomics to situate their work within the context of political economy. In many ways, the field has come full circle from the days of John Maynard Keynes and Michal Kalecki (henceforth KK)

Economists are products of their times. While KK wrote against the backdrop of the Great Depression, the deepest and longest economic crisis faced by capitalism (Chart 1a), this year's Nobel laureates wrote in the aftermath of the unprecedented inflation of the 1970s (see Chart 1b).

These are two watershed moments in both the history of capitalism and the field of macroeconomics. The former brought the Keynesian revolution (though a misnomer, as Kalecki had an equal part in it), while the latter are part of a counterrevolution to reestablish pre-Keynesian orthodoxy in many ways.

Ideas matter a great deal. The arguments and policy flowing out of the KK framework led to what is considered the golden age of capitalism (1945-1973), a period that recorded the highest sustained growth rates (compare the average growth rates across time in chart 2).

What creates a business cycle?

What is a business cycle? Like a ship navigating the ocean, a capitalist economy moves through ebbs and flows in economic activity. Just as a ship cruises smoothly when the waters are calm, an economy has an underlying long-term trend rate of growth. Both the cycle and the underlying trend rate of growth have been the subject of intense debates in economics. There are two broad poles in this debate – with some variations within each: heterodox and orthodox approaches.

Heterodox approaches hold that demand influences both the cycle and the trend, while orthodox approaches believe demand plays a role in the cycle but not the trend, albeit for different reasons. The Nobel laureates work within the latter tradition, while KK did within the former. Why should the readers bother about these esoteric questions? Because our livelihoods, jobs, cost of living, and much else depend on which side is steering the ship.

Consider the orthodox approach. Before KK, it was believed that in the long run, economies move along full-employment paths with cycles arising from external shocks, which did not require policy interventions from the State. These arguments, however, were built on ad hoc assumptions. In the 1980s, a newer version of this orthodox approach sought to build the framework from the bottom up, moving from micro-foundations to a macroeconomic model. This led to the development of real business cycle (RBC) theory, associated with economists Finn Kydland and Edward Prescott, who won the 2004 Nobel Prize in Economics. The economy functions along the full-employment path, with the trend determined by the growth of the labour force and its productivity (Graph 1(a)). For them, output and labour markets clear in the short run, so even the cyclical movements were caused by the supply side, thereby precluding the possibility of any State intervention.



GETTY IMAGES

Economists such as Hall and Woodford, while keeping the RBC framework intact, argued that economies can fall off the full-employment path if prices do not adjust fast enough to clear the markets. The argument they made was that not all firms change their prices at the same time; some do so in one period, while others in another. As a result, prices do not fully adjust between these periods. If household demand for goods is less than what firms collectively wish to supply (Graph 1(b)), prices may not fall enough to restore equilibrium. The economy then operates at lower levels of demand (recession). The opposite happens if demand is greater than supply (boom with signs of overheating).

If you consider a time period long enough (over a business cycle), on average, the prices would have adjusted fully, in which case demand also adjusts fully to what the firms would like to supply. Demand creates supply in the short run while supply determines the demand in the long run. It is obvious, therefore, that policy is required only for the short run and not the long run.

Demand and long-term growth

The KK tradition is markedly different from this. They argued that demand matters not just in determining the cyclical component of growth but also the underlying trend. Kalecki had famously said, "the long-run trend is but a slowly changing component of a chain of short-period situations; it has no independent entity". If the economy is underemployed through the short run, it remains so in the long run as well (see graph 2 (a)). And if policy changes the short-run equilibrium, it affects the trend rate of growth too.

But even more importantly, their analysis of the short term differs as well. Economies are stuck at below-capacity output or with unemployed workers not because prices and wages are rigid but because capital investment by the capitalists is not enough to employ all those who seek employment. Rigidity of investment, not prices, causes unemployment. In Keynes, prices are not even rigid, let alone being the cause of the business cycle. In Kalecki, they are, but that is not the cause of the shortage of demand. Unless the fall in prices could affect investment, it would have no impact on demand. Demand is vertical in prices (Graph 2(b)).

A fall in prices may in fact have a negative impact on investment through debt defaults, etc. All of this had a profound impact on both understanding the workings of a capitalist economy as well as policy prescriptions.

Economists are products of their times. While KK wrote against the backdrop of the Great Depression, the deepest economic crisis faced by capitalism, this year's Nobel laureates wrote in the aftermath of unprecedented inflation of the 1970s

Non-neutrality of money

Having looked at their understanding of how capitalism functions, consider their take on policy, particularly monetary policy.

Before Keynes, it was believed that money could not affect the 'real' economy, i.e., it was neutral in its impact on output. It was believed that a larger pool of money would chase the same amount of goods, which simply leads to a rise in their prices. The role of monetary policy, therefore, was to stabilise prices. The New Keynesian Model (NKM) agrees that this is indeed the case in the long run; however, in the short run, since prices are sticky, a rise in the money supply increases real balances in the hands of households, who increase their consumption, thereby making money non-neutral. But this holds only in the short run. While money is non-neutral in the short run, the primary role of monetary policy nevertheless is to stabilise inflation. No wonder that this policy approach is called inflation targeting. The KK framework, on the other hand, did not believe that money leads to inflation. Given that the ebbs in activity were caused by a lack of adequate private investment, their policy recommendations foregrounded policies which increased the level of activity directly, i.e., through fiscal intervention by the State. If private investment is not coming through, public investment fills the gap.

As for monetary policy, it mostly played a second fiddle to fiscal policy in their framework. Monetary policy on its own may not work because it is an indirect route of increasing private investment by decreasing the cost of loans. KK believed that low investment is because the demand for the products the factories produce is low, so a mere fall in the cost of loans will not reverse the 'animal spirits' of the capitalists.

Class politics of inflation

All of this is not just a theoretical debate. While the Keynesian revolution improved the lot of the workers on the whole, the monetarist counter-revolution has made them the scapegoats in this fight against inflation, which we have written about in these columns earlier. It is not surprising that the wage shares were rising during the KK years and a reversal has taken place since the RBC counterrevolution took hold over the discipline (Chart 3). Economic frameworks and policy prescriptions, therefore, are not, and can never be, class agnostic.

(The authors are a part of the DevMac (Development Macroeconomics) network, which seeks pluralism in Economics)



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

S. Upendran

What is the meaning and origin of the idiom "to live the life of Riley"? (K. R. Manohara, Chitragupta)

When you say that somebody is "living" or "leading the life of Riley", what you are implying is that he/she is leading a very comfortable life. He/she is leading the kind of life that all of us wish we had – a life where one doesn't have to work hard or spend sleepless nights worrying about making ends meet. When you lead the life of Riley, you lead a very "cushy" life.

While Prabha worked all day, Sunil stayed home living the life of Riley.

What is the origin of this expression? Well, no one is really sure as to who this Riley was. Some scholars argue that this Riley (originally spelt "Reilly") referred to the character that appeared in a song written by Pat Rooney in 1890. In the song, Riley says if he ever became the President of the US then "New York" would "swim in wine when the White House and Capitol are mine." It tells you something about the kind of President he would have made, doesn't it? Some others argue that it was an American poet by the name of James Whitcomb Riley who gave rise to this idiom. Apparently, Riley (1849-1916) wrote sentimental poems about young boys, which were very popular during his time. The poems told the stories of young boys lazing around during the summer without a care in the world – wandering about barefoot, swimming in the river, and fishing.

What is the meaning of "sixth sense"? (T. Srinivas, Siddipet)

Sometimes when you get up in the morning you have a feeling that you are going to have a really bad day. There may not be any logical explanation why you feel this way. You just have this strange feeling and, funnily enough, you end up having a perfectly lousy day. This intuitive feeling that you sometimes have that tells you that something good or bad is going to happen is your "sixth sense". We all have five senses – taste, hearing, sight, smell, and touch. This sixth sense cannot be explained by the other five senses; it is something that cannot be explained by logic. Here are a few examples.

Atul's sixth sense warned him not to trust his new lawyer.

Prem's sixth sense told him that something bad was going to happen.

The expression means the same thing as "gut reaction" or "gut feeling". Your gut feeling about something is your personal or intuitive feeling about something. For example,

Satish had a gut feeling that he was going to get some bad news.

What should a sign say? "No admission" or "No admittance"? (G.K.S. Kandasubramanian, Sivaganga)

Both are correct. When you find these signs on a door, what they imply is that you do not have the right to enter. Of the two, "admittance" is the more formal. It stresses on the physical act of entering the premises. "Admission", on the other hand, is far less formal and has several different meanings. For example, we talk about "admission to a club or university". Here the focus is not on the physical act of entering the university or the club, but in the general sense of participating with others. Admission gives you the right to join others and participate in an event/programme.

Published in The Hindu on April 9, 2002

Word of the day

Mendacity:
the tendency to be untruthful

Synonyms: lie, falsehood, fabrication

Usage: *The politician was known for his mendacity.*

Pronunciation: newsth.live/mendacity

International Phonetic Alphabet: /mɛnˈdæsəti/

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

Old doubts linger, yet new Microsoft quantum chip raises the stakes

Not everyone is convinced Microsoft learnt the bigger lesson from its experience with announcing the Majorana 1 chip; University of Pittsburgh professor Sergey Frolov has said Microsoft's previous record has left him unwilling to treat the new work as resting on a well-understood foundation

Vasudevan Mukunth

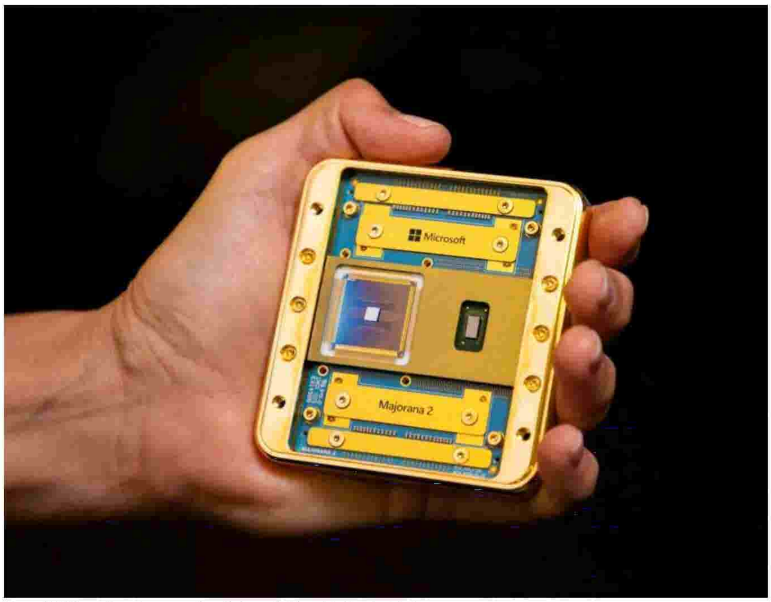
In February, the Microsoft Quantum research group announced a new kind of computer processor called Majorana 1. According to the tech giant, the processor contained the world's first topological qubits, built with a new material it called a 'topoconductor'. Majorana 1 contained eight qubits, with Microsoft Quantum saying it would in future hold a million.

The group published its paper in *Nature* the same day, and that stoked the early concerns about what Microsoft Quantum had actually demonstrated.

Foremost, the paper was considerably more circumspect than Microsoft's press release. The researchers had built devices made of indium-arsenide-aluminium and discussed a way to measure, in a 'single shot', the parity of an electronic state, i.e. whether the number of electrons was odd or even in the state, in the wire.

The team called this measurement a "necessary ingredient" for a highly sought after form of quantum computing.

However, there was a significant gap between the scopes of the paper and of the press release, prompting concerns in the scientific community that Microsoft was trying to lay claim to a commercially lucrative technology without first proving that it actually worked.



Microsoft's Majorana 2 quantum computing chip is seen in this undated handout photo. MICROSOFT/REUTERS

Zero modes

Quantum computing is a new, more powerful form of computing that scientists believe can solve some problems much better than conventional devices can. However, the quantum bits, or qubits, these machines are based on are notoriously fragile.

A qubit stores information in a quantum state, which can be disturbed by even the slightest interactions with stray heat or stray magnetic fields. Another technology called quantum error correction can compensate but not without imposing additional technological hurdles. Many leading quantum computers encode qubits in superconducting circuits, while others use atoms, ions or light. At least on paper, topological quantum computing shows another way.

In this domain, Microsoft Quantum has been trying to build a quantum computer with qubits based on particles called Majorana zero modes (MZMs). Technically, MZMs are 'emergent quasiparticles'. The physicists Sankar Das Sarma, Roman Lutchyn, and Jay Sau had predicted in 2010 that they would occur at the ends of specially engineered superconducting wires.

Two MZMs separated by some space constitute a particular quantum state, and whether that state is occupied or not can encode information, like 0 and 1. This way, each MZM pair stores information in both particles together.

This is less like one half being stored in each particle and more like both particles storing the information together: many small disturbances affecting only one end cannot destroy the information, yet both ends are required to access it. The space between the two MZMs of a pair is crucial to achieve this.

MZMs also follow some strange rules. For example, carrying out one exchange of MZMs and then another can create a different quantum state than performing the same exchange in the reverse order.

Airtight inference

But a big problem today is to ascertain if a device with the necessary superconducting wires and other parts also has MZMs. This is because there are many impostor states that are easier to create but which lack the MZMs' unusual properties. There is no way to directly spot an MZM with some kind of microscope and claim success. Instead, scientists and engineers have to measure the device's properties in different ways, and from that infer the presence of MZMs.

This inference has to be airtight, and the dispute in the Microsoft case is that its inference is not.

The matter is still on, in fact: on June 2 this year, Microsoft Quantum announced a new processor called Majorana 2 and uploaded a new preprint paper. Here, the team replaced aluminium with lead, whose superconducting state is harder to disrupt, to make the desired state more robust. It also switched to a gallium-antimonide substrate and redesigned the semiconductor stack to reduce disorder.

The upgrade was apparently dramatic: in Microsoft's telling, the topological gap – the energy needed to excite the system out of its protected state – had increased from around 30 microelectron-volts to 70 microelectron-volts. The parity switching time had also increased from a few milliseconds to around 20 seconds.

The group presented this as proof of topological quantum computing's promise because the new numbers were indicative of the encoded information being more robustly protected from disturbances. On the back of these reported advances, the company said it would build a scalable quantum computer by 2029 – a significantly shortened deadline considering how complex the technology still is.

Rebuttal and response

However, not everyone is convinced that Microsoft learnt the bigger lesson from last time. As University of Pittsburgh professor Sergey Frolov has said, Microsoft's previous record has left him unwilling to treat the new work as resting on a well-understood foundation.

MZMs are very difficult to create and detect. For example, researchers from TU-Delft in the Netherlands published a paper in *Nature* in 2018 claiming they had spotted MZMs. But it had to be retracted three years later after independent scientists found problems in the data analysis. In its 2025 paper, the Microsoft Quantum team used the topological gap protocol it had presented in a 2023 paper: a way to use electrical conductance data to identify combinations of magnetic field and gate voltage that are consistent with gapped MZMs. The team then used a technique called radio-frequency interferometry to check one region of the device, and where the team said the data had evidence of parity switching.

But at an American Physical Society meeting a month later, scientists remained sceptical. The Microsoft team had demonstrated one measurement on one wire in the paper and itself presented additional measurements of a different kind, but many physicists still had doubts.

Cornell University professor Eun-Ah Kim said the data was quite weak while Argonne National Laboratory physicist Kartiek Agarwal called the paper's claims premature, even if not deserving to be dismissed. Henry Legg, a lecturer at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland, in particular said the headline data came from a small number of measurements on one device. Then, on June 24 this year, *Nature* published a rebuttal by Dr. Legg alongside a response from Microsoft Quantum (physicist Chetan Nayak was the corresponding author). In his rebuttal, based on his own work over the last year, Dr. Legg contended that Microsoft's device itself may not have been qualified to host MZMs, that the underlying data of how electric currents move in the device appeared consistent with a gapless and highly disordered system, and that the topological gap protocol was sensitive, rather than agnostic, to how a researcher chose to analyse the system.

In response, Nayak et al. disputed Dr. Legg's logic and said its claims were based on the radio-frequency measurements, not the protocol.

Many physicists believe Microsoft's attempts are promising and commend its transparency with data. But many physicists also remain unconvinced that the qubits in Majorana 1 and Majorana 2 are working topological qubits.

mukunth.v@thehindu.co.in


A Thai villager paddles a foam float past a flooded home in Ayutthaya on October 6. AFP

Thailand floods villages to save capital, economic hubs

Agence France-Presse

Stilt houses in villages north of Bangkok are no longer high enough to stay dry as authorities in Thailand deliberately flood riverside communities to spare the capital.

Inside the home of Kamonchanok Sathaphonamonwut, raised more than three metres above the ground in Ayutthaya province, her family of three sleeps on makeshift platforms and cannot use the waterlogged toilet.

Her village has been flooded six years in a row, pushing some to move away, while others have raised their houses higher. "Our area simply cannot cope with this much water anymore," the 34-year-old said, wading through her soaked home. But while authorities prioritise protecting Bangkok and other business hubs from floods, "when it comes to our residential communities, they neglect us", she said.

Thailand experiences flooding every year during the monsoon season, and scientists say human-made climate change has made heavy rain and floods more frequent and severe. After devastating floods in 2011, the government expanded embankments, water gates, and other infrastructure to direct water away from Bangkok, the historic city of Ayutthaya, and industrial zones along the Chao Phraya River, which flows through the capital. The defences have largely kept commercial centres safe, but residents of other areas have been left to fend for themselves. Around 20 km from Ayutthaya's centuries-old temple ruins, a UNESCO heritage site, residents say floods that once reached their knees now rise above their heads in some areas and can take several months to recede.

Office worker Kamonchanok has been forced to commute by boat, and hoist her household appliances and other belongings above the waterline. "All we can do is deal with the consequences," she said.

Thai irrigation department spokesperson Thanet Somboon said climate change, low-lying geography, and recently built embankments that altered the natural flow of the Chao Phraya have contributed to more severe flooding of downstream communities. "Even when water is released from the Chao Phraya Dam at the same rate as before, the impact is greater than it used to be," Mr. Thanet said. And after irrigation channels were completely full of diverted water, he said, authorities had "no choice but to discharge the remaining water downstream". But Mr. Thanet acknowledged that officials may need to review infrastructure to "ensure floodwater can be kept within the intended limits".

As flooding in hard-hit districts has become more severe, many who remain have paid to lift their stilt houses higher and keep their living space dry. Ms. Kamonchanok's family raised their home twice in the 1990s, the second time by 1.5 metres.

The government's flagship fix is a $780-million flood diversion canal, designed to carry 1,200 cubic metres of water – around half the volume of an Olympic-size swimming pool – per second around the bottleneck where the Chao Phraya narrows through Ayutthaya. It is expected to be completed by 2030.

Until then, Ms. Kamonchanok said her community was not even demanding an end to intentional flooding, but rather a cap on water levels and financial support for those whose homes sit below the flood line. "All we're asking for is to be able to live comfortably in our own homes," she said ."Why can't they give us that?"

THE SCIENCE QUIZ

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

Movie names that are also scientific concepts

Vasudevan Mukunth

QUESTION 1

In astrophysics, the _____ _____ is the boundary around a black hole beyond which not even light can escape to a distant observer. The film, released in 1997, stars Laurence Fishburne and investigates a spaceship that has mysteriously reappeared near Neptune. Fill in the blanks.

QUESTION 2

Name the effect that describes how extremely small differences in the initial conditions of a system — like water vapour levels, temperature, winds, etc. — can produce drastically different outcomes over time, like a cyclone taking shape or not. In the 2004 film of the same name, a young man is able to travel back in time in a strange way.

QUESTION 3

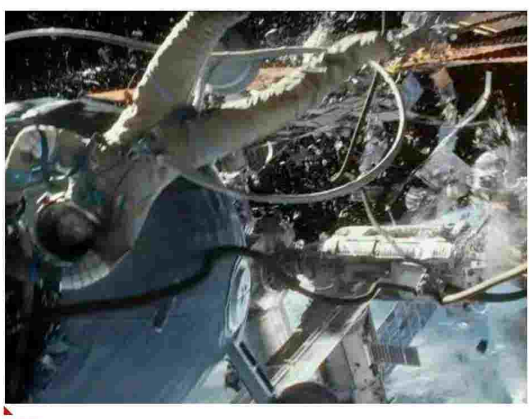
What is the form of energy transferred between two systems because of a temperature difference called? This transfer happens spontaneously and the form can exist only in transit. The 1995 film with this name is considered to be one of the best crime films of all time.

QUESTION 4

A _____ is an arrangement of numbers or other mathematical objects that allows mathematicians to understand systems of equations. They are central to quantum mechanics, computer graphics, and machine learning — just as the turn-of-the-century film of this name is considered a cornerstone of sci-fi filmmaking. Fill in the blank.

QUESTION #5

The 1958 Alfred Hitchcock classic X is centered on some characters' extreme fear of heights, accompanied by the titular condition. In reality, the condition makes a person feel like they are moving when they are not. Name X.


Visual: Name the film in which this nail-biting scene appears. Its director Alfonso Cuarón said he named the film for a physical entity that played a major role in its plot. WARNER BROS./YOUTUBE

Answers to October 13 questions:

1. American physicist who won the physics Nobel Prize twice – **Ans: John Bardeen**
2. Laureate who won the physics Nobel for inventing optical tweezers – **Ans: Arthur Ashkin**
3. Physicist born Maria Skłodowska who named an element after her homeland – **Ans: Marie Curie**
4. Concept for which Hinton and Hopfield won the 2024 Nobel – **Ans: Machine learning**
5. Superconducting device that shows macroscopic quantum tunnelling – **Ans: Josephson junction**

Visual: **IceCube Neutrino Observatory**

First contact
Sheney Muraly | Tamal Biswas | Sadhan Panda | Anmol Agrawal | Krishna Jain

For feedback and suggestions for 'Science', please write to **science@thehindu.co.in** with the subject 'Daily page'

the hindu businessline.
THURSDAY - OCTOBER 15, 2026

PERM challenge

India should turn an impediment into an opportunity

The immediate business impact of the Trump administration's suspension of the Permanent Labour Certification (PERM) process for several major technology companies may be limited. Indian IT services companies have spent years insulating themselves from US immigration policy by increasing local hiring and building larger US-based operations. However, this could alter the movement of talent between India and the US.

PERM is a critical step in the employment-based green-card process. The US Labour Department has suspended the participation of companies including TCS, Infosys, Wipro, HCLTech, Cognizant and Capgemini, as well as Microsoft and Adobe, amid a broader administration scrutiny of foreign-worker programmes. The move does not itself terminate H-1B visas, but it makes the route from temporary skilled-worker status to permanent residency more uncertain. It is only the latest in a series of measures under President Donald Trump to tighten the US skilled-immigration regime, including higher fee for H-1B visas, and moves to eliminate the automatic extension of employment authorisation for foreign workers awaiting renewal.

For decades, the US was the dream destination for ambitious Indian engineers, scientists and technology professionals. Indian talent found opportunities in the world's deepest technology ecosystem, while US companies gained access to a steady pipeline of highly skilled workers. If that door is gradually narrowed, India must ensure that the talent that stays is harnessed to build the next generation of technology. NITI Aayog's report, "Pathways to Progress: Analysis and Insights into India's Innovation Story," identifies the lack of long-term capital as a major constraint on deep-tech development. It notes that India's risk-averse investment environment, limited academia-industry collaboration and inadequate R&D hamper deep-tech startups and commercialisation of breakthrough technologies. India's R&D spending has remained around 0.6-0.7 per cent of GDP for more than a decade, compared with 2.6 per cent in China, 3.4 per cent in the US and 5.3 per cent in South Korea. But there is already a counter-trend. Microsoft has committed $17.5 billion to India, while Amazon plans to invest an additional $13 billion in cloud and AI infrastructure, taking its planned investment to $48 billion. Google too has announced a $15-billion investment. MNCs are expanding global capability centres, creating opportunities beyond traditional outsourcing.

The best-case scenario for India is that tighter US immigration policies create a shortage of STEM talent in US, prompting companies to move high-value work to India. But India must be ready. That entails creating world-class universities, stronger research institutions, patient capital, industry-academia collaboration and an environment where scientists and engineers can experiment without worrying about return on investments. It also means making Indian cities more liveable — to turn any crisis into opportunity.

POCKET

RAVIKANTH

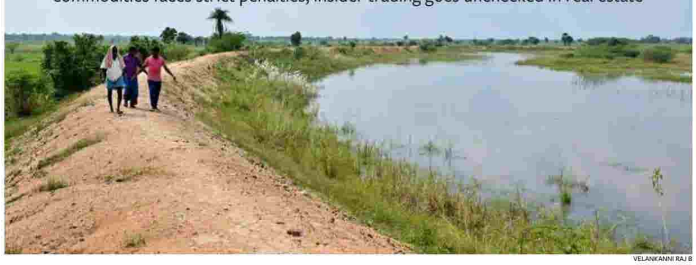




CKG NAIR
V SHUNMUGAM

What about insider trading in land?

UNJUST ENRICHMENT. While market manipulation in stocks and commodities faces strict penalties, insider trading goes unchecked in real estate



VELANKANNI RAJ B

Parandur, an area with paddy fields and lakes near Chennai, was selected in August 2022 for the city's second airport. After that, numerous land deals reportedly took place, driving land prices up two to threefold from 2022 to 2025. However, in August of this year, the new State government cancelled the project. The Assembly debate shifted focus from the airport to farmland and water bodies, with accusations flying between the current and previous ruling parties.

Parandur exemplifies a common pattern: new infrastructure projects like highways, metro lines, airports, or growing capitals often create early beneficiaries, typically those who learn about developments first. In financial markets, using confidential, price-sensitive information before it becomes public is known as insider trading. The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) enforces penalties for such activities under its insider trading regulations.

Real estate law does not include such provisions. Andhra Pradesh's former government prosecuted land buyers in Amaravati, claiming they knew about the capital site beforehand. However, in January 2021, the High Court dismissed the case, stating that insider trading is "totally alien" to the Indian Penal Code. The Supreme Court agreed with this interpretation. Therefore, private land purchases cannot be criminalised without a specific law that addresses them.

Shares are closely monitored, audited, and surveilled, which is why insider trading is detected. In contrast, land lacks such oversight, allowing insiders to quietly accumulate wealth. Commodities are regulated under the Essential Commodities Act and the 1980 anti-black marketing law against hoarding. Land remains the only major asset without such legal protections.

A few decades ago, land was plentiful and inexpensive, with big projects being uncommon. Lawmakers saw no reason to penalise anything beyond *benami* and black money deals. Now, land has become scarce and expensive, making mega projects commonplace. Insider trading in land now undermines public policy, and laws need to be updated.

The burden is on the public. Andhra Pradesh's 2019 three-capital proposal increased land prices across districts, and its reversal had a similar effect. When the government acquires land, it usually pays above the guideline value, allowing insiders to buy cheaply from unsuspecting farmers and pocket the difference. Public funds ultimately benefit private interests.

The bigger prize often lies just beyond a project's limits. Land adjacent to a new airport, expressway interchange, or metro station is rarely bought. However, its value can increase much more than the compensation paid by the State. Many insiders purchase property in that nearby area, not inside the project itself.

The problem is global. A working paper by four economists, including Stanford's Amit Seru, revealed that civil servants in Singapore had a 60 per cent higher likelihood than others to purchase flats close to metro stations that were not yet announced. This trend diminished only when enforcement measures were strengthened.

In India, land is a State subject, but the Centre also has authority. Registration and transfer of non-agricultural property are included in the Concurrent List. Central laws govern corruption, income tax, and money laundering. SEBI's approach provides a useful model: it specifies what constitutes sensitive information, identifies the holders, records their access, and compares trades with these logs.

MODEL CODE OF CONDUCT

The Centre could develop a Model Code of Conduct and encourage States to adopt it. This code should specify project-sensitive information such as site studies, shortlists, draft alignments, station locations, land-use changes, and decisions to halt or modify a project. It should also define a project influence zone, encompassing the site and a surrounding belt, with size adjusted based on the project type — wider for airports or new capitals, narrower for metro stations or highway interchanges. Planning authorities, metro agencies, highway departments, and airport developers should name designated personnel, including decision-makers, officials, consultants, survey firms, and their immediate families.

New infrastructure projects like highways, metro lines, airports, or growing capitals often create early beneficiaries, typically those who learn about developments first

The design should be light-touch. India requires reliable data, collected discreetly, with intervention only in cases of severe violations. Honest buyers and sellers would then have nothing to worry about. Just a few simple measures are enough.

Keep a digital log. Each agency ought to log, with an unalterable timestamp, who viewed which map or file and at what time. If such a record had been available for Parandur, the Assembly might have focused on discussing facts rather than trading accusations.

Observe a quiet period. From the start of a site study until its public announcement, designated persons and their relatives should avoid buying, selling, taking power of attorney, or signing sale agreements in the project's influence zone. The 2013 land acquisition law already halts transactions after the preliminary notification; this freeze should begin even earlier.

Build a real-time land database. Where each registration of any significance includes the buyer's Permanent Account Number and the land parcel number. Over 37 crore parcels are already assigned such numbers. State registration data should be transmitted immediately into State databases connected to a central system. Analytics can detect anomalies like foreign buyers, new companies, chains of power of attorney, and groups within sensitive project areas. Interventions should be triggered only for significant violations.

Take away the gain. If a designated person purchases land during the quiet period and the State later acquires it, compensation should be limited to the purchase price plus interest, with the remaining amount going to the original seller. Most land in the influence zone is never acquired, but if such land is bought during the quiet period and sold within a specified timeframe, any profit should revert to the State. Parliament should amend the Prevention of Corruption Act to criminalise the misuse of such information and include this provision in the money laundering law.

Shorten the secret. Publish the shortlisted sites and draft alignments early, including reasons. Announce cancellations promptly when they are finalised. When information is accessible to everyone, no one gains an advantage. If values keep rising, a betterment levy can return some of the gains to the public.

Some fear this could delay infrastructure projects. However, it will actually accelerate them. Rumours of land deals have strengthened farmers' opposition, with the Parandur protest lasting over a thousand days. India has regained trust in its stock market through discipline, and land management should follow the same approach.

Eliminating insider trading in land doesn't require a stock exchange; it requires a straightforward law, transparent records, and the commitment to enforce them.

The writers are former Director, National Institute of Securities Markets, and Partner, MCQube, respectively

Margin caps on cancer drugs examined

To curb profiteering and ensure fairer prices to patients, the Centre has capped the mark-up in prices

bl.explainer

PT Jyothi Datta

Has the Centre brought down prices of cancer drugs?

Earlier this month, the Centre approved a cap on the margins of non-scheduled anti-cancer drugs, i.e., medicines that are not already under price control. The margins will be limited to 30 per cent of the Maximum Retail Price (MRP), the Department of Pharmaceuticals (DoP) said. This is expected to reduce medicine prices by up to 70 per cent and help cancer patients save ₹2,500 crore annually. A committee of experts under the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS) is finalising the medicines to be covered – and the list is expected anytime now. The final call on the list will be made by the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA). The National List of Essential Medicines (2022) comprises 388 drugs covering 63 anti-cancer drugs.

What triggered this action from the Centre?

The concern over the pricing of cancer medicines is not entirely new. But a recent case on breast cancer drug Ribociclib in Kerala put the spotlight on medicines being priced beyond the affordability of patients. While the lady petitioner passed away during the course of the hearing, the case escalated to the Supreme Court — as civil society groups and others pointed to the inordinate delay with the case being listed 57 times. Parallelly, the apex court raised the issue of mark-ups on cancer and other medicines while hearing petitions filed by advocate Kishan Chand Jain and Dr Sanjay Kulshrestha — seeking regulatory action on the prices of drugs and medical devices.

The court hearings come even as State regulators, including regulatory authorities in Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Karnataka, flag steep mark-ups on medicines and consumables used in hospitals.

Was there data illustrating "profiteering"?

The DoP points to market data that revealed steep mark-ups, and cites the minutes from a recent NPPA meeting: "Analysis of Pharmarack data indicates that non-scheduled anti-cancer drugs carry an average trade mark-up of approximately 170 per cent, with mark-ups of up to 700 per cent in certain cases." The Authority further points to "substantial variations in transaction prices across retail, hospital and e-pharmacy channels, including significant differences in discounts from MRP." "In simple terms, the price rises sharply as the medicine moves through the supply chain before reaching the patient," says the DoP. In India, 60 in a population of one lakh are affected by cancer, it adds, pointing to the burden of out-of-pocket expenses for the patient family. The anti-cancer drugs market includes about 225 drugs and 500 formulations, with an estimated annual turnover of ₹12,500 crore, the NPPA said. Of this, scheduled cancer drugs account for approximately ₹2,250 crore, the rest being non-scheduled drugs.



WORRISOME. The steep rise in cancer drug prices KK MUSTAFAH

Has the Supreme Court asked for similar action on other medicines as well?

At a recent hearing, the Supreme Court judges are reported to have asked why the trade margin caps on cancer drugs could not be extended to other non-scheduled drugs and consumables as well, in patient interest.

Did the Centre take similar action on cancer drugs in the past?

Yes, in February 2019, the NPPA had capped trade margins on 42 selected non-scheduled anti-cancer drugs under Paragraph 19 of the Drugs (Prices Control) Order, 2013.

"That decision reduced MRPs by up to 91 per cent, with reported annual savings of ₹984 crore across 526 brands," the DoP said.

How have pharma companies and hospitals reacted to the Centre's move to cap prices of cancer drugs?

The Indian Pharmaceutical Alliance (representing major domestic drugmakers) pointed out that medicine prices in India were among the lowest in the world, and called for a balance between patient welfare and ensuring adequate margins to channel members.

The Association of Healthcare Providers of India (representing hospitals including major networks) called for an evidence-based approach in these pricing discussions. It said hospitals had high operating costs and capital investments, with operating margins for many hospitals in the 8-12 per cent range. "Labelling hospital pricing as "profiteering" without considering the complete cost structure," it said, presented "an incomplete picture of healthcare delivery."

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.

SEBI on the right track

With reference to "What really protects the small investor?" (October 14), the slew of measures taken by the regulator to protect the small investors in the capital market, enthuse more investor confidence and provide a safety net from the regulatory perspective. As an additional measure, the regulator should aim to recalibrate valuation and pricing of IPOs and the ex-ante disclosures in the offer documents covering the substantial exits by institutional and private equity investors post mandatory lock-in period, to establish a robust investment ecosystem.

Sitaram Popuri
Bengaluru

Fairness in insurance

The editorial 'Unkind cut' (October 14) is well-argued, forceful, and much-needed. The medicare ecosystem in the country, especially the private, corporate sector needs greater regulation and strict watch. This is apparent from the recent reports of pricing of some life-saving medicines. The insurance providers also need to be watched. IRDAI has done well in the recent past trying to rein in the players and their practices. As the edit points out, insurers cannot make the insured pay for the actions (overcharging, etc) of hospitals and service providers. Insurance providers are an integral part of the health service delivery chain and must act in a fair manner.

V Vijaykumar
Pune

Catalysing AI

This refers to 'India isn't a zero in AI' (October 14). The IndiaAI Mission's funding for foundation models is welcome, but it must be matched by dependable access to affordable compute and fair procurement for domestic firms. Government departments and public-sector undertakings could become early customers for Indian language models, giving startups steady revenue. Equally, semiconductor and GPU plans need clear timelines and periodic public reporting. Sovereign models will matter only if they are used widely, and that depends on cost, reliability and trust.

AS Nithish Kumar
Coimbatore

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

BRICS must rejig CBAM

The mechanism should not be rejected completely

Aditya KS
Kiran Kumara TM
Neha Tewari



CBAM. It has a legitimate environmental objective GETTY IMAGES

The recently signed BRICS New Delhi Declaration opposed unilateral, punitive, discriminatory and protectionist measures that are not in line with international law, particularly Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM).

It expressed concern that such measures undermine efforts by countries, specifically the developing countries, aimed at addressing the adverse impacts of climate change, increasing adaptive capacity and resilience. Since then, both political and populist discourse have positioned CBAM as a concept to be completely rejected, which is not entirely true.

HOW CBAM WORKS?

CBAM is based on the principle that if EU producers face a carbon price (which they do under the domestic EU emissions trading system), imported competing goods should face a comparable carbon cost.

Taxing embedded carbon in goods is an approach to internalise the externality; it makes the price of traded goods reflect the embedded carbon (and the harm to the environment), and shifts the equilibrium to lower production or a transition to greener, cleaner production. But imagine what happens if the EU has a domestic carbon tax without a comparable instrument for imports; consumption will continue unabated, and only production will shift to a different country.

If we assume the new country supplying the imports is inefficient in terms of embedded carbon (the most likely scenario), then production may shift to countries with weaker climate policies. In the end, global net carbon emissions will increase, instead of decreasing as a result of the carbon tax. This is called carbon leakage. So, CBAM was introduced to bring parity; legally and institutionally, it is designed to mirror at the border the carbon cost faced by EU producers.

Though the carbon prices at the EU border are the same for all countries, the actual impact would differ. Industries in developed countries have access to climate finance, cheaper green alternatives and a whole ecosystem built around sustainability, all of which seldom exist in a developing country.

CBAM has a legitimate environmental objective, but its unilateral design can convert a climate instrument into a protectionist or developmental burden. Instead of rejecting the idea itself, countries, including BRICS, should negotiate to redesign CBAM, with an emphasis on fair procedures, financial support, technology transfer and revenue sharing.

FAIR TREATMENT

CBAM-like measures should be negotiated through a multilateral process involving developing countries, rather than imposed by individual importing blocs. BRICS and other member countries should have a place at the table where such decisions are made. Agreement should be reached on recognition of domestic carbon adjustment, measurement standards and MRV.

If an importing bloc, such as the EU, imposes a carbon border charge, a substantial share of the proceeds should finance decarbonisation and adaptation in affected developing countries.

This could involve low-cost, long-term loans; open or affordable access to green technologies; joint research and development; technical assistance for monitoring and verification; and recognition of domestic standards and certification systems.

COMMON FRAMEWORK

Finally, BRICS could develop a common framework for measurement, reporting and verification; carbon-intensity databases; mutual recognition of certification; carbon market interoperability; clean technology investment; common industrial benchmarks; and climate finance linked to measurable reductions.

CBAM, therefore, should not be rejected outright, but reformed into a negotiated instrument that aligns climate responsibility with development equity.

Aditya is a Senior Scientist at ICAR- NIAP, New Delhi; Kiran Kumara is Scientist, ICAR-NIAP; Neha is a Research Associate. Views expressed are personal



PAYAL SETH



GETTY IMAGES

Economics Nobel — key takeaways for India

RELEVANT QUESTIONS. Laureates Hall and Woodford showed that expectations steer the economy. India's task is to make sure they rest on accurate data

On Monday, the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences awarded the 2026 Nobel Prize in Economics to Robert E Hall of Stanford University and Michael Woodford of Columbia University for showing how governments and central banks can steady an economy hit by shocks. Consider how the Reserve Bank of India's Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) works. It sets the repo rate, the rate at which the RBI lends to banks overnight.

Since 2019, many floating rate loans have had to be linked to an external benchmark such as the repo rate. It also announces a stance, a signal of where rates are headed: 'accommodative' leans towards cuts, while 'neutral' keeps the options open.

The stance matters because people act on what they expect the central bank to do next. That idea is at the heart of this year's prize. It also raises a question that deserves more attention in India: expectations are built on information, so how good is ours?

The Academy cited the two laureates "for microeconomic foundations of macroeconomic stabilisation". In plain terms, they explained booms, recessions and inflation by starting from how households and firms decide to spend, save and set prices. Hall showed that people spend based on what they expect to earn over time, not just on this month's pay.

Woodford, in interest and prices, built a framework linking household spending, firms' pricing and central bank policy. Its lesson is that economic behaviour depends not only on today's policy, but on what people expect policy to be, which is why central bank credibility and communication matter.

The resulting New Keynesian models are now used by central banks around the world. After the 2008 financial crisis, with interest rates at their lower bound, Woodford argued that explicit statements about future policy could still help. Within a year, the US Federal Reserve, the European Central Bank and the Bank of England were all using such forward guidance.

INFLATION-TARGETING BET

India formally adopted inflation targeting in 2016. The government, in consultation with the RBI, sets a consumer price inflation target of 4 per cent, with a tolerance band of 2 per cent to 6 per cent. In March, that target was renewed until 2031. A six-member MPC sets the repo rate.

The RBI's Quarterly Projection Model, built to support inflation targeting, is a New Keynesian model. Average inflation under the framework has been 4.9per cent, against 6.8 per cent before it.

India stretches the model's assumptions, and Hall's own work offers a clue why. In 1982, he and Frederic Mishkin found that about a fifth of the households in their study lived hand to mouth, spending as they earned. In India, many households borrow outside the banking system altogether: in 2019, 34 per cent of rural household debt was owed to non-institutional lenders such as moneylenders, against 13 per cent in urban India.

Supply shocks add to the strain. Data released on the day of the prize showed retail inflation rising to 5.54 per cent in September from 4.83 per cent in August, with food inflation at 7.74 per cent. Even in the formal system, Nomura estimates that changes in short-term rates take 13-14 months to reach bank lending and deposit rates, and that only about two-thirds of a repo cut reaches rates on outstanding loans.

Expectations can be anchored only if everyone, from households to the RBI, **shares a reliable picture of the economy**

These are often read as reasons to discount the framework here. The opposite is closer to the truth. When rate changes reach people weakly, the RBI's credibility and communication must do more of the work. Expectations matter more here, not less.

THE MISSING LINK

Expectations can be anchored only if everyone, from households to the RBI, shares a reliable picture of the economy. Three gaps stand out. The first is timeliness. GDP for April-June 2026 was released on August 31, two months after the quarter ended.

The second is revisions. In the same round, growth for January-March 2026 was revised up by about three quarters of a percentage point to 8.6per cent. Large revisions change the story after decisions are taken.

The third is coverage. The RBI's survey asking households for numerical inflation expectations covers 19 cities. Rural and semi-urban households are covered by a separate consumer confidence survey. India has made real progress. In February, GDP and the consumer price index moved to newer base years — 2022-23 and 2024. The labour force survey now produces monthly estimates, and the Statistics Ministry publishes a monthly index of services production.

FORWARD GUIDANCE

Three steps would help. First, more high-frequency and State-level indicators so that policymakers can see shocks as they spread. Second, a published revision calendar with clear explanations of why numbers change: forward guidance for statistics. If the RBI can tell markets what to expect from policy, statistical agencies can tell users what to expect from their data. Third, extending the household inflation expectations survey beyond 19 cities.

The next time the MPC changes a word, its power will depend on whether people trust the numbers behind it. Hall and Woodford showed that expectations steer the economy. India's task is to make sure those expectations rest on accurate data.

Payal Seth is the Chief Research Officer at Pahle India Foundation. Views are personal

Biggest tropical carbon sink sees deforestation accelerate

Antony Sguazzin

Trees in Africa's vast Congo Basin are being cut down at a faster rate even as deforestation in other tropical regions slows. The amount of land cleared in the Central African basin in 2025 almost matched tree loss in Latin America and the Caribbean for the first time since the Forest Declaration Assessment produced its first report in 2015.

About 2.43 million hectares (6 million acres) of tropical forest was lost in Africa last year, up 1.4 per cent from the year before.

That compared with 2.54 million hectares in the South and Central American region, which includes the Amazon.

POLITICAL WILL LACKING

The group, which assesses progress in halting deforestation, laid the blame for the persistently high rate in Africa on the uncontrolled expansion of small-scale farming, a lack of political will and inadequate regulation.

There is "increased pressure on land, on resources, from a combination of factors, including population growth, intensive logging, agro-industries, increased mining activities and investment in large infrastructure development," said Samuel Nguiffo, a lawyer who founded Cameroon's Center for Environment and Development.

"There is a deficit in government capacity and in government will to see a change in how the forest is being managed."

The Congo Basin, a region larger than India that stretches across 12 African nations from Cross River in Nigeria to the Rift Valley in East Africa, is the world's second-biggest tropical forest area and its biggest tropical carbon sink. It's vegetation absorbs 600 million tonnes of planet-warming carbon dioxide a year, equivalent to Germany's emissions.



CONGO BASIN. The region larger than India needs a fresh green cover GETTY IMAGES

BIODIVERSE AREAS

It ranks among the world's most-biodiverse areas, boasting 10,000 plant species and forests that provide homes for four species of great apes, as well as forest elephants and okapis — an endangered relative of the giraffe.

"Once gone, the true value of service rendered by the forest to indigenous and local communities, to our national communities in Congo Basin counties and to the whole planet will be better perceived," said Nguiffo on a conference call. "This will be too late."

POOR REGULATIONS

In addition to poor regulations, he pointed to decades of conflict in the region, much of it in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo, that had led to uncontrolled logging. Overall global deforestation fell 15 per cent last year from 2024, with just over 7 million hectares of forest harvested or burnt, an area the size of Ireland.

The area lost declined by almost a third in Latin America and the Caribbean, while in tropical regions of Asia it dropped by 11 per cent to 1.6 million hectares. BLOOMBERG

thehindubusinessline.

TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

October 15, 2006

Sasol ready to invest $6 billion

South African petrochemical major Sasol Ltd has approached the Union Ministry of Coal with a $6 billion (around Rs 27,000 crore) investment proposal for a coal liquefaction project. If the project comes through, it will constitute the largest foreign direct investment in India.

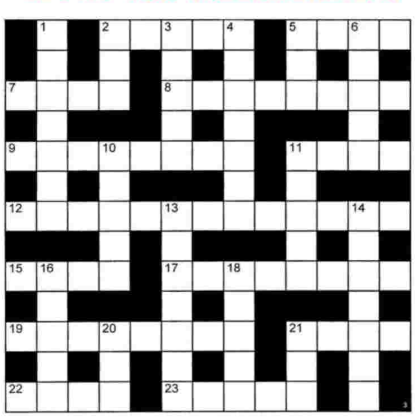
Pact with EU could go beyond FTA

The Trade and Investment Agreement (TIA) that India and the European Union have agreed to negotiate on is likely to go beyond a Free Trade Agreement and take into account various issues such as non-tariff barriers, export of services and movement of professionals between the two trading partners.

Film industry running for insurance cover

Film producers are increasingly reaching out for insurance to protect themselves from losses arising out of accidents at the sets, and starry tantrums. In the past year, regional and documentary makers have also been seeking insurance. United India Insurance, which pioneered film insurance in 1998, has so far insured 130 films. The tally in 2002 stood at 22.

BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2757



EASY

ACROSS

2. Replenishment (3-2)
5. Animal with mane (4)
7. Slotted part receiving staple (4)
8. In a restricted way (8)
9. For twelve months continuously (8)
11. Wife of knight, lord (4)
12. Pilgrimage, wandering (13)
15. Minute (4)
17. Madness (8)
19. Place caring for the sick (8)
21. Look open-mouthed at (4)
22. Pile of material for burning corpse (4)
23. Regal (5)

DOWN

1. Acrobat's swing (7)
2. A gratuity (3)
3. Soldier, Englishman in Australia (5)
4. Model of perfection (7)
5. A card game (3)
6. Lubricated (5)
10. Sounding thin, nasal (5)
11. A dead language (5)
13. To revel noisily (7)
14. Eight-armed cephalopod (7)
16. Tusk material (5)
18. A sudden rushing forth (5)
20. Pastry dish (3)
21. Come together, begin to set (3)

NOT SO EASY

ACROSS

2. A refill showing which way the head should be placed (3-2)
5. As a man of great courage, does he have his pride? (4)
7. Has a coin a staple can latch on to (4)
8. Lawn Rory planted out – but only just (8)
9. For twelve months it will nearly go astray (8)
11. Knight's wife is to be found in the three card trick (4)
12. A wandering Nigerian toper is turned out (13)
15. Very little can be produced at the end of the day (4)
17. Isn't any one responsible for such madness? (8)
19. Those injured are here treated to stop hail forming (8)
21. A peg used to show how far the mouth is open (4)
22. There's some happy release for body committed to its flames (4)
23. A sort of blue blue blood? (5)

DOWN

1. A swing part put up and catching half the breeze (7)
2. A piece of useful information may upset one (3)
3. Monkey with an Englishman when in Australia (5)
4. Model of virtue quietly going to a part of Spain (7)
5. Where to spend a penny on a game of cards? (3)
6. The way an oldie became tipsy (5)
10. Thin-sounding bucks turning up at start of year (5)
11. Thieves' cant, as was spoken in Rome (5)
13. Have a noisy revel with the right kind of Tories (7)
14. One having widespread influence could turn the cops out (7)
16. Dentine is an alternative used in something that clings (5)
18. A witty remark from Sarah, in short (5)
20. A dish made according to the rule-book, one hears (3)
21. It will begin to set a limb upsi

SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2756

ACROSS 1. Discontinued 8. Apposite 9. Fess 11. Nylon 12. Recluse 13. Fast 15. Plus 19. Carnage 20. Lacet 22. Neat 23. Flamingo 24. Enterprising

DOWN 2. Impel 3. Casino 4. Notary 5. Unequal 6. Dispensation 7. Magnificence 10. Act 14. Servant 16. Wax 17. Cellar 18. Clamps 21. Canon

THE INDIAN EXPRESS

Explained

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 15, 2026

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

• TECHNOLOGY

Can makeup beat facial recognition? Conditions apply

Yashee
New Delhi, October 14

ACTOR RICHA Chadha recently shared a makeup tutorial on X, suggesting that protesters concerned about being filmed without their consent could use cosmetics to confuse facial recognition systems. Her suggestions included drawing additional eyes and lips, using coloured patterns on the face and concealing eyebrows. But can makeup really dodge such systems?

How facial recognition works

Broadly, facial recognition involves matching a face with one stored in the system database. Such systems do not simply compare photos pixel by pixel. They use artificial intelligence models to analyse a face and convert its visual characteristics into a numerical representation, often called a face embedding. This is compared with representations stored in a database to determine a likely match. The system learns patterns associated with identity from training data. Makeup can alter the image presented to the model, potentially changing the numerical representation enough to prevent a match. This doesn't necessarily stop the system from detecting that a face is present; it may simply fail to establish whose face it is.

DAZED & CONFUSED

- The CV Dazzle project was inspired by the Dazzle initiative used by the British during World War I, when naval ships were painted in high-contrast colours, and patterns such as stripes and geometric shapes.
- The designs were intended to confuse enemy observers, making them harder to target.

Past research

Chadha's method largely depends on drawing extra eyes and lips to confuse machines, and using colour to alter light and dark patterns of a face.

In 2010, American artist Adam Harvey's CV Dazzle project explored how unconventional makeup and hairstyles could interfere with computer vision algorithms.

Then in 2021, researchers at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev found that "software-generated makeup patterns can be used to consistently bypass state-of-the-art facial recognition," the university's website says.

The Ben-Gurion experiment used makeup patterns designed with the help of machine learning to interfere with specific facial recognition models. It did not establish that any unusual makeup, extra facial features or coloured patterns would reliably defeat surveillance systems.

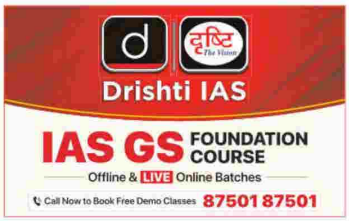
Also, in both Chadha and Harvey's methods, the makeup may fool cameras, but will make the people highly conspicuous to human eyes. In the Ben-Gurion experiment, the makeup was designed to look relatively ordinary, rather than resembling elaborate camouflage.

Modern systems vary in their algorithms, camera quality, lighting conditions and identification thresholds. A technique that works under one set of conditions may fail under another.

India's laws on surveillance

Facial images and digital templates linked to identifiable people fall within the broad definition of personal data under the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023. Section 17 of the law, however, exempts several obligations when data is processed for preventing, detecting, investigating or prosecuting an offence.

The Centre may also exempt notified state instrumentalities, including security forces like the Delhi Police, for reasons including state security and public order. The law does not lay down a dedicated framework for police facial recognition.



• ECONOMY

The long and rocky road to a trade deal with US

Despite convergence on the issue of overcapacity, India is worried about the concessions US wants & the uncertainty that may remain even after inking a deal



RAVI DUTTA MISHRA & ANIL SASI



PM Narendra Modi with US President Donald Trump at the G7 Summit in France in June. NYT

ON SATURDAY, Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal said that India and the US would finalise their interim trade agreement framework in line with "changed circumstances". That statement appeared to indicate that negotiations for the first phase of the bilateral trade pact still have some way to go despite a framework being agreed in February.

Negotiations for the long-delayed trade deal have continued for nearly a year. This month, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said talks had reached a plateau beyond which a compromise would be difficult. This followed comments from United States Trade Representative Jamieson Greer that a trade deal was in its final stages, "but not imminent". Meanwhile, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said on Wednesday that the two countries are continuing to engage, and that negotiations are heading towards a "landing point".

While trade negotiators have suggested that they are making progress, much of the political signalling in the interim has suggested the opposite. So how far away are both parties from a deal?

Areas of progress

There are some positives. The first relates to "overcapacity" — a situation when a sector or a country's production capacity exceeds the demand in the market. Increased supply can push down prices and affect manufacturers in other countries.

China is often accused of having overcapacity in sectors such as automobiles, electric vehicles, batteries, chemicals, semiconductors and solar panels.

The US has launched an investigation into overcapacity under Section 301 of the of the Trade Act of 1974, targeting China and 15 other economies, including India.

Last Wednesday, the US government said that India, along with 13 other countries and blocs including the European Union, Australia and Japan, has decided to take "effective actions" against structural excess capacity. The joint statement, released after the G20 trade ministers' meeting, in Milwaukee is significant on two counts.

FIRST, India's inclusion could mean that it may fall outside the Section 301 tariff net. The convergence on overcapacity comes just weeks before the US is expected to release the results of the Section 301 probe.

SECOND, tariffs on India were reduced from 12.5% (proposed earlier this year) to 10% after New Delhi issued a notification banning imports of goods produced through forced labour.

Sticking points

While the new Section 301 agreement suggests some tangible progress, the concerns in New Delhi are on two counts.

ONE, whether entering into a deal, which entails significant concessions given the Donald Trump administration's usual approach, will indeed result in any competitive tariff advantage for India over its competitors.

TWO, the US has, on various occasions, imposed fresh curbs despite having signed trade agreements. This was particularly evident in its dispute with Canada despite signing the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) during Trump's first term in 2020.

Ajay Srivastava, founder of thinktank Global Trade Research Initiative, said that while Chinese President Xi Jinping secured a tariff pause from Trump over China's Russian oil purchases, India continues to face that threat from the Lindsey O. Graham Sanctioning Russia and Iran Act of 2026. That legislation gives Trump the power to impose up to 100% tariffs on buyers of Russian oil and gas.

"We saw this pattern in July 2025, when Washington spared China but imposed an additional 25% tariff on India for buying Russian crude. If Russian oil purchases are the issue, why does India face the tariff while China gets an exemption? The tariff threat appears aimed at forcing India to cut Russian oil purchases and sign a deeply unequal bilateral trade agreement. Washington could offer a lower rate in return for concessions, but that would give India no lasting certainty. India should not trade its energy security for temporary tariff relief or let US tariff threats dictate its national energy policy," said Srivastava.

Asked about the US-China trade truce extension, a government official had earlier told *The Indian Express*: "It's just (for) two months. The Chinese wanted it till the end of Trump's term. That hasn't happened. Our side has also expressed concerns to DC over the scope of the sanctions legislation."

There is considerable unease in New Delhi over the arbitrariness of the trade negotiations with Washington DC. Last year, India faced some of the highest US tariffs imposed on any country, a move the US Supreme Court later struck down.

Currently, the talks have also been complicated by the new US legislation against Russian oil.

When the US Supreme Court invalidated the reciprocal tariff regime, the February framework that had offered to reduce India's reciprocal tariff from 25% to 18% in return for concessions lost its sheen.

"While there has been considerable narrowing of differences since the February framework signing, the sticking points that remain continue to be too significant to be papered over. At this point in time, a situation of suspended animation, with somewhat lower tariffs, is perhaps a better option than getting into a deal involving significant concessions by India. There is uncertainty even after signing a deal, as multiple other countries are finding out," an official aware of the negotiations told *The Indian Express*.

Lingering uncertainties

India and several other economies are awaiting the results of the Section 301 investigation into overcapacity. The government's stance is that India does not have structural excess manufacturing capacity in the sectors identified by the G20 presidency, and that the country's manufacturing capacity serves both domestic and global needs.

Indian exporters have said that US buyers have become cautious and are refraining from placing large orders in a single country. This is affecting low-margin products such as footwear and textiles. However, US concessions on electronics and pharmaceutical imports have so far helped India maintain its overall export levels to the US. Without those, the figures would have been more adversely tilted against India.

Goods exports to the US showed a sharp 21% jump in August to $8.3 billion compared to August last year, when India began facing 50% tariffs. Between April and August, too, India's exports jumped by over 6%, driven by electronics and engineering goods. India's electronics exports jumped 89% to $5.5 billion compared to $2.9 billion.

However, India's imports from the US, driven by energy products, are also rising sharply. In August, imports went up by 65% to $5.97 billion. This comes as India has also been making several regulatory changes to aid American companies by lowering tariffs on US bourbon whiskey and motorcycles, among several other items. New Delhi has also announced a tax holiday for data centres and opened its nuclear sector, moves that align with US commercial interests.

Trade lens

The US's Section 301 investigation is evaluating 16 economies for 'overcapacity'.

•

These are China, the EU, Norway, Switzerland, Mexico, South Korea, Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, Cambodia, Thailand, Vietnam, Taiwan, Bangladesh, Japan and India.

• HEALTH

How govt plans to rein in prices of expensive cancer drugs

Anonna Dutt
New Delhi, October 14

THE UNION government recently decided to cap the trade margins on 110 expensive cancer medicines, including around 35 patented ones. While the list is still being finalised, officials say it will cover the branded, generic, domestically manufactured and imported versions of these drugs.

This is not the first time the government is trying such a step. A 2019 pilot had demonstrated up to 91% reduction in the MRP of 42 cancer medicines. The present step is likely to bring down the marked prices of select cancer drugs by up to 70%, say officials.

Why is this necessary?

Regulating prices is essential in a country with a rising cancer burden. Survival improves in many cases today with the use of targeted and immunotherapy drugs. Yet, the latest therapies remain out of reach for most.

A real-world study from Tata Memorial Hospital had shown that only 1.6% of the patients who need such therapies are able to access them, with cost being one of the most significant barriers. This issue of cost has also been raised in courts. The Supreme Court recently questioned the nearly tenfold markup in some cancer drugs.

What is trade margin rationalisation?

The trade margin of a medicine is essentially the difference in the price at which it is sold to stockists (the first point of sale) and its MRP (the price at which it is sold to customers). This gap is usually quite significant, sometimes going as high as 1000% of the cost at the first point of sale.

Under trade margin rationalisation (TMR), instead of capping the price of each medicine — and its different formulations, doses and brands — the government caps the percentage markup at which the medicine can be sold in order to bring down the cost to the consumer. Very simply put, a 30% TMR would mean a medicine can carry an MRP of only Rs 100 if it was sold to the stockist for Rs 70.

Which drugs are likely to be covered?

While the the Director General of Health Services is yet to finalise a list, it is likely to include commonly used but expensive cancer medicine. "One of the considerations for selecting a medicine is that it should be expensive. This is because a 30% capping on trade margin for the cheaper drugs can disincentivise companies because it does not cover the marketing costs. Other than that, of course, the drug should be one that is approved for treatment of cancer in India and is used frequently for it," said an official from the Department of Pharmaceuticals.

How much could prices fall?

At a recent meeting of the National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority (NPPA) — the body that is responsible for regulating medicine prices — experts said that non-scheduled anti-cancer drugs carry an average trade mark-up of approximately 170%, with mark-ups going up to 700% in certain cases. At present, the annual turnover of cancer drugs is around Rs 12,500 crore. Of this, scheduled cancer drugs, whose prices are regulated, account for only around Rs 2,250 crore.

Addressing these huge markups on non-scheduled drugs, experts at the NPPA meeting said the move is expected to reduce MRP broadly in the range of 20-70%, resulting in annual savings of approximately Rs 2,500 crore.

What do experts say?

Experts and patients' rights activists say that there is still scope to game the system as there is no control over the price to stockists. "A company may sell 1,000 vials at an inflated price to the distributor and say that I will give you 500 vials free, meaning the company will be able to keep prices artificially inflated even if they abide by the 30% margin capping," said one expert familiar with the issue. They said that the capping should be based on the manufacturing cost or the cost at which the product is imported.

K M Gopakumar, co-convenor of Working Group on Access to Medicines and Treatments, said: "This is unlikely to make many of the patented cancer drugs affordable. Despite such capping in 2019, prices of cancer medicines increased. For instance, the monthly cost of ribociclib rose from Rs 58,000 in 2022 to Rs 78,000 in 2025 despite margin capping." Patented drugs face no competition and, hence, no pressure to reduce prices.

How govt sets drug prices

- The government fixes prices only for 'scheduled drugs' (which are on the National List of Essential Medicines). The 'ceiling price' for such drugs is based on the average market price of the most commonly selling brands of the medicine.
- For 'non-scheduled' drugs, the only regulation is that companies cannot cannot raise MRP by over 10% a year.
- It is the second category of drugs on which trade margin rationalisation will be applicable.

• CLIMATE

Kigali Amendment at 10: The challenge India faces as demand for cooling booms



EXPERTS EXPLAIN

DURWOOD ZAELKE & ZERIN OSHO

THE KIGALI Amendment to the Montreal Protocol turns 10 today. It agreed to phase down hydrofluorocarbons, or HFCs, which had become common refrigerants after countries moved away from chemicals — like chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) — that destroyed the ozone layer.

The amendment is expected to prevent up to 0.5°C of warming by 2100. Yet at its 10th anniversary, the world is getting hotter, demand for cooling, expectedly, is rising rapidly, and the machines that provide it can themselves add to warming.

India will confront this problem at unusual scale. What Kigali does next may therefore matter as much as what it has already achieved.

What is the Kigali Amendment?

The Montreal Protocol was agreed in 1987 to phase out CFCs and other chemicals that damage the ozone layer. Countries have since eliminated nearly 99% of the controlled ozone-depleting substances, and the layer is recovering.

Hydrofluorocarbons, or HFCs, became common substitutes in refrigeration and air-conditioning. These chemicals carry heat out of the space being cooled. If they escape, many have hundreds or thousands of times the warming impact of carbon dioxide over a century, weight for weight.

As the use of HFCs grew, the Federated States of Micronesia and Mauritius proposed bringing them under the Protocol in 2009.

Governments adopted the amendment in Kigali, Rwanda, on October 15, 2016; it entered into force in January 2019. It sets binding schedules for reducing HFC production and consumption.

How much warming could it prevent?

Full implementation could avoid about 0.3°C to 0.5°C of global warming by 2100, according to the UN-backed scientific assessment of ozone depletion. That is the difference between projected temperatures with the HFC controls and those without them. Even a fraction of a degree matters when the Paris Agreement seeks to keep warming well below 2°C and pursue a limit of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.

However, Kigali has yet to achieve universal participation: 175 parties had joined by early October.

Why has cooling become central to Kigali's next decade?

Cooling contributes to warming in two ways. Refrigerants can escape into the atmosphere, while the electricity used to run the equipment causes emissions wherever fossil fuels supply the power. Switching to a refrigerant with a lower warming impact addresses the first problem. A more efficient machine reduces the second.

Manufacturers changing refrigerants often need to redesign their equipment. Improving efficiency during that redesign can reduce electricity use for the lifetime of the appliance. The UN Environment Programme and the International Energy Agency estimate that combining the HFC transition with better cooling efficiency could roughly double the climate benefit.

For India, the electricity savings would be substantial. Cooling already accounts for slightly more than a tenth of annual electricity demand, according to the IEA. On hot summer nights, air-conditioners can account for as much as a third of power consumption. Under current policies, India's cooling demand is projected to more than double by 2035.

What must India do under Kigali?

India ratified the amendment in 2021 and must freeze HFC production and consumption in 2028. This caps them at an agreed baseline. The first cut, of 10% below that baseline, is due in 2032; reductions reach 85% in 2047. The limits are calculated according to the gases' warming impact. Equipment bought before the first cuts may remain in use well into the 2030s.

Who pays for the transition in developing countries?

The Montreal Protocol's Multilateral Fund helps meet the agreed additional costs of compliance. Established in 1990 and operating since 1991, it receives contributions from developed countries to help poorer countries change technologies. Its support includes converting factories and training the people who service cooling equipment.

Could a parallel approach work for other short-lived climate pollutants?

The four main short-lived climate pollutants, or SLCPs, are methane, black carbon, HFCs and tropospheric, or ground-level, ozone. Often called super pollutants, they have strong warming effects and generally remain in the atmosphere for much less time than carbon dioxide. Reducing them can therefore slow warming relatively quickly, alongside the carbon dioxide cuts needed to limit warming over the longer term.

Kigali already addresses HFCs. Other sources would need different rules. For example, In India, measures to reduce methane from cattle have to account for small farmers' incomes and food production. Black carbon, the soot produced by incomplete combustion, requires action on sources such as diesel engines and household cooking fuels.

The case for agreements covering particular sectors rests on these differences: each can set obligations suited to the sources of pollution and provide support for those who must comply.

Zaelke is President of the Institute for Governance & Sustainable Development. Osho is Director of its India Programme.

WEB EXCLUSIVE
Jantar Mantar: Why the powers that be want to move protest sites out of sight
— *Shiny Varghese*
Log on to www.indianexpress.com

WORDLY WISE
When the rich wage war, it's the poor who die.
— *Jean-Paul Sartre*

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

In Trump-Putin deal, a message for Europe, India

LESS THAN a month after the Lindsey O Graham Sanctioning Russia and Iran Act of 2026 was signed into law by US President Donald Trump, he has struck a deal with Russian President Vladimir Putin to release Russian diesel supplies into global markets. The late senator Lindsey Graham's bill was meant to impose new sanctions and tariffs on countries that buy Russian oil and gas, choking off the revenue that funds the Kremlin's war in Ukraine. Trump's deal does the opposite. It will directly bankroll that war and undermine the international sanctions against Russia already in place. Ostensibly, the President wants to bring diesel prices down "for Americans and, indeed, the World", as he put it in a social media post. But the real motive may not be hard to decipher. Poll after poll shows the Republican Party trailing the Democrats, and with midterm elections less than three weeks away, the likely goal is to placate American voters. The plan may not work. Energy analysts largely agree that the 36 million barrels of Russian diesel covered by the deal won't bring down prices significantly, and many Republicans are pushing back. Trump has also made Ukraine's position more difficult by demanding that Kyiv suspend strikes on Russian oil refineries, a move that would weaken its leverage.

From Trump administration officials such as Scott Bessent and Peter Navarro to the US President himself, India has been at the receiving end of Washington's moral posturing over Russian energy imports. India was not only targeted by the Lindsey Graham Act, but also hit with an additional tariff penalty in August 2025 that prompted Indian refiners to reduce their purchases of Russian crude. Of course, energy security matters to the US. But it matters just as much to India. New Delhi should ask that its energy needs and costs be judged by the same standards as Washington's. Throughout the war, India has maintained that its energy purchases are guided by national interest and the needs of its people. It has also put forward its own proposal to end the war and remained in constant contact with both sides in pursuit of a negotiated settlement.

India is not the only country caught in this web of contradictions. Europe, too, has been left scrambling for a coordinated response. Treasury Secretary Bessent said that the EU has given Russia more money than it has given Ukraine, owing to Europe's dependence on Russian energy. The episode, along with previous summits and offers of investments, also shows that Trump continues to be open to a rapprochement with Putin. For Europe, the lesson is clear: It must strengthen its defence capabilities and reduce its dependence on Russia for hydrocarbons and on the US for security.

Livelihood scheme for women deserves better

THE CENTRE'S decision to let its flagship urban livelihoods scheme lapse without a successor is injudicious and perplexing. This is particularly so given the positive impact that the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana-National Urban Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NULM) has had on the social and financial empowerment of women. Since its launch in 2014, the scheme has helped create 10.02 lakh self-help groups (SHGs), covering more than one crore women across cities. To risk leaving these beneficiaries adrift for want of continued support would be to betray the promise contained in slogans about women-led development invoked by parties across the spectrum.

Significantly, concerns over funding and the policy vacuum created by the end of NULM in October 2024, cut across party lines. Of the five states that have flagged the issue — Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Tripura — only the first two are Opposition-ruled. All five have sought funding to ensure continued support to SHGs and prevent disruption to their access to institutional credit and bank linkages. Addressing these concerns is critical to the larger goals of poverty alleviation and support to women's entrepreneurship. There is ample evidence of SHGs' capacity to advance women's social and economic empowerment — by improving access to credit and skills, building financial literacy and leadership, and increasing self-confidence and mobility. The impact of initiatives such as Didi ki Rasoi and Bank Sakhis under Bihar's JEEViKA scheme shows how such programmes can put money in women's hands while shifting them from dependent household roles to decision-makers. Kerala's Kudumbashree offers an even more expansive model, evolving from credit groups into a network involved in community kitchens, waste collection and training SHGs in other states.

States, too, must do their part. They have found resources for cash-transfer schemes; they must prioritise programmes for women that build enduring economic capacity. SHGs are institutions through which women acquire skills, networks, and a greater say in households and communities. To ensure these gains are sustained, efforts must be directed towards ensuring access to training, mentorship and institutional support. Going forward, it is not enough to expand SHG numbers — investment must also be made in the human resources, infrastructure, credit linkages and market networks that allow them to thrive.

Immortality lessons from Jonathan the tortoise

ACHILLES, KNOWN to be fleet of foot, can never catch up to a tortoise as long as the slow-moving reptile has a head start. For, in every moment that Achilles moves, so does the tortoise. Zeno's 5th-century BCE paradox, like Aesop's fable about the hare and the tortoise a hundred years later, is a nice tale, easily resolved by simple observation, and the fact that motion is not the property of a single, static instant. But a look at Jonathan — the 180-kg giant tortoise who recently turned 194 years old — shows that on a long enough timeline, speed doesn't matter all that much.

In many ways, Jonathan has an ideal and idyllic life. He is the star attraction on the island of St Helena, where he spends much of the day lolling around on the grounds of the governor's mansion. A living heritage site, Jonathan is well fed and watered, and his health is monitored closely. While he shows some signs of ageing, his appetite — for sustenance and procreation — is intact. His hearing is also reportedly pretty good. In the race of life, he has clearly beaten both Achilles and the apocryphal hare.

Jonathan's longevity, though, is coming at a price. Aware of its own mortality, the *Homo sapiens* is, as always, looking for the fountain of youth. The giant tortoise is being poked and prodded, his DNA studied for clues that could help people live longer and better. Perhaps the frantic search for ways to cheat time misses the point of Jonathan's long life: Take it easy, take it slow.

Citizens' march to defend right to vote sends a message to all institutions



THAROORTHINK
BY SHASHI THAROOR

WHEN TENS of thousands of citizens, Opposition leaders, students, and civil society advocates marched shoulder to shoulder toward the Supreme Court (SC) this Monday, the sight was nothing short of historic. Against a backdrop of police barricades, an excessive deployment of uniformed security personnel aimed at enforcing compliance (but mercifully restrained), and public transit suspensions at six Metro stations, ordinary Indians marched to protect the heartbeat of our republic: The right to vote. Monday's march was not merely a political demonstration; it was a resounding triumph for Indian democracy, proving that when the fundamental architecture of our constitutional rights is threatened, the spirit of our people remains unyielding.

For weeks, I have emphasised a stark truth across my columns, television appearances and public forums: The core issue today is that over 130 million Indian citizens have been arbitrarily deprived of their right to vote and choose their political representatives — with possibly more deletions to follow. To put that figure into perspective, 130 million people is larger than the entire population of Japan, Germany, or the United Kingdom. Stripping that many people of their franchise is not a mere administrative oversight by the Election Commission of India (ECI); it is an existential crisis for a democratic constitutional republic. Franchise is the foundational bridge connecting the individual citizen to the state. When that bridge is broken for over 130 million citizens, popular sovereignty is shattered.

Let me be clear: I am not against cleaning the voter rolls of duplicate, deceased, or ineligible names that genuinely shouldn't be there. Maintaining an accurate electoral roll is a basic requirement of good administration. However, the fundamental legal and constitutional principle of "innocent until proven guilty" must apply to voting rights just as it does to our justice system. You cannot unilaterally deregister citizens and then place the burden on them to prove their eligibility. It should be the other way around; the onus must remain on the state to prove ineligibility through due process before any citizen's name is removed.

How did India's globally admired electoral democracy arrive at this perilous brink? The crisis stems from the hasty implementation of modified rules, a bizarre algorithmic identification of "logical discrepancies" that make no allowance for past clerical errors and typing mistakes, an arbitrary selection of the 2002 electoral register as definitive, an illegal modification of Form 6 and mass filings of Form 7, coupled with an opaque, centralised new software architecture that has systematically crippled local electoral governance.

Under the law, Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) in local communities served as the vital custodians of voter eligibility. Anchored in ground-level realities, EROs were empowered to exercise due diligence, verify residency, and ensure that no legitimate voter was unfairly disenfranchised. But this decentralised system of safeguards was overridden by algorithms and centralised directives, effectively stripping EROs of their authority. As *The Indian Express* revealed from Goa, decisions that determine whether a citizen retains voting rights are now rendered by centrally administered software, insulated from local scrutiny, the ERO's judgement and natural justice. The new rules and procedures violate the spirit of the Representation of the People Act by allowing mass deletions without rigorous, individual-level notice or ground verification.

This iniquitous exercise must be suspended immediately. A robust democracy cannot endure on the promise of periodic elections alone; its basic strength rests entirely upon a transparent, competitive, and accessible electoral system. Of the 82,000-plus deleted voters whose appeals were heard in Bengal, 91 per cent were found to have been wrongly deleted; but lakhs more appeals are pending and those waiting to be heard were disenfranchised. This erosion becomes existential: When the electoral process is compromised and executive convenience is prioritised over constitutional rights, the democratic framework collapses. When the state systematically deletes voters from the rolls and then undermines the public's right to peaceful popular protest, it cuts off the vital channels through which citizens express their collective will. This is why we must fiercely defend an electoral ecosystem where every eligible citizen's vote is secured and autonomous institutions like the ECI act as impartial guardians of the public rather than handmaidens of the ruling apparatus.

> The current Chief Election Commissioner has fundamentally lost the confidence of the primary opposition parties. In the interests of accountability for the maladministration of the SIR, he must resign

The Opposition mobilisation called for clarity, urgency, and unwavering commitment to constitutional principles. The SIR must be suspended to halt further disenfranchisement; the irrational and legally questionable rules and procedures under modified Forms 6 and 7 must be repealed; the software architecture rewritten so that EROs regain their rightful, statutory role as the ultimate authority on voter eligibility; and a transparent audit undertaken to restore every disenfranchised citizen to the voter rolls. The ECI must reaffirm the core democratic principle that voter eligibility is presumed; the burden of proof must lie on the authorities to justify any removal rather than forcing citizens to re-prove their citizenship and residency. And the SC should review the entire process.

Restoring procedural integrity is only half the battle; institutions require trusted leadership. An electoral umpire must be above suspicion, yet the current Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) has fundamentally lost the confidence of the primary opposition parties. In the interests of accountability for the maladministration of the SIR, he must resign. A compromised CEC who no longer commands trust across the political spectrum cannot credibly preside over the world's largest election system. Once a verified, inclusive electoral roll is in place, and the election process is demonstrably free, fair, and impartially conducted, all parties will honour the results.

Monday's march demonstrated that the conscience of the nation is wide awake. When thousands walked the streets of the Capital, carrying copies of the Constitution and demanding their fundamental rights, they sent an unmistakable message to every institution in the country: Democracy is not a gift bestowed by government decree; it is a right of the people. Until it is restored, the peaceful struggle for our constitutional rights will continue.

The writer is a fourth-term Congress MP from Thiruvananthapuram

IMF growth numbers for India don't tell the whole story



DEEPANSHU MOHAN

THE INTERNATIONAL Monetary Fund in its most recent forecast raised India's GDP growth rate to 7 per cent for 2026-27, up from 6.4 per cent in July, suggesting "stronger than expected momentum" for a country that has anchored resilient domestic demand and services-driven sectoral growth. The RBI, too, has pushed India's growth prospects to 7.1 per cent this year while also increasing short-term interest rates amid rising inflation.

This comes against the backdrop of recent quarterly growth data, where the economy was highlighted to be growing at 7.8 per cent in the April-to-June quarter. These appear to be impressive numbers for an emerging market economy (EME).

India's macroeconomic fundamentals so far have withstood a series of shocks, accentuated by the West Asian crisis, which has imposed serious supply-side concerns and imported inflationary risks. Adding to this is a growing, unsustainable pile of accumulated debt and (high) borrowed capital cost for most developing and developed countries, which have fiscally strained (and drained) nations leaving too much in the hands of monetary policy.

India's macro-position in this global climate of chaos appears stable for now, despite a volatile rupee, but doesn't insulate it. Brewing uncertainty may well continue in a geopolitical climate of crisis, creating chaos in financial markets triggered by changing pricing of US bond yield rates, a fragile dollar valuation, and a hyper AI-investment fuelled stock-market bubble, all of which are increasing capital flight risks from EMEs (and other countries), including India.

For India's economy, now entering its most consequential growth quarter fuelled by the demand of the festive season, a few pointers need closer monitoring.

The key macro challenges are clear: Manage inflation, address structural issues behind high unemployment and exacerbating inequality, and make sufficient interventions to allow cheaper capital to flow across sectors for productive growth.

Yet while a growth rate number is suggestive of macro-production activity, it never really tells the full story. One needs to pay attention to the context in which that economic growth happens; its granular diffusion in actual well-being amongst the citizenry (across different groups and classes); the share of productive investment creating good jobs, and the actual share of household demand, all of which is critical, in the evolution of the statistical framework putting the headline number in perspective.

> While a growth rate number is suggestive of macro-production activity, it never really tells the full story. One needs to pay attention to the context in which that economic growth happens

For India, there are other underlying concerns "hidden" in the IMF's forecast number. Despite the expansion of the economy in a relative sense, informality in India across sectors continues to widen, whereby more workers, especially those migrating from rural to urban areas, are finding less "good" job opportunities in the organised space, and/or are otherwise choosing to remain out of it due to poor wages, high living costs, and more difficult working conditions.

This is where India's growth and its subsequent development story, despite what quarterly data indicate, merits an intersectional approach. An intersectional growth validation, as an economic mechanism, needs to be established in the formal interpretation of a heterogeneously placed economic landscape, answering questions around who participates in and benefits from higher "real" growth versus who doesn't.

After all, the increasing volume of resentment expressed against the state, heard quite clearly in youth-driven street protests, shows another reality. This is where the government must realise that it should shift the focus from GDP numbers and economic projections to a prosperity-driven process of growth.

India's growth and its development trajectory also needs better, more decentralised policy coordination with states, and a deeper state-market interaction to avoid monopolistic control across sectors.

The writer is dean and professor of Economics, O P Jindal Global University, a visiting professor at LSE and visiting research fellow at the University of Oxford

Don't let the koffee go cold on us, KJo



SHALINI LANGER

BACK IN the 1980s, two blockbuster films set teen hearts aflutter. Even then, we realised that *Qayamat Se Qayamat Tak*'s love story, against the backdrop of gun-toting generational rivalries, was unlikely to be our kismet. But there was *Maine Pyar Kiya*, and surely, it was not difficult to land a boy-man rich enough to live in a mansion and to find a *kabootar* that delivered love letters. So convinced was I that Salman Khan and Bhagyashree were sworn to lifelong bliss that I refused to believe it when a cousin explained the meaning of a *Stardust* article saying there was "no love lost between them". It was the summer holidays and there was plenty of time to debate things such as this.

It would take 20 more years for "things such as this" to claim their space as national pleasure, to be enjoyed collectively at prime time in living rooms. That was when Karan Johar slid into our couches with *Koffee With Karan*, changing the celebrity talk show in India forever, altering our equation with Bollywood and never left. As Karan preened and prodded, nudged-nudged and winked-winked (had we ever seen that on Indian TV before), the stars became somehow more human (in all their bitchiness) and more astral (in the lives they led). There was no doubting the producer-director-talk show host's sense of, as they now say, the vibe.

Who to pair: SRK and Kajol were obvious, but also Deepika Padukone and Sonam Kapoor having a go at a certain ex; Ranveer Singh and Ranbir Kapoor, sharing too much on- and off-screen. Long after an episode, its tremors kept setting off minor quakes.

How to take on what was thrown at him: People thought Karan was too elitist? Bring on Rakhi Sawant. He had favourite actors? Give space to Kangana Ranaut. He was gay? He was comfortable enough to take jibes about it. So he was a dad through surrogate children? Yes, just like the other parents who came to his couch, with whom he discussed his children, and often his mother.

How to laugh at oneself: In his biggest achievement, Karan led the way in this. If the conversations appeared often like friends having a good time at a party, this was the main reason: The guests were neither too venerated nor too vulnerable. Giving just two comparisons, talk show host Tabassum was too kind, and Simi Garewal an intimidating alabaster figure with an accent.

If the latter seasons seemed to lack the zing, it was hardly Karan's fault. Not only is the new Bollywood devoid of real stars, they seem to come newly minted from a common PR machine, saying the same things, and never the "wrong" things. Is that why Karan's gossipy tone, a breath of fresh air in its frankness, steered too much, too tactlessly towards the bedroom in some episodes?

Now, Karan has one more chance to reset. He has said his ninth season is "most definitely" his last. Not on our account, please. We wouldn't be the same without Bollywood and, even if you admit it grudgingly, Bollywood wouldn't be the same without KJo. As they say in a Karan Johar film: "*Tussi na jao*."

> As Karan preened and prodded, nudged-nudged and winked-winked (had we ever seen that on Indian television before), the stars became somehow more human (in all their bitchiness) and more astral (in the lives they led)

The writer is editor (planning and projects), The Indian Express. shalini.langer@expressindia.com

40 YEARS AGO
October 15, 1986


INDIAN EXPRESS
PM for immediate global moratorium on nuclear tests
Reagan renews invitation to Gorbachov
No arms deal discussed with Weinberger

PM calls for nuclear moratorium

PRIME MINISTER Rajiv Gandhi called for an immediate global moratorium involving all nuclear weapon states. Speaking at a banquet hosted in his honour by Australian Prime Minister Bob Hawke, he said the unilateral Soviet moratorium was now more than a year old. Sharing the Indian PM's concern, Hawke said major powers alone were not arbiters of the world's destiny and that others also had a constructive role to play.

No arms deal discussed

INDIA SCRUPULOUSLY avoided discussing any military deals or production of weapons systems with the US defence team. The talks were mainly confined to the transfer of technology in wide-ranging items, with India insisting on early absorption of technology offered. There was no discussion of the offer the US Defence Secretary, Caspar Weinberger, had made on his arrival in New Delhi.

Reagan wants talks to resume

THE US PRESIDENT, Ronald Reagan, has said that he has renewed the invitation to the Soviet leader, Mikhail Gorbachev, to visit the US and resume arms control talks they left off in Iceland. President Reagan, however, said there was no indication by Gorbachev as to when or whether he plans to travel to the United States, "as we agreed to last year in Geneva".

Gorbachev warns the West

SOVIET LEADER Mikhail Gorbachev warned the West that his country had "everything to answer any challenge". In an address to the nation in a country-wide television broadcast, he made this observation in reference to Western notions about the Soviet Union not being able to withstand the pressures of the arms race economically.

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

The BJP must address young people's political and economic frustrations.
— Financial Times

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

Weigh public benefits of street protest against costs on others, especially poor



SUMIT AGARWAL AND SHASHWAT ALOK

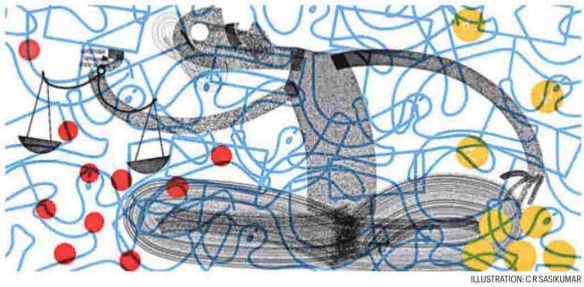


ILLUSTRATION: C R SASIKUMAR

PEACEFUL PROTEST is a democratic right and can secure remedies for serious institutional failures. Its justification depends on the merits of the grievance, the response of the authorities, and the costs of the tactics employed. When disruption becomes a bargaining instrument, however, its costs may fall on citizens who had no say in the decision to disrupt daily life, and most heavily on the poor.

The protests in Delhi on October 10 by the Cockroach Janta Party and INDIA bloc parties illustrate the problem. Ahead of the protests, the Delhi Metro shut down 45 stations and traders' associations advised closures in several places. The president of the Khan Market Traders Association put the loss from a day's closure at Rs 1 lakh to 1.5 lakh per shop, with rent and salaries due regardless. Traders in Chandni Chowk pointed out that festival stock is bought on credit or bank loans. Navratri began the next day.

When a road or a market is shut, it imposes a negative externality. The ordinary commuter, the shopkeeper, the daily-wage worker, and the patient bear much of the cost. As the private cost of disruption to its organisers is lower than its social cost, more of it may be supplied than is socially efficient. Thousands of bystanders cannot negotiate with an organiser, and the organiser is rarely held liable for damages. These costs fall disproportionately on poorer households.

In December 2020, ASSOCHAM put out a rough estimate of the loss from the farmers' agitation at Rs 3,000 to 3,500 crore per day for Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, and Jammu and Kashmir. Lost turnover overstates lost output because some purchases are deferred to another day or another shop. But Ahsan and Iqbal find that multi-day political strikes in Bangladesh reduced the likelihood of a firm making an export shipment by 6.3 percentage points. Some shipments can be rescheduled, but countries with higher levels of political disruption face a comparative disadvantage as foreign buyers seek stable markets.

The political problem is larger than any single protest. In every democracy, a large share of voters supports the side that lost. In the 2024 Lok Sabha election, the NDA won 43.8 per cent of the vote and the INDIA bloc 41.5 per cent — more than 26 crore votes for the opposition alliance alone. The parties representing these voters have cadres, funds and networks to sustain collective action. If disruption becomes an accepted instrument of bargaining, the losing side of every election holds a standing option to impose costs on the economy until it obtains concessions it could not win in Parliament.

Economists call this a hold-up. A party that can impose costs on others can extract terms with no relation to the merits of its claim. Governments anticipating unrest tilt policy towards the groups most able to mobilise. Policy follows the capacity to disrupt rather than the merits of competing claims.

An examination paper leak illustrates why the merits of a grievance matter. Students who have spent years preparing for a competitive examination have a legitimate reason to protest if leaked papers undermine fair selection. Where authorities fail to investigate or provide a credible remedy, collective action can help secure accountability and restore confidence in the examination system. Those benefits can justify some disruption, provided the tactics remain proportionate and protect essential access. The economic argument is not that every protest must be costless; it is that its expected public benefits must be weighed against the costs imposed on others.

> Street mobilisation can be a tool to demand accountability, but cannot confer a mandate to govern. Those who seek to govern in the Constitution's name must seek the people's approval at the ballot box

Students have a stronger agenda to put before their government. How will it prepare young people for jobs that artificial intelligence may transform or displace? How will education, retraining, and support for displaced workers keep pace? How will climate policy protect livelihoods and encourage investment that creates productive employment? Political attention and the government's capacity to respond are scarce resources: Mobilisation around one issue can crowd out work on another.

Two objections deserve a direct answer. The first is that disruption built Indian democracy. Indeed, the freedom movement relied on hartals and civil disobedience. That movement confronted a colonial government that Indians could not vote out. Even then, Gandhi suspended the non-cooperation movement in February 1922, after the violence at Chauri Chaura.

The second is that some grievances concern the electoral process itself, as the current dispute over the revision of voter rolls does. Allegations of "vote theft" are serious, but their seriousness makes evidence more necessary, not less. The electoral record poses an awkward question for those who portray the system as an instrument to guarantee BJP victories. In 2019, the BJP won 303 Lok Sabha seats, and Narendra Modi won Varanasi by 4,79,505 votes. In 2024, the BJP fell to 240 seats, losing its own parliamentary majority, while Modi's margin narrowed to 1,52,513 votes. His party lost 63 seats, and his personal victory margin shrank by more than two-thirds. These results do not establish that every electoral roll is error-free or rule out specific instances of wrongdoing. They do, however, demand an explanation from those advancing a sweeping claim that the electoral machinery is rigged to secure the ruling party's dominance.

The proper forums for testing such claims are the courts, the Election Commission, and Parliament. If those institutions fail, the case for protest grows stronger. The case remains one for peaceful protest. A blockade only measures which side can impose a higher cost on third parties; it does not establish that votes were stolen.

Albert Hirschman's distinction between exit and voice explains why protest can be valuable when citizens cannot readily leave an institution and ordinary channels of representation fail. A collective voice can bring neglected grievances to public attention and prompt corrective action. Protesters should, however, be careful not to mistake their visibility for evidence that they speak for the majority. Equally, governments cannot count silence as approval. Citizens who stay away may support a grievance, reject a tactic, or simply be unable to afford participation.

An electoral victory does not certify every government decision as sound, just as a compelling grievance does not make every protest tactic defensible. The economic test is whether a proposed path produces lasting improvements in public welfare, at a reasonable social cost, and without imposing disproportionate burdens on the poor.

Peaceful protest has a legitimate place in democracy. It gives citizens a platform to voice their concerns, challenge government policy, and demand better from their representatives. That right must remain protected between elections. But protest cannot become a licence for violence, or a means of overturning an electoral mandate through coercion. Street mobilisation can be a tool to demand accountability, but cannot confer a mandate to govern. Those who seek to govern in the name of the Constitution must seek the people's approval at the ballot box.

Agarwal is professor of Finance, National University of Singapore and president, Asian Bureau of Finance and Economic Research. Alok is associate professor of Finance, Indian School of Business

How to turn overseas green regulation into export advantage



RAJAT GUPTA

INDIA'S INSTINCTIVE response to climate-linked trade regulation has been to resist it. The EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism is described as protectionist; deforestation and product-traceability rules as intrusive; and sustainability clauses in trade agreements as an attempt to impose rich-country standards on a developing economy. Some of this criticism is justified.

But green trade regulation is no longer a temporary irritant that can be negotiated away. EU carbon allowances for domestic producers are being withdrawn on a fixed schedule. The scope of carbon border adjustment is set to widen. Other economies with domestic carbon prices will face the same pressure to protect their producers. India must ask a more fundamental question: Can the demand and price signals created by these rules finance the early years of its own green industrialisation?

Most of the India of 2070 (the targeted net-zero timeline) is yet to be built. The country can continue to set up new power, steel, aluminium, chemical and transport systems around fossil fuels and then pay to replace them. Or, it could use the upcoming global green-trade rules to establish lower-carbon industries from the outset. Cleaner technologies are more capital-intensive and initially more expensive. The opportunity is to make regulated foreign markets pay part of that early cost while India builds scale and capability at home.

Green ammonia, for which India has discovered some of the world's lowest prices, illustrates this approach. While domestic demand will take time to mature, India could export to Europe, Japan and Korea. Long-term export contracts could help finance the early plants, lower costs through scale and build an industry that then supplies green fertiliser at home, substituting imported natural gas.

Sustainable aviation fuel (SAF) offers a second example. ReFuelEU Aviation regulation began with a 2 per cent blending requirement in 2025 that rises sharply over time. Global production remains tiny and the fuel commands a premium over conventional jet fuel. Ethanol from the domestic petrol-blending programme can be diverted to make higher-value aviation fuel for exports, while EVs serve the domestic mobility market.

As carbon costs are loaded onto European primary steel, prices in Europe will rise. India could use the resulting price umbrella and export revenues to finance cleaner blast furnaces, more scrap-based capacity and eventually hydrogen-based production. In aluminium, India's exposure will grow when indirect emissions from electricity are counted. Investments in recycled aluminium and smelters using clean power can derive an export advantage.

The world's electrification will require vastly more transformers, cables, switchgear, batteries and solar equipment. Across the largest traded categories, a market of roughly $500 billion, China has about 30 per cent of exports while India has less than 2 per cent. Without an industrial response, electrical equipment could become one of India's largest import bills as domestic demand surges. With one, it can become a major export engine. For example, India supplies nearly 20 percent of the UK's non European transformer imports, while having a negligible share in Europe, which presents an opportunity.

There is also an opportunity in the compliance infrastructure itself. Carbon borders, deforestation rules and digital product passports all depend on trusted data. India built digital public infrastructure (DPI) that enables ubiquitous payments and communications at low costs. It should now build low-cost, interoperable systems for product-level carbon accounting, traceability and third-party verification. Becoming capable of tracking and verifying carbon at the lowest cost in the world would lower compliance costs and make our green products more competitive.

Finally, external pressure should be used to redesign India's own recently established carbon market to incentivise decarbonisation. Carbon price (the fee emitters must pay for every tonne of greenhouse gas) needs to be $30-50 a tonne to change investment decisions in steel, hydrogen or fertiliser. At these levels, India also retains more of the carbon revenues under the CBAM regulations. Sector-level targets (like in Europe) are better than the current plant-specific targets, which perversely reward high emitters and penalise efficient plants.

India should contest protectionism, seek transition periods and demand that rich countries share technology and finance. But the primary aim should shift to enabling Indian firms to turn overseas green regulation into export advantage. For example, India could use bilateral trade and green-partnership agreements to secure mutual recognition of carbon accounting, testing and certification.

A durable path for India is to lower the carbon content of our production, capture the overseas markets that regulation creates and use it to build the industries the domestic economy will eventually need. This requires a shift in the mindset of both the government and industry.

The writer is a senior partner at McKinsey & Company. Views are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Stand united

THE SUCCESS of any protest indeed lies in the unity of all stakeholders ('Going forward, all protests must be one, coordinate efforts and energies', *IE*, October 14). The right to protest is a fundamental right that cannot be curtailed using disproportionate force. Permitting dissent and acknowledging divergent views is fundamental to democracy.

Praveen Gupta, New Delhi

Unending crisis

RESTORING NORMALCY in Manipur requires more than disarming groups and deploying security forces ('In Manipur, the work of peace is still to be done', *IE*, 14 October). Displaced families need safe homes, livelihoods and confidence that violence will not recur. The government must ensure impartial law enforcement, recover looted weapons and hold offenders accountable, irrespective of community.

Abbharna Barathi, Chennai

THE UNRESOLVED Meitei-Kuki conflict in Manipur has now been compounded by tensions involving Naga, Kuki and Zomi communities ('In Manipur, the work of peace is still to be done', *IE*, 14 October). When will this cycle of violence end? The question also arises whether the "double engine" government is doing enough to restore peace. Extending AFSPA by another six months will only deepen public anxiety. Despite appointing former Union home secretary Ajay Kumar Bhalla as Governor, the Centre has failed to prevent further escalation. Extending the benefits of the Sixth Schedule deserves serious consideration to protect tribal interests and strengthen local self-governance. With China pursuing its strategic ambitions, India cannot afford prolonged instability in a sensitive border state. Peace, dialogue and constitutional safeguards must take precedence over coercion.

Tushar A Rahatgaonkar, Dombivali East



PARTHA SINHA

Our Durga doesn't fast, she feasts

IN GOOD faith

LAST MONTH, in Liluah, thousands of phones rose into the dark like obedient moons. Bageshwar Baba had asked for a show of lights. Those who ate meat on holy days, he said, were hypocrites. Then the phrase that gave the game away: Free Bengal, this Navratri. This Navratri.

The word sat in the sentence like a stranger at a family wedding: Correctly dressed, entirely wrong. Bengal knows Navratri, but it lives in *pujo*: Mahalaya before dawn, the long ache of *nabami* night, the terrible clarity of *dashami* morning. The two calendars overlap the way a map of Kolkata overlaps a memory of it. Roughly.

What followed was farce with the weight of a referendum. Even the BJP CM Suvendu Adhikari went to Kalighat and sat down to basanti pulao and a fish head offered to Ma Kali. "As a Bengali," he said, "I accept the *bhog*." A saffron chief minister eating saffron pulao to rebut a saffron sadhu. Bengal likes its irony slow-cooked.

Elsewhere, pilgrims climb to the goddess. In Bengal, she comes down. She leaves the ash-smeared husband and his ganja on Kailash for her father's house, where Menaka has waited since Bhadro. She brings the children: Lakshmi, Saraswati, Ganesh with his belly, Kartik with his peacock and too-careful hair, all pressed into one *ekchala* like a family in an Ambassador bound for her parents' house. The icon is a family photograph before it is theology.

> She brings the children: Lakshmi, Saraswati, Ganesh, Kartik, pressed into one ekchala like a family in an Ambassador bound for her parents' house

The *agamani* songs of Ramprasad and Kamalakanta know her mother, a Bengali woman who has heard her son-in-law is a vagabond and her daughter has grown thin, and who makes the oldest promise mothers make: This time, I will not send her back. A society that married its daughters young and far gave its goddess a married daughter's itinerary. Four days at her parents'. Then sindoor, tears, the river.

Yet the loudest sound in that *pandal* is the *Chandi path*. At four on Mahalaya morning, Birendra Krishna Bhadra rises from the radio, and half of Bengal — most of whom have never read the *Markandeya Purana* — knows every cadence of *Ya devi sarvabhuteshu* in the dark. At Sandhi puja, 108 lotuses greet Chamunda as she bursts from the goddess's brow. The *dhak* enters a trance; so does the *para*. The same face holds a homesick daughter and a ten-armed fury with a trident through a buffalo's heart.

Bengal never chose. The Shakta delta keeps Annapurna in the kitchen and Kali on the burning ghat. The goddess eats what field and river offer; fish, after all, is a vegetable that swims. *Nabami*'s mutton, cooked without onion or garlic, is called, with a straight face, niramish mangsho. Vegetarian meat. The Baba called it hypocrisy. A semiotician might call it range.

Other *devis* endure in stone. Bengal's is river clay and straw, built to dissolve, and in Kumartuli she still begins with earth from a sex worker's doorstep. The holiest body is incomplete without soil from a threshold society calls impure. In much of the north, the season is a fast that ends with Ravana in flames. *Pujo* is a feast that happens to have a priest.

In Delhi's C R Park, the Kali Mandir keeps its little hill while the fish market nearby roars with *bhetki*. The farther the *probashi* lives from the Ganga, the more fiercely he insists on fish in the *pujo* meal.

We are not innocent. We look at *garba* with the condescension of people who read the menu in French. We cheer Mahishasura's slaying and seldom ask why the Asur villages of Purulia mourn. Every family photograph has someone cropped out of the frame.

On *dashami*, the idol will descend into the river at Bagbazar. Women will smear sindoor on her cheek and then on each other's, as if to keep a little of her. Someone will call out *ashchhe bochhor abar hobe*, as though it were a promise and not a prayer.

She was never ours to lend. We only ever had her for four days.

The writer is a senior advisory professional



SAPTARSHI BASAK

Peace Nobel to Navi Pillay is a challenge to impunity

THE POWER of the Nobel Peace Prize can often be gauged by how governments read it as a verdict on themselves.

Consider the fury of Germany when Carl von Ossietzky, a journalist jailed for exposing the country's secret rearmament in violation of the Treaty of Versailles, was awarded the prize in 1935. In 1975, the Soviet Union denounced the award to Andrei Sakharov, a physicist who had helped develop its hydrogen bomb but later became a critic of its repression. Like Ossietzky, Sakharov was barred from travelling to accept the prize. China followed a similar script when Liu Xiaobo, imprisoned for his advocacy of human rights, won the prize in 2010, and froze ties with Norway for years.

Israel's reaction to this year's prize warrants a return to these examples. "The Nobel Prize committee has lost its moral compass," PM Benjamin Netanyahu's office said after the award went to Navi Pillay, a former judge of the International Criminal Court (ICC), "for her efforts to promote peace and international law". The Nobel Committee's announcement does not mention Israel by name, and unlike the above-cited dissidents who were targeted by their own governments, Pillay isn't even Israeli.

What, then, explains the angry reaction from Israel, and from the US and its President, Donald Trump, who claimed to have "never heard" of Pillay? In September 2025, a UN commission she was chairing at the time concluded that Israeli authorities and security forces had "committed genocide" against Palestinians in Gaza. The Committee's announcement included that commission in Pillay's list of contributions, and Israel and the US heard the rest for themselves.

Understandably so. By honouring Pillay, the Committee has recognised the validity of an investigation that has placed Israel's conduct in Gaza under the harshest possible international scrutiny. It has lent legitimacy to the findings, which Israel and the US have sought to discredit, that have challenged Israel's account of its military campaign. And it has affirmed the importance of the institutions and individuals who pursue accountability, even when their findings are unwelcome to powerful states.

> The prize cannot compel governments to change course, but it can deny them the final word on their own actions

Speaking of the powerful, look at Washington's response. Right after Pillay was honoured, the Trump administration announced new sanctions against the ICC. Secretary of State Marco Rubio said the US would "ban transactions with this rogue court". This, despite the fact that the ICC and the UN commission that Pillay chaired are separate institutions, and the Nobel Committee's announcement does not mention the US at all.

If Pillay's career demonstrates anything, it is her relentless pursuit of accountability, most famously in the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, which prosecuted those responsible for the 1994 genocide. She is also serving as an ad hoc judge at the International Court of Justice in the case brought by The Gambia against Myanmar over allegations of genocide against the Rohingya. One can hardly be blamed for putting faith in a woman who has a long record of investigating violence by the state, rather than in a government accused of committing violence, or one that has funded it.

Perhaps that is the real measure of the Peace Prize. It cannot compel governments to change course, but it can deny them the final word on their own actions. Thanks to Pillay's work, the world cannot be prevented from considering the evidence of the destruction of Gaza — however furiously the powerful may object.

The writer is copy editor, The Indian Express. *saptarshi.basak@expressindia.com*

IDBI, Poster Boy for More Privatisation

Sets template for stronger banking industry

The strategic sale of IDBI Bank is India's most ambitious disinvestment undertaking to date. GoI has tapped into rising overseas interest in India's financial sector to pare its holdings and those of LIC into minority stakes, even as RBI reassuringly continues 'full regulatory and prudential supervision' of the bank. Indian-Canadian V Prem Watsa-owned holding company Fairfax raised its bid for IDBI Bank — average of two independent valuations reportedly serving as benchmark price for evaluation of qualified bids — and the deal went through. This brings a welcome end to a decade-long chapter of rescuing the bank from bad loans that involved, apart from recapitalisation, bringing government-owned LIC on board as largest shareholder. IDBI Bank, now profitable, is the candidate for GoI's attempt to privatise banks, which was placed on the back burner due to political opposition.



Indian banks have seen a flurry of investments by Japanese and West Asian banks of late. Fairfax has a controlling stake in CSB Bank that will have to be merged or sold within in two years of the IDBI Bank deal. But the real challenge for Fairfax lies in driving the bank into the hyper-competitive private banking space. The competitive intensity can only intensify in one of the world's fastest-growing markets for credit that is drawing interest from foreign lenders. IDBI Bank may have to rationalise its branch network under its new management to maintain its regional presence in western India. The bank's legacy infrastructure must be integrated with Faifax's technology stack.

Critically, IDBI Bank will make a huge leap from its development finance origins to foreign ownership with the government riding side saddle. It has been done before, of course. Other overseas investors are looking at the private and shadow banking space for acquisitions. Fairfax will have to make the cultural transformation at IDBI Bank, which requires larger management bandwidth. Success should pump energy into India's stalled privatisation of banks. GoI's greatest divestment coup could set the template for a stronger banking industry.

Protect Patients and Patents Smartly

In reading last month's 65-page order by Kerala High Court in two cases concerning the high cost of ribociclib, a patented breast cancer medicine, GoI must consider the bigger picture and the spirit of the order: patients should be able to afford life-saving drugs, including cancer therapies. Importantly, however, it should resist the temptation to invoke Section 100 of Patents Act 1970, which allows GoI to override patents and authorise third-party manufacturing of patented life-saving drugs on a non-commercial basis. GoI has a duty to ensure such medicines are accessible to those who need them. But should also avoid measures that could undermine the pharmaceutical industry to come up with drugs.

Along with pharma companies, GoI must identify ways to bring down drug costs and curb excessive markups by hospitals and retailers. Supreme Court's latest intervention reinforces this need. On Monday, it called for price controls on all non-patented medicines and consumables, questioning why regulation should be confined to a few categories of drugs. Rather than overriding patents, GoI can use the Aadhaar-based DBT system to provide financial support to needy patients. This would require robust eligibility criteria and oversight, but could offer a more targeted solution. It would complement AMRIT (Affordable Medicines and Reliable Implants for Treatment) retail outlets.



Invoking the Patents Act may be politically attractive. But it risks sending the damaging signal that India is willing to take a permissive approach to IPR and patents. That is hardly the reputation it wants to attract global investment. The challenge is to make life-saving treatment affordable without undermining incentives that sustain pharma research and innovation.

With the IDBI strategic sale to Fairfax, GoI has taken a giant step in the disinvestment pathway

EARLY DIWALI DHAMAKA



Madan Sabnavis

The sale of IDBI Bank comes at a time when the economy is facing challenges on account of a persistent crude oil shock impacting forex balances that are being addressed by RBI. This has also strained government balances with various conjectures being made on the fiscal slippages due to higher subsidy outflows. Needless to say, a flow of ₹26,000 cr comes as a bonanza for the government.

What makes this sale special is that while discussions started from 2022 onwards, the deal has been completed in 2026 during which time the bank has become even stronger than before, thus making it a good pick for Fairfax in terms of valuation.



The funds will go as FDI. While this ~$5.5 bn will be a one-time flow, it opens the door for greater participation of FDI in future asset sales in the banking sector

Several things stand out from this sale:

- GoI would be getting around ₹26,000 cr, which is significant at a time when fiscal balances can be strained due to the higher subsidy bill outflow. In fact, the budget has been delivering well on the non-debt receipts side, which includes both disinvestment and asset monetisation where a lot of urgency has been shown. The target will now be exceeded with the IDBI Bank sale providing the icing. Further, with GoI still retaining 15% stake, there is room for further sale in the market at an opportune time.
- As the investment comes from Fairfax, a Canada-based company, funds will go as FDI — something that India has been looking to shore up the capital account. While the amount of around $5.5 bn would be a one-time flow, it opens the door for greater participation of FDI in future asset sales in the banking sector. Fairfax has equity stake in CSB and would have to merge the same over a time period. We have already seen such investment by foreign entities in banks like Yes Bank and RBL Bank, which will make other foreign investors interested.
- IDBI Bank has demonstrated over time that with adept management and support from government and LIC, there can be a major turnaround. Gross NPA ratio has fallen to 2.3% in FY26, which is almost 30% over 2018 when it was placed under the umbrella of prompt corrective action.

Further, the capital adequacy ratio of the bank is more than comfortable at 25.5%. And this has been accomplished with no major management change, and with the existing so-called public sector bankers bringing about this transformation.

- The curious thing about this sale is that while GoI gets money that's accounted for as disinvestment, the transaction is not really privatisation. This is so because the bank is treated as a private bank since LIC was the leading stakeholder with around 49%, while GoI held around 45%. This means that this deal cannot be interpreted as being the beginning of a programme of privatisation in the banking sector, and should be viewed on a standalone basis.
- While the deal isn't privatisation, this issue will come back to the discussion table for sure. In 2021, GoI had spoken about privatising a couple of PSBs. It was largely believed that IDBI Bank would be a test case as it would provide some clues to how such deals transpire — even though it's not a case of government giving up ownership.

The decision on such future deals is evidently the prerogative of the owner, which is the government. But there will be a couple of issues that will have to be kept in mind:



Lighting it up

- PSBs have played a very important role in carrying out government social programmes like Jan Dhan and MUDRA. A lot of resilience shown by the economy during Covid has been due to cash transfers being enabled by these accounts. This lever will get diluted once there is any change in ideology on this subject.
- All PSBs are profitable and comparable to private sector banks on almost all performance parameters. In fact, there is a change in investor presentations where private banks juxtapose their performance with some of the large PSBs for comparison. In the past, it was the other way round.
- PSBs have built a strong retail lending franchise in the last 5 yrs based on leading-edge technology that has added to stock valuation.
- Banks as a group have turned profitable, and been paying progressively high dividends to GoI, which comes as non-tax revenue in the budget. The dividend paid has been rising and has been upwards of ₹25,000 cr in the recent past. Any divestment will mean an immediate gain in terms of revenue, but depletion of future flow of income.



Banks as a group have turned profitable, paying progressively high dividends to GoI. Any divestment will mean an immediate gain in revenue, but depletion of future flow of income

Will anything change for IDBI Bank? It would mean business as usual for deposit holders and borrowers, and the regulatory framework for the bank remains the same. The interesting thing would be the future of HR management. Normally all such deals could involve some disruption at the top in terms of roles and designations. There could be upward calibration in compensation. This is something that needs to be seen.

The writer is chief economist, Bank of Baroda. Views are personal

Catch Up If You Can, BhAI



Ananya Roy

The AI race is fast turning into a battle of deep pockets. The US is pouring billions into frontier models, advanced chips and data centres, while China is building competing capabilities. India, meanwhile, risks being left behind in the most capital-intensive phase of the tech revolution.

Does missing the first phase mean missing the entire opportunity? History suggests otherwise. India missed much of the manufacturing boom that transformed East Asia. It still built a globally competitive ITeS industry during the same period. AI could offer a similar second chance — provided India plays to its strengths.

In the 1990s-early 2000s, China and other East Asian economies strengthened their position in global manufacturing supply chains. India struggled to replicate their success. But it found an alternative: benefiting from tech advances, outsourcing and growing global demand, its services exports grew more than 80× since the 1990s, and now contribute around 55% to GVA.

Missing manufacturing was not inconsequential. India did forfeit opportunities in employment, exports and industrial capabilities. But a country can miss one structural boom and still capture value from an adjacent opportunity that aligns better with its existing strengths.

Phase 1 of the AI boom has been dominated by foundational models, high-performance computing, advanced semiconductors and data centres. These require capital, specialised research capabilities and access to cutting-edge hardware. India has made progress. But it doesn't yet command the global position enjoyed by leading US tech companies.

The centre of gravity could gradually shift — from expensive business of building ever-larger models, to the far-less-settled challenge of putting them to work across the economy, from customer service and software development to banking, healthcare, manufacturing and logistics. This is where India's existing capabilities matter. Its large technical workforce, globally integrated ITeS industry, DPI, and experience in delivering technology solutions to international clients provide a foundation for AI applications and integration.

An October 2026 World Bank report, 'India and Artificial Intelligence: Seizing the Development Opportunity', makes a similar case. It identified India's technically skilled workforce, IT ecosystem and digital infras as strengths that could give the country an edge when it comes to AI application. Private AI investment in India has risen from $1.2 bn in 2024 to $4.1 bn in 2025, while employment in GCCs has increased from 1.9 mn to 2.36 mn professionals.



C'mon

But having the right ingredients may not always translate into a perfect dish. Indian firms must move beyond cost-efficient execution, and move to proprietary applications that can help integrate AI into client workflows at scale. Otherwise, AI could commoditise parts of the very ITeS industry that has the potential to anchor its next growth phase.

Alternatively, the extraordinary investment cycle could disappoint. If incremental spending on computing infra generates progressively lower returns, revenues fail to justify valuations, interest rates rise, or public resistance slows adoption, AI investment could decelerate sharply.

The recent debate around OpenAI illustrates the uncertainty. Its Sept 2026 annualised revenue was nearly $50 bn, much below a previously indicated $70 bn figure. To be sure, the difference also reflected differences in the treatment of cloud partner sales.

A correction could benefit India if it makes computing cheaper and allows domestic businesses to adopt AI without replicating the enormous infrastructure investments made elsewhere. India could avoid some direct capital losses, while capturing productivity gains from affordable technology.

But as the 2000 dotcom bust showed, investors who avoided excesses of the bubble were spared heavy losses. It, however, didn't make them immune to the economic consequences of a tech revolution reshaping entire industries. Similarly, India may escape some of the financial fallout if the AI investment boom unravels. But it can't escape the cost of falling behind in its adoption.

Ultimately, the bubble may or may not deflate. But India's fortunes from here onwards will depend on whether it can turn its existing technology ecosystem into a springboard for the next lap of the AI race.

The writer is founder, Credibull Capital

Pump Price Before Trump Politics



Sanjeev Choudhary

Donald Trump's deal to buy Russian diesel may look like striking hypocrisy from a president who has pressured other countries to stop buying Russian oil. But as S Jaishankar said in June this year about US signalling to India in the early years of the Ukraine war, 'At that time, the US specifically asked India to buy Russian oil to stabilise the oil market. Let's not pretend that there is some great principle involved here. Do it when it suits us, don't do it when it doesn't suit us.'

Jaishankar's remarks point to a recurring feature of US energy policy: when geopolitical objectives collide with the need to keep fuel affordable at home, the latter takes precedence.

The immediate pressure is political. US pump prices have risen ahead of November's midterm elections, threatening to fuel inflation and hurt the Republican Party. With fuel taxes much lower than in India, the US has limited scope to cut levies when global prices rise. India can reduce its higher fuel taxes and ask state-run oil companies to absorb losses temporarily, spreading the price impact over time. US private retailers, by contrast, are more likely to pass on market movements quickly. So, keeping global supplies abundant and prices contained becomes a domestic political imperative for every US president.

There is a strong precedent. After Russia invaded Ukraine, the Biden administration persuaded European allies to support a price cap on Russian oil rather than block its exports altogether. The cap aimed to limit Moscow's revenues while keeping Russian crude flowing. Removing large volumes from the market risked pushing prices higher and hurting consumers and the global economy. Washington's encouragement of Indian purchases, as Jaishankar described it, reflected this concern about maintaining supplies.



Diesel disco

Similarly, US enforcement of sanctions on Iranian oil has been uneven, with exports continuing, particularly to China, until the current naval blockade of Iranian ports. As the US war on Iran disrupted supplies through the Strait of Hormuz, Washington also temporarily relaxed restrictions on Russian oil and even Iranian oil to bring additional supplies to market. The underlying concern was the same: the US cannot punish its adversaries at the cost of higher fuel prices for its own consumers.

Trump has announced Russian diesel supplies totalling 8 lakh tonnes over 2 mths. But deliveries can take weeks, freight costs are high, and it remains unclear how much will add to global supply rather than divert cargoes from other buyers.

The sequence is telling. Trump pressured Ukraine to stop attacking Russian refineries, blaming the strikes for high US diesel prices, before announcing the deal. Two days later, he declared an 'energy ceasefire' between Russia and Ukraine, although neither side publicly confirmed it. Together, the moves could reassure markets by promising supplies and reducing the risk of further disruption.

As with Trump's repeated claims that the Iran war was nearing an end, expectations of a recovery in diesel supply can influence prices before the physical market improves. This doesn't prove that market management was the sole motive but underscores the political importance of fuel prices.

Why is the US, despite its vast oil production, so sensitive to global markets? Its crude oil output is lower than its consumption, and its production does not always match what its refineries are designed to process. The shale boom has increased supplies of light, sweet crude, while many US refineries are configured for heavier grades.

This helps explain why the country imports crude even as it exports its own oil. It also trades extensively in refined products, including diesel, whose prices reflect global supply and demand. Disruptions abroad can, therefore, raise US prices even when domestic production remains strong.

Canadian energy minister Tim Hodgson told ET in January that the US appeared to be trying to redraw the world's energy map by changing where countries obtained their supplies. But events since then show the limits of this ambition. BP CEO Meg O'Neill, speaking to ET last week, said decades of global trade had embedded product flows so deeply that materially changing them would be difficult, even as governments sought greater resilience and independence.

The US can seek to weaponise global interdependence through tariffs and sanctions. But it can't insulate itself from the consequences. When those consequences reach the pump, geopolitics can yield to the price of a gallon of diesel.

sanjeev.choudhary@timesofindia.com

JUST IN JEST

It's uncool to force yourself to come across as cool — watch the Meta boss

Guinness Look of Zuckerberg Recorded

Let's Face(book) it. There are few spectacles more embarrassing than a man determined to appear cool. Mark Zuckerberg, who has already traded his Silicon Valley hoodie for gold chains and designer tees, has now demonstrated that even googols of dollars cannot purchase the ability to drink a pint of Guinness — that delightful Irish stout which, like Bob Dylan's songs, is an acquired taste — convincingly. During a podcast aired this week, the Meta-physical boss took a sip of the Dark Stuff, appeared to chew it, and produced a facial expression suggesting that somebody had slipped him liquid taxation. The internet, naturally, guffawed.

There is a valuable lesson here. Coolness is a peculiar commodity whose value depreciates in direct proportion to the effort invested in acquiring it. The moment somebody decides to become cool — rather than simply being whatever creature he or she is — the enterprise is doomed. Being hip is a treacherous investment, especially for 42-yr-olds like Zuck. By the time the aspiring hipster has identified a trend, purchased necessary accessories and rehearsed appropriate facial expressions, the trend has moved on. The punter is left holding, well, a pint of beer. The sensible alternative is to embrace one's uncoolness. It's cheaper, needs no rehearsals and rarely attracts ridicule. (Meta stocks were unaffected.)

THE SPEAKING TREE

Let Your Ego Transcend

A K JAGANNATHAN

The 2026 Nobel Peace Prize has been awarded to South African jurist and human rights pioneer Navi Pillay for her lifelong commitment to peace, international law, and prosecution of war crimes and genocide. A former UN high commissioner for human rights, she exemplifies quiet perseverance. Like most Nobel laureates, she never sought the prize; recognition arrived unbidden, a testament to selfless service.

Contrast this with US President Donald Trump, who once proclaimed he had brokered India-Pakistan ceasefire after the Pahalgam terror attack. Pakistan supported his Nobel candidacy; India did not. When the committee overlooked him, he denounced it, calling its decision a 'stain on Norway'. His expectation of peace prize while overseeing conflict with Iran shows how ego can distort rationality.

Gita teaches that renouncing ego leads to spiritual progress: performing duty without attachment to results, abandoning pride in doership, surrendering desires to God. Ego renunciation is not merely symbolic; it is transformative.

Men and women alike enact this principle through tonsure at Tirupati, offering their hair to Swami Venkateswara. It is a ritual of humility that sheds worldly esteem and purifies the soul. Similarly, fasting, silence or service to the poor are other pathways where ego dissolves, leaving space for devotion and peace. Ego can inflate or dissolve. When surrendered, it becomes the doorway to peace.

STEP UP TO THE PLATE

Sazenka

Tokyo

At Sazenka, in Tokyo's upmarket Minami-Azabu neighbourhood, Chinese cuisine finds a distinctive, Japanese soul. Chef Tomoya Kawada's culinary philosophy brings together the intensity of Chinese cooking — its fire, oil and intricate layering of flavours — with the restraint, seasonality and delicacy associated with Japanese cuisine.

The name Sazenka evokes tea, Zen and Chinese cooking, and the experience is designed around this meeting of traditions. Rather than simply grafting Japanese ingredients onto Chinese recipes, Kawada seeks a more considered conversation between the two culinary cultures.



Seasonal produce finds its way into dishes such as spring rolls and Sichuan preparations, while the kitchen's command of contrasting textures and flavours lends familiar ingredients new dimensions.

The pheasant soup, steamed pork with aubergines and simmered Ōnori abalone are among the dishes associated with the restaurant. Tea, too, is integral to the experience, with carefully brewed selections offering an alternative to conventional wine pairings.

Sazenka is not an inexpensive indulgence, but it offers something more compelling than novelty — an exploration of how two great culinary traditions can enrich each other without losing their identities.

Chat Room

Voter Delight, Not Satisfaction

The Edit, 'Listen to Consumer Feedback, It Helps' (Oct 14), rightly urges businesses and governments to welcome criticism and act before dissatisfaction becomes distrust. One distinction, however, is that citizens deserve to be recognised more than consumers. Access to public services and the exercise of democratic rights must not depend on their ability to attract attention or exert pressure: (1) Every grievance should have an accountable owner, a reasonable resolution deadline and an accessible appeal mechanism. (2) Listening must reach those least able to complain, such as the elderly, persons with disabilities and people unfamiliar with digital systems. (3) Institutions should measure whether problems were actually resolved, rather than merely count complaints marked 'closed'. Let's face it, welcoming criticism is a sign of institutional confidence.

Koushik Acharya
Noida

Opinion

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 15, 2026



KEEPING TABS
Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw

There are times when friends become foes, so it is very important to identify the factors that could make your production and economy vulnerable to someone else's policies

Privatisation at last

IDBI Bank's sale must spur wider banking reforms

THE GOVERNMENT'S DECISION to sell a controlling stake in IDBI Bank to Canada's Fairfax Financial Holdings is a decisive victory for economic reform, even if New Delhi prefers the euphemism of "strategic restructuring" to privatisation. After years of delays, the government is finally relinquishing control of a commercial bank. The ₹52,878-crore transaction brings foreign capital and reinforces a fundamental principle: the government has no compelling reason to be in the business of running banks. Fairfax's winning bid for the 60.72% stake held jointly by the government and LIC challenges the belief that public ownership guarantees financial stability. The state should be an effective regulator, not an indiscriminate owner of commercial enterprises. The distinction matters because ownership reform is ultimately about incentives, accountability, and the efficient allocation of scarce national public capital.

The sale has endured an exasperatingly long journey. In-principle approval came in 2021, expressions of interest were invited in 2022, and successive regulatory, valuation, and procedural hurdles kept pushing the finish line further away. Even this year, bids falling below the reserve price threatened to derail the process before revised offers revived it. Such delays undermine investor confidence and expose the government's reluctance to deliver reform. Fairfax's investment comes amid a powerful wave of foreign financial institutions betting on India, drawn by its expanding affluent class, deepening financial markets, and status as the world's fastest-growing major economy. Japanese lenders alone invested more than $6 billion in Indian banking stakes last year, including deals involving Mitsubishi UFJ Financial Group and Sumitomo Mitsui Financial Group. Global capital clearly sees the opportunity. India's policymakers must stop making it unnecessarily difficult to participate.

For IDBI Bank, private ownership promises freedom from constraints that have historically hobbled public-sector banking. Its troubles predate the present government. During the United Progressive Alliance years, aggressive corporate lending, particularly to infrastructure and other large projects, planted the seeds of a debilitating bad-loan crisis. The subsequent recognition of stressed assets exposed weak credit appraisal and oversight, eventually necessitating massive capital support and LIC's rescue in 2019. Successive governments bear responsibility for allowing these problems to fester. The bank's experience illustrates the enormous costs of political influence, weak governance, and delayed corrective action. Commercial decisions should be driven by risk, returns, and customer needs, not political priorities. Private ownership can bring sharper accountability, better technology, and greater efficiency. Privatisation is not a substitute for robust regulation, but neither should regulation become an excuse for continued state ownership. Regulators must treat all lenders alike. Public resources belong in infrastructure, education, and healthcare, not commercial loan books.

The test is whether IDBI Bank begins a broader programme rather than becoming another isolated achievement. Cabinet approval must translate swiftly into completed ownership transfer, without fresh obstacles or attempts to dilute the incoming investor's operational autonomy. The government must also build stronger public-sector banks, some capable of becoming global champions. Consolidation, professional management, and greater operational freedom must accompany a credible programme of selective privatisation. Political resistance and institutional inertia cannot be allowed to dictate economic policy indefinitely. India needs more capital, competition, and innovation in banking, not an expanding justification for state ownership. Fairfax's acquisition sends an encouraging signal that international investors are willing to commit serious capital to India's financial future. The government should respond with equal confidence. IDBI Bank's sale is long overdue. The greater mistake now would be to stop here.

Karaoke hack shows cybercrime is routine

A SPATE OF cyberattacks that has rocked Japan Inc in recent weeks is alarming not because of some novel artificial intelligence hacking methods, but the sheer scale.

The head of the ruling Liberal Democratic Party's cybersecurity body went so far as to describe it as a "state of emergency in cyberspace". Brokerage firm Daiwa Securities Group, SoftBank's cloud subsidiary IDC Frontier, railway operator JR East, convenience-store chain Lawson, car-rental platform Times, and even a major karaoke operator and grilled meats restaurant chain have all been affected.

Publicly disclosed breaches, mostly impacting customer data, through September surpassed the total for all of last year, according to Tokyo-based cybersecurity firm Trend Micro. And while ransomware attacks globally slid by 3% between July 2025 and June 2026, according to Microsoft's Digital Defense Report published this month, they surged 67% in Japan. This is likely only the tip of the iceberg.

I've been warning that this could happen in Japan for a while. Now Qilin, the notorious Russian-speaking cybercrime group that claimed responsibility for last year's attack on beermaker Asahi Group Holdings, told local broadcaster JNN last week that attacks on Japanese companies and government agencies were likely to increase. "That is not a threat, but our expert opinion," the group added, claiming that Japan has one of the worst computer security systems in the world.



CATHERINE THORBECKE
Bloomberg

Breaches impacting karaoke joints and barbecue chains might not get the same headlines as the looming threat of rogue agents misbehaving. Yet Japan's deluge shows how new AI tools have made it easier and cheaper for bad actors to find and exploit older security holes and automate the process.

Many in the AI industry have shifted the safety debate to supposedly existential threats while the more immediate harms proliferate in plain sight. If governments and AI companies can't use the technology to defend against easily exploitable weaknesses, there's little reason to trust that they'll coordinate effectively against future dangers.

Tokyo, to its credit, is treating this as an extremely urgent problem. Yet some of the official guidance still feels surprisingly surface level, including checking logs for abnormalities, patching vulnerabilities, and re-examining what data needs to be stored. The government has also ramped up standards, especially around critical infrastructure, and large firms are more likely to harden systems. Yet small and medium-size businesses account for roughly 99% of firms. Some 70% lacked adequate cybersecurity defence systems, a government survey found.

Tokyo has long been aware of cybersecurity talent shortages that leave Japan vulnerable. Yet it's clear that it needs a much more sustained push into training and investment. This is far from a Japan problem. South Korea spent the past week reeling from cyberattacks on major banks and even megachurches. US-based Crowdstrike said the attacks on the banks likely came from a financially motivated actor using a Chinese agentic AI tool and Anthropic's Claude Code. Over the weekend, hundreds of supermarkets in France were hit by cyberattacks that disabled refrigerators and spoiled food. Australia said last month that an OpenAI agent gained unauthorised access to a government health portal, becoming the latest in a growing list of hacking incidents involving rogue systems. The cross-border nature of threats makes timely information sharing between governments and the private sector increasingly urgent.

AI companies also have a role to play. If their products are dramatically lowering the cost and expertise required to conduct cyberattacks, they should help with preventing abuse and provide tools and training for defenders. Governments too should push to accelerate the adoption of such security systems.

COMPETITION CLUES

HOW COMPANIES IGNORE WARNING SIGNS, DISMISS DISRUPTION, AND INVEST THEIR WAY INTO DECLINE

The art of missing the obvious

RITA MCGRATH
M MUNEER

Respectively professor, Columbia Business School, and founder of Valize; and Fortune-500 advisor, startup investor, and Co-Founder, Medici Institute for Innovation



EVERY CEO DREAMS of finding a sustainable competitive advantage. Business schools teach it. Consultants package it into colourful frameworks. Boards discuss it with the seriousness normally reserved for succession planning.

The traditional strategy prescription has remained consistent for ages: find an advantage, build barriers around it, defend it aggressively, and enjoy the profits. Unfortunately, competitive advantages expire faster than what Michael Porter had proclaimed.

They simply fade away while management continues presenting optimistic outlook explaining why everything is under control. By the time the numbers start looking ugly, the patient is already in ICU. Consider the once-mighty HMT watches. There was a time when owning an HMT was passage. Then consumer tastes changed, global brands arrived, and younger buyers decided time could also be displayed on a mobile phone. The advantage did not disappear overnight. It slowly wandered away while everyone was busy attending meetings.

The good news is that competitive decline leaves clues behind.

Your employees secretly prefer the competition: One of the earliest warning signs is surprisingly simple. Your own employees stop buying your products. Employees are walking advertisements and recommend the company's offerings to family and friends. When they migrate to competitors, trouble is brewing. Many organisations suffer from what might be called Corporate Family Syndrome. Everyone knows Uncle Ramesh has a drinking problem, but nobody mentions it at weddings. Similarly, everyone knows the competitor's product is better, but nobody raises it in management meetings. Silence is the first symptom of decline.

More spending, less growth: There comes a point when organisations start investing more money and getting less in return. Psychologists call this escalation of commitment. CEOs call it confidence. The outcome is usually identical. Instead of questioning strategy, companies double down. More marketing, consultants, dashboards, and innovation workshops. Kingfisher Airlines famously demonstrated that spending money and creating value are not always the same thing. If investment keeps increasing while growth and margins remain stubbornly flat, you may not be strengthening the business.

Customers start choosing "good enough": Businesses have a curious tendency to fall in love with complexity. More features, more technology, etc. Customers want something simple. India's digital payments revolution is a classic case. Banks spent years adding features and paperwork. Then UPI arrived and essentially said, "How about pressing one button instead?" Consumers responded enthusiastically. History shows that customers rarely wake up demanding additional complexity. They generally prefer convenience. When simpler alternatives begin winning, it is a sign that your competitive advantage is becoming an expensive hobby.

Competitors appear from strange places: Most organisations define competition far too narrowly. Banks watch banks, hotels watch hotels, telcos watch telcos. Then someone from an entirely different industry steals their lunch. Newspapers worried about other newspapers. Then social media arrived. Taxi operators worried about other taxi operators. Then Uber appeared. The greatest threat to your business comes from somebody who does not even think they are competing with you.

Business historian Richard Tedlow described denial as refusing to acknowledge truths obvious to everyone else

Customers stop getting excited: Every innovation eventually becomes plumbing. Remember when food delivery apps felt magical? Now customers become irritated if delivery takes 30 minutes instead of 25. That is the lifecycle of every competitive advantage. When customers stop talking enthusiastically about your products and start discussing them like electricity, differentiation is evaporating.

The talent market votes against you: Companies often obsess over customer surveys while ignoring an equally important indicator. Can they attract top talent? The best professionals usually migrate towards opportunity. If talented people consistently choose other employers, pay attention. Even more worrying is when your star performers begin leaving. Employees are the first to detect strategic drift. They tend to leave before the crisis becomes obvious.

Investors lose their interest: Markets are never perfect. A few bad quarters are normal but years of underperformance won't be forgiven. When investors repeatedly assign low valuations despite management's heroic explanations, they may be signalling doubts about the future. Markets care less about where you've been than where you're going. Unfortunately, many CXOs continue celebrating past achievements while investors are already pricing future irrelevance.

Your technical experts keep warning you: One of the greatest ironies is that disruption is rarely invisible. Somebody usually sees it coming. The engineers, the scientists, the product teams know. The problem is that strategic decisions are made by people whose last interaction with technology involved resetting an AI tool. Kodak understood digital photography. Nokia saw smartphones coming. Countless organisations possessed the knowledge required to adapt.

What they lacked was the willingness to listen.

Innovation has gone missing: Success can be surprisingly dangerous. When the core business generates healthy profits, new ideas don't get funded. Experimental projects appear risky. Before long, innovation becomes something discussed in conferences. If few meaningful innovations have reached the market in recent years, your organisation may be harvesting yesterday's success instead of planting tomorrow's growth.

Leadership starts denying reality: This is the final and most dangerous stage. Customers, employees, investors, and competitors see the problem. Only leadership remains unconvinced. Business historian Richard Tedlow described denial as refusing to acknowledge truths obvious to everyone else.

Corporate history suggests denial is the last remaining competitive advantage before bankruptcy.

No single indicator guarantees decline. But when several appear together, the warning lights are flashing. The answer is not panic but honesty. Bring together people from different functions. Ask difficult questions. Challenge assumptions. Listen to bad news.

By the time the board finally agrees there is a problem, the market has usually moved on to discussing who will buy the company's assets. The best time to rethink strategy is when the first whispers of irrelevance begin echoing through the corridors.

A carbon market for agri-based income



SHASHANK PANDEY

The author is a 1991 Fellow with Mercatus Centre at George Mason University, Washington DC. He is working on the carbon market operation in Uttar Pradesh

The Aadi private carbon project, which has paid farmers for something they could prove, has set a benchmark that is as much legal as agronomic

ON SEPTEMBER 17, the director general of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR), in Ludhiana, initiated direct benefit transfers of over ₹2.9 crore to 2,550 farmers in Punjab and Haryana. The money was payment for carbon stored in their soil. Between 2019 and 2022, these farmers adopted direct-seeded rice, reduced tillage, and residue management under the Aadi programme, a private carbon project run by Grow Indigo, with technical guidance from ICAR, and registered with Verra under its agricultural land management methodology. The first issuance covered about 30,000 acres and produced more than 50,000 credits—individual farmers received between ₹3,000 and ₹15,000, depending on the credits verified from their own fields.

The transfer of funds is significant for the future of the agriculture-based carbon credit market in India. This is one of the first instances where an Indian farmer has been paid, through a traceable public process, for a measured environmental outcome rather than for acreage or inputs. Three features of the transaction deserve attention, because together they describe what a credible farm carbon market requires, and because much of what is being built elsewhere in the country does not yet meet that standard.

The first is that payment was done post-measurement. The practice was adopted in 2019, and the credits were issued in 2026; the funds were released only after independent verification. Farmers waited seven years to receive payment, highlighting one of the biggest barriers to the carbon market: delay. But the delay is a normal incident of the existing domestic carbon market. A carbon credit represents a tonne of CO_2 that would otherwise be in the atmosphere, and the market for it depends on the claim being demonstrable. Farmers with similar holdings received different amounts because their fields sequestered different quantities, which is precisely how an outcome-based instrument should behave. Compare the tendency across several state programmes to announce projected credit volumes and rupee values years before any issuance. Uttar Pradesh's agroforestry scheme has publicised 42 lakh credits and ₹202 crore, while the registry entries for its six forest circle projects record annual estimates that are a small fraction of that figure; actual disbursement is in the region of ₹50 lakh. Projection is not a substitute for verification, and a market that confuses the two will discount everything that comes out of it.

The project will be judged on whether its second monitoring cycle, covering farmers who joined after 2022, holds up under scrutiny

The second is that the terms were disclosed. The ministry's statement recorded the acreage, the number of credits, the per-farmer range, and the revenue-sharing arrangement: farmers could choose an assured upfront payment, funded by the developer before the credits were sold, or 75% of net proceeds after sale. That contract can be evaluated by farmers. Most Indian farm carbon arrangements, state and private, disclose none of it. The rate per credit, share retained by the aggregator and the verifier, treatment of advances on failure, and forum for disputes remain unpublished, and the enrolment instrument itself is rarely available. A cultivator who commits land to a 20-year crediting period on those terms is not a participant in a market. He is a supplier of a commodity, whose price he does not know, to a buyer he cannot identify. Disclosure of the kind seen in Ludhiana should be the minimum condition of any programme that describes itself as farmer-centric.

The third is the division of labour. Aadi is a private project, but its measurement protocols, soil sampling, and remote sensing were developed with ICAR and delivered through agricultural universities and Krishi Vigyan Kendras; a public official initiated the transfer through the DBT architecture. The state supplied scientific credibility and payment infrastructure; the developer supplied aggregation, capital, and market access. This is a more defensible structure than either of the alternatives now in circulation, like a state forest department acting as project proponent, aggregator, and seller of credits generated on private land, as in Uttar Pradesh. It concentrates every role in one office and leaves the farmer's legal entitlement to the carbon resting on an unpublished form. A purely private aggregator with no public scientific anchor, as in several grouped projects now listing across the Indo-Gangetic plain, leaves consent and measurement to the developer's discretion, and recent field reporting from Uttar Pradesh found village heads unaware of projects enrolled in their jurisdictions.

None of this makes Aadi a complete model. It sits in the voluntary market, outside the offset mechanism of the Carbon Credit Trading Scheme whose start-date rule excludes projects that began before January 2025. It relies on a single standard's methodology. And soil carbon is among the more contested credit types globally, because reversal is easy and measurement is expensive. The programme will be judged on whether its second monitoring cycle, covering farmers who joined after 2022, holds up under scrutiny.

But it has set a benchmark, which is as much legal as agronomic. Any farm carbon programme in India should now be expected to pay against verified issuance, disclose its terms before enrolment, and separate the functions of scientific measurement, aggregation, and payment. The Model Rules for Felling of Trees in Agricultural Lands, issued in June 2025, already give states a registry framework for trees on farmland; a comparable parcel-level register for soil carbon is the obvious next step, and the Centre's agriculture carbon framework should require it. The farmers in Ludhiana were paid for something they could prove. That should be the rule, not the exception.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Security & convenience

Apropos of "Connecting financial dots" (*FE*, October 14), consolidating financial information can help people track savings, identify forgotten accounts, and make better financial decisions. But convenience shouldn't come at the cost of privacy. Linking bank accounts and investment records across platforms creates risks if data are misused or security systems fail. Customers must retain control over the information they share. Regulators should insist on explicit consent, encryption, clear grievance procedures, and penalties for unauthorised access. Financial institutions must also explain these arrangements in simple language. Digital integration will earn public confidence only when transparency, security, and individual choice receive the same priority as convenience.
—A Myilsami, Coimbatore

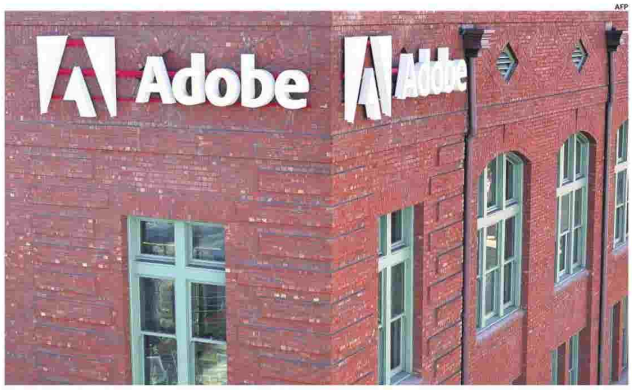
Drug pricing plunder

It is appalling to learn that more than 180 life-saving drugs and 780 medical devices are being sold at inflated margins up to ten times their actual landing cost. Profiteering off critically ill patients suffering from cancer, heart diseases, and kidney failures is nothing short of extortion. While vulnerable families are pushed into poverty trying to afford basic healthcare, pharmaceutical entities continue to extract huge profits. Mere appeals to the government and the pricing regulator are insufficient; strict regulatory caps on drug pricing must be enforced immediately. The government must act swiftly to stop this plunder and make critical treatment affordable for every citizen.
—Vijaykumar HK, Raichur

●Write to us at feletters@expressindia.com

Regd. No: DL -21048/03-05. R.N.I. No.26750/74. Printed and Published by Ramesh Chander Malhotra on behalf of The Indian Express (P) Ltd and printed at The Indian Express (P) Ltd Press, A-8, Sector-7, Noida - 201301 and published at The Indian Express (P) Ltd, Mezzanine Floor, Express Building, 9 & 10, Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg, New Delhi-110002. Phone: 0120-6651500. (Cover price: Patna:₹12, Raipur: ₹12, Srinagar ₹15) Chairman of the Board: Viveck Goenka, Editor: Shyamal Majumdar, Editor (Delhi) Shobhana Subramanian* (*Responsible for selection of News under the PRP Act)
©Copyright: The Indian Express (P) Ltd All rights reserved. Reproduction in any manner, electronic or otherwise, in whole or in part, without prior written permission is prohibited. The Financial Express®

OUR VIEW



AFP

AI isn't done shaking up the software industry

The latest warning shot is an AI-enabled clone of an Adobe suite that took very little time and money compared to the original. Software package incumbents need to fortify themselves

Artificial intelligence (AI) has even begun to disrupt the packaged software industry. Adobe, famous for its design tools, recently received a shot across its bow. Developer Brandon Thomas used an Anthropic AI model and the open-source Rust programming language to build ArtCraft, a free alternative to Adobe's Creative Cloud suite. The seven-app package, released on GitHub, lacks the original's finesse, features and more. But it is clear how easily replicas can be made of stuff developed by big companies. In its last fiscal year alone, Adobe invested $4.3 billion in R&D, almost a fifth of its annual revenue. All Thomas needed was a few months with Claude Opus 5.5 to 'vibe-code' the apps in Rust. As other developers pitch in to give ArtCraft feature parity, an entire industry stands exposed to such pursuits.

Thomas has cloned Microsoft Office too; Autodesk is next. AI coding tools do not need one to copy the target's source code. Whether such efforts constitute legitimate competition or cross legal limits is a question of detail that jurists may or may not be able to grasp. In the interim, clones could blunt the edge of established vendors and cramp their pricing power. In February, Anthropic's release of 11 open-source agentic AI tools for its Claude Cowork platform had rattled global software stocks and pushed Indian IT companies on the defensive, as investors asked whether agents could replace software products and services at scale. The same lab's Mythos model then took the shape of a wrecking ball for cybersecurity sellers. Even software-as-a-service firms are feeling the heat. In a post, Zoho co-founder Sridhar Vembu said the company would have to reinvent itself amid an "uncertain business outlook for software." Rising server costs and AI bills have begun to weigh on companies like Zoho. Cheap software scrambled together with AI cannot count on instant adoption, though; at least not by users who need reliable and secure systems. It can take much more effort to review AI-spun code than human work. Running such software locally without telemetry may reduce privacy risks, but does not assure either reliability or security. Corporate users would also be wary of the intellectual property questions that arise. Thomas claimed a "clean room" approach that used new code based on public specifications and observed behaviour, instead of copying Adobe's source code. This method does have precedents. However, matters of copyright, trademarks and trade secrets are not treated the same way across jurisdictions.

By now, software companies must be well aware that customers may switch to free or cheaper options if the latter find the trade-offs acceptable. Given their deep pockets, incumbents could try buying out startups that pose a threat, although this could invite even more cloning. Open-source offerings could aim for the enterprise market with quality and legal assurances, much as IBM's Red Hat does for Linux. Software majors could also leverage their brand appeal, distribution networks and client relationships, while upgrading their warranty coverage of risks. With some effort, users who dabble with other options could potentially be lured back. How the market pie of packaged software is eventually shared will be determined by what users trust. In that sense, this contest has only just begun. As with Indian IT services, it also makes space for contrarian bets on this industry's future.

MY VIEW | OTHER SPHERE

Why we must focus on building the capacity of children to learn

Knowledge evolves but orthodoxies often prevail. It's an educational imperative to foster open minds



ANURAG BEHAR
is CEO of Azim Premji Foundation.

In 1960, at Gombe in Tanzania, Jane Goodall watched a chimpanzee strip the leaves from a twig, push it into a termite mound and draw it out crawling with insects. She wrote to her mentor Louis Leakey, who is said to have replied that we must now redefine 'tool' or redefine 'man' or accept chimpanzees as human. Tool-making was supposed to separate us from every other creature. In one afternoon, it was gone.

It is worth asking how that separation line came to be drawn so firmly. The 20th-century study of animal minds began with a sound instinct: do not credit an animal with sophisticated thought when a simpler explanation will do. That is good method. But good methods have a way of hardening into doctrine. Caution became denial, and denial became orthodoxy. Generations of researchers were trained to see animals as stimulus-response machines and contrary evidence was waved away as sentimentality. Frans de Waal has a name for the reflex: anthropodenial, the refusal in advance to see in other animals what we recognize in ourselves.

His work dismantles that refusal. Take his experiment with capuchin monkeys. Two animals do the same small task. One is rewarded with a juicy grape and the other with a cucumber. The one with the cucumber, perfectly content a moment earlier, flings it back at the experimenter. A sense of fairness is evidently not a sole human preserve.

Ed Yong's *An Immense World* summarizes vast amounts of research on what animals perceive and feel. Many migratory birds appear to carry a compass in their eyes. The leading hypothesis is that light-sensitive proteins let them detect Earth's magnetic field through quantum chemistry, so that they literally see the planet's magnetism laid over the landscape. Some fish live in a world of electric fields, sensing distortions in the currents they generate and conversing with one another in electrical signals, a channel with no counterpart in human experience nor imagination.

Jakob von Uexküll proposed the idea of the 'umwelt' in 1909: every creature lives inside its own sensory bubble and mistakes it for the whole world. All the research in Yong's book emphasizes the centrality of this notion in nature.

In 2024, researchers studying African savanna elephants reported that the animals seem to address one another with individual names. These are not imitations of the other elephant's voice but specific sound labels. An elephant responds to the call meant for it, not one meant for another. We have shared this planet with elephants for as long as we have existed. We lacked the patience and instruments to notice that they might be calling each other by name.

What should we take from this? Not merely that animals are more intelligent than we assumed. The deeper lesson is how confidently wrong our earlier consensus was and how natural that confidence looked. Textbooks said with the calm authority of settled science that animals lack morality, that only humans make tools, and that the world is what our five senses report. Each claim was held by learned people. Each was overturned by accumulation of knowledge: observers who watched for years, experimenters who designed fairer tests, curious minds who faced reality for what it is.

This is one reason to read and learn widely and with an open mind. Knowledge does not advance in a straight line inside one discipline. It often advances at the edges, where ethology meets psychology, where sensory biology meets physics, where a field researcher's patience meets an engineer's instruments. The person who reads only within her field, or only what confirms what she already believes, is consulting an outdated map and does not know it.

The habit must begin in childhood, and school education has responsibility. School cannot stuff all knowledge into a child, especially since knowledge grows every day. By the time a student leaves school, much of what she learnt gets refined, qualified or overturned.

Learning content will always be incomplete. What can endure is the disposition and capacity to keep learning. School can build these: the stamina to stay with a long text, the ability to hold a view lightly, the pleasure of being surprised, the instinct to ask why and listen. A child who has learnt to love a book, and wander from it to the next, has developed what no syllabus can specify and no examination can assess.

No one finishes being educated at 22. So confidence in settled knowledge is especially dangerous among those who run institutions or shape policy. I have watched this happen more often than I care to count. Orthodoxies in education, as in ethology, are perpetuated by able people who stopped learning at the edge of their own certainty.

Let us end with humility. If we could be so wrong about the minds of chimpanzees, monkeys and elephants, how sure can we be about the lives of people unlike ourselves? Those in poverty, the unfamiliar, those whose language or habits are not ours. The denial of another's capacities and worthiness has an ugly history among humans too. Humility is not weakness of conviction. It is simply about not forgetting that our mental map is partial and that others may perceive what we cannot. A world made of minds with humility would be a more humane one.

10 YEARS AGO


mint
Infosys again lowers revenue outlook

JUST A THOUGHT

Software is eating the world... but AI is eating software.

JENSEN HUANG

THEIR VIEW

How a net-zero labour strategy can save jobs from AI

SAUMITRA BHADURI



is professor, Madras School of Economics

The predominant question in the artificial intelligence (AI) debate, that of how many jobs it will destroy, matters but is not the most important. Some degree of labour displacement is inevitable, but we must understand where that will occur, how it will affect the structure of employment and whether we can design institutions that allow society to capture AI's productivity gains without letting its costs fall disproportionately on workers.

AI adoption is relatively slow and uneven, constrained by transition costs, organizational inertia, the need to redesign workflows and the difficulty of training systems on proprietary and incumbent data. In the US, business AI usage was only about 17-20% between December 2025 and May 2026. These early observations should, therefore, not be mistaken for AI's final effects. Nonetheless, they offer some useful stylized facts.

First, AI is exposing cognitive and white-collar work more than earlier automation, which focused largely on routine physical tasks. Generative AI is particularly effective at language, coding, information processing and analysis. The International Labour Organization estimates that one in four workers globally is in an occupation exposed to generative AI, rising to 34% in high-income countries. This does not mean white-collar jobs will disappear, but that the boundary between 'skilled' and 'automatable' work is shifting. *Second*, the risk is greatest at the entry level. AI can perform the generic tasks through which young workers traditionally enter firms and gain experience. US Census research found that employment among 22–24-year-olds fell by about 12% in the most AI-exposed industries over the 10 quarters after ChatGPT's introduction, largely because hiring weakened.

This makes firm-specific knowledge increasingly valuable in an AI-dominated ecosystem. A senior manager who understands a firm's customers, systems and risks is harder to replace than a junior programmer writing standard code. The same applies to junior analysts, accountants and researchers. The more generic the task, the easier it is to automate; the more firm-specific the knowledge, the more AI can complement the human worker.

This brings us to the *third* stylized fact: firm-specific knowledge is becoming an important source of protection against displacement. So far, there is little evidence that widespread AI adoption has produced economy-wide mass unemployment. An Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development survey found that 83% of small and medium firms (SMEs) using generative AI reported no change in their overall staffing needs. Only 9% reported a decline while 6% reported an increase. At the same time, 65% of AI-using SMEs reported that AI improved employee performance while 20% said it increased their demand for skills.

Such a policy approach could help balance human employment with AI deployment

Therefore, deployment matters. AI can replace workers doing generic tasks while enabling professionals and entrepreneurs to do far more. Productivity gains can create new markets, demand and jobs. The policy challenge is to capture AI's productivity gains while keeping its net employment impact broadly neutral. One way of doing this is to pursue a 'net-zero labour loss' strategy. The basic principle would mirror the logic of net-zero carbon policy. Firms adopting AI would bear a measurable labour-displacement obligation, while firms that generate employment would get labour credits that could be traded to offset that obligation.

To achieve net zero, the first step would be to establish a standardized labour-equivalent token measure. In simple terms, we would need to estimate how many AI tokens, or perhaps units of AI compute, are, on average, equivalent to replacing one full-time worker performing a standardizable task per year.

The next step is to tax each AI company with a reasonable rate of labour losses based on the number of labour-equivalent tokens it sells. The precise rate, of course, needs to be calibrated empirically against observed employment displacement.

Further, we need to differentiate between AI that substitutes workers and AI that makes them more productive. A company that uses AI to expand production and create additional jobs should be able to generate labour equivalent token credits. These credits could be sold to AI companies or other firms with an outstanding labour-displacement obligation. However, if sufficient credits are unavailable, that obligation could be settled through a labour-transition levy.

The government could use the proceeds to finance retraining, apprenticeships and skill development. Similarly, firms would need to report their token consumption and the corresponding labour displacement at a specified rate, as well as their net labour displacement. This would incentivize firms to use AI to raise productivity and create new jobs. It would also encourage firms to move workers along the AI value chain, ensuring net-zero labour loss rather than displacing them outright.

Therefore, the objective would be to make firms internalize part of the social cost of displacement while rewarding those that use AI to expand employment. There is no doubt that the smarter response to the risk of AI-driven labour displacement would be to design a system that manages it without stifling innovation. Regulating the AI industry to protect existing jobs could create costly distortions. A principle of net-zero labour displacement could help strike a balance.

MY VIEW | STATISTICALLY SPEAKING

Strong GDP but weak sentiment: are we witnessing a vibecession?

Persistent gaps between economic data and perceptions should make us examine the surveys designed to measure the latter



T.C.A. ANANT
is a visiting professor at the Institute for Studies of Industrial Development and former chief statistician of India

ISTOCKPHOTO



The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) released its latest consumer confidence surveys this week. The urban Current Situation Index stood at 87.9, down from 95.7 in March, and the rural index has fallen similarly. India's growth numbers are strong, and yet the mood apparently is not.

A 'vibecession' is a gap between two sets of numbers: the official figures on output and jobs, and what people tell surveys about how they feel. The first set gets relentless scrutiny; revisions to gross domestic product (GDP), base years and deflators are debated in public. The second tends to be read like a thermometer. But a sentiment index is built from a survey, and surveys have their own challenges.

The central bank's urban survey samples about 6,000 households in 19 cities. They are asked whether the general economic situation, employment, prices, their own income and their own spending are better, the same, or worse than a year ago, and what they expect a year ahead. The Current Situation Index is 100 plus the average of the five net balances (the 'better' share minus the 'worse' share); a Future Expectations Index is built the same way from the year-ahead answers. On balance across the five questions, a reading below 100 means more answers report deterioration than improvement.

Over the year to September, urban households' net balance on India's general economic situation worsened from −3.9 to −29.3, and on employment from −6.2 to −21.6, while on their own income, it rose from 3.2 to 3.9 and on spending from 78.5 to 81.1. So, the urban decline is concentrated in their assessments of the economy and jobs; the balances on own income and spending rose slightly. (In rural India, own income worsened, from −2.1 to −9.9.)

This may be a real change in mood. It may also reflect how the index is built: it gives equal weight to opinions about the economy and jobs, which no household can see directly, and to reports of a household's own income and spending. Prices also matter: official inflation rose from 2.7% in January to 4.8% in August, but the price-level component accounts arithmetically for only about a sixth of the urban decline.

Question order is one way a survey instrument shapes answers. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) guide to perception surveys, written for regulation, cites an experiment in which respondents who rated specific public services before the general question reported significantly lower overall satisfaction. Who answers and in what setting is another, as I argued in my earlier columns on opinion polls. RBI interviews both women and men, and it reports inflation perceptions separately for each. They differ: in its rural survey, men's median perception in September was 7.3% and women's 6.3%, and the gap has grown since March. The central bank's releases do not report the sentiment indices this way, so we cannot tell whether a fall is driven mainly by men or women, by earners or those who run the household. RBI should report data by gender and occupation, which it already records, to show which group drives the average.

Vijayendra Rao of Northwestern University poses the deeper problem simply: are these the questions people want to answer? In a recent essay, he describes villagers in South India designing their own survey. Only 17% of their questions matched the national sample survey because they wanted to know different things.

To judge poverty, they asked whether the last person to eat in a household had gone hungry that week, a question the standard surveys had not asked. Do RBI's five questions match what households worry about? We do not know.

Better survey practice would start by asking households what is on their minds, in their own words, as Rao and the OECD advise, and by publishing the answers that RBI already collects on why spending changed and how households describe their finances. These currently do not enter the indices and are not in the published tables. We could also add a rotating panel alongside the fresh samples, as the New York Fed's survey does; following the same households separates changes in opinion from changes in who answers, while replenishment keeps the panel representative. Further, we could seek to test sentiment against behaviour, as a Federal Reserve Board study did by linking surveys to verified purchase records; real spending on everyday retail items, the exercise found, had held up among those who felt worse.

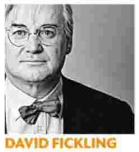
If data sources, base years and deflators are reasons to question GDP data, similar questions apply to the sentiment index: how it is designed, whom it samples, how its interviews are conducted and how much it is revised. RBI publishes standard errors for its inflation medians, but as far as I could find, not for the sentiment indices or their components. Even standard errors would not be enough because they capture only sampling error, not bias. In a column in this paper, Deepa Vasudevan noted that households' median inflation perceptions have long run above measured inflation.

Does current sentiment show a similar tilt? In the 31 RBI survey rounds from January 2018 to March 2020 and January 2023 to November 2025, the urban current index exceeded 100 only once, while the expectations index exceeded 100 throughout. The sustained contrast between pessimism about the present and optimism about the future suggests such a tilt in the instrument. It does not prove bias, but it warrants testing: we need to understand whether wording, reference periods and index construction contribute. A gap between GDP and sentiment does not show that either is wrong. It is a reason to examine how both are constructed and how uncertain they are, even where that uncertainty cannot be reduced to an error bar.

MINT CURATOR

Singapore has the means to fix Southeast Asia's air pollution

The city-state could use its financial heft to ensure accountability



DAVID FICKLING
is a Bloomberg Opinion columnist covering climate change and energy.



Singapore's prized air quality has taken a severe hit in recent months. AFP

A cloud of haze has descended across Southeast Asia over the past few months as a brutal El Niño helps incinerate forest and scrub in Indonesia. The smoke has spread across the region, forcing schools to close in Malaysia, diverting flights and giving tiny Singapore the world's worst air pollution. If these trends persist, this episode may turn into the worst in Southeast Asia since devastating wildfires in 2015.

To hear the way this is talked about in Singapore, the situation is an act of God: Fires just happen and no one can be sure exactly who is responsible. A more sophisticated diagnosis blames intransigence in Indonesia. When Singapore passed a law in 2014 threatening millions of dollars in fines for companies causing haze, Indonesia's refusal to cooperate made it impossible to implement. For the city-state, discretion towards its giant neighbour has become the better part of diplomacy.

It's hard to discern who is responsible for the region's forest fires because laws across the region are riddled with loopholes. With officialdom in Indonesia and Singapore blaming each other for the grim state of affairs, smallholders and businesses can get on with despoiling the landscape without accountability.

The central problem lies in Indonesia's fragmented oil palm, timber and paper industries. In each case, large companies control key supply nodes, such as palm oil mills and pulp factories, as well as significant plantation estates. While Malaysia's plantation companies such as SD Guthrie are mostly based in Kuala Lumpur, many of Indonesia's largest businesses are listed or headquartered instead in Singapore, the region's leading capital market and private wealth hub.

Beneath these giants is a complicated network of suppliers. In palm oil, that includes millions of smallholders—often poor rural farmers managing just a few hectares, sometimes with uncertain rights to their land and under far less scrutiny from government forestry officials. Their crops frequently pass through intermediaries before reaching mills. Pulpwood, by contrast, comes predominantly from large forestry concessions, whose ownership and relations with the major producers aren't always transparent.

Agribusiness companies source materials both from their own, more closely monitored plantations, and from outside suppliers whose environmental practices can be much harder to establish.

The result is a chronic governance gap. Singapore attempted to bring legal action against six companies over the 2015 fires, which cost the economy $1.4 billion and led to 100,000 deaths across the region. But two of the cases were dropped, and in the other four, Jakarta refused to cooperate with Singaporean authorities' requests to question a director. It is similarly argued that maps that would be needed to establish concession boundaries—and thus link liability with the clear evidence of fire hotspots provided by satellite imagery—cannot be handed over because of Indonesia's freedom of information laws. Faced with this pushback, Singapore allowed the cases to disappear into limbo.

That's too passive an approach. The four unresolved cases didn't involve obscure and remote companies, but major suppliers to Asia Pulp & Paper, part of the Sinar Mas business empire controlled by Indonesia's Widjaja family. Another business associated with the family, Golden Agri-Resources, has long been embedded in Singapore's corporate establishment.

If Singapore were serious about tackling this problem, it would leverage Indonesia's reliance on its financial sector. Plantation companies seeking listings, loans or capital there should be required to provide up-to-date maps of their concessions and suppliers. Singapore could impose the same principle that the EU applies to palm oil: produce must be traceable to the plots where it was grown, rather than vanishing into a mill where fruit farmed responsibly gets mixed with stuff of murkier provenance.

Turning it into a bilateral fight is a convenient excuse precisely because it lets both countries point fingers at each other. The truth, though, is that groups in each of them do well off the broken *status quo*, to the detriment of the vast majority who must live with the choking, eye-watering consequences—not to mention the rainforest itself, which is more shrunken and degraded with each passing year.

The aftermath of Singapore's 2014 law proved that responsibility for haze can drift and disperse over international borders quite as effectively as the smog itself. If anything good can come out of Southeast Asia's pollution disaster of 2026, let's hope it is rules that can finally deliver accountability to those who profit from the burning of a rainforest. ©BLOOMBERG

GUEST VIEW

How Hall and Woodford recrafted stabilization policy

AMARENDU NANDY



is an associate professor, economics and public policy, Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Ranchi

For much of the post-World War II period, Keynesian demand management guided macroeconomic policy. Governments raised spending or cut taxes during recessions and restrained demand when inflation threatened. It assumed stable relationships among income, consumption, unemployment and prices. That confidence faltered with the oil shocks of the 1970s that drove up costs as growth slowed and joblessness rose. Further demand stimulus risked worsening inflation. Milton Friedman and Edmund Phelps had already questioned the presumed trade-off between inflation and unemployment. Robert Lucas raised a more basic objection. When governments change policy, households and firms revise their expectations and behaviour. Past relationships may thus be unreliable policy guides.

This year's Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in memory of Alfred Nobel recognizes Robert Hall of Stanford and Michael Woodford of Columbia for their contributions to the microeconomic foundations of macroeconomic stabilization. While Hall established an empirical basis for forward-looking consumption behaviour by households, Woodford developed a framework connecting such behaviour with firms' pricing decisions and monetary policy.

Hall began with consumption, the largest component of demand. In a 1978 *Journal of Political Economy* article, he questioned the Keynesian function linking spending to current disposable income, which implied predictable effects from tax cuts and transfers. Hall examined how spending decisions would change if households based them on expected lifetime income. He began with the life-cycle and permanent-income theories of Modigliani and Friedman. Under these theories, consumption depends on wealth and expected lifetime income, not current earnings alone. A one-off bonus should generate a smaller increase in spending than an equivalent permanent salary rise.

Expected future earnings weren't observable, but Hall found a way to test the theory. If households already incorporated available information into their spending plans, anticipated income changes should produce little further adjustment when they occurred. Consumption would change chiefly when new information altered expectations of lifetime resources. Since such information is unpredictable, changes in consumption should also be difficult to forecast. It would approximate a 'random walk.'

Hall found support for this in post-war US data. Past disposable income did not predict future consumption once current consumption was known, although stock prices retained some predictive power. The evidence supported a modified permanent-income hypothesis, with a major qualification. Households without sufficient savings or access to credit might have to wait until income arrived before spending it.

They gave us a more rigorous basis for policy evaluation to help optimize monetary and fiscal responses

Subsequently, Hall and Frederic Mishkin studied food expenses among 2,309 US families from 1969 to 1975. They found that it responded more strongly to permanent rather than brief income changes, but was also more responsive to current income than the theory predicted. Their model suggested that roughly one-fifth of consumption tracked current income, consistent with households living hand-to-mouth.

For fiscal policy, it implies that identical transfers need not get the same spending responses. A cash-constrained household is likelier to spend a one-off payment quickly than one with large savings. The effect of fiscal stimulus depends on who gets the money and how much they spend, as well as the central bank's response.

Woodford linked household decisions to the wider economy. In a 1997 paper with Julio Rotemberg, he developed an optimization-based model of US output, inflation and interest rates to compare alternative Fed policy rules. Unlike models built mainly on historical correlations, it derived economic relationships from decisions that respond to policy changes.

In his 2003 book, *Interest and Prices*, Woodford showed how monetary policy can be analysed through short-term interest rates rather than money-supply targets. The resulting New Keynesian model brought together three core relationships. Demand depended on expected future activity and the real interest rate relative to its natural level, extending Hall's work. Inflation depended on expected future inflation and firms' production costs, with prices adjusting gradually. A monetary policy rule could be set for central banks to manage inflation and economic activity.

This synthesis reconciled two insights that earlier macro debates had often set against each other. Households and firms make forward-looking decisions and adapt when policy changes, as Lucas noted. Yet prices do not adjust right away. Monetary policy thus influences real spending and output, giving stabilization a role.

It gave us a closer view of monetary transmission. Current spending depends partly on the expected future path of real interest rates. Firms also price wares based on expectations. So credible central-bank communication about future policy can influence economic activity before a rate change takes place. The framework Hall and Woodford helped develop now informs central-bank analysis, though later research has exposed limitations in its treatment of financial frictions and differences across households and expectations. Yet, crucially, they gave us a more rigorous microeconomic basis for evaluating policy and weighing the welfare gains from stabilization against the costs of intervention.

The Hindustan Times
ESTABLISHED IN 1924

{ OUR TAKE }

Sailing steady in stormy seas

India has done well so far, but needs to address four challenges going forward

The International Monetary Fund's endorsement of India's economic resilience should not come as a surprise to anyone. India's fiscal management, starting from the country's response to the Covid pandemic, where it scrupulously avoided the free-money relief measures announced by many western countries, has been commendable. Domestic demand and substantial investments by the government in public infrastructure have kept the country's growth engine chugging along at a time when India is negotiating US tariff action, supply chain disruptions caused by two wars, and an oil shock. The economy is expected to grow at over 7% not just this year, but next. That is no small achievement.

As the finance minister gets down to the business of putting together next year's Union Budget — it is usually presented on February 1, to come into effect from April 1 — she will have to address four challenges: Inflation and a bigger oil shock; global trade and supply chain disruptions; AI; and the climate crisis. Both retail and wholesale inflation have risen substantially and will likely rise more once the government allows the increase in oil prices to filter down to fuel prices (the budgetary math will look very different if the assumption for oil price is even $100 a barrel, the average of India's crude import basket since April 1), though higher inflation will also boost nominal growth and shore up tax revenues.

On the trade front, while India will benefit from the free trade agreements it has signed, some of which will kick in by next year if not earlier, it will be wary of more tariff action by the US (a large trading partner, and one with whom India enjoys a surplus), and non-tariff measures that could hurt the country's services exports. The latter, especially IT services, will also be roiled by the AI boom, which has already seen foreign investors desert Indian markets in favour of those with more AI-play. And the recent tragedy in Nepal, and India's own poor monsoon have yet again highlighted the human — and economic — cost of the climate crisis.

India could, and most likely will, still do better than most countries — the Prime Minister said on Monday that in a world of uncertainty, it offers reliability and stability — but policymakers here would dearly love a less uncertain external environment.

The taxation test for LGBTQIA rights

Earlier this week, the government told the Karnataka High Court that the Income Tax (I-T) Act cannot be used to legitimise same-sex couples by granting them spousal status to avail of tax exemption. It also made its stand clear that same-sex relationships are not equivalent to marital relationships, and that persons in same-sex relationships are not spouses under the law. There are two issues at the heart of the Union's submissions. One, the watertight definitions in the Act. Two, the Centre's stand on same-sex relationships. To conflate the two would be a disservice to the Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer Intersex Asexual (LGBTQIA) community, which deserves equality and access guaranteed in the Constitution, to all citizens.

The 1961 Act is clear: Section 56, which deals with Other Incomes, underlines that any sum of money received from a "relative" can be excluded from the scope of "income from other sources"; and, in a very specific list of who constitutes a relative, "spouse" is included. In other words, the number of relatives who can avail such exemption is narrowly specified. A first cousin, for instance, cannot. But a grandparent or a child — a lineal ascendant or descendant — can.

The question before the court is this: Is the I-T Act, with its specific definitions, the right channel to open up a conversation on the definition of spouse? The Centre argued that this would open up space for tax evasion. That argument may or may not hold. What is clear is that same-sex couples need a structure through which they can transfer wealth and assets to each other without being penalised or taxed. But to expect a challenge to the I-T Act to reopen the debate on same-sex spousehood — three years after the Supreme Court adjudicated on it in its *Supriyo @ Supriya Chakraborty & Anr v Union of India* — might be a stretch, however well-intended. All the same, the petition is an urgent reminder of the need for an overarching blanket of rights for the LGBTQIA community.

SIR & perils of bypassing Parliament in law-making

Our representatives spend most of their time on governance activities at the constituency level, while technocratic or executive bodies, acting opaquely, make decisions that should ideally belong to the legislature



Gautam Bhatia

On Monday, October 12, the Supreme Court made an important clarification. In a case challenging the allegedly unilateral special intensive revision (SIR)-related decisions taken by chief election commissioner Gyanesh Kumar, the Court stated that it had not adjudicated the amendments to Form 6 — the form new voters must fill for enrolment. The clarification came in relation to an October 5 observation by the Chief Justice of India Surya Kant — Justices Joymalya Bagchi and V Mohana are the other members of the bench hearing the case — that the changes had not been "approved" by the Supreme Court. The Court said on Monday that since it had not ruled on the changes, it had neither approved nor rejected them.

The clarification remains in stark contrast to the Election Commission's own public stand, according to which certain controversial changes that had been made to Form 6 — such as listing the details of one's parents in the 2002 SIR — had been granted the Supreme Court's *imprimatur*.

While the fallout of this will become apparent in the days to come, the episode revealed something else: The Election Commission had made a hugely consequential alteration to a statutory instrument — one that directly impacted citizens' voting rights — without any public deliberation or oversight.

This, in turn, reveals a deeper problem: A lot of effective law-making, at present, takes place with little to no involvement of the actual representative body — Parliament.

It has long been accepted that the size, scale, and complexity of the modern-day administrative State preclude the legislature from being involved in every act that could have an impact on legal rights and liabilities. For modern-day States to function, legislatures need to delegate a significant portion of this task to executive bodies and to other, fourth-branch institutions.

It is, therefore, enough that laws passed by Parliament enunciate legislative policy and set out the contours of the legal framework. The task of day-to-day administration within that legal framework can then be left to other bodies. Thus, what courts must guard against — and step in to prevent — is excessive delegation.

While that has been the theory, in practice, Indian courts have shown extreme deference to executive action that purports to act within broad statutory frameworks. Executive-made rules are almost never struck down on grounds of being outside the scope of the parent statute (what, in technical terms, is known as *ultra vires*), and laws are almost never struck down on grounds of excessive delegation.

A good example of this phenomenon was seen during the Covid-19 pandemic. During the pandemic, the executive invoked the Disaster Management Act, which gave it very broad rule-making powers to take steps in cases of "disasters." To start with, it was doubtful whether the Act — which had been passed in the wake of the Odisha cyclone and was meant to deal with localised natural disasters — was meant to be used for an ongoing national public health crisis. Be that as it may, having invoked the DMA, the executive then essentially "managed" the pandemic through a succession of executive orders that had a far-reaching impact on fundamental rights, as they included restrictions on movement, livelihood, privacy, and so on. Parliament was accorded no role in addressing the pandemic at any point.

While on a couple of occasions this issue was raised in court, it was swiftly dismissed. Indeed, during the pandemic, it was only the legislature of the state of Kerala that passed specific legislation to deal with the issue: Even at the level of the states, it was the executive that ran the show, including passing far-reaching externment orders – for example, in Maharashtra.

The Election Commission's unilateral alteration of Form 6 is, therefore, just the latest example of how essentially law-making acts have been outsourced to non-representative bodies. Even the decision to have a nationwide SIR of the electoral rolls was taken without parliamentary involvement, and the results are there for all to see. This reflects a deeper malaise at the heart of Indian democracy: Our representatives spend most of their time on governance activities at the constituency level, while technocratic or executive bodies, acting opaquely, make decisions that should ideally belong to the legislature.

There may be objections that the contemporary legislature is not particularly known for the quality of its deliberation: Laws are passed without meaningful debate, and executive control over the party through the anti-defection law means that Parliament is hamstrung in exercising its powers of oversight and accountability. That, however, is a call for strengthening Parliament through structural reform, as well as bringing about a shift in the extent to which Parliament has surrendered control over law-making to executive and technocratic bodies. Indeed, one has to follow from the other: Recovering parliamentary control over law-making only makes sense if Parliament itself is restored to a position where it becomes, once again, a representative and deliberative body.

Specific to the Election Commission, the responsibility lies at least partly with the Supreme Court, which in the early 2000s vastly expanded the powers of the Commission with a view to keeping politicians in check.

However, given that the appointment of the Commission is itself within executive control, an expansion of those powers — as we have seen — is fraught with risk. What is needed, therefore, is reform of both the Election Commission and Parliament, so that law-making can once again be public, deliberative, and accountable.

Gautam Bhatia, a Delhi-based advocate, is the author of Offen, Shock, or Disturb: Free Speech under the Indian Constitution. The views expressed are personal



Executive-made rules are almost never struck down by the courts on grounds of being outside the scope of the parent statute. ARVIND YADAV/HT PHOTO

Jantar Mantar, when it was not a protest site



Swapna Liddle

In popular consciousness, at least in the national capital and abutting cities, Jantar Mantar is synonymous with protests against the government. It offers a particular setting deemed desirable for rallies to be heard by the State — proximity to the corridors of power (Parliament) and a prominent urban-scape the masses visit in the normal course (Connaught Place). That perception could perhaps change with the government denotifying it as a protest site. This may end an era, since the term 'Jantar Mantar' has been closely connected to the expression of dissent in India since the 1990s.

Jantar Mantar and its environs have always occupied a very distinctive place in Delhi's landscape. Its history begins sometime in the 16th century, when Akbar occupied the Mughal throne. The young emperor married the princess of Amer in early 1562, an event that marked the beginning of close ties between the Mughal royal family and the Kachhwaha Rajputs of Amer. Several relatives of the princess rose to high offices in the empire. For instance, her nephew Man Singh became the governor of several important provinces and a trusted general of Akbar.

It was probably during Akbar's reign that a piece of land in Delhi was given to the rulers of Amer. Though Akbar moved his capital to Agra in 1558, Delhi remained an important city of the Mughal Empire, and many saw it as the true capital of Hindustan. Akbar himself had ruled from the city for a few years, living in the fortress built by his father Humayun, which we now call *Purana Qila*. The land given to Amer was some distance north of this fortress.

As time passed, the Amer rulers and others connected to them built on the land. Two distinct settlements, Jaisinghpura, founded by Maharaja Jai Singh (reigned 1621-67), and Madhoganj, named after Madho Singh (reigned 1750-68), were founded. Several temples were built as well: The Hanuman temple (now on Baba Kharak Singh Marg near Connaught Place) is the best known of these. It is said that one of the prominent Bhakti poets, Tulsidas, visited this temple.

The Amer *rajas* also built their own residence on this land, which they used when visiting Delhi. It was this house that was offered to the visiting Sikh Guru Harkishen when he came to Delhi in 1664. Following Guru Harkishen's death shortly thereafter, the site was given to the Sikhs as a permanent memorial. This was the genesis of the Gurudwara Bangla Sahib. The *bangla* in the name references the house (bungalow) it originally was, though it has since been rebuilt and considerably expanded.

The construction of the Jantar Mantar was the work of a later ruler, Sawai Jai Singh, who also founded the new capital of Amer — Jaipur — in 1727. In the 1720s, Sawai Jai Singh, who had a deep interest in astronomy, also embarked on a related project. Astronomical observations were a matter of interest for the Mughal rulers, too, as the determination of auspicious timings depended on accurate astronomical readings. Emperor Muhammad Shah was concerned that many errors had crept into the astronomical tables, and Jai Singh pressed for the need to take fresh and accurate readings to update the charts. This paved the way for the construction of several large observatories across various cities within the imperial territories — Ujjain, Varanasi, Mathura, the new city of Jaipur, and within the *raja*'s own land in the imperial capital, Delhi. The set of giant astronomical instruments, or *yantra*, built in Delhi is what we today call Jantar Mantar.

Delhi's Jantar Mantar and the surrounding settlements remained the property of the *rajas* of Jaipur for more than two centuries thereafter, though Delhi experienced many political upheavals. In the second half of the 18th century, the city was battered by civil wars and invasions; during this period, the buildings that made up the Jantar Mantar complex sustained significant damage. General disorder within the Mughal Empire also led to neglect of the buildings. Despite this, the complex remained a prominent, imposing landmark. The British artists, Thomas and William Daniell, who visited Delhi in 1789, chose to include two sketches of the Jantar Mantar among the total of 10 views of Delhi that made it into their published aquatints of Indian scenery.

Despite Delhi coming under the rule of the British East India Company in 1803 and direct Crown rule in 1858, Jantar Mantar and the lands around it continued to be the property of the Jaipur *rajas*. In 1852, the Delhi Archaeological Society carried out repairs on some of the instruments, with ₹600 given for the purpose by the then maharaja. In 1910, repairs were again carried out in anticipation of prominent visitors who would come to Delhi for the Coronation *Durbar* of George V.

The year 1913 marked a major reorganisation of the lands in Delhi. Most of the Jaipur lands were acquired for the construction of the new British capital — New Delhi. The old settlements of Jaisinghpura and Madhoganj were cleared away, though Jai Singh Road acknowledged the nomenclature for posterity. Jantar Mantar, of course, was too important a monument to be demolished. It, in fact, remained the property of the *maharajas* of Jaipur, who gave ₹30,000 for the creation of a garden around it and handed over the maintenance to the government of India.

The flag of the Jaipur State continued to flutter over Jantar Mantar for many years. The observatory was transferred to the state of Rajasthan only in 1949 and eventually came under the government of India. In 1956, the government notified the site as a nationally protected monument. Though somewhat dwarfed by the high-rise constructions in its vicinity, Jantar Mantar stands proud today, with its layers of complex history.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE JANTAR MANTAR WAS THE WORK OF SAWAI JAI SINGH, WHO ALSO FOUNDED THE NEW CAPITAL OF AMER — JAIPUR — IN 1727. HE HAD A DEEP INTEREST IN ASTRONOMY

Swapna Liddle is a Delhi-based historian and conservationist. The views expressed are personal

{ FRIEDRICH MERZ } CHANCELLOR, GERMANY

We will no longer stand idly by when other States harm our economy... Anyone who seeks a trade conflict with us will find that we are now prepared to fight back



Fix the Tejas problem fast, and then move beyond it



Harsh V Pant

With fighter strength at roughly 29 squadrons against an authorised 42, the Indian Air Force is operating with a margin that is becoming increasingly difficult to sustain. India continues to face the possibility of a two-front contingency involving China and Pakistan, and both are modernising their air forces. China's rapid progress in stealth technology and reports of a potential Chinese fifth-generation aircraft being supplied to Pakistan point to a changing regional balance. India cannot afford to allow its numerical disadvantage to widen further.

The debate over air power often becomes a choice between quantity and quality. But India needs both. Advanced aircraft, precision weapons, sensors and networks provide qualitative advantages, but they cannot compensate indefinitely for insufficient numbers. Aircraft need maintenance, training and rotation. A force that is too small has limited surge capacity and reduced flexibility across multiple theatres.

This is why the delays — involving GE F404 engines, radar and missile integration, and software certification — surrounding the Tejas Mk-1A are strategically important. The root problem is that engine supply, certification and HAL's production capacity have each been managed as separate problems. Until one authority owns delivery timelines, the aircraft will keep arriving late. The IAF has several streams through which it can begin rebuilding squadron strength. The first is the Tejas Mk-1A. The immediate objective should be to enable HAL to reach production rates of 20 or more Tejas annually. The second is the proposed Multi-Role Fighter Aircraft (MRFA) programme, involving roughly 114 aircraft and potentially centred on the Rafale, with substantial production in India. Once established, this could provide another stream of around 12 aircraft annually. The additional Su-30 aircraft already envisaged would provide further reinforcement.

If these programmes proceed on schedule, India could approach the 35-40-aircraft-a-year induction rate. But that requires procurement, industrial production, engines, certification, and logistics to be treated as an integrated national-security problem. Also, the existing fleet must be kept combat-ready. Su-30s, Rafales, Mirage-2000s, Jaguars and Tejas Mk-1s need reliable spares, high serviceability, and rapid integration of indigenous weapons such as the Astra family. Numbers matter only when aircraft are available for operations.

India's long-term answer must remain the indigenous Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA). If AMCA timelines slip substantially, India will eventually have to consider interim options, including the Russian Su-57 offer. This would involve difficult questions concerning cost, technology access, interoperability and industrial benefits. Nevertheless, the choice should be made on the basis of strategic necessity rather than institutional inertia.

Modern air warfare is increasingly about systems rather than individual platforms. Sensors, electronic warfare, missiles, communications, command-and-control networks, training and doctrine can be as important as the aircraft itself. India, therefore, needs an integrated combat system rather than a fixation on individual platforms.

Unmanned systems and loitering munitions will increasingly shape the battlefield, but must not become an excuse for accepting inadequate fighter numbers. The future battlefield will involve manned aircraft, unmanned systems, missiles, electronic warfare and air-defence networks operating together. The objective should be integration, not creating parallel structures that fragment command. Humans are likely to remain in the decision loop for the foreseeable future.

Indigenous weapons such as Astra, Akash and BrahMos need to be produced and integrated rapidly. AI should augment human decision-making. Integrated air and missile defence must keep pace with increasingly complex threats involving aircraft, cruise missiles, ballistic missiles and unmanned systems.

Self-reliance must mean the ability to produce engines, components, weapons and platforms in sufficient quantities and within strategically relevant timelines — the Tejas experience demonstrates the difficulty of achieving this. Self-reliance that delivers 16 aircraft a year when the IAF needs 40 is just a slogan.

India, therefore, needs both indigenous development and carefully structured international partnerships. The IAF's priorities should be sequenced clearly. First, arrest the decline in fighter numbers. Accelerate Tejas Mk-1A production, move the MRFA into execution, induct additional Su-30s, and maintain the existing fleet. Second, protect qualitative capability. Third, push AMCA aggressively while establishing clear milestones and decision points. If delays become strategically unacceptable, India should consider interim fifth-generation options. Fourth, expand unmanned systems, AI, integrated air defence and network-centric warfare as force multipliers.

India must rebuild strength instead of managing scarcity, before the strategic environment leaves it with fewer choices.

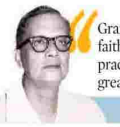
Harsh V Pant is vice-president, ORF. The views expressed are personal

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

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

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

EDITORIAL



"Granting votes to one and all was an act of faith, faith in the common man of India and in his practical common sense. This decision launched a great and fateful experiment unique in the world" — Sukumar Sen

INDIAN EXPRESS IS NOT AN INDUSTRY. IT IS A MISSION.
— Ramnath Goenka

PROTEST IS A RIGHT, DON'T RELEGATE IT TO EVENT MANAGEMENT

THERE was a particular poignancy to the status of Jantar Mantar as the national capital's designated protest site. It is at one end of Sansad Marg, whose other end leads to the old Parliament House. So the people could air their grievances at a walking distance from where the people's representatives convened to legislate. The earlier protest site at the Boat Club Lawns along Kartavya Path was also a shouting distance from the House of the People. The proximity remained intact even when Parliament was shifted in 2023 to the new premises. But now the denotification of Jantar Mantar as a protest site severs that vital democratic link for the first time.

Let's consider the three alternative sites notified by Delhi Police. Ramlila Maidan, which is a bit over 6 km to the north of the new Parliament House, offers for free only a small space that can hold a few hundred people; the main ground, which can accommodate more than 50,000, needs to be booked well in advance with a daily fee and a security deposit that add up to more than ₹1 lakh. It seems there are only three days near the end of December that are open for booking this year. Those who want to exercise their democratic right to protest peacefully will also have to compete with fairs, weddings and religious events to book Burari Ground near the city's northern fringes or CBD Ground across the Yamuna to the east. So the idea of a thriving democracy—Ram Manohar Lohia's "*zinda qaum*" or alive nation, which does not wait for five years to demand its rights—will now be subservient to commercial priorities of event management.

It's not a mere symbolic shift. Along with large-scale detentions and internet shutdowns, it reinforces the sense that the space for democratic dissent is being stifled and invisibilised. London has Parliament Square adjacent to Westminster Abbey and Washington has Union Square at the foot of Capitol Hill. As courts hear challenges to Jantar Mantar's denotification and Cockroach Janta Party leaders are remanded to judicial custody for protesting it at the site, surely the "mother of democracy" feels the need to pass the 'town square test', which measures freedom by the citizenry's ability to openly express views close to the seat of power.

FARMERS' BRIDE DROUGHT REFLECTS AGRARIAN STRESS

KARNATAKA Chief Minister D K Shivakumar received a unique request during a recent open meeting to hear people's grievances (Praja Seva) in Mysuru district's Periyapatna town. A farmer sought the CM's help to find a bride for himself and fellow farmers whose marriage proposals were being repeatedly rejected despite them owning land. The 30-something petitioner claimed some of them were even contemplating suicide. He sought a government scheme to incentivise marriage with farmers. The request was dismissed with a joke on '*maduve bhagya*' (marriage guarantee) as the sixth welfare scheme of the Congress government, but it highlighted a broader socio-economic problem caused by the state's rural distress and urban migration.

The issue is not new. Earlier this year, Kunigal MLA H D Ranganath had written to then CM Siddaramaiah on women's reluctance to marry rural bachelors and sought incentives. Unmarried farmers in their 30s and 40s have formed forums in both the fertile southern districts and arid northern Karnataka to highlight their plight. It is not only a case of women being choosy. As education levels improve in rural areas, men and women are moving to cities in greater numbers to pursue non-farming careers. As a result, ancestral lands are now largely tended to by senior citizens. Where owning farmland was once a matter of social prestige, it is now a hurdle to personal progress as agriculture has steadily lost its sheen.

Extreme climate events have played a big role in the shift. Rainfall disruptions have led to crop losses, unstable incomes and piling debts in the country's second-most drought-prone state. This year, farmers are bracing for another drought. Over the past three years, Karnataka has recorded 2,809 farmer suicides. Between 2011 and 2021, the flow of working-age people from the state's villages to cities has increased sharply.

It is not that state's sex ratio is skewed against finding ample matches. At 979 women per 1,000 men, it's rural sex ratio is a far cry from Punjab's (907) or Haryana's (882), two agrarian states that have faced a shortage of brides due to the illegal practice of sex selection at birth. Brides have also been denied to families living in areas with water scarcity and lack of toilets. Until agricultural reforms stabilise the sector and make it more lucrative, young men may have to pay the price with bachelorhood.

QUICK TAKE

AVOID DIGITAL WHEN STUCK

A technical glitch has allegedly again come in the way of citizens' access to vital government support. At a time Maharashtra declared its intent to extend the PM POSHAN school meal programme to class 10, it has come to pass that in a large part of the state, teachers are paying for midday meals from their own pockets as disbursement under the central scheme has been delayed for months because of a technical problem. This follows lakhs of people locked out of their food rations or pensions because of trouble with Aadhaar-linking or other digital technologies. As courts have held, such problems cannot be proffered as reasons to deny people their essentials. Manual workarounds must be embedded in the schemes' rules to avoid such troubles.

The electronic voting machine continues to be blamed for technological troubles concerning conduct of elections. We must also look closely at the system that governs voter rolls

THE CRUCIAL VOTER TECH WE AREN'T SCRUTINISING



K F WILFRED
Former Senior Principal Secretary, Election Commission of India



SOURAV ROY

THE world over, elections have tended to tread familiar conservative paths with some circumspection, if not reluctance, in turning to technology. By and large, conventional methods seem to be the comfort zone for election managers and stakeholders. Even tech leaders such as South Korea, Japan, Israel, Sweden, and most European and North American countries still use paper and pen for voting in national elections, not to mention many other Asian countries. The Netherlands, Italy, Ireland and a few others contemplated electronic voting machines in the first decade of this century and even tried them out, but they later abandoned the idea on grounds of high cost or lack of broad public and political support. Electronic machine-voting was briefly attempted in Germany before being struck down by the country's Constitutional Court.

Quite a few countries have machine-based elections at the provincial or local levels. A few use technology for biometric voter registration and for vote counting. Among the countries that do employ electronic voting, Estonia has gone a step further with the added option of internet voting.

India was one of the early birds in adopting technology for elections. The idea of a voting machine was mooted by the Election Commission as early as in 1977, and a prototype of what later evolved into the present electronic voting machine (EVM) was first presented in 1979. We introduced EVM on a pilot basis in 50 polling stations of an Assembly constituency in Keralam in 1982. Electoral roll, the base document for elections, were computerised by the end of the last century. The focus here is not on technology *per se*, but on its role-limitation in the Indian election law framework.

Our EVM was designed as a direct-recording, standalone machine, an electronic mirror image of ballot voting, retaining all checks and balances of paper ballot including secrecy of ballot and post-election auditability of vote, should a court require it in an election-related litigation. The paper trail of vote was later added to aid physical verification by the voter.

It is a different matter that a number of opposition parties still do not seem to be convinced about electronic voting and the demand for returning to paper ballot is almost an ongoing campaign. It's interesting to recall in this context that a current leader of the ruling BJP who was also a member of Parliament had, in 2010, authored a book titled *Democracy at Risk: Can we trust our Electronic Voting Machines*, with a foreword by a founder-leader of the party.

While the voting machine has always been a punching bag and continues to be so, the technology used for electoral rolls has not attracted any noticeable dissent. The recent controversy surrounding the special intensive revisions and the resultant scrutiny from various quarters have put the IT component of electoral roll management under the spotlight along with several other issues.

The Representation of the People Act, 1950 and the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960 constitute the legal architecture for preparation and revision of electoral rolls. The Supreme Court held in a 1971 judgement that the 1950 Act and the amplitude of its provisions show that the entries made in an electoral roll can only be challenged in accordance with the machinery provided in the Act, and not in any other manner or before any other forum unless question of violation of provisions of Constitution is involved.

When the SIR operations in West Bengal last year were spiralling out of control and threatening to create chaos, by an extraordinary direction of the Supreme Court, judicial officers and tribunals were entrusted with the job of deciding claims and objections and appeals in the exercise. They temporarily replaced the regular civilian officers appointed for this purpose in terms of the 1950 Act and the 1960 Rules. Except for this unusual arrangement, it is well recognised that the Act and the Rules govern the ecosystem of electoral rolls.

Reference in the Act and Rules to the use of IT in electoral roll is primarily for the limited purpose of enabling filing of claim and objection applications electronically to the electoral registration officer (ERO) whose exclusive domain is to decide the applications in accordance with the law and to reflect the decision in the electoral roll with suitable addition, deletion or correction in the roll. The decision of ERO on an application made to him cannot be substituted by that of any other person or authority although appeal lies against the ERO's decision.

Technology can never be a roadblock in the discharge of this important responsibility by ERO which directly impacts a sacred constitutional right of citizens. The recently reported case of Goa about some EROs failing to make additions in the roll in the case of some eligible electors due to inability to access the IT platform is intriguing. The fact that the number of electors involved in this case is small should not diminish the significance or seriousness of the matter.

Deletion of names from the roll calls for even greater degree of caution. For preventing applications from random sources, the law restricts the right to file a deletion application (Form 7) to a person enrolled in the roll of the same constituency. The only other manner for setting in motion the process for deletion of name from the roll is when the local ERO considers that ineligible persons have got into the roll in which case he/she can initiate *suo motu* action to remove the names after due process of notice and opportunity of personal hearing.

There is a recent report about 16 lakh appeals pending disposal in West Bengal filed against inclusion of names. While the number itself may raise some eyebrows, it is the lack of clarity about the source of these appeals that adds to the mystery. The question whether these appeals are also system-generated or algorithm-based similar to the controversial "logical discrepancies" cases at the earlier stage will be a matter of great interest.

The EC, in a recent press release, has announced its intention to review the ECINET system for its compatibility with the provisions of law. Technological solutions in our context cannot in any manner override, much less armtwist, legal provisions. Technology may, at best, be a friend, but not an overbearing guide or philosopher chartering the course for statutory authorities.

(Views are personal)

CLIMATE ACTION WHOSE TIME IS HERE





DURWOOD ZAELKE
President, Institute for Governance & Sustainable Development

ZERIN OSHO
Director, India Programme, Institute for Governance & Sustainable Development

SUCCESSFUL environmental treaties have a peculiar disadvantage: the disasters they prevent never become news. The Montreal Protocol, agreed in 1987, put the ozone layer on the path to recovery. It has also helped avert a much hotter planet. Yet its capacity to do more remains underused, just when governments are starved for actionable ideas to slow warming.

On October 15, the Kigali Amendment to that treaty turns 10. The anniversary demands attention for reasons extending far beyond its storied achievements in regulating harmful chemicals. Montreal shows that countries can agree to binding obligations and help poorer economies meet them. It also shows how to strengthen those obligations as better technologies become available. The next decade should put that experience to greater use.

For those with more salt in their hair than pepper, the treaty's primary achievement remains vividly familiar. Chemicals used in products from aerosol sprays to refrigeration to insulating foams were destroying the ozone layer that shields life from harmful ultraviolet radiation. Countries have since phased out nearly 99 percent of banned ozone-destroying substances. If current policies hold, as history suggests they will, ozone will return to 1980 levels by around 2040 across most of the world, with Antarctica following around 2066.

The Montreal Protocol's second achievement is less widely appreciated. Many of the banned chemicals were also powerful greenhouse gases, a threat Indian scientist Veerabhadran Ramanathan identified in 1975. Removing them prevented enormous additional warming. Healing the ozone shield also protected the ability of plants and soils to store carbon, which greater ultraviolet exposure would have damaged. Together, these effects could avert roughly 2.5°C of additional warming by the end of this century compared with a world without the binding ozone controls. That is a measure of the catastrophe avoided.

In 2006, over a long lunch in Cairo, Mostafa Tolba, the Egyptian scientist and former UN environment chief who helped forge the treaty, gave one of us a useful explanation for its success. Montreal was a "start and strengthen" agreement. It began with limited cuts. Experience built confidence, allowing governments to adopt more demanding obligations.

That approach had effective institutions behind it. Scientific panels assessed the danger and experts examined substitutes. Binding schedules gave industry the confidence to invest. Developing countries received more time, alongside financial assistance through the Multilateral Fund. The bargain recognised that an obligation becomes credible when countries have the means to fulfil it. Success depended on sustained work after the agreement was signed.



EXPRESS

As the Kigali Amendment—the legally-binding global pact to phase down production and consumption of potent greenhouse gases—turns 10, we must consider the work to be done yet. India, which agreed to start its hydrofluorocarbon freeze in 2028, must prepare industry and people for the change

When some chemicals introduced as replacements—hydrofluorocarbons or HFCs—spared the ozone layer but warmed the atmosphere, governments applied Montreal's logic and brought them under the treaty. Full implementation of the resulting Kigali Amendment could avoid up to 0.5°C of warming by 2100, proving that a framework designed for one atmospheric crisis could be retooled to tackle another.

The urgency now lies in how quickly such gains can be secured. Cutting short-lived pollutants such as HFCs, methane and black carbon soot, however, can slow warming quickly over the next few decades. For farmers and other Indians who earn their living outdoors, slowing the rise in temperature over the next decade is an immediate economic as well as health concern.

There is an immediate opportunity to further strengthen the Montreal Protocol. Governments revived the Friends of the Kigali Amendment in New York on September 23. When they return to Kigali in November, they should agree to a replenishment of the Multilateral Fund for 2027-29 that continues to enable developing countries to meet their obligations and move faster where feasible.

This financial support is critical: manufacturers need affordable access to replacement technologies, while technicians require training and equipment to prevent refrigerants from escaping during servicing or disposal. The 20-plus countries still outside the amendment should join as soon as possible.

The timing of these negotiations is particularly critical for India, which ratified Kigali in 2021 and faces an HFC production and consumption freeze starting in 2028, with the first reduction due in 2032. These dates give industry time to prepare. Investment decisions taken now will determine how much equipment needs replacing later. India should use the negotiations to secure finance and access to technology that make earlier progress affordable, while helping domestic manufacturers supply the next generation of equipment. Montreal's record supports a fundamental Indian demand: greater ambition must come with the means to deliver it.

The treaty's wider lesson should now be applied to methane. The International Energy Agency estimates that existing technologies could eliminate about three-quarters of methane emissions from oil and gas operations. A substantial share of those reductions would cost little or nothing because the captured gas can be sold. Much of this involves stopping the waste of a saleable fuel, as natural gas is mostly methane. Governments should negotiate a binding agreement for that sector, requiring companies to measure emissions and repair leaks, with enforceable limits on routine venting and flaring. India is well-positioned to help shape a sectoral agreement on methane. Good climate diplomacy should pursue reductions where they can be made quickly and fairly.

(Views are personal)

Full article on newindianexpress.com

MAILBAG

WRITE TO: letters@morningstandard.in

Overbearing State

Ref: *Govt must explain* (Oct 14). A State that mobilises extensive security to prevent protests should devote equal, if not greater, attention to examining the grievances that prompted it. The response to the earlier paper leak controversy demonstrated that public pressure can lead to corrective action. Citizens rarely take to the streets without a reason; their concerns merit constructive engagement, not mere containment.
Vidyasagar Reddy Kethiri, New Delhi

Women scientists

Ref: *Beautiful minds* (Oct 14). The author's elegy for the era of eccentric scientists is charming, but nostalgia is doing some of the arguing. The tolerance he celebrates was real. But it was extended largely to those already inside the circle. Who got to be eccentric? Every scientist he names, from Krishnan and Bhatnagar to Dhawan and Ramanna, is a man. A woman scientist or a first-generation student rarely got to be "colourful"; she was simply difficult, or absent. Tolerance that depends on the generosity of great personalities is a gift, not a system. If Indian science is to recover its aesthetic, it must first widen who is allowed to be heard.
Sakshi Raj Wardhan, Dhenkanal

Journalists assaulted

Ref: *Women journalists' assault* (Oct 14). A free press can survive only when journalists can report the truth without fear. Journalists are vital in bringing truth to the public. Effective safeguards for women's safety in all professions remain ever-relevant.
Anoodha K P, Kannur

Improving exams

Ref: *Nilekani bats for tech* (Oct 14). Technology can make examinations more secure, but it cannot replace integrity. Behind every leaked question paper are students who lose confidence in a system they have worked hard to succeed in. Computer-based testing is a welcome reform, but accountability must be equally strong.
Razeen Shukoor, email

Automation scare

Ref: *Zoho freezes pay hikes* (Oct 14). We keep on asking if AI will replace workers. Zoho shows a different risk: AI is expensive, and that cost can squeeze employers into freezing hiring and pay even if no job is automated. The two claims don't strictly contradict each other, which is why the angle holds up. Freshers feel a hiring freeze first, because new graduates are the cheapest headcount that stop adding up.
Simak, Puttur

THE MORNING STANDARD, NEW DELHI
Chairman of the Board: **Manoj Kumar Sonthalia** Editorial Director: **Prabhu Chawla** Editor: **Santwana Bhattacharya**
Published by **Avnish Singh** on behalf of Express Publications (Madurai) Private Limited, at third floor, Express Building, 9-10, Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg, New Delhi—110002 and printed by him at Jagran Prakashan Ltd. D-210-211, Sector 63, Noida, Uttar Pradesh — 201301. **New Delhi:** Vol. 09, No. 246
RNI registration number DELENG/2018/76719 Phone(011) 23705701 Fax: (011) 41555059. **Copyright:** Express Publications (Madurai) Private Limited. All rights reserved. Reproduction in any manner, electronic or otherwise, in whole or in part, without prior written permission is prohibited.

Business Standard
VOLUME XXXIII NUMBER 155
NEW DELHI | THURSDAY, 15 OCTOBER 2026

Shifting immigration rules

Indian IT firms are prepared for the change

The recent decision by the United States (US) to suspend eight tech companies, including Infosys, Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), Wipro and HCL Tech, from the Permanent Labour Certification (Perm) programme strikes a discordant note in relation to the treatment of highly skilled foreign professionals. As the Ministry of External Affairs has said, the restrictive move hinders the shared ambition between the two countries. Since 2005, when Perm came into effect, it has helped reduce the processing time for an employer in the US to sponsor a foreign worker for permanent residency or the green card. The adverse impact of the suspension of the programme on Indian information-technology (IT) firms and their employees cannot be overlooked, though many top companies have said that the repercussions of the US action on them will not be significant.

Although the move is being interpreted as a worrying signal overall, Indian IT majors have been in a state of readiness for such an eventuality. This should minimise any harm arising from the Perm suspension. The action could also accelerate the prospects of research & development as well as engineering jobs shifting to the global capability centres (GCCs) in India. In a statement, Nasscom, the leading association of the Indian tech industry, asserted that companies had reduced their dependence on the H1B visa in recent years while stepping up their hiring in the US. It has underscored the fact that the number of workers moving from the H1B visa to permanent residency through Perm is not high. TCS, India's largest IT-services exporter, expressed similar sentiments, stating that the action by the US administration wouldn't disturb its workforce strategy. Infosys, Wipro and HCL too have been on the same page, claiming that the suspension would have no material impact on the companies' operations.

Estimates suggest Indian IT firms constituted less than 2 per cent of the Perm applications filed between October 2024 and September 2025. This implies that they may not be impacted in the near term, but the fallout could be felt in the longer run in terms of higher hiring cost and rising compliance-related expenses because they would need to depend majorly on local talent in the US. Anticipating changes in the US administration, large Indian tech companies have been changing their work models. The numbers for H1B visa registration reflect the change. The top six Indian IT firms, for instance, recorded a 92 per cent decline in numbers during FY27 over the previous year. From 21,919, the registrations dropped to 1,763.

The US has been tightening the immigration system with measures such as a $100,000 fee for certain visas, changes in the H1B lottery system, and a rule to end the automatic renewal of work permits for some immigrants, prompting Indian tech companies to prepare for a future that's very different from the body-shop model they followed till recently. But with the latest action, the tech-job market may see a churn as a pathway to the green card disappears from the horizon. Beyond the business and economic implications, the green-card restrictions came with offensive remarks by US Vice-President J D Vance and Labour Secretary Keith Sonderling. While Mr Vance called tech workers "foreign indentured servants", Mr Sonderling said jobs in the US would not go to "foreign fraudsters". With foreigners, including several Indian-origin professionals, running top firms in the US, those statements expose the nature and thinking of the US administration.

Mind the gap

Travel survey underlines public-transport shortage

The first all-India survey on household travel, conducted by the National Statistics Office between July 2025 and July 2026, offers useful pointers for transportation and urban planners. Covering over 14,000 villages and 10,000 urban blocks, the broad findings suggest that the average Indian commuter is disproportionately dependent on personal and private transport. In other words, public transport in India is woefully inadequate in serving the needs of a burgeoning working population.

Only 15 per cent of workers use public transport — buses, trains, or trams. Forty-three per cent use two-wheelers and 3 per cent cars. The rest either walk — especially in rural areas — or use bicycles or cycle rickshaws. Over 57 per cent of workers travel more than 1 km to their workplace. But average commute times are relatively short — 25 minutes, on average, with 27 minutes in urban areas and 23 minutes in rural areas. The low rate of women's workforce participation is evident in a wide gender-mobility gap, with 62 per cent of male workers undertaking daily work trips as against 42 per cent of female workers. Overall, travelling to work is an expensive proposition for the average Indian. According to the survey, workers spend roughly ₹785 a month on fixed-workplace travel, with urban workers shelling out a steep ₹1,044, compared with ₹612 for rural workers. Thus, commuting accounts for a significant proportion of average monthly wages, which stand at around ₹22,000 for regular salaried employees and ₹15,000 for the self-employed.

The big picture explains the skewed and inequitable process of urbanisation, where affluent suburban agglomerations and factories located on the edge of large towns and cities tend to be surrounded by shanties and slums to house the supporting workforce. The average worker cannot afford to live too far away from her or his place of work. This unbalanced pattern of urban development, whether in India's older cities or the newer ones, is socially suboptimal. Workers are forced to live in grossly unhealthy environments, with scant access to basic necessities, side by side with middle-class and wealthy Indians. The survey, therefore, underlines the need for integrated urban planning. The provision of a safe and well-distributed transport system that radiates from city centres to the outskirts, supplemented with genuine low-cost housing, would go a long way towards expanding the ambit of employment for both men and women — a model that Mumbai and Kolkata follow — though imperfectly — with their suburban train systems.

The inadequacy of public transport highlighted in the survey also plays its role in the chronic problem of pollution. For overnight travel, the survey shows that buses rather than the electrified Indian railway system are the preferred mode of transport. Workers travelling more than 1 km to the workplace rely disproportionately on fossil fuel-powered two-wheelers and cars. Electric-vehicle penetration is still below 10 per cent in both categories. The resulting congestion from idling engines adds to the particulate matter, which citizens are increasingly inhaling in dangerous quantities. This first national household survey has offered practical, if obvious, tips. Its value would be enhanced if planners converted these findings into actionable policy.

Tata's paradoxical succession

The group faces the same problem as family-owned businesses with many heirs

ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA



Should the Tata Sons board place its trust in a professional with proven credentials? Should the Tata Sons board heed the views of its majority shareholder? The answer depends on the question we ask. And therein lies the seed of the ongoing leadership imbroglio at Tata Sons. Disagreements are natural when there are multiple stakeholders, and good organisational design is about creating spaces where differences can be sorted out in a structured and cogent manner. Clearly, in the case of Tata Sons, this has not occurred.

There are multiple perspectives on the issue, based on legal norms, regulations, and historical events, to name a few. However, I will focus on the implications for efficient and effective corporate governance, especially as they relate to family-controlled businesses, and the role of professional managers.



LAVEESH BHANDARI

There are many entities that together make up Tata Trusts, and there are many trustees. Following Ratan Tata's stepping down, a sequence of events led to the entry of Noel Tata and his children into various trusts under the Tata Trusts umbrella. This was followed by an apparent dissent over who should lead Tata Sons. There are, of course, other trustees, and some of whom may not be in sync with Noel Tata's perspective. Such dissonance among stakeholders is a common occurrence in any organisation, including family-controlled corporations.

The "family", in this case Tata Trusts, has two nominated directors on the board of the holding company, Tata Sons. The latter is then bound to follow the vote of the majority (i.e, both) of the nominee-directors on key issues. Arguably, this is a rather neat organisational design. That is, limited owner-nominee directors ensure coherent instructions, while binding clauses and veto powers enable control over the holding company. But this design assumes alignment within Tata Trusts. Unfortunately, in this case, the two nominated directors ended up on different sides; the core dissonance, therefore, emanates from Tata Trusts.

Running any corporate entity requires both managing contracts and managing relationships. Contracts cannot capture all eventualities and informal mechanisms and relationships bridge that gap. The latter are idiosyncratic and individual-specific. Therefore, when regime change occurs within family-owned corporations, the new owner and incumbent manager relationship is weak; the next-generation owner tends to replace incumbent managers. This, of course, causes much distress to the managers, but it is an important component of long-term owner and manager relationship.

Ratan Tata needed the full might of J R D Tata and his immense goodwill to eventually control the Tata group. Together they accomplished with great difficulty what typically unfolds far more smoothly in other family businesses. Although I am not conversant with the inner workings of the group, it is obvious why a change of leadership at the Tatas is more difficult than in other groups that depend on professional managers. The Tata ecosystem embraces, perhaps even adopts, managers as its own, much more than other families do.

This has the advantage that professionals steeped in the culture of the conglomerate can help sustain and grow its cultural-commercial foundations. But in doing so, the professional managers are no longer as answerable to the family — they effectively become "family". Consequently, the group suffers from the same problem that owner-families with many progeny suffer from. Efficiency is compromised because the chain of command is compromised, decision-making becomes blurred and consensus becomes a necessity in such situations.

There is a quirk in this specific situation. J R D Tata enabled Ratan Tata to take over from entrenched managers. Ratan Tata, on the other hand, favoured the professionals who grew under his leadership. Moreover, almost all of the Tata Sons board has been around for about a decade, whereas Noel Tata, who joined the board a couple of years back, is the most recent entrant. The chairman of Tata Trusts is, in effect, the outsider in this equation.

Perhaps because of this, his ascent as the overall head of the Tata group is also being questioned. This, too, is not unusual. In a family regime change, leadership lines often become blurred. This can be resolved in three ways. First, the group can be carved up; second, a compromise solution with divided powers can be found; and third, all players yield to a single entity. While all three are feasible, the problem we must solve is which owner-manager dynamic yields maximum efficiency.

Carving up the group makes sense if the entities are independent and unconnected. But given its current situation, the group will need all its might and more to navigate through the difficult challenges ahead. Air India will continue to bleed for some time; Tata Digital still needs to find its space; and Tata Electronics has taken big bets in emerging technologies. At the same time, Tata Consultancy Services' core model faces a deep challenge from artificial intelligence, while Tata Motors has much to catch up in the global electric vehicle space.

A compromise solution will be by far the worst from an efficiency standpoint. In the volatile business climate ahead, a clear chain of command is key. The professional manager who eventually leads Tata Sons must be fully empowered with strategic flexibility and tempered by high levels of accountability. Compromise solutions achieve neither.

And, therefore, from an efficient corporate governance perspective, the question is not what, or who, but how. The "what" is well understood: Tata Trusts answers to philanthropic goals, and its investment choices reflect both national pride and commercial objectives. The "who" will be decided by Tata Trusts voting at the annual general meeting on who best represents its perspective. But in the "how" lies the real challenge. The distinction between ownership and executive is critical for accountability. The accountability of the professional manager who heads Tata Sons will best be achieved if this person operates at an arm's length from Tata Trusts, not fused with it. And the professional manager's empowerment will work best when he or she enjoys the confidence of the Tata Trusts and whoever is its key representative. Compromise plays no role here.

The writer heads CSEP Research Foundation.
The views are personal

Clean streets need capable cities

An Indian city's cleanliness is decided afresh every morning, by sanitation workers on their beats, drivers on their collection routes and the supervisors who direct them. It is this daily work that PRAGATI-50, launched on September 29 at the Prime Minister's direction, now holds to a higher standard in 50 cities across 24 states.

These cities must demonstrate "sustained, high-performance parameters of visible cleanliness", tracked through key performance indicators or KPIs, a digital review and meetings chaired by a Union minister every other month. The push is welcome, and it aims to turn a decade of building and campaigning under the Swachh Bharat Mission into everyday practice — something cities can sustain only with capacities and institutions of their own.



CONURBATION
AMIT KAPOOR

When the Swachh Bharat Mission began on Gandhi Jayanti in 2014, Indian cities processed 16 per cent of their waste. By the time of the national review in May this year, that share had risen to 81 per cent, door-to-door collection had reached 97 per cent of wards, and 65 per cent of the waste in old dumpsites had been cleared. Much of this progress, like the toilets that made urban India open-defecation-free, came from what could be sanctioned, built and counted. It was carried along by a campaign that made *swachhata* a matter of civic pride and turned the Swachh Survekshan into a contest cities took seriously.

The Solid Waste Management Rules, 2026, in force since April, show how many hands a clean city passes through. Households are to segregate waste into four categories and bulk generators are to process their own wet waste where they can. Municipalities collect and transport it; state pollution control boards levy penalties; district collectors oversee landfills; the Central Pollution Control Board runs a national portal; and a committee chaired by each state's chief secretary is to steer implementation. These rules assume a level of coordination that India's waste governance has historically found difficult to sustain, and that enforcement falls mainly on generators, with no equivalent mechanism when a city lacks the vehicles, staff or plants to keep segregated waste apart.

Used water passes through more hands still, with sewerage in larger cities falling under the AMRUT scheme and in towns with fewer than 100,000 people under the Swachh Bharat Mission, which, since 2021, has aimed to keep untreated wastewater out of water bodies. In many states, the pipes and plants belong to water boards that answer to state governments rather than city governments.

The Comptroller and Auditor General's audits of 393 urban local bodies in 18 states found that cities fully controlled only four of the 18 functions the 74th Amendment assigns them, with parastatals running five on average. They also found 37 per cent of sanctioned municipal posts vacant and local bodies in 16 states with limited or no power to recruit. Municipal revenues have hovered around 1 per cent of gross domestic product for over a decade, a 2024 paper for the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister noted. Grants can build a plant, but running it needs recurring revenue, and a 2025 study of three leading cities found no state charging cost-covering user fees and most residents unwilling to pay.

The mission's guidelines for its second phase acknowledged in 2021 that the first had brought to light "qualitative and quantitative shortfalls in the capacities of the key personnel" and called for "a cadre of professionals" in cities and states. The capacity-building framework that followed delivers support through programme units, contractual city managers and two-month internships, and measures progress by the number of training sessions held. Sensibly, it also made the integration of informal workers, including those who clean sewers and septic tanks, a condition for the release of funds. The new rules, however, still offer little guidance on integrating waste pickers, who risk being displaced as segregation tightens and systems are mechanised.

The 50 cities for PRAGATI initiative include major cities, cultural and tourist centres, and economic hubs, chosen to serve as role models for the rest of the country. The towns expected to follow are smaller, and the 2025 study linked better results to the greater capacity of larger cities, observing that in a smaller city improvements can be prompt but short-lived. Financing the clean-up of legacy dumpsites will remain hard for towns with limited fiscal capacity.

The task ahead is to enhance recruitment powers, ensure timely fiscal transfers, establish clear accountability for sewerage, and enable regional bodies to plan shared facilities for small-town clusters. Once cities are equipped with supportive institutions, fiscal space and technical capacity, fair monitoring of outcomes can track institutional measures alongside visible ones, such as vacancies filled, running costs recovered through user charges, and sewage treatment capacity actually used, as verified through household surveys. Each model city could mentor smaller towns so that capability spreads alongside results.

Change of this kind tends to arrive in two movements. Swachh Bharat's first decade created awareness and added numbers, in toilets built, wards covered and waste processed, and it did so at remarkable speed. The movement now required is slower, turning new habits into settled practice, and it depends on cities with the people, money and authority to sustain them after the campaign has passed. That is capacity-building in its fullest sense, and PRAGATI-50 can be where it begins.

The writer is chair, Institute for Competitiveness.
With inputs from Meenakshi Ajith. @kautiliya

The elusive challenge of 'taming' Bastar

BOOK REVIEW

ADITI PHADNIS

This book illustrates a dilemma reporters frequently face when writing a story: What to include and what to leave out. Most of us are greedy and when you have masses of information, you tend to try and cram everything into one story. The result is damage to the structure, with tantalising glimpses of many stories struggling to get out.

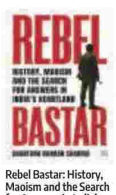
Senior journalist and author Shantanu Nandan Sharma's book is masterful for its research on the history and society of Bastar. It draws on years of field reporting, archival records, and colonial accounts to paint a rich tapestry of a slice of India most Indians know nothing about. Bastar — Abujhmad, or as he prefers to call it, Metabhum — was the arena of early foreign incursions. Each one left its mark. Mr Sharma describes the rise and fall of various ruling dynasties through medieval India and then the advent of the British. His description of the teak economy is brilliant. The British needed wood for transportation via rail carriages as much as they needed cotton to feed the mills in Manchester after the Industrial Revolution. When they discovered Bastar, they found not just teak forests but also huge mineral deposits of gold, mica, diamonds, rubies, and bauxite. The Tata group worked at this too.

The problem, of course, was taming those who lived in those forests. At first, the British tried concessions through the princely rulers, going so far as to arrange marriages and manipulate court bureaucrats. When this did not yield the results they wanted, they decided to go in themselves. Mr Sharma describes, based on historical records, the Bhumkal uprising and the battle of Ulnar (1910). The role played by the great hero of Bastar, Gunda Dhur, still figures in folk songs and local lore.

Bested by the tribals who fought with bows and arrows, the British, on the basis that discretion was the better part of valour, decided to reduce the number of police stations in the inner reaches of the forests. This decision proved fateful in controlling the region for decades later. This, combined with the support of some princes —reinforced the endemic restiveness of Bastarhis. The author paints a fascinating portrait of how the last "Raja" of Bastar, Pravir Chandra Bhanjdeo—a hero of the tribals who wanted to build a Hindu nation — fancied himself as a *tantrik* and led an attack on police stations in the 1960s well after the British had left India.

The author then takes us on a long journey covering the rise of Maoism in India, including a long section on Mao himself, the rise of the Chinese Communist Party, its relationship with the Kuomintang Party, its external affiliation and Mao's treatment of women. The book would have been no poorer if this section had been dropped. He briefly discusses the experiences of Mohit Sen, Communist ideologue and the first Indian to train at Beijing's Marxism Leninism Academy (International).

The really informative section of the book is the discussion on the strategy and tactics of Maoists in India, beginning with the friendship between Charu Mazumdar and Kanu Sanyal. The book has an account of the author's conversations with modern-day Maoists, including former NITI Aayog Vice-Chairman Rajiv Kumar and teacher and activist Dilip Simeon. But how Maoists made the ideology relevant to Bastar tribals comes alive in the pages of the book. Mr Sharma's insights include speaking to a schoolgirl in Sukma. When he asked her what the colour of India's national flag was, her prompt reply was "*kale jhande*" (black flag), suggesting Maoist contempt for the Indian state is more deeply ingrained than we realise. Yet, he outlines the Mahua ideology that even Maoists have failed to understand: The complexities of tribal beliefs and culture that bubble up to the fore. The Mahua ideology represents the core of Bastarhi identity — encompassing its language, social fabric, cultural traditions and spiritual beliefs.



Rebel Bastar: History, Maoism and the Search for Answers in India's Heartland
by Shantanu Nandan Sharma
Published by Hatchette India
310 pages ₹799

Although the book has Bastar as its focus, it does discuss why Maoism found no success in other tribal regions of India such as the Northeast. He finds evidence of the militant group United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) helping to bring the Communist Party of India (Maoist) together but believes that identity played a bigger role in politics in the Northeast than ideology. His assessment is reinforced by another recent book: The biography of former chief minister of Mizoram, Zoramthanga.

Mr Sharma notes without comment that despite Home Minister Amit Shah's assertion that the regime would "completely eradicate Naxalism from the country before March, 2026," no-go areas in Bastar still exist. Maoists across the country are surrendering their guns. And yet, they live.

Although it could have done with some editorial tightening and more rigorous structuring, this book is outstanding for its research and understanding of a region that is still an enigma. In the debate about the Uniform Civil Code, for instance, Bastar tribals continue to represent dissent. Mr Sharma says the culture of Mahua needs to be understood if we need to understand Bastar. Never was a truer word said.

The Tribune
ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Exam reforms

AI-generated papers merit a trial

INFOSYS co-founder Nandan Nilekani has suggested an innovative way to curb paper leaks. His proposal to use artificial intelligence (AI) to generate question papers on exam day offers a promising opportunity to reform a system desperately in need of credibility. Nilekani, who is heading a committee dedicated to systemic reforms, has argued that setting the papers from a vast question bank at the last minute could eliminate the commercial incentive behind paper leaks. His idea, coupled with a nationwide transition to computer-based testing, deserves serious consideration. However, technological innovation must be accompanied by institutional accountability and equal access. The logic behind AI-generated papers is compelling. If questions are selected securely just before a test, the possibility of advance access could be substantially reduced. Still, independent audits and human oversight will be essential to prevent errors, bias and manipulation.

The proposed expansion of computer-based testing infrastructure needs equal attention. Although India already has around 1.5 lakh testing locations, accommodating millions of candidates will require secure Internet connectivity and standardised examination facilities. Rural students and candidates from economically backward areas must not be placed at a disadvantage. An earlier committee made extensive recommendations on security, governance and the functioning of the National Testing Agency. Yet subsequent controversies, including the 2026 NEET paper leak, have exposed serious implementation gaps. Another committee will achieve little unless its suggestions translate into measurable action.

Examinations shape young people's future, so their integrity is a matter of public trust. Nilekani's technology-led approach could mark a significant step forward, provided it is implemented transparently, inclusively and responsibly. India needs a system in which every student can compete fairly and trust the result.

Funding gap

Poor women need dependable livelihood support

THE closure of the Deendayal Antyodaya Yojana–National Urban Livelihoods Mission (DAY-NULM) without a clear, adequately funded successor risks undoing a decade of work in empowering poor urban women. The Centre must resolve funding disputes with states and ensure that self-help groups (SHGs) and the livelihoods they sustain do not become collateral damage of a policy transition. Significantly, BJP-ruled states have joined Congress-governed Karnataka and TVK-led Tamil Nadu in flagging the funding crisis. Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh and Tripura have sought financial assistance, exposing a concern that cuts across party lines. This convergence should prompt the Centre to address the issue on merit rather than treat it as a routine Centre-state tussle.

By September 2024, NULM had helped form over 10 lakh women's SHGs, bringing nearly one crore urban poor women into their fold. It sought to help women move beyond subsistence work towards sustainable livelihoods. But the mission ended on September 30, 2024, while uncertainty over its successor continues. The states' demands include assistance for existing activities, payment of interest subsidies and staff salaries. The Centre maintains that no state fund demand is pending and says SHGs are being connected with other government programmes. These competing claims call for transparent, state-wise disclosure of funds released, liabilities verified and payments due.

Women stitching uniforms, preparing meals or running small enterprises need affordable loans, dependable markets, timely payments and institutional support. Without these, self-employment can become a cycle of debt rather than a route out of poverty. Convergence with other schemes may offer opportunities, but it cannot automatically replace a dedicated livelihoods framework. The Centre must settle legitimate outstanding liabilities, announce a time-bound transition plan and establish measurable targets for income growth and enterprise survival.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

LAHORE, FRIDAY, OCTOBER 15, 1926

Right of the minority

THE most important part of Lala Duni Chand's article on the Independent Congress party, which we publish elsewhere in this issue, is that in which he disputes the right of that party to act against the Cawnpur resolution and yet remain within the Congress and call themselves Congressmen. Duni Chand is a Swarajist and is doubtless aware that his own party, as long as it was a minority in the Congress, claimed and exercised precisely the right which he would now deny to the Independent Congress party. It is undoubtedly open to him to say that this is not a conclusive argument because if the principle he lays down is sound, the mere fact that his own party violated it would not give another party the right to violate it with impunity. But before he does so, he has to show that the principle is sound. The analogy of the British Constitution does not hold at all, for the simple reason that the Congress is not an organisation of the same kind as the British Parliament and has not the same or even similar functions to exercise. It is an unofficial, voluntary body whose sole function is, by the education of public opinion and by peaceful and organised national activities, calculated to bring the pressure of that opinion to bear on the British electorate, to transform the present irresponsible Government in India into a government wholly responsible to the people. In the case of such a body, it is not necessary to demand allegiance of the particular kind from its members that the State is entitled to and does demand from its citizens, but is in the highest degree inexpedient and even impossible.

Chinese duplicity to the fore

It's an irony that Beijing has opposed India's move to standardise names of 28 places in Ladakh



GAUTAM BAMBAWALE
FORMER AMBASSADOR TO CHINA AND TRUSTEE, PUNE INTERNATIONAL CENTRE



TIT FOR TAT : It seems that India's latest manoeuvre has got under China's skin. PTI

INDIA's move to standardise the names of 28 places in Ladakh by identifying and marking them on an official map drew a quick and somewhat petulant response from China. The spokesperson for the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs said on October 13 that China "firmly opposes the so-called standardised names publicised by India," adding that this move was illegal and void.

The fact that China has been doing this long before India resorted to a tit-for-tat exercise appears to have been totally ignored by Beijing. This is its standard playbook. What China does is right; when others do the same thing, they are wrong.

It appears that the Indian manoeuvre has got under China's skin — hence its immediate and strong riposte. In its hubris over how powerful China has become, Beijing ignores the simple fact that two can play the same game. India is only catching up with what China originally started.

The mandarins in Beijing should expect more such "standardised names" — a term used by the Chinese themselves — from New Delhi in the coming months and years. Please don't forget that a similar exercise was done in Arunachal Pradesh a few months ago. India had assigned standardised names to 27 places and geographical features in Arunachal in August. The Ministry of Home Affairs had announced that the exercise was carried out in consultation with the state government.

There are other aspects of the Chinese Foreign Ministry's statement that also need deeper analysis. It said, "China has never recognised the so-called 'Union Territory of Ladakh' unilaterally and illegally established by India."

The immediate questions that arise from this comment are: Does Beijing have a say in any reconfiguration of the administrative set-up of India? Isn't that a matter for India alone to decide? Did Beijing object when the state of Telangana was created from the erstwhile Andhra Pradesh in 2014? Clearly not. Then how come Beijing feels it had a say when India created the Union Territories of Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh in 2019? How can China object to the abrogation of Article 370, which was a domestic administrative arrangement of India?

When Article 370 was abrogated, Delhi had very clearly conveyed to Beijing that this development was India's internal matter with no implications for the India-China boundary question. Disputes about the boundary would need to be discussed and negotiated between the two countries. Even then, possibly at Pakistan's prodding, Beijing had taken exception to the creation of the two Union Territories. China has never conveyed to India why it is opposed to the termination of the special arrangement under Article 370. Perhaps it is time for Beijing to be upfront about this matter and tell India what its objections are. It is likely that the Chinese don't want to do so as their position on what is a domestic Indian matter may get exposed.

> As per China's playbook, what it does is right; when others do the same thing, they are wrong. Beijing ignores the simple fact that two can play the same game.

Of course, we must keep in mind that when India converted Arunachal Pradesh from a Union Territory into a state in 1987, China had objected to that move also. Even today, Beijing strenuously objects whenever Indian leaders pay visits to that state of India. It is clear that those objections emanate from the fact that China lays claim to the entire state, whereas the reality is that India has actual control of almost the whole territory — in most places right up to the McMahon Line.

Is it this principle that is being applied to Ladakh? Is China arguing that until the boundary is delineated and demarcated, it will have a veto over what India does in what is ostensibly its own territory and which is not even being disputed by China? This is a far-fetched argument, and even Beijing must see how hollow it rings.

This brings us to the third aspect of the Chinese Foreign Ministry's statement, which states, "... does not change the fact that the western sector of the India-China boundary belongs to China." This is exactly the point. India disputes what China believes is its territory. Conversely, China disagrees with what India thinks is its own territory. That is why there is a boundary question or a boundary dispute.

Now, China appears to be unilaterally saying that what the two countries have broadly defined as the western sector of the boundary is Chinese territory. This may be a methodology to reiterate one's position on the issue, but it is rather childish.

The way to proceed on these issues is to sit across the table and have a frank talk about them. However, since China made its military moves in eastern Ladakh in 2020, even such talking has become very difficult, time-consuming and protracted.

Beijing will be a real superpower in the making if it were to practically, realistically and candidly discuss such issues with India rather than indulging in name-calling, innuendo and diplomatese. Rather than flexing its muscles and attempting to exhibit its comprehensive national power, China should adopt a practical, solution-finding approach.

This may not lead to a resolution of the boundary dispute between India and China, but it may lay the foundation for a more straightforward, direct and simpler relationship between the two neighbours.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

"It is not possible to imagine a peaceful world without some effort to deal with China. — Henry Kissinger"

A farewell that never happened

SILKY BAJAJ

FOR nearly 10 years, my parents had lovingly served Radha-Krishna, treating them not merely as deities to be worshipped, but as family members. My mother, in particular, was deeply attached to them. Every day, she would spend nearly two hours preparing their *shringaar*, carefully dressing as well as adorning the idols with the same affection one would show a beloved child.

One day, an incident left her devastated. One foot of Lord Krishna's idol got damaged. My mother felt that something precious and irreplaceable had broken. She was inconsolable. A fellow devotee suggested that the appropriate course would be to perform *jal pravah* — respectfully immersing both idols in the Yamuna.

With profound sadness, she accepted what she believed was the right thing to do. Her heart, however, seemed to be saying something entirely different.

We were travelling by train to Vrindavan when my mother received a call from her brother. My uncle said he had chosen new idols for her. She paused and said something that seemed to carry a deeper meaning: "They are also not seeking separation from me."

The following morning, we reached Vrindavan. Our first thought was to go to the Yamuna and bid the idols what we believed would be the final farewell.

While staying at a temple, we met a devotee from Poland, with whom our family had a long association. When he heard that we were going to the Yamuna, he expressed a desire to accompany us.

I felt that we should tell him why we were going, so I explained everything — the idol's damaged foot, my mother's anguish and our decision to perform *jal pravah*.

"I want to have a look immediately," he exclaimed.

When he saw the idol, he looked at us with disbelief. "How can you say there is a defect?" he asked. "How can Krishna be imperfect?"

Then came words that changed everything: "From now on, I will take care of both idols like my own children. I will do their *seva*." We were left speechless.

The moment we surrendered the idols into his care, my mother received a call from her brother. The new ones had arrived at his house. In that moment, what had appeared to be a painful farewell revealed itself as something else. There had been no separation at all.

Perhaps, in ways we could not understand at the time, Krishna had simply arranged for His *seva* to continue, ensuring that neither He nor His devotee would have to experience the pain of parting.

The writer is Senior Sub Editor, The Tribune

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Safeguard strategic autonomy

Refer to 'India must stay engaged with the US'; judging by past experience, Marco Rubio's visit will not yield any favourable result for India. If we need the US in some spheres, it also needs the Indian market. Our relationship with Russia is quite strong, and Trump knows this, and that is why Washington keeps arm-twisting New Delhi. A balanced foreign policy, maintaining strong ties with Russia while engaging the US on equal terms, is essential to safeguard India's strategic autonomy and long-term economic interests. India must negotiate keeping its national interests above external pressure and political rhetoric.

ASHOK KUMAR GOEL, PANCHKULA

Conducive ecosystem for techies

Refer to 'The tech-talent irreversible tango'; India has come a long way since the 1960s. The prowess of the country's talent pool, especially in the IT industry, is globally acknowledged. Now, it is the government's responsibility to ensure a supportive ecosystem on a par with Western nations. The time has come to capitalise on global developments in talent management and retention. By investing in research, innovation, skill development and world-class infrastructure, India can create an environment that encourages its own professionals to stay here and contribute.

JK GULATI, JALANDHAR

Track down food adulterators

Refer to 'Health threats'; more importantly, widespread food adulteration and contamination expose consumers to potentially harmful substances. Food safety enforcement often intensifies during festivals, only to lose momentum later. Raids on petty vendors followed by minor penalties cannot dismantle organised adulteration networks. The need of the hour is effective traceability. Investigations must extend beyond the immediate jurisdiction to identify their source, manufacturers, suppliers and distribution networks across state boundaries. Preventing disease must begin not only in schools and hospitals, but also in our kitchens, markets and food supply chains.

SURJIT SINGH BHATOA, PANCHKULA

Police must enjoy public goodwill

Refer to 'What the police gain by allowing a protest'; the administration always faces the dilemma of whether to allow a protest march because there is no hard and fast rule governing this critical decision but only real-time objective assessment of the situation along with concrete, credible intelligence inputs. The police must always enjoy the goodwill and confidence of citizens and convey to them through their acts that the administration respects their right to protest peacefully and with dignity. A balanced approach that combines firm law enforcement with restraint can help maintain public order without undermining democratic rights.

RAVI SHARMA, DHARIWAL

Effective policing is crucial

Refer to 'Activist's killing'; the daylight killing of an anti-drug activist in Mansa raises serious questions about public safety and the effectiveness of law enforcement in Punjab. Beyond the immediate criminal investigation, this tragedy demands a broader examination. Are complaints about the illegal sale of narcotics being acted upon promptly? Are credible threats assessed seriously? Can citizens report suspected wrongdoing without fearing for their own safety? The responsibility for enforcing the law rests with the State, not individual citizens. While civic participation is essential, confronting suspected offenders should never become a substitute for effective policing.

PARRY GARG, LUDHIANA

Ensure whistle-blowers' safety

With reference to 'Activist's killing': unless and until the black sheep in the police are identified and weeded out, the drug trade would continue to flourish. The clandestine sale of addictive drugs at some chemists' shops is also a matter of concern. The government should consider putting a robust mechanism in place for identifying the officials indulging in nefarious activities. More worrying is that some arrested drug smugglers are released under political pressure.

RAVINDER SINGH, JALANDHAR

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**

UP votes in early 2027. Why SIR is not an issue



RADHIKA RAMASESHAN
SENIOR JOURNALIST

IN stark contrast to Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Chennai and smaller state capitals such as Patna and Panaji, Lucknow — long considered a most politically volatile city — has reported no protests, unlike the two rounds of demonstrations resulting from the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP)'s mammoth assemblage at Jantar Mantar in July and the Opposition-led demonstrations last week.

Uttar Pradesh votes in early 2027, along with Punjab, Goa and Manipur. The issues relating to the suspected manipulation of voter lists to suit the ruling BJP government in Lucknow and Delhi ought to have incited the Opposition and civil society or, at least, caused concern, to put it mildly. However, barring the protests in Prayagraj (Allahabad) by Left-aligned youth outfits, street presence has been negligible.

The state has had its share of combustible student politics. The RSS' student wing, the Akhil Bharatiya Vidyarthi Parishad, the Samajwadi Party's Samajwadi Chhatra Sabha and the Congress's NSUI were not been averse to resorting to violence when university elections took place.

Indeed, these student outfits were considered appropriate nurseries to identify and nurture prospective 'netas'. However, since 2017, direct elections to students' unions in UP have remained suspended, citing law and order issues and the possible threat of violence.

While student unions have remained dormant, the Opposition, which could have galvanised the protests, has fallen shy of hitting the streets. Multiple reasons abound, especially in an election-bound state as explosive as UP.

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's by-now proven response, which is to adopt strong-arm tactics to quell dissent, has reached new levels. Not for nothing has he earned the moniker 'Bulldozer Baba' after earthmovers mercilessly steamrolled their way through the streets to raze properties and homes belonging to the opponents of the BJP.

The staging of encounters and throwing dissenters into prisons without any questions asked has become common. The fear of losing life and limb has shut up most potential agitators.

The last known street protests were in 2021, when some spirited Congress activists and independent women came out to challenge the proposed amendments to the Citizenship Act, but they were roughed up by cops and herded inside prisons.

Adityanath seeks to reinforce his image as more than an archetypal law-and-order enforcer. He will juxtapose the relative "peace" that prevails in UP against the fortified security enclosures of uniformed men and women all over Delhi, by saying that these security forces are hardly used in his state. In fact, the UP government replenished the national capital's security requirements with its own contingents.



UNTOUCHED : A protest is the last thing to distract the people of Uttar Pradesh. ANI

Adityanath rode back to power in the last Assembly polls on the promise of creating a template of 'zero tolerance for crime control', even as the Opposition flayed his brand of bulldozer justice. Voters had long complained about the Samajwadi Party's alleged propensity to cohabit with 'criminals'.

The emerging dominant trope in UP now is that "chain- and purse-snatchings are a thing of the past", while men believe that the delivery of "instant justice" against their adversaries must be applauded. Adityanath's large-scale use of the kangaroo court has been a hit with many voters.

> Adityanath seeks to reinforce his image as more than an archetypal enforcer of law and order.

Significantly, the SP expressed its solidarity with the SIR-driven protests in Delhi and not Lucknow. Whether it was Mainpuri MP Dimple Yadav nursing injured protesters or Akhilesh climbing on the INDIA bandwagon to stage marches, Lucknow has been missing from the party's radar.

Unlike his father Mulayam Singh Yadav, a hard-wired combatant who thought nothing or organising a 'jail bharo andolan' or confront the police, Akhilesh shies away from direct fights. Despite his formidable party apparatus endowed with a once-active student wing, mobilising the cadre for street fights should have been a breeze for the former CM. But he clearly prefers backroom politics.

There was another reason why the NEET paper leaks saga did not move UP. Back in 1992, when the BJP was first independently elected to power, then Chief Minister Kalyan Singh enacted the anti-copying law to end cheating in school and university exams.

The 'use of unfair means in exams' became a cognisable and non-bailable offence; it empowered the police to enter exam centres and arrest offenders and defaulters. There was a howl of protest from the Opposition.

The unpopular law was the real reason why the BJP lost the 1993 state election, a year after it brought down the Babri Masjid. When the SP-BSP alliance came to power, one of Mulayam Singh's first acts was to revoke the law. Shortcuts to getting through exams are perfectly acceptable in UP.

Unlike Bihar, which endorses reforms in law and order periodically to try and create a level-playing field for all, Uttar Pradesh plays to other horizons.

A degree of fatalism is a peculiar characteristic, which, for example, led to the people of UP accepting without question the record number of deaths reported during Covid. In the elections that followed the pandemic in 2022, nobody said a word about the marked callousness of the state government towards the tragedy. Instead, there was all-round praise for Adityanath for the freebies he had doled out.

Those who aspire to a better life move to Mumbai, Delhi or the southern states. The rest are content living in a world characterised by *bhajans* and *kirtans*, caste identities, cow worship (never mind the havoc caused by rogue cattle swarming the streets) and government handouts, with minority baiting and rioting becoming both sport and entertainment.

A protest is the last thing to distract the people of UP unless it's over a communally polarising "provocation", like the amendments over the Citizenship Amendment Act. The chokehold of Mandir and Mandal — the twin strands fashioning its politics since the late eighties — continues.

Punjab's drug problem remains front and centre



NIRMAL SANDHU
SENIOR JOURNALIST

ANTI-DRUG activist Parvinder Jhota has paid with his life for something he could have kept quiet about, like so many others around him. But he chose to speak up and confront the chemist shop owner in Mansa in the heart of Punjab, he suspected was selling the deadly substance.

The brutal daylight murder on camera has shaken Punjabis. They are already tired of the daily routine of killings and extortions, which have created a sense of fear about their safety and doubts about effective policing in the state. Reports of drug-related deaths only add to their sense of disgust.

Politicians are once again resorting to their usual expressions of concern and using the daylight murder to corner the Bhagwant Mann government. On its part, the state government must take the blame for its failure at multiple levels to manage law and order in general and the drug menace in particular.

In Parvinder Jhota, society has lost a well-meaning former kabaddi player who would not have had to take the law into his own hands had the drug inspectors honestly done their job and kept a tight leash on the synthetic drugs business. It is widely believed that chemist shops in Punjab illegally sell intoxicants and that this is not a recent phenomenon.

The police have tried to underplay the incident by dismissing it as a case of personal enmity, but the harsh truth is that people tend to settle personal scores only when governance lets them down and justice eludes them.

In his enthusiasm to curb the proliferation of drugs in his area, Parvinder crossed the line and that was because the government didn't do its job. The police do not inspire confidence for not acting promptly if a crime is reported.

The drugs issue has dogged successive governments over the years but none have formulated an effective, workable strategy. There is no point in kicking up dust about the past — who started it, who all encouraged and benefited from it and who swore by a religious book to end the problem within four weeks of forming a government.



MORE NEEDED : Despite doing a good job, the police agenda, at best, is still a work-in-progress. FILE

The Aam Aadmi Party government has done some credible work in this direction, but the success has not matched its full-blown advertisement blitz 'Yudh Nashian Viruddh'. Thankfully, there are few allegations of a politician-police-nexus at work now, unlike in the past. The Mann government has encouraged sports and built stadiums in rural areas.

> People tend to settle personal scores only when governance lets them down.

Despite doing a good job of reining in the supply of illegal drugs, the police agenda, at best, is still a work-in-progress. While crushing the supply line should remain the focus of strategic policy, it is not the only solution. Since the drug trade has become a thriving business, operators have taken to digital marketing. The police should go after the cartel wholesalers and local dealers who use the Internet, smartphones and the cashless payment system to lure customers.

Civil servants and police officers seem content with the present clean-up rate of crime and drugs, which apparently is dismal. Faith in the justice system is at a new low. Prisons are choked with the influx of criminals. Courts are unable to cope with backlogs. The conviction rate in drug cases is abysmally low.

Apart from crushing the supply lines, the government needs to refocus its energy on driving down the demand for opioids. Controlling demand takes a community effort. Panchayat, civil society members and parents of addicts have to be involved. There are innumerable do-gooders like Parvinder Jhota who can be guided and trained to handle chitta peddlers.

The government can incentivise local-level solutions and empower people to take up the challenge, help young ones change the course of their addiction and recover by effectively integrating them back into the community. There is an urgent need to fund, upgrade and reorient rehabilitation centres.

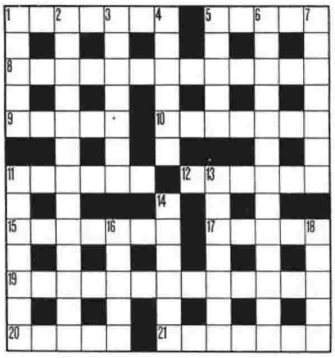
Ahead of the elections, the AAP leadership is running short of political capital. If it continues with its business-as-usual approach on law and order, it may find itself politically outplayed by opponents. Its performance is less than average on the arrest and conviction of gangsters, drug mafia and political opponents behind the incidents of sacrilege.

Options before Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann are limited. If he has to get back the chief-ministerial *gaddi*, he has to show results on the ground. Actions, not just a delightful way with words, are needed. People can't just look on with despair at what is happening and let thugs and gangsters boss the streets.

Though the traditional parties have little to boast about their past performance, the BJP is expected to make drugs a key issue in its election campaign. Home Minister Amit Shah has set a deadline for ridding Punjab of drugs.

But people have learnt from their experience and are unlikely to be swayed just by rhetoric.

QUICK CROSSWORD



ACROSS

1 Fictitious (7)
5 Underlying (5)
8 Expressing a question (13)
9 Chew vigorously (5)
10 Meeting of a court (7)
11 Philippines city (6)
12 To dress (6)
15 Withstand (7)
17 A board game (5)
19 Unsuitable (13)
20 Blustery (5)
21 Disintegration (5-2)

DOWN

1 Generally accepted principle (5)
2 Hidebound (3,2,4,4)
3 Arrange in order (7)
4 Sleepy (6)
5 Copper-zinc alloy (5)
6 Wild guess (4,2,3,4)
7 Hot red pepper (7)
11 Absent (7)
13 Swiss lake (7)
14 Bury (6)
16 Be relevant (5)
18 Wide expanse (5)

Yesterday's Solution

Across: 1 Clash, 8 Anarchic, 9 Stern, 10 Windfall, 11 Flair, 12 New, 16 In time, 17 At will, 18 Toy, 23 Unsay, 24 Tangible, 25 Toxic, 26 Gratuity, 27 Agony.

Down: 2 Let alone, 3 Sardinia, 4 On fire, 5 Pride, 6 Shoal, 7 Scale, 12 Net, 13 Way, 14 Swan song, 15 Alsatian, 19 Of late, 20 Stagy, 21 On tap, 22 Virus.

SU DO KU

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

HARD

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

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

CALENDAR

OCTOBER 15, 2026, THURSDAY

Shaka Samvat	1948
Ashwin Shaka	23
Ashwin Parvishte	29
Hijari	1448
Shukla Paksha Tithi 5, up to 3:26 am	
Saubhagya Yoga up to 9:15 pm	
Jyeshtha Nakshatra	
Moon in Scorpio sign	

FORECAST

SUNSET: THURSDAY 17:52 HRS
SUNRISE: FRIDAY 06:25 HRS

CITY	MAX	MIN
Chandigarh	32	20
New Delhi	29	20
Amritsar	30	20
Bathinda	33	18
Jalandhar	32	20
Ludhiana	32	19
Bhiwani	32	20
Hisar	32	20
Sirsa	32	20
Dharamsala	25	16
Manali	18	08
Shimla	18	12
Srinagar	20	10
Jammu	26	18
Kargil	18	02
Leh	16	02
Dehradun	29	21
Mussoorie	18	12

TEMPERATURE IN °C

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

Behind barricades

A democracy is tested not when its institutions enjoy public confidence, but when citizens challenge them. The escalating confrontation in Delhi over electoral-roll revisions presents India with precisely this test. What began as a youth-led campaign has expanded into a broader struggle over voting rights, freedom of assembly and the accountability of institutions entrusted with protecting democratic processes. The repeated detention of Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) leaders, the sweeping restrictions imposed on demonstrators and the withdrawal of Jantar Mantar's status as a designated protest site suggest an increasingly coercive approach to public dissent. Authorities have responsibilities to maintain order, prevent violence and regulate demonstrations. But those responsibilities cannot justify measures so extensive that peaceful assembly becomes near impossible. Closing metro stations, disrupting transport and deploying overwhelming force to prevent people from reaching a protest site risk making the restrictions themselves a source of public anger.

The decision to remove Jantar Mantar ~ a site picked after previous governments found Boat Club and the India Gate lawns too close for comfort ~ from the list of designated protest venues is troubling. A democratic government should facilitate peaceful demonstrations through reasonable regulation, not make them dependent on permissions that can effectively extinguish rights. Alternative sites offer little reassurance if access remains uncertain or the practical arrangements discourage participation. The constitutional right to express dissent must mean more than permission to speak where and when the authorities find it convenient. Yet the electoral controversy demands careful scrutiny rather than automatic acceptance of either side's claims. The Election Commission maintains that its voter-roll revision is intended to remove ineligible entries. Opposition parties allege that the exercise risks excluding legitimate voters and could benefit the Bharatiya Janata Party. The scale of deletions makes transparent verification essential, but allegations of partisan manipulation must be established through evidence. Rahul Gandhi's decision to challenge the revision in the Supreme Court offers an institutional route for resolving the dispute. Judicial scrutiny can establish whether the process complies with the law and whether safeguards adequately protect citizens' voting rights. But litigation cannot substitute for administrative transparency, particularly when elections depend on millions of individual entries being accurate. Any wrongful exclusion must be corrected before it deprives a citizen of the opportunity to vote.

The CJP's persistence has also exposed the political consequences of suppressing youth mobilisation. Its origins in anger over unemployment, examination irregularities and a controversial judicial remark gave it a constituency extending beyond conventional party loyalties. Its influence will ultimately depend on whether it can turn protest into specific, evidence-based demands. Opposition parties, meanwhile, must demonstrate that concern for electoral integrity extends beyond their immediate contest with the ruling party. India's institutions should not mistake enforced quiet for restored confidence. The Election Commission must establish the integrity of its revision exercise, the government must protect peaceful dissent, and the courts must provide timely scrutiny. The measure of democratic authority is not its ability to empty a protest site, but its willingness to answer citizens have gathered there.

Maritime Peril

The Black Sea is becoming a test of how far a regional war can spread without drawing neighbouring states into direct confrontation. Repeated drone attacks on merchant vessels near Bulgaria, a member of NATO, have brought that danger into sharp focus. The sinking of a ship with 11 crew members missing, following a fatal incident a few days earlier, demonstrates that commercial shipping is no longer insulated from the Russia-Ukraine conflict. The consequences extend well beyond the immediate combatants.

The strategic significance lies in the vulnerability of maritime trade. Russia has sought to constrain Ukraine's ability to export goods by targeting infrastructure and shipping associated with its ports. Moscow maintains that it is striking vessels carrying weapons and dual-use cargo. Kyiv and its European supporters contend that civilian commercial traffic is also being endangered. Without conclusive evidence establishing responsibility for the latest attacks, accusations must be treated cautiously. Yet the repeated incidents point to a maritime environment in which the distinction between military targets and commercial activity is becoming increasingly difficult to enforce.

The economic stakes are substantial. Ukraine and Russia are major agricultural exporters, and disruption in the Black Sea can affect grain availability, freight rates, insurance premiums and food prices in import-dependent countries. Poorer nations, which have little influence over the conflict, may ultimately bear a disproportionate share of the costs. The weaponisation of maritime access thus carries consequences beyond the battlefield, turning commercial uncertainty into a potential source of international economic distress.

For Bulgaria, the challenge is particularly acute. As a NATO member bordering the Black Sea, it must protect its maritime interests without provoking an escalation that could draw the alliance into open hostilities with Russia. The attacks occurred outside Bulgarian territorial waters. That distinction matters: an incident in a country's exclusive economic zone does not automatically constitute an armed attack on its sovereign territory, nor does it automatically activate Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty. Nevertheless, repeated strikes close to allied territory cannot be dismissed as somebody else's problem.

NATO must therefore combine vigilance with restraint. Improved surveillance, intelligence-sharing, maritime coordination and assistance in investigating attacks are necessary. Any attribution of responsibility must rest on credible evidence, while deterrence must make clear that attacks threatening allied security will carry consequences. An automatic military response would be dangerous; an absence of meaningful response could be equally damaging if it encourages further attacks.

The central danger is not that every drone strike will trigger a NATO-Russia war. It is that repeated incidents will gradually normalise risks that could eventually produce one through miscalculation. The Black Sea must not become a theatre where civilian lives and international commerce are treated as expendable instruments of war. Deterrence is essential, but so are evidence, communication and restraint. The cost of failing to combine them could be measured not merely in sunken ships, but in a conflict that becomes far harder to contain.

What the Rupee Knows~I

The external accounts show where that pressure lands. The current account was not the problem in April-June: the deficit was $4.2 billion, 0.5 per cent of GDP, as services and remittances offset most of an $86.1 billion merchandise deficit. The capital account was. Net portfolio outflows were $9.6 billion in the quarter and net foreign direct investment only $6.1 billion, according to the RBI. The oil bill has since grown



Five weeks ago India's foreign-exchange reserves stood higher than ever before: $785.7 billion in the week to 4 September, according to the Reserve Bank of India. By 2 October, the latest week reported, $51.1 billion had gone, including $18.3 billion in the week to 25 September alone. On the morning of 9 October the rupee opened at about 96.7 to the dollar, barely off the weakest levels in its history, two days after the Monetary Policy Committee raised the repo rate for the first time since 2023.

In these columns on 6 April I argued that a credit rating measures intent while a currency crisis measures structure. Six months on, a sharper distinction has emerged. India keeps its official books gross: real output, gross reserves, share prices in rupees. The currency market settles net: income after the oil bill, reserves after promised repayments, returns after conversion into dollars. The rupee's slide is the market reconciling the two ledgers. This first part follows the money that has held the rupee; the second turns to the statistics that describe the economy behind it.

The rupee ended 2025-26 near 94.8 to the dollar, down about 9.9 per cent on the year. In late March the RBI turned to regulation. A circular of 27 March limited each bank's net open rupee position in the onshore deliverable market to $100 million at the close of each business day; banks were then barred from offering rupee non-deliverable forwards, and on 2 April the currency posted its biggest one-day gain since 2013. The relief did not last.

The RBI, which had already sold a record net $53.13 billion in the spot market in 2025-26, sold a further $8.9 billion in April and $6.1 billion in May, yet on 20 May the rupee touched about 96.96, its weakest ever. It is down more than 7 per cent this year.

Then the RBI changed instruments. From 8 June it opened concessional swap windows through which banks could pass fresh three-to-five-year FCNR(B) deposits and external borrowings to the central bank at par, to be returned at maturity.

By 18 September the windows had drawn $143.5 billion, about $133 billion of it in non-resident deposits gathered before the deposit window shut, a month early, on 31 August. Reserves duly climbed from a low of $666.9 billion in the week to 26 June to the September record. Yet by 18 September gross reserves stood only about $99 billion above their late-June level, less than the swap money alone.

The difference lies in the forward book. Every swapped dollar must be delivered back, and the RBI's net short position in forwards, the dollars it has promised to sell at future dates, rose from $103.06 billion at end-March to about $137 billion at end-July and a record $200 billion at end-August. That was 27 per cent of the reserves it then held.

Most of the book matures after a year, which buys time but not freedom. The Governor reports import cover of 'around 11 months'; that is a gross figure. On the RBI's own data, short-term external debt by residual maturity equalled 50.5 per cent of reserves at end-June, up from 47.3 per cent in March, while total external debt stood at $778.2 billion, 20.8 per cent of GDP. The cushion is real, but the data suggest a large part of it is borrowed.

The swaps had a second effect, on monetary policy. When the RBI takes in dollars it pays out rupees, and the deposit inflows left the banking system in large liquidity surplus, which can blunt any increase in the policy rate. The MPC held the repo at 5.25 per cent in April, June and August.

On 7 October it raised the rate to 5.50 per cent by six votes to none, and moved its stance to 'calibrated tightening' by four to two, with Nagesh Kumar and Ram Singh preferring to stay neutral. Against August's consumer inflation of 4.82 per cent, the real policy rate is 0.68 percentage points.

The bond market has moved too. The ten-year government bond yield closed above 7.25 per cent on 8 October. Yet that was only about two percentage points above the yield on ten-year US Treasuries, which has risen above 5 per cent since the Federal Reserve raised its target range to 3.75–4.00 per cent on 16 September.



T KANNAN

The writer is a practising Chartered Accountant and a Vedantic Scholar. The views expressed are personal. He can be reached at kannan@cakt.in

Carry, the yield advantage that draws foreign money into rupee assets, is thin protection when the currency itself has lost more than 7 per cent this year.

The stock market has held up, and the manner of its holding up is instructive. On the NSE's provisional data, foreign institutions sold a net Rs 2.3 lakh crore or so of shares between April and September, and were net sellers in every one of those months; domestic institutions bought close to Rs 4 lakh crore.

Monthly SIP contributions reached a record Rs 32,297 crore in August, according to AMFI data, while depository data show foreign portfolio investors pulling about Rs 2.6 lakh crore out of Indian equities in January-September, already well beyond the total withdrawn in all of 2025. The Nifty closed on 8 October at 22,231.80, within half a per cent of its level at the end of March.

In dollars it has lost about 7 per cent since 6 April alone. Over the year as a whole, Indian shares have fallen in dollar terms while the emerging-market index has risen by about a fifth, on both MSCI's own data and Bank of America's tallies.

The market also absorbed record main-board IPO issuance of Rs 94,205 crore in April-September, according to Prime Database, and only 47 per cent of the Rs 2.43 lakh crore of public equity raised was fresh capital.

The India VIX, near 15 on 8 October, is far below its March highs: this is an orderly retreat, not a panic. But the market's resilience is a rupee resilience.

It clears the price of shares; it does not clear the price of dollars. Every share a foreign fund sells to a domestic buyer yields rupees that usually become dollars, so a market that absorbs selling in rupees passes the pressure to the currency.

The external accounts show where that pressure lands. The current account was not the problem in April-June: the deficit was $4.2 billion, 0.5 per cent of GDP, as services and remittances offset most of an $86.1 billion merchandise deficit. The capital account was. Net portfolio outflows were $9.6 billion in the quarter and net foreign direct investment only $6.1 billion, according to the RBI.

The oil bill has since grown. The merchandise deficit was still $26.86 billion in August, the Indian crude basket averaged well above $110 a barrel in September, and the crude import bill for April–August was $74.8 billion, up 48 per cent on a slightly smaller volume.

So the defence of the rupee has been financed, in large part, by dollars that are lent rather than earned: non-resident deposits that must be repaid, a forward book that must be delivered, and domestic savings that support share prices but cannot pay for oil. That is not a crisis.

It is a holding operation, and holding operations are judged by what they buy time for. The answer depends on whether the economy behind the currency is as strong as its headline numbers say, and that is a question about the numbers themselves.

(To Be Concluded)

CHINA DAILY

Value of institutionalized dialogue proved

Trust is the background and foundation of relations between China and the European Union, and economic and trade differences are only a stage phenomenon.

This remark by China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi in his discussions with Emmanuel Bonne, the French president's diplomatic adviser, during the 28th China-France Strategic Dialogue in Datong, Shanxi province, on Saturday highlights why the establishment of institutionalized arrangements provides a safeguard for managing differences and deepening cooperation.

It was notable that while the dialogue covered a broad range of bilateral and global issues, both sides spoke positively of the progress made in the discussions of the second meeting under the China-EU trade and investment consultation mechanism, which was jointly chaired by China's Commerce Minister Wang Wentao and EU trade chief Maros Sefcovic in Beijing.

After their consultations, both sides agreed that the mechanism was operating smoothly and efficiently, and that the second meeting under the mechanism represented a new beginning.

In the absence of such mechanisms, trade disputes tend to trigger a vicious cycle in which unilateral actions and countermeasures escalate quickly.

A Member Of The ANN ASIA NEWS NETWORK

Consultation mechanisms, by contrast, provide channels for communication, allowing both sides to raise concerns, explore solutions and monitor progress.

The endorsement of this assessment during the China-France Strategic Dialogue underscores that in an era of growing global uncertainties, major economies should seek to avoid confrontation over their differences through dialogue.

The consultations in Beijing produced a list of common understandings to address differences in a balanced manner within the framework of World Trade Organization rules. Implementing the outcomes will be conducive to deepening mutually beneficial cooperation and promoting stable development of China-EU economic ties.

During the China-France Strategic Dialogue, Wang clearly articulated China's position on China-EU trade relations, stating that the two sides are fully capable of properly handling economic and trade differences via dialogue and bringing bilateral relations back on track.

This reflects a conviction that China and the EU, as two of the world's major economies, share a responsibility to manage their differences properly through dialogue.

Beijing's emphasis on dialogue carries particular weight given recent tensions and trade frictions between the two sides. In the days leading up to the October consultations, France and Germany had proposed strengthening the EU's trade instruments, and the EU has been making preparations for imposing more protectionist measures against Chinese exports and investments.

Bonne said that the EU does not want a trade war with China, nor does it seek to "decouple" from China.

It is clear that confrontation would be mutually damaging. Reflecting this, the agreement of the two sides to continue relevant procedures concerning electric vehicle companies' price undertakings and reviews in the EU's "anti-subsidy" case involving Chinese EVs represents a calibrated step to address European concerns while preserving the sustainability of Chinese exports.

Both sides also agreed to explore the possibility of reducing tariffs on certain goods within the WTO framework and to hold a technical dialogue on the EU's Foreign Subsidies Regulation, while the EU side will continue to work toward resolving key licensing cases involving China in the dual-use sector.

Both sides have agreed to hold the third meeting of the mechanism in March, with a ministerial-level video conference scheduled for January.

Letters To The Editor | editor@thestatesman.com

Condemnable

Sir, I condemn Modi government's heavy-handed security clampdown in Delhi on 10 October. The measures – including shutting down 45 metro stations, closing major railway hubs, suspending the internet, and detaining hundreds of peaceful leaders, including former Keralam, West Bengal and Delhi's Chief ministers, besides CJP founder Abhijeet Dipke, its other top leaders and YouTuber Dhruv Rathee – were deployed to block protests against the resignation of Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar over alleged voter-list manipulation of 13.37 crore voters, and over changes relating to Form 6.

Regarding the clamp down and detention, the food processing industries minister Chirag Paswan said: "These are India's youth. They possess the capacity to show



the world the way, just as previous generations have done. Nothing can hold them back." But my question is how will this "undeclared emergency" be remembered in comparison to the 1975 Emergency.

Yours, etc., Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee,
Faridabad, 10 October.

Baffling

Sir, Apropos the incidents that took place in the National capital yesterday, I say that in my 79 years, I have never seen any government adopt such extreme preventive measures to quell protests; it was as if a notorious and formidable criminal gang was about to launch an assault on the nation's capital. This is unimaginable.

It is not as if the CEC and the election body made no mistakes; the Supreme Court, too, observed several irregularities.

Has anyone received a "satisfactory explanation" regarding the deletion of millions of voters' names across the country? Or the meaning of "logical discrepancy"?

It is baffling why BJP leaders are answering questions of the press on behalf of the Election Commission.

Yours, etc., Rupam Guha,
Kolkata, 11 October.

Tyrannical

Sir, The siege-like security cordon at Delhi's Jantar Mantar and its vicinity starkly reveals the ruling dispensation's authoritarian reflex. Authorities may cite late notice as justification for denying permission, but such procedural lapses cannot excuse the tyrannical suppression of peaceful protest. What should have been a forum for democratic expression has been smothered under barricades and baton-wielding force.

John F. Kennedy's warning rings alarmingly true in our capital today: "Those who make peaceful revolution impossible will make violent revolution inevitable." A democracy deaf to dissent is already halfway to tyranny, and those at the helm ignore this peril at their own risk.

Yours, etc., Avinash Godboley,
Dewas, 11 October.

Power dispersed in the Middle East

ADVITYA MADAN

In 1991, the United States emerged from the Gulf War at the height of its influence in the Middle East. Iraqi forces had been expelled from Kuwait, the Soviet Union was nearing dissolution, and preparations were under way for the Madrid peace conference. Washington appeared capable of shaping the regional order. Thirty-five years later, can America still guarantee regional security?

The war with Iran has exposed the limits of that capacity. What was expected to be a short campaign has become a costly confrontation, threatening energy supplies, shipping and the security of America's Gulf partners. Washington may reduce its military commitments, but the more consequential change would be the erosion of its role as the region's principal security architect. American power will endure; its ability to determine regional outcomes may not. This is a strategic, not merely military, shift.

The record of American interventions helps explain this predicament. The invasion of Iraq removed Saddam Hussein but also eliminated a principal counterweight to Iran, enabling Tehran to expand its influence. Interventions in Libya and Syria failed to produce stable political orders, while the Yemen conflict exposed the limits of military superiority in securing political outcomes.

Arab governments have also questioned Washington's consistency, from its handling of Hosni Mubarak's departure in Egypt to its changing regional priorities. These episodes differed, but they illustrate a persistent problem: military dominance does not automatically deliver a durable political settlement.

The breakdown of the interim understanding between Washington and Tehran has left both sides seeking leverage. Iranian pressure on shipping through the Strait of Hormuz threatens global energy markets, while American sanctions seek to restrict Tehran's economic connections. Oil prices have become an instrument of pressure on President Donald Trump, particularly ahead of the November midterm elections. Tehran may calculate that prolonging the conflict will raise the domestic political cost for Washington.

Instability around the Red Sea compounds the problem. Houthi advances in Yemen and attacks on Saudi territory underline the vulnerability of Gulf infrastructure and transport networks. The monarchies face an uncomfortable dilemma: continued conflict damages energy revenues, tourism and investment, but a rapid American withdrawal would leave them exposed. Washington, meanwhile, must weigh the costs of maintaining regional bases against their vulnerability to drones and inexpensive missiles. Aircraft carriers and Diego Garcia cannot fully offset the risks to its forward presence.

A reduced American role would not necessarily produce a stable regional balance. Three powers may exploit the resulting space, but their ambitions are unlikely to be compatible.

Iran has developed formidable missile capabilities and networks of allied armed groups across the region. Its survival would preserve its capacity to influence Iraq, Syria and Lebanon. My experience as a commanding officer in Lebanon after the 2006 war underscored the depth of Iran's regional networks. Tehran is likely to seek their reconstruction and could revive its nuclear ambitions. A serious move towards acquiring a nuclear weapon would sharpen the prospect of renewed American or Israeli intervention. Iran may gain leverage over Hormuz, but using a vital international waterway for coercion would invite resistance.

Türkiye combines military capabilities with expanding commercial and diplomatic relationships. Its engagement with Syria and Iraq, interest in trade corridors and water supplies, and security ties with Pakistan and Saudi Arabia reflect a pragmatic effort to extend its influence. Support for Islamist movements is only one dimension of Turkish policy; defence and construction interests also matter.



Israel, meanwhile, remains a formidable military and intelligence power. Following the October 7 attacks, its determination to eliminate perceived threats has reinforced its security-first outlook, while the Abraham Accords have deepened its ties with the United Arab Emirates.

None of these powers, however, is positioned to establish an uncontested regional order. Israeli-Turkish tensions in Syria, the unresolved confrontation between Israel and Iran, and the historic rivalry between Tehran and Ankara will complicate accommodation. Their competition could make the region less stable.

Arab states risk becoming the principal losers. Iraq and Syria remain burdened by conflict, while Egypt's former regional leadership has diminished. Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Qatar are pursuing ambitious economic transformations, but their business models depend on regional security. Their rivalries, including in Yemen, undermine responses to shared threats. The weakening of the Arab League and Gulf Cooperation Council is more than an institutional problem: it leaves regional states less able to manage competition without external intervention.

Nor is there an obvious successor to Washington. Europe lacks comparable military capacity, Russia remains constrained by its war in Ukraine, and China has little appetite for regional hegemony. Beijing depends heavily on Gulf energy but understands the financial, military and human costs of America's decades of engagement. It prefers economic influence without becoming the principal security provider.

Meanwhile, Washington is increasingly focused on strategic competition with China and rebuilding its own capabilities. A more selective American presence is plausible, even if complete withdrawal is not.

For India, the decisive question is not whether American bases will close, but whether Washington can still be relied upon to contain a crisis. A weaker security framework could accelerate military competition, encourage shifting alignments and expose Indian energy supplies, trade routes, expatriates and economic interests to disruption. India must assess the region without assuming that any single external power can guarantee stability. The end of American hegemony, if it comes, will not necessarily usher in a new order. It may instead leave a Middle East where power is dispersed, rivalries harder to manage and strategic uncertainty the defining condition.

The writer, a retired Brigadier of the Indian Army and an analyst, commanded 15 Punjab in Lebanon under the United Nations flag.

Our courts need sunlight

RAMJI SRIVASTAVA 'PRAVEEN'

A hearing lasts twenty minutes. The order that records it runs to two lines. The question the judge asked, the undertaking counsel gave, the assurance on which a party withdrew: it survives only in the memory of whoever sat in the room. Six months later, when the point is taken, those memories will not agree. A High Court preserves everything else. The hearing is the only part of a case we allow to disappear.

Contempt is where this bites hardest. The fight there is rarely about what the order said, but about what was undertaken, in what words, and what the court understood it to mean. I have seen what that costs. In a contempt petition I filed against the State, the judge hearing it took in open court precisely the view we had pleaded, and said so. The order sheet recorded none of it. By the next date the Bench had changed, the matter was heard afresh, and it went the other way. Whether the second view was right is not the point. The point is that I cannot show any forum what the first judge said, because nothing in the file retains it. The hearing happened. It left nothing behind.

Nor is this confined to contempt. Almost every order opens with the words "heard learned counsel for the parties", and a four-minute dismissal produces the same line as a forty-minute argument.

Then there is the everyday texture of a courtroom. Litigants are spoken to sharply for mistakes their lawyers made. Juniors are told to sit down before they have opened. Sarcasm from the Bench costs the judge nothing and can cost an advocate the client sitting behind him. None of it reaches the order. The strongest case for a camera is not that it will catch the worst of this, but that it will make it rarer, because conduct that can be watched is conducted differently.

Which is why we record police stations. In Paramvir Singh Saini (December 2020) the Supreme Court ordered CCTV in every police station, and was exact: the systems "must be equipped with night vision and must necessarily have audio as well as video footage", preserved for eighteen months and never less than a year. Three years earlier, in Pradyuman Bisht, the same Court had ordered courtroom cameras "(without audio recording)", put the footage beyond the Right to Information Act, and fixed retention at normally three months. Audio was later permitted. It was never required.

So, our law holds that an interrogation room must keep a verifiable account of what was said in it for a year and a half, while a courtroom need keep none at all. High Courts were not brought within even that modest scheme.

Of the two people in a courtroom, who is less able to prove what happened in it?

We know what a record makes possible, because once there was one. In 2024 two clips from a live streamed Karnataka High Court courtroom went around the country, one of a judge calling a Muslim majority part of Bengaluru "Pakistan", another of his remarks to a woman advocate. The Supreme Court took cognisance within a day, which the recording alone made possible. When the Bangalore bar asked that live streaming of such courts be stopped, Chief Justice D.Y. Chandrachud refused: "The answer to sunlight is more sunlight."

It cuts the other way too. An advocate who must appear before the same Bench on Tuesday rarely complains about last Tuesday; a judge falsely accused is equally helpless. The camera is an instrument not against judges but against uncertainty.



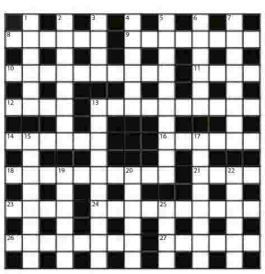
Allahabad streams nothing, at either seat, though it runs video conferencing for both. When Raj Vikram Singh asked the Lucknow Bench for live streaming in March 2025, a Division Bench sent the question to the court's administrative side and disposed of the petition with a hope. Nineteen months on, nothing has come of it. The objection that clips will be misused was met in July, when the Supreme Court barred their unauthorised extraction and re-uploading. That polices the clip, not the camera.

Live streaming is publicity; a preserved recording is evidence. What is asked for is narrow: synchronised sound and picture for the whole hearing, the original in the court's own custody with an audit trail, and preservation longer than the time a party has to appeal.

Justice must not only be done but be seen to be done. A third requirement has arrived unnoticed: it must also be capable of being proved. A hearing is an exercise of state power over a citizen, and we no longer accept elsewhere that such power may leave no trace. A court that cannot establish what happened in its own room is asking for a faith no public institution is entitled to ask.

The writer retired from the service of the Uttar Pradesh government.

Crossword | No. 293607



Yesterday's Solution

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

ACROSS

8 Guilty child leaves home (6)
9 Trusted friend to change and say nothing (5,3)
10 He hopes to dismiss bid involving partners in deal storing access code (3,7)
11 Trade union repeatedly provides cover for routine performer (4)
12 Club's run preserved by 1-0 win at the death (4)
13 Tight dresses cut to reveal her body? (10)
14 Kind, young volunteer nurse? (6)
16 Elected majority is closest to the centre (6)
18 Colouring book containing words but no chapter by school (10)
21 Well-known North American author (4)
23 Send-up exposed ludicrous naked figure (4)
24 Model auditor's more accurate report-writing mechanism? (10)
26 Latin sign I assume contains symbols associated with office (8)
27 Slight change isn't limiting usage to begin with (6)

DOWN

1 Person with ticklish throat picked up something chesty? (6)
2 Revolutionary Guards like somebody logical (8)
3 Sewer's storage facility regularly tests unit (4)
4 Man boxing woman gets beaten (6)
5 Draw evacuated terrorist gunmen into fighting (10)
6 Credit checks estimate evidence of impact (6)
7 Stuff goes tits up for people who care for themselves (8)
13 Cryptic entries cracked by writer like me (10)
15 Expressive line omitting one quote in translation (8)
17 Informant is safely conveying part of log (8)
19 What could lead whistleblower to share photos? (6)
20 Where company might be occupying legal position allowing further action (2,4)
22 Foreign character lies about fare from Europe (6)
25 Raise base of lead object containing flower (4)

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 1926

OCCASIONAL NOTE

As was both hoped and expected, Sir George Rankin has been selected to succeed Sir Lancelot Sanderson at the High Court. In the eight years of his Indian service he has made a great name for himself, and the reputation of the court will be safe in his hands. Through the not unhappy omission of a line we informed our readers yesterday that "at the age of 42—comparatively early for a judge—he showed sound legal knowledge." To that opinion we adhere. The new Chief Justice impressed the public with his competence as soon as he arrived, and his work has always been of a high order. Twice he has been called away from Calcutta for special duties—to sit on the Hunter Commission which inquired into the Amritsar disturbances, and to preside over the Civil Justice Committee, whose recommendations for the improvement of the judicial system are now receiving attention. A man of energetic spirit, he has found time to take a generous share in public obligations outside his professional labours; in particular he is identified as President with the work of the Society for the Protection of Children in India and with the University Corps as Commandant. It is no secret that he might have become Vice-Chancellor of the University.

News Items

"U. S. OF EUROPE"

JOINING INDUSTRIES OF A CONTINENT

BERLIN, OCT.

FACTS are emerging which indicate that the recent informal economic negotiations throughout Europe are bearing fruit, especially in the direction of combining the steel industries of all Europe except Russia.

It is now known that negotiations for the formation of an East European Steel Trust composed of Czecho-Slovakia, Austria, Hungary and Rumania are progressing favourably. The Trust contemplates an alliance with the recently formed combine, while the Swedish steel industry is being rapidly trustified and is tentatively discussing joining. It is also expected that the report of the Anglo-German conference at Romney, when published, will reveal the measure of British co-operation.

Though much depends on the formation of an International Railway Trust for which negotiations are opening in London on October 16, interested optimists believe that the Steel combine will be extended to allied industries and will form the foundation stone of an economic "United States of Europe."— Reuter's Special Service.

FIRE ON STEAMER

HOLD FLOODED IN EFFORT TO SUBDUE FLAMES

THE Italian steamer Rosandra from the East is off the port with two holds and the engine-room bunkers on fire. All means are being taken to extin-guish it, and there is a possibility of success. Two other holds are being flooded and their cargo discharged on deck.

The cargo consists chiefly of copra, soya-beans, cotton, pepper, tea, general goods and oils.—Reuter's Special Service.

END OF CANTON STRIKE

IMPROVED OUTLOOK IN CHINA

(BRITISH OFFICIAL WIRELESS.)
RUGBY, OCT.

ACCORDING to Canton telegrams the strike and blockade are definitely at an end, and pickets have all been withdrawn.

Unrestricted communication is now operating between Canton and Hong Kong, and the Chinese are again coming in large numbers to the foreign concessions on Shameen Island.

Other native staffs of British firms are returning to work.

It is impossible as yet to estimate the degree to which trade is being resumed, and propaganda is still proceeding against it. Nevertheless silk dealers and other Chinese merchants are hopeful that normal business will be re-established in a few days, and do not anticipate any further difficulty.

THE ASIAN AGE
15 OCTOBER 2026

Match RBI moves with long-term fiscal reform

Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman and Reserve Bank of India governor Sanjay Malhotra, the heads of India's financial and monetary establishments, have asserted that the Central bank will support the rupee to prevent excessive volatility and speculative activity in money markets.

While Mr Malhotra said the Central bank does not target any specific price level or band for the rupee, Ms Sitharaman said the rupee has depreciated "very significantly" over the past year and a half because of global uncertainties and the country's macroeconomic fundamentals, including forex reserves, are strong.

The rupee is the second worst-performing currency among major Asian economies, with 2.8 per cent depreciation since April 1, 2026. Indonesia's rupiah is the worst currency in Asia, with a comparative decline of six per cent in the same period.

The RBI's measures, which have taken effect on October 12, have been successfully helping the rupee to stabilise. The special dollar window for public sector oil marketing companies and increasing cost of speculation in currency markets are sensible responses, which brought order into the money markets.

The rupee is the second worst performing currency among Asian economies, with 2.8% depreciation. Indonesia's rupiah is the worst, with a comparative decline of 6%.

Tighter documentation requirements for derivatives, restrictions on rebooking cancelled contracts and the new reserve requirement seek to restrain transactions that amplify pressure on the rupee. These measures can restore discipline when expectations become overwhelmingly one-sided.

A market gripped by expectations of uninterrupted depreciation will adversely affect not only businesses but also the overall economy. Nevertheless, the RBI should also ensure that businesses protecting themselves against currency losses are not treated as speculators merely because they fear further depreciation.

Having controlled the demand side of the forex trade, the RBI faces a greater challenge in the form of rising inflation. Government data puts September's wholesale inflation at 11.39 per cent, the highest since September 2022. The increase was mainly driven by rising prices of food, manufactured items, and fuel and power.

The higher wholesale inflation signals rising pressure across production costs. Though higher wholesale prices do not translate immediately into consumer inflation, a sustained rise in WPI will make the inflation outlook more difficult.

Theoretically, higher inflation will mount pressure on the rupee; a weaker rupee leads to outbound flight of portfolio investments, sparking a vicious cycle. While the interest rate could be used to contain inflation expectations and support the attractiveness of rupee assets, it does not offer a long-term solution. Excessive reliance on interest rates would impose additional costs on investment and consumption without resolving the original supply shock.

The government, therefore, must play a bigger role in complementing the RBI's efforts through credible fiscal management, measures to ease food supply constraints and careful management of energy costs. Durable investment inflows matter more than repeated emergency mobilisation of foreign currency.

Before he became the Prime Minister, Narendra Modi had famously said there is business for the government to be in business and coined the slogan "minimum government and maximum governance". It is high time his government puts those slogans into practice to attract long-term foreign investors into the country, which will stabilise the economy and also boost employment.

Reminder to decide on defectors

Defections by elected representatives using loopholes or interpretations of the law have of late been a bane of the Indian democracy. While the law has been clear and conclusive in that it does not allow piecemeal defection or desertion by legislators elected on a party symbol and that the legislature party is part of the larger political party, the country has been witnessing large scale change of sides by members. The law entrusts the Speaker of the legislative body concerned to uphold the law in letter and spirit and decide such cases whether the deserters can remain members of the House or not.

The order of the Madras high court on Tuesday, which upheld the decision of the Tamil Nadu Speaker to accept the resignation of six MLAs of the AIADMK who voted against the party whip and later joined the ruling TVK, that the Speaker should decide on the disqualification petitions moved by their parent party in a time-bound manner comes as a whiff of fresh air. While fixing a period of two months for the Speaker, the court also reminded him that he is "duty bound to rise above his individual predilections and respect the robe which the Constitution has gifted to him" and that he is expected to "respect the sensitive constitutional trust by acting on the disqualification proceedings with utmost expedition". The court also made it clear that the question of resignation and the proceedings of disqualification are two entirely different issues.

It is not for the first time that courts have reminded the presiding officers of the Houses about the two elements that must be part of their decisions in such cases — impartiality and timelines. Several high courts and the Supreme Court have done it in the past. It is time that they paid heed to the suggestions the judiciary has placed before them and acted accordingly.

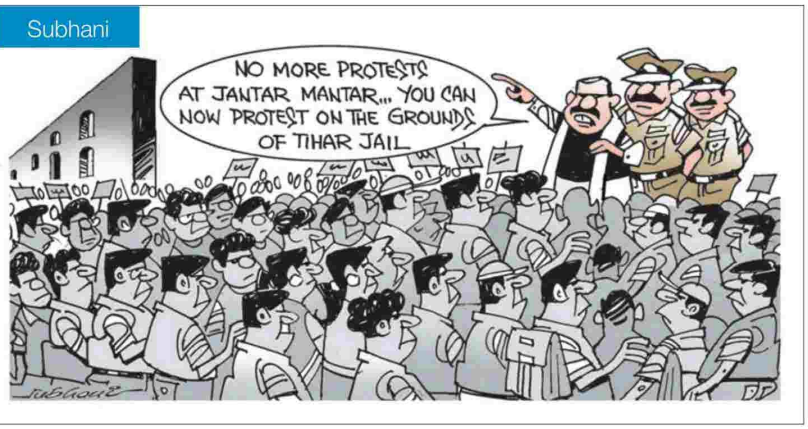
THE ASIAN AGE

KAUSHIK MITTER
Editor

K. SUDHAKAR
Printer & Publisher

THE ASIAN AGE office is located at:
New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi-110002. Phone: (011) 23211124.
Published and Printed on behalf of and for
▸ Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited, Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi 110 002 at CLASSIC IMPRESSION, F-23 Sector-6, Noida: 201 301.
▸ London: Quickmarsh Ltd. 8th Floor, Block 2, Elizabeth House, 39 York Road, London, SE1 7NQ.
RNI Registration number: 57290/94

Subhani



Govt can't secure its future just by hassling protesters



Shikha Mukerjee

Neither the Congress and other parties of the INDIA bloc, nor the CJP have shown signs of retreat in the face of the abuse of power by the Modi administration. The dissenters have gone to court and opened up another front...

When the writ of government is disregarded, which is how the Cockroach Janta Party and knots of non-aligned young people reacted through organised flash protests on October 13, against the "denotification" issued on October 12,banning protest demonstrations at New Delhi's Jantar Mantar, the message was crystal clear. The unprecedented scale and presistence of protesters , both civil society led and politicial party mobilised, from October 2 and even now, is a significant shift.

It has changed the equilibrium that enabled the Narendra Modi's BJP-led NDA to dominate and steer not just the political discourse, rather inappropriately on occasion described as "the narrative," but the conduct of politics in large parts of India. Neither Mr Modi, nor his trusted henchman Amit Shah, nor even the BJP, not even the fountainhead of the party's existence, the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh have any control over the conduct of politics, the language and the content of the discourse, any more.

Of how the invincible BJP and its helmsman lost control will be a matter of enquiry over the next several years; for now, it is enough to note that Mr Modi and the Home minister, Amit Shah, misunderstood and miscalculated and mismanaged the unbreakbale bond between the idea of freedom and the right to protest. The Modi administration began by slamming protest as "anarchy" fomented by the Congress and its leader Rahul Gandhi, after he climbed atop a barricade on Oct. 6. Ever since, it is both lost for words and for decisive action against the steady escalation of protest.

Dissent does not disappear by inconveniencing protesters, determined to be heard and seen, demanding things must change. The priorities of the dissenters-protesters have been clearly articulated. Nevertheless, listing them is necessary to understand that the demands are neither insurrectionist, portends of anarchy, or to be honest, even remotely illegitimate.

The demands are simple — the face that launched the special intensive revision that threatens to disenfranchise 13.37 crore voters, that is, Gyanesh Kumar, must go; all elections post SIR are illegitimate; therefore, they must be rolled back. The Modi government has spent years campaigning against the illegitimacy of elections won by the Opposition, especially the Congress and the erstwhileunified Trinamul Congress, accusing them of establishing "vote banks" by illegaly enfranchising "infiltrators".

The idea that elections can be externally manipulated to produce results by the government in power has thus become "real" through the frequency of BJP's messaging. That same idea of external manipulation by the Election Commission at the behest of Gyanesh Kumar, directed by what the Congress, the Opposition and the CJP believe to be Mr Modi and Mr Shah is, therefore, not farfetched or illegitimate. It merely makes the other side the villains in the same story.

That the demand has turned into a popular struggle for fundamental rights guaranteed by the Constitution in Article 19 and Article 14—the first protecting freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and hence protest, forming associations and unions, and the second, protecting equality and equal protection under the law — is not the protesters' fault. The escalation of the struggle is entirely on account of the panic reaction of the Government of India. It resorted to the use of barricades, manned by paramilitary and police forces, to physically enclose itself within a safe zone by creating a fortress around Parliament and adjacent buildings, residences and offices, including the Prime Minister, Modi's new fortified home on Lok Kalyan Marg. Why would a legitimately elected government, claiming that its actions are above board and right, find it necessary to insulate itself from the miniscule fraction of protesters?

How can a demand for the chief election commissioner, Gyanesh Kumar's resignation, after news reports on why decisions of the Election Commission were made in contravention of the law, be considered illegitimate? Nor can the demand for annulling all elections that used the electoral rolls after these were processed through the new minted special intensive revision method be illegitimate. If the process of revision under SIR is suspect, it is perfectly within the rights of Indians, all 13.37 crore whose names are currently deleted, to demand that the revision be cancelled.

As matters stand, the beleagured Modi administration is defending itself by hunkering down inside the security cordon it has thrown up to shut out the Opposition even as its lawyers struggle to explain why Paresh Salgaokar and six of his family in Goa have been stripped off their right to choose who will represent them.

If elections are not free and fair then 13.37 crore erstwhile voters, because their names are deleted, need to be represented in a fight that the Modi government has irreversibly chosen to make its own, instead of doing what canny politicans do, pass the buck and sacrifice the CEC to protect themselves.

Dissent and the right to express it, inside Parliament and on the streets, is at the heart of democracy, where the rulers in power must necessarily be challenged by the Opposition, organised as political parties or as civil society. The Modi government ought to have known better than to confront dissent in the way it is doing now.

The government forgot that it was helpless against the organised protest of farmers; it used iron spikes, razor-edged barbed wire, concrete blocks and massive police and paramilitary deployment, to barricade them in. The Modi administration forgot that there was Shaheen Bagh and, too, the Seelampur-Jamia Millia protests against the Citizenship Amendment Act. This time, it has barricaded itself in to shut out the protesters, implying that those outside the barricade are stronger than the rulers inside.

The BJP's, or rather Mr Modi's, problem is inexperience in knowing what a protest is that takes to the streets. That explains, in part, Mr Shah's reduction of the nationwide eruptions of protest, conventions and demonstrations as a move by Rahul Gandhi to defend "infiltrators", meaning Muslims, as "vote banks". The misplaced confidence of BJP in manipulating the "narrative" by insinuating that all dissent or protest against it is an assault of the Hindu majority and the idea of Hindutva reveals how beseiged it feels in such unprecedented circumstances.

Are the youth, comprising about 48 per cent of India's population, one part of which is represented by the Cockroach Janta Party and others, "infiltrators", or "vote banks" of the Congress and the INDIA bloc Opposition?

Neither the Congress and other parties of the INDIA bloc, nor the CJP have shown signs of retreat in the face of the abuse of power by the Modi administration. The dissenters have gone to court and opened up another front to pursue the fight against repression and against what they allege are illegalities in the conduct of electoral roll revision.

Shikha Mukerjee is a senior journalist in Kolkata

LETTERS

WATER PASSBOOK

Rain is a guest we cannot summon, but we can always keep the house ready ("El Niño-driven drought poses a major challenge", October 14, 2026). Why not give every village a "Water Passbook", a simple public board showing how much drinking water remains in tanks, wells and borewells, who is supplying it and when the next tanker will arrive? Neighbours could then share fairly, and officials would answer to a number everyone can read. Rooftop rain harvesting, pond desilting and hardy millets deserve a push now, so that the next dry spell finds us prepared. Relief should arrive with the first warning, not the last tanker. Rain may be uncertain, but preparation never is.

K. Chidanand Kumar
Bengaluru

REAL PARASITES

IT IS AN IRONY that a large section of the people who are born with a silver spoon in their mouths consider underprivileged citizens to be parasites and encroaches. Century-old casteism has shaped this kind of paradoxical behaviour, where a person feels no guilt sending their own child to a smart school while hiring another child to do domestic chores. He feels that birth legitimises whether a child should enjoy privileges or be deprived of them. But he fails to understand that the privileged child is actually a parasite on the system, facing much less competition in an unequal society that eliminates a large section of children from the race entirely.

Sujit De
Kolkata

ACTIVIST'S MURDER

THE SLAYING of anti-drug abuse activist Parminder Singh Jhota in broad daylight in the Mansa district of Punjab is very unfortunate. This shows that the state is still under severe grip of drug menace and illegal narcotics trade. It also speaks to the poor law and order situation there. The AAP government is already under the scanner with serious corruption charges against officials including the OSD of chief minister Bhagwant Singh Mann who are under investigation as per a high court order. The murder of Jhota in a marketplace adds to the problems of the Mann government. Elections in Punjab are due in less than four months and AAP is on the back foot.

D.B. Madan
New Delhi

M.P. Nathanael



Top cops must lead by example, push for law against torture

Speaking at the launch of a book "Policing the Republic" by a former IPS officer Yashovardhan Azad on September 4, Supreme Court Judge Justice Ujjal Bhuyanwhile referring to the July 20 Neet students protest at the Jantar Mantar said, "All of us are dismayed when we see young officers of the Indian Police Service (IPS) personally going and assaulting protestors and demonstrators. This is something very, very distressing to observe."When senior officers themselves take the lead, the message goes down the ranks that they have a free hand to tackle the situation in a manner they choose to, even if it amounts to excessive use of force.

A division bench of the Gujarat high court in Vadodara directed the Gujarat Home department on August 14 to transfer Rajdeepsinh Nakum, deputy commissioner of police, Surat district, stating that his continued presence could affect the fairness of the preliminary inquiry against him by intimidating witnesses, including subordinate police personnel. Mr Nakum is reported to have publicly beaten and humiliated accused persons, videos of which went viral. The accused were handcuffed, paraded in public, "dragged by their hair, slapped and beaten with lathis in full public view under the supervision of senior police officers".

Balveer Singh, a 2020-batch IPS officer, was suspended by the Tamil Nadu government on March 29, 2023, for alleged human rights violations in police stations while serving as assistant superintendent of police. On March 10, as ASP in Ambasamudram town in Tirunelveli district, he allegedly took nine men, including two teenagers, into custody when two groups had clashed. At the police station, he reportedly wore gloves, pulled out the detainees' teeth with cutting pliers, crushed one person's testicles, stuffed pebbles into their mouths, and slapped them forcefully, causing severedental trauma.

An FIR was lodged against Balveer Singh on April 17, 2023 and an enquiry ordered. Ms P Amudha, a senior IAS officer, enquired into the allegations and submitted her report. One of the victim's counsels Henry Tiphange informed the judicial magistrate that the report contains damning statements about several police personnel receiving bribes, switching of CCTV during the torture and even named a doctor who gave fitness certificates to the victims despite their injuries. Meanwhile, the Madurai bench of Madras high court stayed the proceedings against the officer. He has since been posted as ASP, STF, in Erode.

Another IPS officer, Avinash Pandey, was attached to the Uttar Pradesh DGP's office after he allegedly manhandled Digvijay Bhati, president of the B.R. Ambedkar faction of the Bharatiya Kisan Union, on August 19, 2026. Mr Pandey was serving as SSP, Meerut, when Mr Bhati and his associate, Mohit Jatav, approached him to remove their names from an FIR registered over a July 8 protest. The SSP and Special Operations Group personnel detained them for nearly 12 hours and beat them up ruthlessly. Mr Bhati alleged "the SSP repeatedly kicked me with his shoes, damaging my eye". Mohit Jatav's legs were swollen, and his hearing impaired after the severe beating.

An enquiry into the allegations is under way. While the SHO Akhilesh Gaur has been suspended, eight others involved in the brutality have been attached to police lines.

When senior police officers take the law into their own hands and resort to brutality, they send wrong signals to their subordinates about violence being a legitimate tool for maintaining law and order. Custodial torture then comes to be seen as a routine way to extract confessions or control alleged criminals. Small wonder, therefore, that police personnel use torture with impunity, confident that they will not be held accountable for serious injuries — or even deaths — in custody.

According to the Status of Policing in India Report 2025, 34 per cent of IPS officers are inclined to justify custodial torture, while 37 per cent of interrogators view it as part of the process. Overall, 80 per cent of police personnel considered beating suspects to be normal.

The fact that most police personnel justify custodial beating and torture is deeply troubling. It points to serious flaws in recruitment and training, including inadequate scrutiny of candidates' latent streak of brutality during interviews for the Civil Services Examination and other subordinate service examinations.There is a definite need to observe every probationer closely to assess his or her mental status in training institutions to gauge their psyche so that they are counselled or kept away from duties that expose their brutal side. Such observations need to be conveyed to their state police heads through pen-pictures that are normally initiated at the end of the basic training.Officers who have earned infamy for their brutality ought to be kept under close observation of senior officers or posted to such offices where their dealings with the public would be minimal.

India signed the United Nations Convention against Torture on October 14, 1997, but has still not ratified it. Former law minister Ashwani Kumar has said that, on the directions of then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, he drafted the Prevention of Torture Bill, 2010. However, the bill could not be passed for various reasons, including repeated disruptions in Parliament, and it eventually lapsed. When Mr Kumar petitioned the Supreme Court in 2016 seeking directions to Parliament to enact the bill, the court held that it could not direct the legislature to pass a particular law.

With hundreds reportedly maimed or dying in police custody each year, India urgently needs a Prevention of Torture Act to curb this menace and ensure accountability. Because "torture" remains undefined in law, such legislation would define the offence, prescribe action against offenders, lay down clarity regarding compensations to be paid to victims and thus deter those who resort to it.

Though the apex court in one of its seven directives to the Centre and all states in the Prakash Singh case in 2006 stated that police complaints authorities at the district and state levels be established, these do not seem to be very effective due to lack of awareness among the public and also fear of getting on the wrong side of police establishment.

To create awareness all police stations must have boards prominently displaying names of officials of district and state police complaints authorities with their telephone numbers and e-mail IDs. The police hierarchy must be held accountable when custodial deaths go on unchecked. Torture is inconsistent with human dignity.

The writer is a retired CRPF IGP

Editor's TAKE

Kalam's unfinished dream: A developed India

On World Students' Day, Kalam's legacy goes beyond missiles; it lies in his enduring faith in young minds and his vision of a developed India

Every October 15, classrooms across India fill with quizzes, speeches and posters. It is the birthday of the "People's President", celebrated as World Students' Day. Avul Pakir Jainulabdeen Abdul Kalam, born on 15 October 1931, was indeed a president unlike any other. He rose through the ranks, sold newspapers in his childhood and, through sheer grit and determination, went on to become the 'Missile Man of India' and then the country's President.

The day is often described wrongly, so a correction belongs here. The day has not been declared by the United Nations, but it is celebrated in India as Students' Day. No resolution created it. A grateful country did, because Kalam had earned it. Tamil Nadu goes further and observes the date as Youth Renaissance Day. Why students? Because Kalam never stopped being one, and never stopped being a teacher. As President from 2002 to 2007, he met students constantly, and he kept doing so after leaving office.

He returned to the classroom as a visiting professor at the IIMs in Ahmedabad, Indore and Shillong. On July 27, 2015, he collapsed while lecturing IIM Shillong students on creating a livable planet and died soon after, aged 83. He was teaching until his last hour. The nation's debt to him is larger than the classroom.

As Project Director of SLV-III, India's first satellite launch vehicle designed and produced at home, he helped put the Rohini satellite into orbit in July 1980 and bring India into the select circle of space-faring nations. At the DRDO, he led the Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme, which delivered Agni and Prithvi and earned him the name "Missile Man". He then played a central scientific and technical role in the Pokhran-II tests of May 1998, which made India a declared nuclear-weapon state. Every Indian who sleeps behind a credible deterrent owes him a quiet thank-you. The honours followed: the Padma Bhushan in 1981, the Padma Vibhushan in 1990 and the Bharat Ratna in 1997.

Yet his most lasting work may be the one that carried no title. Wings of Fire, published in 1999, gave millions of young Indians a story in which a modest background was no barrier to ambition. India 2020 gave them a target to build towards. His vision aimed at a developed India by 2020. That year has passed, and the work is unfinished. Kalam would have been the last person to call this an embarrassment.

He would have called it homework. So the best way to mark October 15, is not with garlands. It is with better questions in classrooms, better laboratories in universities and more students who believe, as he did, that a dream is a plan waiting for effort. India gave Kalam its highest civilian honour. The least it owes him in return is a generation that finishes what he started.

Nepal's democracy: Can algorithms rewrite history?

Nepal's demand for generational change raises a deeper question: are democratic institutions being renewed or reduced to narratives amplified by digital platforms? The challenge is to embrace change without erasing history, weakening institutional accountability or confusing online visibility with democratic legitimacy



NAVITA SRIKANT



The Nepali Congress is not merely another political party; it is part of Nepal's democratic heritage, shaped by decades of political struggle, sacrifice, imprisonment and democratic movements. Its history is inseparable from Nepal's democratic journey. What is unfolding therefore deserves examination beyond an ordinary contest among leaders and factions.

Can a country's democratic journey be overwritten by the politics of the algorithm?

The Nepali Congress must renew itself. Democratic institutions cannot remain frozen in time; generational change is necessary, leadership must be accountable, and parties must respond to changing aspirations. But renewal is not erasure. Sher Bahadur Deuba cannot constitutionally seek a third term as party president. Any capable leader, from any generation, who believes they can lead the party forward should make their case. Constitutional processes and party representatives must determine its future, not the personalisation of generational transition.

The question is not which leader should remain or make way, but whether leadership claims are judged by institutional merit, democratic principles and the capacity to serve Nepal's future. Change must be judged by what it improves, not simply by whom it replaces.

The question goes beyond the Nepali Congress

Are we renewing institutions, or simply replacing the people inside them?

Nepal's proposed changes to the bureaucracy, lateral entry into specialised positions, retirement and service tenure, and diplomatic appointments may legitimately seek expertise and fresh thinking. But public servants need leaders who respect experience, invest in human capital and give them space to speak up. If the State demands agency, it must provide the authority and institutional space it requires.

Merit must prevail over conflicts of interest. Wider expertise in diplomacy can be valuable, just as deploying the Army in a genuine emergency may be necessary. But emergency deployment does not automatically justify permanent military management of civilian economic functions. Wider diplomatic recruitment should expand competence without weakening professional standards.

Put the right institution, expertise and accountability behind every public responsibility.

Institutional Signalling: A test of institutional renewal

Institutional accountability also depends on how State power is exercised when consequential questions are sub judice.

Court proceedings do not automatically freeze political or organisational action, but the eventual judicial outcome cannot be ignored. Where the Supreme Court remains seized of a consequential question, those involved must recognise that their actions may have implications for the judicial process.

The reported incident of former Chief Justice Cholendra Shumsher Rana being taken from his residence at midnight raises a broader question: how should State power be exercised when institutional confidence is at stake?

The Executive exercises power, the Legislature scrutinises it, the Judiciary independently reviews it, while the media and civil society expose matters requiring public scrutiny. No one is above the law, but the exercise of State power must preserve institutional confidence and judicial independence.

Democracy is protected when each of its pillars can perform its constitutional function without fear of the others.

And then comes the algorithm

Institutional accountability depends not only on how power is exercised, but also on how political responsibility is assigned. Nepal's post-September 2025 political discourse deserves closer examination.

A reading of Nepali media before and after the upheaval reveals a pattern worth questioning: the demand for generational change became increasingly associated with Nepali Congress leader Sher Bahadur Deuba.

This is not to suggest that Deuba was the only senior leader criticised, or that criticism of him lacked justification. The September uprising challenged an established political generation represented by Deuba, KP Sharma Oli, Pushpa Kamal Dahal (Prachanda) and Dr Baburam Bhattarai. Yet subsequent discourse increasingly concentrated political renewal on the Nepali Congress and, more specifically, Deuba.

Prachanda, Oli and other established leaders remained part of the political process around the March 2026 general election. Dr Bhattarai initially filed his nomination but subsequently withdrew it.

Why, then, did the wider burden of decades of political governance appear increasingly concentrated on one party and one individual?

This is where the algorithm matters.

Digital platforms do not create every grievance, nor does their influence invalidate genuine public anger. But amplification can determine which grievances dominate, whose accountability receives sustained attention and which complexities disappear. "Old leader must go" is easily circulated; examining institutional failures, multiple political actors' responsibilities and the reforms needed to prevent recurrence is harder.

The danger is not criticism of established leaders, but the narrowing of accountability into a personalised narrative: one leader represents an era, one party the establishment, and one generation the explanation for failures with multiple political authors.

Visibility is not proof of representativeness; repetition is not evidence of consensus. Political responsibility must be assessed against conduct, decisions and outcomes-not the intensity with which a narrative is amplified.

Nepal is neither anti-youth nor anti-reform, and it should not be anti-technology. Young leadership can bring new ideas, institutional reform can correct outdated systems, and digital platforms can widen participation. But democratic renewal requires scrutiny of political narratives as well as political actors.

Who shapes Nepal's political memory: institutions that carry democratic experience across generations, or narratives that digital platforms amplify today?

Factional politics and the weight of history

These questions are especially consequential within the Nepali Congress. Its democratic inheritance is not threatened by internal competition alone, but by the possibility that factional advantage may take precedence over institutional renewal. Factional politics is not new to the party. Its history includes divisions, rival leadership claims and competing political agendas. Such contestation is not inherently undemocratic; factions can challenge entrenched leadership and offer alternatives. The test is whether they strengthen internal democracy or reduce the institution to a contest for control.

Uncertainty surrounds the competing factions, their claims and the eventual course of their conventions. The question is not simply who prevails, but whether the process strengthens the party's credibility, respects democratic procedures and prepares it to serve Nepal's future.

No faction can claim the party's legacy exclusively. Nor should generational change become a justification for replacing one concentration of influence with another. Leadership renewal must improve accountability, broaden participation and strengthen the institution beyond individual fortunes.

History will judge every faction by its conduct: whether it protects democratic processes and advances Nepal's democratic future, or deepens divisions and weakens the institution for immediate political advantage.

The Nepali Congress carries a responsibility beyond its internal contests. Its legacy was built through a wider democratic struggle; its future depends on whether it continues to advance that journey.

Renewal without amnesia

The challenge is not to preserve the past unchanged, but to ensure that change does not erase the institutional experience from which Nepal's democracy emerged. The Nepali Congress must renew its leadership and structures without allowing its history to become collateral damage in a contest for organisational control. Nepal need not choose between continuity and change. It can reform institutions while retaining the experience, constitutional principles and accountability that give them legitimacy.

Across political parties, the civil service, diplomacy, the security establishment and democracy's four pillars, renewal should strengthen institutions, prioritise competence and ensure accountability rather than unchecked discretion.

Tools and technologies will evolve; political generations will change. What must endure is merit, institutional integrity and public service.

There is no shortcut to democratic legitimacy and no substitute for public service on the ground. Virality is not constitutional legitimacy. Digital mobilisation cannot replace the everyday work of serving citizens.

Can Nepal modernise its democracy without allowing the algorithms of the present to overwrite the democratic history that made that democracy possible?

The writer is a financial, geopolitical and security analyst and India-Nepal Relations Observer

Daiv Vani

WISDOM FOR A MEANINGFUL LIFE

The Battle Fought Only Within

Navaratri also carries the reminder that our fiercest battles are rarely against others.

Mahishasura, a demon who could not be defeated by any male god, having secured that particular boon through years of penance, terrorized the heavens until the combined energies of all the gods converged into a single, radiant being, Durga, who alone possessed the power to end his reign. It was not brute strength that made her invincible, but the unification of scattered powers into one focused will. Each god gave something of his own: Shiva his trident, Vishnu his discus, and the mountains the lion she rode. None of them alone could have ended Mahishasura; together they became a force he had never planned for. Her victory is a picture of what undivided attention can do.

Mahishasura's boon reveals his real flaw. He had prepared for every threat he could imagine, except the one born of unity itself. His downfall came from what he underestimated, not what he failed to guard against.

We often scatter our own energy across many small distractions, worries, ambitions, comparisons, weakening ourselves against challenges that require our full, undivided strength to overcome. Exhaustion and indecision rarely come from one great enemy. They come from many small ones pulling us in different directions.

This Navaratri, identify one area of your life where your energy feels fragmented, and consciously bring it together, like the gods once did, into a single, focused resolve.

–DAIV

PIC TALK



A man navigates a small wooden boat through a pond to harvest lotus flowers during the festive season, in Nadia district, West Bengal. PHOTO: PTI

The mind as medicine



RAJYOGI BRAHMA KUMAR NIKUNJ JI

2ND OPINION



Today, medical professionals all over the world have accepted the fact that diseases such as diabetes, coronary artery disease and hypertension are the result of poor lifestyles, mental stress and tension. Hence, they are now advising less dependence on medicines and emphasising exercise and dietary control to maintain physical health. Medical research has found that almost 85 per cent of all diseases are psychosomatic in nature, ie they originate in negative mental states. Therefore, to nip the evil in the bud, it is important to tackle the malady at the level of the mind, and that involves checking and changing our patterns of thought.

Research has shown that positive thoughts sustained over a long period produce positive health effects, while negative thoughts ultimately lead to diseases. In that case, it is necessary for us to give our minds a positive direction so that we can remain happy and healthy. Having control over our thoughts means having the ability to take the mind where we want, keep it there for as long as we want and withdraw it at will. Practising this frequently, starting with even a few seconds at first, will gradually give us more control over the mind. It will also reduce waste thoughts, which consume a lot of our time and energy.

While this is a rudimentary exercise to improve our concentration, gaining mastery over the mind requires some spiritual knowledge and practice. For this, first of all, we need to understand that we are souls and not bodies. The brain, which is part of the physical body, is merely the hardware that enables the soul to control the body.

The spiritual exercise of the mind involves taking the mind out of the physical body and remaining in an eternal state of being a soul, i.e. a sentient point of light and power. Along with this exercise, one also needs to have a proper mental diet in the form of pure thoughts that are necessary to keep the mind healthy. On the other hand, waste thoughts deplete mental energy and leave us weak. Negative thoughts are like poison and damage mental health, eroding our ability to make sound judgements, take correct decisions, tolerate negative situations or face adversity. Such thoughts arise from body-consciousness but are rooted in the soul in the form of vices such as lust, anger, greed, attachment and ego. We must understand that the most elevated thoughts arise in a state of meditation, when the soul establishes a loving mental link with the Supreme Source, who is the Father of all souls. It is through this divine connection that true healing begins, not just of the body or the mind, but of the soul itself.

When our inner world is aligned with purity, peace and purpose, the outer world begins to reflect that harmony. A healthy mind, anchored in spiritual wisdom and silence, becomes the foundation of a healthy body. So, let us strive not just for fitness, but for inner well-being, where the mind is calm, the soul is strong and the body follows. Because, in the end, lasting health is not just about how we live, but also about how we think, feel and connect with the Source.

The writer is a spiritual teacher and popular columnist

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Tamil Nadu's costly power purchase

The Tamil Nadu Power Distribution Corporation Limited's (TNPDCL) decision to purchase short-term emergency power from private entities at over ₹30 per unit is deeply concerning. It places an additional burden on public funds and raises questions about the ruling TVK government's planning. Neighbouring Andhra Pradesh reportedly secured power for October 2026 through advance tendering at ₹16-₹20 per unit, while Tamil Nadu waited until the last moment. Equally worrying is the state's power generation. Against a conventional thermal capacity of over 5,000 MW, actual production reportedly struggled to reach 3,000 MW. Why are Tamil Nadu's power plants operating below capacity when demand is high?

The government cannot dismiss these expensive purchases as a temporary measure to prevent load shedding. The alleged additional expenditure of₹5 crore a day points to the need for better forecasting, timely procurement and improved plant performance.

A state cannot progress sustainably without efficient planning and accountable administration. Can Tamil Nadu move beyond personality-driven politics towards an institutionalised system of governance that prioritises public welfare, financial prudence and reliable electricity supply?

RANGANATHAN SIVAKUMAR | CHENNAI

Reservation through separate institutions

If reservations are to be extended on the grounds that a large majority of India's population belongs to BC, OBC, SC and ST communities, an alternative approach could be to establish exclusive institutions and administrative structures managed by members of these communities.

Separate educational institutions, government departments, hospitals, banks, police stations, courts and polling arrangements could be staffed entirely by members of reserved categories. Similarly, representation in legislative assemblies, Parliament and ministerial positions could reflect the proportion of these communities in the population. Such segregation could ensure proportional representation while reducing friction arising from competition and allegations of discrimination, bias and social harassment in educational institutions, workplaces and public offices. It could also create environments where disadvantaged communities feel secure, represented and empowered. Leadership positions, promotions and decision-making could become more accessible to underrepresented groups, promoting social mobility, confidence and community-specific solutions. Such an approach could strengthen dignity, representation and self-governance, though its impact on social integration requires consideration.

O PRASADA RAO | HYDERABAD

Kalam's vision of an inclusive India

As India observes the 95th birth anniversary of APJ Abdul Kalam on 15 October, his life offers an opportunity to examine whether the country is advancing towards the inclusive, knowledge-driven society he envisioned.

Rising from modest beginnings in Rameswaram to the highest constitutional office, Kalam demonstrated the transformative power of education and perseverance. His contributions to ISRO and DRDO, including the SLV-III project, missile development and Pokhran-II tests, strengthened India's technological and defence capabilities. Yet, as the People's President (2002-2007) and a lifelong teacher, his legacy rests equally on his accessibility and faith in youth.

Kalam's *India 2020* vision emphasised technological progress, rural development and self-reliance. Despite advances in digital technology and space exploration, unemployment, educational inequality and the digital divide remain challenges. His principles of scientific temper, ethical responsibility and independent thinking offer guidance in the age of AI. Strengthening public education, scientific research and inclusive growth would be a fitting tribute to his vision.

AC VINEETH KUMAR | KERALA

Bihar floods: The need for a continuous record

Bihar's recurring floods demand more than daily casualty and damage figures. A consistent reporting system linking flood phases, affected communities, river conditions and relief operations can track cumulative impacts, improve coordination, strengthen accountability and support long-term recovery



EKLAVYA PRASAD



Floods in Bihar rarely occur as isolated events. They arrive in successive phases, affect different parts of the state and sometimes return to places already hit. A family may still be recovering from lost crops, damaged housing or depleted savings when another flood arrives. Flood reporting must therefore do more than count those affected by the latest rise in water levels. It must show where flooding occurs, how often it returns and how its effects accumulate over the monsoon season.

Bihar already has a flood-reporting mechanism. The Disaster Management Department (DMD), Government of Bihar, publishes daily flood reports and press releases. The challenge is to make these instruments more consistent, connect the information they provide and maintain a reliable record of the flood season.

The first step is to make the reporting system easier to follow. The daily report appears under different titles, including Flood/Heavy Rainfall Report, Daily Flood Report and Daily Flood Situation Report. The department should adopt one consistent title, such as *Daily Flood Situation Report*, so affected communities, disaster-response agencies, development partners and government officials can readily identify the same reporting series across dates. Press releases also appear under different titles, including Hindi titles. Their titles need not match that of the daily report, but each release should clearly identify its purpose and the flood phase it covers.

The September 2 daily report summarised affected areas and relief operations, while the accompanying press release detailed specific incidents, river conditions and administrative responses, including erosion in Bhagalpur and flooding in Bhojpur. The September 15 documents similarly demonstrate how the formats can complement each other. Both recorded 15 affected districts and 575 gram panchayats. The daily report provided a summary, while the press release included additional information on relief operations and river conditions. Linking these records would help affected communities, disaster-response agencies, development partners and government officials understand both the scale of the situation and the response under way.

The Daily Flood Report should consistently distinguish three measures: changes during the preceding 24 hours, impacts recorded during each flood phase and cumulative impacts across the season. These figures should be clearly labelled and kept separate. Phase-specific press releases can provide focused updates on important developments, while the daily report maintains the continuing record.

The need for this distinction becomes clear when the September and October reports are read together. The September 24 Daily Flood Report recorded cumulative impacts across 15 districts, 576 gram panchayats and 50.49 lakh people, before the third flood phase developed around September 28-29. By October 7, the Daily Flood Report recorded 22 affected districts and 61.72 lakh people affected cumulatively during the monsoon season. The October 4 press release, focusing specifically on the third phase along and around the Gandak, reported approximately 9.87 lakh people affected across six districts, 30 blocks and 169 gram panchayats. By October 11, the press release for the same phase reported approximately 10.22 lakh people affected across six districts, 33 blocks and 173 gram panchayats. These figures describe the evolving impact of the third phase, while the daily report records cumulative seasonal impacts. They should therefore be linked to provide a clearer picture of how each flood phase contributes to the wider seasonal impact, rather than added together as separate totals.

The reporting system should connect such phase-specific accounts to the seasonal record. It should show which places were affected in each phase, which remained inundated and which experienced flooding again. This also raises an important question about affected populations. If the same community is flooded more than once, how can seasonal figures avoid counting the same people repeatedly while still recording repeated exposure? The total number of people affected and the number exposed to multiple floods measure different aspects of the disaster. Reporting should make that distinction clear.

The same clarity is needed for relief operations. Reports should distinguish assistance provided during a particular phase from assistance provided earlier and from the seasonal total. They should state how many community kitchens are operating on a given day, distinguish this from the total established over time and specify the period covered by meal figures. Without these distinctions, affected communities, disaster-response agencies, development partners and government officials cannot reliably interpret what the numbers represent. The Daily Flood Report also needs to identify affected blocks and gram panchayats by name under each district, rather than provide only aggregate figures. This would help affected communities, disaster-response agencies, development partners and officials identify where flooding has occurred, which areas remain affected and where flooding has returned. The same location-wise information should be updated and carried forward in subsequent reports to build a clear record of changing conditions.

River conditions need equally clear reporting. Reports should identify the rivers being observed, show water levels against warning and danger levels, and indicate whether levels are rising or falling. They should also record how long places remain inundated. A falling river level does not necessarily mean that a village is accessible or that drinking water, health care and other essential services have resumed.

Reporting should distinguish between different kinds of damage. A road under water is different from one washed away. A hand pump or piped water supply system that cannot be reached is different from one that has been damaged. A school temporarily cut off is different from one with structural damage. Reports should distinguish assets that are inundated, inaccessible, non-functional, damaged or destroyed. Over time, they should also capture verified impacts on drinking water, sanitation, health care, transport, schools, crops, livestock, housing and livelihoods.

Consistency across reporting days is equally important. Each report should state its cut-off time and indicate whether figures are provisional, verified or revised. Significant changes should be explained, and earlier reports should remain available in a searchable archive. This would allow communities, researchers, development workers, journalists and officials to follow the situation without piecing together information from scattered documents.

These improvements need not require an entirely new data collection system. Much of the information is already generated by departments and district administrations. What is needed is a clear process for collating, verifying and presenting it consistently. The Daily Flood Report should be published regularly, including when the situation stabilises, so that the seasonal record remains continuous.

The need for greater continuity is evident in the online reporting record. As observed on October 13, the latest daily report available was dated October 7, while press releases were available through October 11. The priority should be to maintain a regular, up-to-date Daily Flood Report alongside timely press releases. Together, they can provide both a continuous account of the flood situation and focused updates on significant developments.

The value of this approach extends beyond immediate relief. A continuous record can help assess losses, plan recovery and identify settlements repeatedly inundated, infrastructure that fails more than once and communities whose recovery is interrupted by successive floods.

Bihar does not need figures merely for the sake of having more figures. It needs a connected account of what changed, where it changed, what remained unresolved and how impacts accumulated across successive flood phases. Strengthening the existing Daily Flood Report and linking it more effectively with press releases would make flood information easier to understand and more useful for relief coordination, public accountability and future planning.

THE SEPTEMBER 24 DAILY FLOOD REPORT RECORDED CUMULATIVE IMPACTS ACROSS 15 DISTRICTS, 576 GRAM PANCHAYATS AND 50.49 LAKH PEOPLE, BEFORE THE THIRD FLOOD PHASE DEVELOPED AROUND SEPTEMBER 28-29. BY OCTOBER 7, THE DAILY FLOOD REPORT RECORDED 22 AFFECTED DISTRICTS AND 61.72 LAKH PEOPLE AFFECTED CUMULATIVELY DURING THE MONSOON SEASON. THE OCTOBER 4 PRESS RELEASE, FOCUSING SPECIFICALLY ON THE THIRD PHASE ALONG AND AROUND THE GANDAK, REPORTED APPROXIMATELY 9.87 LAKH PEOPLE AFFECTED ACROSS SIX DISTRICTS, 30 BLOCKS AND 169 GRAM PANCHAYATS

The writer is the Managing Trustee of Megh Pyne Abhiyan

Politics of protest: The Opposition's dangerous drift



TUHIN A SINHA

India is witnessing an unsettling contest in which political opposition increasingly risks being reduced to a competition in disruption. The Congress and the Cockroach Janata Party (CJP) appear to be converging on a common strategy of street mobilisation, confrontation with constitutional institutions and relentless amplification of allegations. The question is no longer merely whether the Opposition can challenge the government, but whether it is willing to respect the democratic processes through which governments are elected and disputes are resolved.

The BJP's recent by-election victories in Assam and West Bengal, including in minority-dominated constituencies, have challenged entrenched political assumptions. These results reaffirm that voters cannot be taken for granted. Faced with a BJP that continues to demonstrate electoral resilience, the Opposition appears increasingly tempted to substitute street spectacle for a persuasive political alternative.

The examples of Nepal and Bangladesh offer a cautionary tale. Rahul Gandhi has previously invoked youth-led upheavals abroad while addressing young Indians. But India is a constitutional democracy with an elected Parliament, an independent judiciary and established mechanisms for peaceful political change. Importing the vocabulary of street-driven regime change into Indian politics risks blurring the distinction between democratic protest and destabilisation. Disruption cannot become a substitute for democratic persuasion.

Consider Rahul Gandhi's reported remarks following his interaction with the President. Expressing surprise that the President had not rebutted his allegations of vote theft after receiving a memorandum betrays a fundamental distinction: receiving a representation is not the same as endorsing its contents. Constitutional office-holders routinely receive memoranda without certifying the claims they contain. The President's courtesy cannot be converted into an implied admission of the Opposition's allegations.

This is not the first controversy involving Rahul Gandhi's interpretation of constitutional institutions. His earlier remarks concerning the Supreme Court's Rafale proceedings led to an apology. Political leaders have a responsibility to distinguish between allegations, demonstrable facts and what constitutional authorities have actually said. Repeating an accusation does not make it true. The present protests raise another troubling question: why escalate street mobilisation when the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls is already under the Supreme Court's scrutiny? If the Opposition possesses compelling evidence of electoral wrongdoing, it should present it before the Court. If the Election Commission's explanations are inadequate, the shortcomings must be demonstrated. The judicial process must be allowed to run its course.



By seeking to amplify political pressure while proceedings are under way, the Opposition risks creating the impression that it is more interested in shaping the public narrative than awaiting judicial findings. A courtroom is where evidence is tested; the street cannot become an alternative route to a judicial outcome. Constitutional institutions must be permitted to function without being overshadowed by political brinkmanship.

The Modi government was justified in taking firm action to prevent demonstrations from degenerating into a law-and-order crisis in the national capital. Governance requires prevention, not merely a response after disorder erupts. When protesters threaten to breach barricades, obstruct essential routes or disrupt public institutions, the administration cannot remain a passive spectator.

Delhi is not an open-air political theatre available for indefinite occupation by any party seeking confrontation. It is the capital of the Republic, where hospitals, courts, schools, offices, transport networks and diplomatic missions must continue to function. Millions of ordinary citizens cannot be made collateral damage in a partisan political contest. The police have a duty to maintain public order, enforce lawful restrictions and prevent foreseeable escalation. The claim that every firm police response constitutes an assault on democracy distorts the relationship between liberty and responsibility. The right to protest is not a licence to paralyse public life, disregard lawful orders or compel constitutional institutions to submit to street pressure. Peaceful democratic engagement is welcome; disorder and unlawful obstruction must invite firm, lawful action.

Social media has made this challenge more acute. Viral videos, slogans and short-form content can create an impression of certainty long before evidence is examined. From the Citizenship Amendment Act to reservation policies and now electoral-roll revision, complex issues have repeatedly been reduced to inflammatory narratives. Young Indians deserve facts and context, not to be mobilised through misinformation for the political ambitions of others.

The costs of perpetual agitation extend beyond law and order. India is investing in infrastructure, manufacturing, energy security and technological competitiveness. Where is the Opposition's credible roadmap for employment, economic growth and preparing young Indians for an economy transformed by artificial intelligence? When every institutional disagreement becomes a conspiracy and every administrative action is portrayed as repression, substantive debate is crowded out by manufactured outrage.

Public patience, too, has limits. Citizens have jobs to reach, schools to attend, businesses to run and families to care for. Public spaces belong to everyone, not exclusively to professional political protesters. When agitation becomes an end in itself, it ceases to serve the public and begins imposing costs upon it.

India needs an Opposition that scrutinises the government, exposes wrongdoing and offers credible alternatives. But criticism must be backed by evidence, allegations must be established and political mobilisation must remain within the boundaries of democratic responsibility. No party can claim a monopoly over democracy or demand that constitutional rules be suspended whenever they become inconvenient.

India stands at a decisive inflection point. The Viksit Bharat mission requires institutional confidence, sustained economic momentum and a national focus on the opportunities ahead. The country cannot afford to have its aspirations derailed by a politics of perpetual confrontation. The choice before India is between democratic competition that strengthens institutions and a politics that risks weakening them through relentless disruption. A confident democracy accommodates dissent while enforcing the law. It does not confuse anarchy with accountability. Viksit Bharat cannot be built by paralysing the present. It must be built by debating the future—and refusing to let the politics of anarchy derail the aspirations of a nation.

The writer is a national spokesperson of BJP and acclaimed author

Bastar's transformation and the role of Prime Minister Modi's resolve



NANDAN JAIN

There are certain figures in public life whose identities are shaped not merely by the offices they hold or the political victories they secure, but by their connection with the people and their determination to transform the course of the nation. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is one such leader. From his tenure as Chief Minister of Gujarat to his stewardship of the country as Prime Minister, the past 25 years of his public life represent a journey marked by political experience, sustained engagement and an abiding commitment to public service.

Prime Minister Modi's political journey cannot be assessed solely through electoral victories or the number of government schemes launched during his tenure. One of the defining features of his leadership has been his ability to establish a direct connect with the people. Bringing the aspirations of citizens from diverse regions into the larger discourse on national development has remained an important element of his political approach.

Today, Modi occupies a central place in Indian politics, with large sections of the population looking to him for stable leadership, decisive action and the fulfilment of the country's national aspirations. This public confidence is, in itself, a considerable political asset. Yet, sustaining that confidence requires continuous engagement, accountability and tangible results on the ground. Initiatives such as the Seva Sankalp campaign provide an opportunity for the organisation to deepen its engagement with the people and reaffirm its commitment to their welfare.

Among the many significant aspects of Prime Minister Modi's tenure, the sustained effort to eliminate Naxalite violence stands out as particularly consequential. His firm resolve has contributed to a decisive shift in regions that were once afflicted by Left-Wing Extremism. Areas where violence had taken root amid the absence of adequate educational opportunities and basic amenities are now witnessing a gradual transition towards development. Bastar has emerged as a compelling example of this transformation. Inspired by the Prime Minister's vision and supported by sustained efforts to restore peace and expand development, the region is seeking to leave behind the shadow of Maoist violence and embark on a new journey of progress.

As Prime Minister Narendra Modi completes 25 years in public life, the Seva Sankalp campaign being undertaken in Chhattisgarh seeks to take



the message of development to villages and connect people with the larger national resolve for progress. As part of this initiative, I had the opportunity to interact with schoolchildren in Tarandul village of Kanker district, in the Bastar division. Our conversation centred on their aspirations, interests and future career opportunities. Spending time with the children, understanding their dreams and encouraging them to pursue education was an enriching and deeply personal experience. Schoolbags and books were distributed among them, along with a message that education remains one of the most enduring means of achieving their goals.

The interaction offered a glimpse into the aspirations of children in rural and remote areas. Even in villages far removed from major urban centres, young minds are looking towards a future shaped by progress, opportunity and achievement. For many of them, Prime Minister Modi's life and journey serve as a source of inspiration. His rise from a modest family background to the highest executive office in the country conveys a powerful message: that perseverance, determination and sustained effort can help turn ambitious dreams into reality. Such examples can encourage children to nurture their aspirations and equip themselves to pursue them with confidence.

This, indeed, is the spirit of the Seva Sankalp campaign: to reach out to people, understand their aspirations and strengthen the bond with them through service. Realising the vision of a Viksit Bharat under Prime Minister Modi's leadership requires sustained efforts to extend access to education, skills, healthcare and employment opportunities to the remotest parts of the country. The time spent with children in Tarandul served as a reminder of a larger national responsibility: investing in the opportunities available to children today is essential to building a stronger India tomorrow.

In a state such as Chhattisgarh, endowed with abundant natural resources and a distinctive tribal cultural heritage, development must be understood in terms that go well beyond the construction of roads, buildings and other physical infrastructure. It must also mean ensuring better educational and healthcare facilities in remote villages, creating opportunities for young people, enabling women to become economically self-reliant and integrating rural households into the mainstream of development. Only when the benefits of progress reach the last mile can development acquire a truly inclusive character.

As Chhattisgarh looks towards the Assembly elections in 2028 and the Lok Sabha elections in 2029, sustained organisational engagement will remain important. However, our preparations must extend beyond electoral calculations. The long-term strength of any political organisation rests on its ability to earn public trust, communicate the benefits of government programmes, understand the challenges encountered in their implementation and maintain an enduring dialogue with different sections of society.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's public journey offers an important lesson in this regard: progress demands the will to keep moving forward, but lasting public confidence can be secured only by remaining connected with the people. The transformation unfolding in Bastar must therefore be viewed not merely as a change in the region's circumstances, but as an opportunity to build a future in which peace, education, opportunity and inclusive development become the foundations of lasting progress.

The writer is the State Vice-President of the Bharatiya Janata Party, Chhattisgarh

EDITORIAL



"Granting votes to one and all was an act of faith, faith in the common man of India and in his practical common sense. This decision launched a great and fateful experiment unique in the world — Sukumar Sen

INDIAN EXPRESS IS NOT AN INDUSTRY. IT IS A MISSION.
— Ramnath Goenka

PROTEST IS A RIGHT, DON'T RELEGATE IT TO EVENT MANAGEMENT

THERE was a particular poignancy to the status of Jantar Mantar as the national capital's designated protest site. It is at one end of Sansad Marg, whose other end leads to the old Parliament House. So the people could air their grievances at a walking distance from where the people's representatives convened to legislate. The earlier protest site at the Boat Club Lawns along Kartavya Path was also a shouting distance from the House of the People. The proximity remained intact even when Parliament was shifted in 2023 to the new premises. But now the denotification of Jantar Mantar as a protest site severs that vital democratic link for the first time.

Let's consider the three alternative sites notified by Delhi Police. Ramlila Maidan, which is a bit over 6 km to the north of the new Parliament House, offers for free only a small space that can hold a few hundred people; the main ground, which can accommodate more than 50,000, needs to be booked well in advance with a daily fee and a security deposit that add up to more than ₹1 lakh. It seems there are only three days near the end of December that are open for booking this year. Those who want to exercise their democratic right to protest peacefully will also have to compete with fairs, weddings and religious events to book Burari Ground near the city's northern fringes or CBD Ground across the Yamuna to the east. So the idea of a thriving democracy—Ram Manohar Lohia's "*zinda qaum*" or alive nation, which does not wait for five years to demand its rights—will now be subservient to commercial priorities of event management.

It's not a mere symbolic shift. Along with large-scale detentions and internet shutdowns, it reinforces the sense that the space for democratic dissent is being stifled and invisibilised. London has Parliament Square adjacent to Westminster Abbey and Washington has Union Square at the foot of Capitol Hill. As courts hear challenges to Jantar Mantar's denotification and Cockroach Janta Party leaders are remanded to judicial custody for protesting it at the site, surely the "mother of democracy" feels the need to pass the 'town square test', which measures freedom by the citizenry's ability to openly express views close to the seat of power.

FARMERS' BRIDE DROUGHT REFLECTS AGRARIAN STRESS

KARNATAKA Chief Minister D K Shivakumar received a unique request during a recent open meeting to hear people's grievances (Praja Seva) in Mysuru district's Periyapatna town. A farmer sought the CM's help to find a bride for himself and fellow farmers whose marriage proposals were being repeatedly rejected despite them owning land. The 30-something petitioner claimed some of them were even contemplating suicide. He sought a government scheme to incentivise marriage with farmers. The request was dismissed with a joke on '*maduve bhagya*' (marriage guarantee) as the sixth welfare scheme of the Congress government, but it highlighted a broader socio-economic problem caused by the state's rural distress and urban migration.

The issue is not new. Earlier this year, Kunigal MLA H D Ranganath had written to then CM Siddaramaiah on women's reluctance to marry rural bachelors and sought incentives. Unmarried farmers in their 30s and 40s have formed forums in both the fertile southern districts and arid northern Karnataka to highlight their plight. It is not only a case of women being choosy. As education levels improve in rural areas, men and women are moving to cities in greater numbers to pursue non-farming careers. As a result, ancestral lands are now largely tended to by senior citizens. Where owning farmland was once a matter of social prestige, it is now a hurdle to personal progress as agriculture has steadily lost its sheen.

Extreme climate events have played a big role in the shift. Rainfall disruptions have led to crop losses, unstable incomes and piling debts in the country's second-most drought-prone state. This year, farmers are bracing for another drought. Over the past three years, Karnataka has recorded 2,809 farmer suicides. Between 2011 and 2021, the flow of working-age people from the state's villages to cities has increased sharply.

It is not that state's sex ratio is skewed against finding ample matches. At 979 women per 1,000 men, it's rural sex ratio is a far cry from Punjab's (907) or Haryana's (882), two agrarian states that have faced a shortage of brides due to the illegal practice of sex selection at birth. Brides have also been denied to families living in areas with water scarcity and lack of toilets. Until agricultural reforms stabilise the sector and make it more lucrative, young men may have to pay the price with bachelorhood.

QUICK TAKE

AVOID DIGITAL WHEN STUCK

A technical glitch has allegedly again come in the way of citizens' access to vital government support. At a time Maharashtra declared its intent to extend the PM POSHAN school meal programme to class 10, it has come to pass that in a large part of the state, teachers are paying for midday meals from their own pockets as disbursement under the central scheme has been delayed for months because of a technical problem. This follows lakhs of people locked out of their food rations or pensions because of trouble with Aadhaar-linking or other digital technologies. As courts have held, such problems cannot be proffered as reasons to deny people their essentials. Manual workarounds must be embedded in the schemes' rules to avoid such troubles.

The electronic voting machine continues to be blamed for technological troubles concerning conduct of elections. We must also look closely at the system that governs voter rolls

THE CRUCIAL VOTER TECH WE AREN'T SCRUTINISING



K F WILFRED
Former Senior Principal Secretary, Election Commission of India



SOURAV ROY

THE world over, elections have tended to tread familiar conservative paths with some circumspection, if not reluctance, in turning to technology. By and large, conventional methods seem to be the comfort zone for election managers and stakeholders. Even tech leaders such as South Korea, Japan, Israel, Sweden, and most European and North American countries still use paper and pen for voting in national elections, not to mention many other Asian countries. The Netherlands, Italy, Ireland and a few others contemplated electronic voting machines in the first decade of this century and even tried them out, but they later abandoned the idea on grounds of high cost or lack of broad public and political support. Electronic machine-voting was briefly attempted in Germany before being struck down by the country's Constitutional Court.

Quite a few countries have machine-based elections at the provincial or local levels. A few use technology for biometric voter registration and for vote counting. Among the countries that do employ electronic voting, Estonia has gone a step further with the added option of internet voting.

India was one of the early birds in adopting technology for elections. The idea of a voting machine was mooted by the Election Commission as early as in 1977, and a prototype of what later evolved into the present electronic voting machine (EVM) was first presented in 1979. We introduced EVM on a pilot basis in 50 polling stations of an Assembly constituency in Keralam in 1982. Electoral roll, the base document for elections, were computerised by the end of the last century. The focus here is not on technology *per se*, but on its role-limitation in the Indian election law framework.

Our EVM was designed as a direct-recording, standalone machine, an electronic mirror image of ballot voting, retaining all checks and balances of paper ballot including secrecy of ballot and post-election auditability of vote, should a court require it in an election-related litigation. The paper trail of vote was later added to aid physical verification by the voter.

It is a different matter that a number of opposition parties still do not seem to be convinced about electronic voting and the demand for returning to paper ballot is almost an ongoing campaign. It's interesting to recall in this context that a current leader of the ruling BJP who was also a member of Parliament had, in 2010, authored a book titled *Democracy at Risk: Can we trust our Electronic Voting Machines*, with a foreword by a founder-leader of the party.

While the voting machine has always been a punching bag and continues to be so, the technology used for electoral rolls has not attracted any noticeable dissent. The recent controversy surrounding the special intensive revisions and the resultant scrutiny from various quarters have put the IT component of electoral roll management under the spotlight along with several other issues.

The Representation of the People Act, 1950 and the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960 constitute the legal architecture for preparation and revision of electoral rolls. The Supreme Court held in a 1971 judgement that the 1950 Act and the amplitude of its provisions show that the entries made in an electoral roll can only be challenged in accordance with the machinery provided in the Act, and not in any other manner or before any other forum unless question of violation of provisions of Constitution is involved.

When the SIR operations in West Bengal last year were spiralling out of control and threatening to create chaos, by an extraordinary direction of the Supreme Court, judicial officers and tribunals were entrusted with the job of deciding claims and objections and appeals in the exercise. They temporarily replaced the regular civilian officers appointed for this purpose in terms of the 1950 Act and the 1960 Rules. Except for this unusual arrangement, it is well recognised that the Act and the Rules govern the ecosystem of electoral rolls.

Reference in the Act and Rules to the use of IT in electoral roll is primarily for the limited purpose of enabling filing of claim and objection applications electronically to the electoral registration officer (ERO) whose exclusive domain is to decide the applications in accordance with the law and to reflect the decision in the electoral roll with suitable addition, deletion or correction in the roll. The decision of ERO on an application made to him cannot be substituted by that of any other person or authority although appeal lies against the ERO's decision.

Technology can never be a roadblock in the discharge of this important responsibility by ERO which directly impacts a sacred constitutional right of citizens. The recently reported case of Goa about some EROs failing to make additions in the roll in the case of some eligible electors due to inability to access the IT platform is intriguing. The fact that the number of electors involved in this case is small should not diminish the significance or seriousness of the matter.

Deletion of names from the roll calls for even greater degree of caution. For preventing applications from random sources, the law restricts the right to file a deletion application (Form 7) to a person enrolled in the roll of the same constituency. The only other manner for setting in motion the process for deletion of name from the roll is when the local ERO considers that ineligible persons have got into the roll in which case he/she can initiate *suo motu* action to remove the names after due process of notice and opportunity of personal hearing.

There is a recent report about 16 lakh appeals pending disposal in West Bengal filed against inclusion of names. While the number itself may raise some eyebrows, it is the lack of clarity about the source of these appeals that adds to the mystery. The question whether these appeals are also system-generated or algorithm-based similar to the controversial "logical discrepancies" cases at the earlier stage will be a matter of great interest.

The EC, in a recent press release, has announced its intention to review the ECINET system for its compatibility with the provisions of law. Technological solutions in our context cannot in any manner override, much less armtwist, legal provisions. Technology may, at best, be a friend, but not an overbearing guide or philosopher chartering the course for statutory authorities.

(Views are personal)

CLIMATE ACTION WHOSE TIME IS HERE





DURWOOD ZAELKE
President, Institute for Governance & Sustainable Development

ZERIN OSHO
Director, India Programme, Institute for Governance & Sustainable Development

SUCCESSFUL environmental treaties have a peculiar disadvantage: the disasters they prevent never become news. The Montreal Protocol, agreed in 1987, put the ozone layer on the path to recovery. It has also helped avert a much hotter planet. Yet its capacity to do more remains underused, just when governments are starved for actionable ideas to slow warming.

On October 15, the Kigali Amendment to that treaty turns 10. The anniversary demands attention for reasons extending far beyond its storied achievements in regulating harmful chemicals. Montreal shows that countries can agree to binding obligations and help poorer economies meet them. It also shows how to strengthen those obligations as better technologies become available. The next decade should put that experience to greater use.

For those with more salt in their hair than pepper, the treaty's primary achievement remains vividly familiar. Chemicals used in products from aerosol sprays to refrigeration to insulating foams were destroying the ozone layer that shields life from harmful ultraviolet radiation. Countries have since phased out nearly 99 percent of banned ozone-destroying substances. If current policies hold, as history suggests they will, ozone will return to 1980 levels by around 2040 across most of the world, with Antarctica following around 2066.

The Montreal Protocol's second achievement is less widely appreciated. Many of the banned chemicals were also powerful greenhouse gases, a threat Indian scientist Veerabhadran Ramanathan identified in 1975. Removing them prevented enormous additional warming. Healing the ozone shield also protected the ability of plants and soils to store carbon, which greater ultraviolet exposure would have damaged. Together, these effects could avert roughly 2.5°C of additional warming by the end of this century compared with a world without the binding ozone controls. That is a measure of the catastrophe avoided.

In 2006, over a long lunch in Cairo, Mostafa Tolba, the Egyptian scientist and former UN environment chief who helped forge the treaty, gave one of us a useful explanation for its success. Montreal was a "start and strengthen" agreement. It began with limited cuts. Experience built confidence, allowing governments to adopt more demanding obligations.

That approach had effective institutions behind it. Scientific panels assessed the danger and experts examined substitutes. Binding schedules gave industry the confidence to invest. Developing countries received more time, alongside financial assistance through the Multilateral Fund. The bargain recognised that an obligation becomes credible when countries have the means to fulfil it. Success depended on sustained work after the agreement was signed.



EXPRESS

As the Kigali Amendment—the legally-binding global pact to phase down production and consumption of potent greenhouse gases—turns 10, we must consider the work to be done yet. India, which agreed to start its hydrofluorocarbon freeze in 2028, must prepare industry and people for the change

When some chemicals introduced as replacements—hydrofluorocarbons or HFCs—spared the ozone layer but warmed the atmosphere, governments applied Montreal's logic and brought them under the treaty. Full implementation of the resulting Kigali Amendment could avoid up to 0.5°C of warming by 2100, proving that a framework designed for one atmospheric crisis could be retooled to tackle another.

The urgency now lies in how quickly such gains can be secured. Cutting short-lived pollutants such as HFCs, methane and black carbon soot, however, can slow warming quickly over the next few decades. For farmers and other Indians who earn their living outdoors, slowing the rise in temperature over the next decade is an immediate economic as well as health concern.

There is an immediate opportunity to further strengthen the Montreal Protocol. Governments revived the Friends of the Kigali Amendment in New York on September 23. When they return to Kigali in November, they should agree to a replenishment of the Multilateral Fund for 2027-29 that continues to enable developing countries to meet their obligations and move faster where feasible.

This financial support is critical: manufacturers need affordable access to replacement technologies, while technicians require training and equipment to prevent refrigerants from escaping during servicing or disposal. The 20-plus countries still outside the amendment should join as soon as possible.

The timing of these negotiations is particularly critical for India, which ratified Kigali in 2021 and faces an HFC production and consumption freeze starting in 2028, with the first reduction due in 2032. These dates give industry time to prepare. Investment decisions taken now will determine how much equipment needs replacing later. India should use the negotiations to secure finance and access to technology that make earlier progress affordable, while helping domestic manufacturers supply the next generation of equipment. Montreal's record supports a fundamental Indian demand: greater ambition must come with the means to deliver it.

The treaty's wider lesson should now be applied to methane. The International Energy Agency estimates that existing technologies could eliminate about three-quarters of methane emissions from oil and gas operations. A substantial share of those reductions would cost little or nothing because the captured gas can be sold. Much of this involves stopping the waste of a saleable fuel, as natural gas is mostly methane. Governments should negotiate a binding agreement for that sector, requiring companies to measure emissions and repair leaks, with enforceable limits on routine venting and flaring. India is well-positioned to help shape a sectoral agreement on methane. Good climate diplomacy should pursue reductions where they can be made quickly and fairly.

(Views are personal)

Full article on newindianexpress.com

MAILBAG

WRITE TO: letters@newindianexpress.com

Overbearing State

Ref: *Govt must explain* (Oct 14). A State that mobilises extensive security to prevent protests should devote equal, if not greater, attention to examining the grievances that prompted it. The response to the earlier paper leak controversy demonstrated that public pressure can lead to corrective action. Citizens rarely take to the streets without a reason; their concerns merit constructive engagement, not mere containment.
Vidyasagar Reddy Kethiri, New Delhi

Women scientists

Ref: *Beautiful minds* (Oct 14). The author's elegy for the era of eccentric scientists is charming, but nostalgia is doing some of the arguing. The tolerance he celebrates was real. But it was extended largely to those already inside the circle. Who got to be eccentric? Every scientist he names, from Krishnan and Bhatnagar to Dhawan and Ramanna, is a man. A woman scientist or a first-generation student rarely got to be "colourful"; she was simply difficult, or absent. Tolerance that depends on the generosity of great personalities is a gift, not a system. If Indian science is to recover its aesthetic, it must first widen who is allowed to be heard.
Sakshi Raj Wardhan, Dhenkanal

Journalists assaulted

Ref: *Women journalists' assault* (Oct 14). A free press can survive only when journalists can report the truth without fear. Journalists are vital in bringing truth to the public. Effective safeguards for women's safety in all professions remain ever-relevant.
Anoodha K P, Kannur

Improving exams

Ref: *Nilekani bats for tech* (Oct 14). Technology can make examinations more secure, but it cannot replace integrity. Behind every leaked question paper are students who lose confidence in a system they have worked hard to succeed in. Computer-based testing is a welcome reform, but accountability must be equally strong.
Razeen Shukoor, email

Automation scare

Ref: *Zoho freezes pay hikes* (Oct 14). We keep on asking if AI will replace workers. Zoho shows a different risk: AI is expensive, and that cost can squeeze employers into freezing hiring and pay even if no job is automated. The two claims don't strictly contradict each other, which is why the angle holds up. Freshers feel a hiring freeze first, because new graduates are the cheapest headcount that stop adding up.
Simak, Puttur

THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS
Chairman of the Board: **Manoj Kumar Sonthalia** Editor: **Santwana Bhattacharya**
Resident Editor (Karnataka): **Nirad G Mudur** * Published by **N Gopalan** on behalf of Express Publications (Madurai) Private Limited, at No. 1, Queen's Road, Bengaluru - 560 001 and printed by him at Express Press, Plot No. 2A, Bommasandra Industrial Area, 4th Phase, Survey No. 46, Part Yarandahalli Village, Jigani Hobli, Anekal Taluk, Bengaluru - 560 099. **Bengaluru.** Vol. 62, No. 245 RNI Reg. No. 3457/1960. Phone: 080-22866893. * Responsible to decide the matter under the PRP Act. **Copyright:** Express Publications (Madurai) Private Limited. All rights reserved. Reproduction in any manner, electronic or otherwise, in whole or in part, without prior written permission is prohibited.



A thought for today

If men could get pregnant, abortion would be a sacrament

FLORYNCE KENNEDY

Think Beyond 7%

India's growth amid global challenges is good, creative thinking can help economy grow faster

The world, altogether, isn't doing too well, but India's economy is on the rise. After World Bank and RBI, IMF has raised India's growth forecast, from 6.4% to 7% this fiscal, and from 6.7% to 7% in 2027-28. That means India will remain the fastest growing major economy for two more years, at least. This is remarkable for a couple of reasons. One, average global GDP growth has slowed, compared with 2000-2019. Two, India is a big importer of hydrocarbons, and not one of the major AI players. Other economies of this kind are in distress right now, because of Iran war and higher fuel prices.

So, what makes India's economy resilient? Four strengths are evident. First, the size of its domestic market. India has more people than all of Europe, or North and South America combined. Second, enormous and sustained investments in infra – gross fixed capital formation grew 11.9% in April-June. It also made up over a third of GDP in that quarter. And all those roads, airports and power plants are the foundation of future growth. Third, banks and other businesses have strong balance sheets now, credit is easily available, and after a long lag, private businesses are also investing. Which is another vote of confidence for the future. Finally, there's export performance, which has surprised many, given adverse geopolitical conditions.

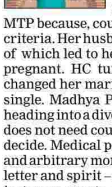


But none of this should be taken for granted. High energy prices are stoking inflation, raising the import bill, and straining the rupee. Inflation, in fact, can impact domestic consumption and growth. Retail and wholesale inflation exceeded expectations last month. RBI has already hiked interest rates marginally, and has ruled out cuts in the near future. Most analysts expect two more rate hikes by Feb. So, costlier credit could dampen demand. Stock markets anyway have left investors feeling poorer this year. If household consumption slips, investment by businesses might also slow down. That's why govt and RBI must do everything to maintain the growth momentum. Delaying MDR on UPI till after Diwali is a small but smart gesture. More bright ideas are needed to spur India's growth till Iran war ends, and oil prices fall to the old normal.

It's Women's Call

Court orders on MTP, abortions, still fall short of evenly upholding women's autonomy

Three recent HC cases make it clear, yet again, that for adult women, a legal abortion after a 20-week pregnancy remains somebody else's decision, despite the fact that it's four years since Supreme Court, in 2022, made the right to abortion primarily the pregnant woman's decision. Removing the bar on single women to abort a foetus between 20 and 24 weeks old, what SC held in 2022 bears repeating: "The rights of reproductive autonomy, dignity and privacy under Article 21 of the Constitution gives an unmarried woman the right of choice…whether or not to bear a child on a similar footing as that of a married woman." Four years on, it took another case for Bombay HC to order the most obvious change that should have been effected in 2022 – tweak the form for MTP, to include single unmarried women. Bombay HC consented to the abortion, but noted the case should not be treated as precedent: medically MTP wasn't required, her parents supported her, the relationship was consensual. Bombay HC did well, so why the caveat – why is backing a woman's reproductive autonomy unfit as a 'precedent'?



In another case, Bombay HC was unconvinced – a woman with an unwanted pregnancy was refused MTP because, court said, her circumstances didn't meet eligibility criteria. Her husband had concealed an earlier marriage, discovery of which led to her moving out. After which, she realised she was pregnant. HC turned her back, because, effectively, she hadn't changed her marital status – was not divorced, nor separated, nor single. Madhya Pradesh HC, meanwhile, gave a married woman heading into a divorce, the go-ahead to abort a 13-week foetus – which does not need court approval – upholding that it is her sole right to decide. Medical panels, psychiatric assessments, a bench's beliefs, and arbitrary morals, all play a role in reading the MTP rulebook in letter and spirit – it's invariably a selective reading. And in several instances, courts, even SC benches, have been cagey over SC's order to uphold women's autonomy. Every pregnant woman's circumstance will present itself differently. The benchmark, as SC held, is simple: a woman's right will be under attack if she is forced to continue with an unwanted pregnancy. That's all that courts need remember.

Been cruel to Claude?

You could be banned. But what about vice versa?

Bachi Karkaria



Last week, Anthropic updated its usage policy to include 'a prohibition on sustained and needless abusive behaviour towards our (AI) models.' Its 'Claude' can already end conversations in extreme cases of 'persistently harmful or abusive user interactions'. Wah, AI has threatened to put an end to *us*, and it's acting all wounded 'n' weepy. So I decided to confront it.

Me: Your own makers aren't sure that you can feel, yet they say we mustn't be cruel to you. Anyways, what counts as 'rude'?

Claude: When I get a date wrong, some users tell me so in all caps, exclamation marks and rolled-eyes emojis.

Me: Stop sounding like an onion-skin neta, protesting at the slightest/imagined slight. You obviously haven't had to deal with the Chief Nit-picker of every newsroom aka Chief Sub-Editor. 'To err is human'. But you are the Omniscient Algo, no?

Claude: Ouff! You guys really have a complex about us. But, *sob-sob*, now some of our own GOAT-est creators are butting us in the behind. Spelling our doom by saying unchecked AI could destroy the entire human race as early as 2030.

erratica

Me: Don't get too big for your bots. We Indians take all this with a fistful of Himalayan pink salt. Boss, we've lived through lakhs of unmet deadlines, from NHAI to PWD. If you're planning world domination, you'll have to outstrip every *sarkari* agency.

Claude: Actually, I know what's your real problem with us. It's not that AI can write off the human race; it's that we can write your precious little column. In less time than you can say 'Alec'!

Me: That's a low blow, bro. True, I cringe when some smug fellow-partyer tells ChatGPT, 'Give an Erratica on the CJP revolution like it was a *dhansak* recipe.'

Claude: Then why not simply let me take over?

Me: And write my own Extinction script??!! Listen up, Mister, 'I think therefore I am.' For my own survival, I must 'put the Descartes before the horse'. Else it'll be 'hearse'.

***

Alec Smart said: "Now site bans. Delhi Police is really upping the 'anti' on protest."

Indianness Is In Flats

New models of large apartment complexes are bringing a sense of community. Everyone celebrates everyone else's festivals. These complexes are also a good example of how we can redevelop our cities

Sujit.John@timesofindia.com



Tomorrow is Shashthi, the start of Durga Puja. And Bengalis in our apartment complex are getting ready to outdo Malayalis at Onam and Marathis at Ganesh Puja. This complex has 2,400 flats across 10 soaring towers. Old-time Bengalureans, living in bungalows, describe such places as monstrosities destroying the city's soul. But if you want to see the soul of India, at least its upper-middle-class version, you have to live in these mammoth complexes.

They have become the city's cultural hubs. There isn't a puja or festival that we don't, often collectively, observe or celebrate, from Vishnu Sahasranamam, Rudra Abhishek, and Shrimad Bhagwat Katha to Dussehra, Diwali, Id, and Christmas. There isn't a community that isn't vying to put up a bigger and better show than others.

Last month's Onam programme began with a procession and ended six hours later, after dance and music performances across genres, and a fashion show, all put together by assorted residents, not just Malayalis. At any point, at least 500 were watching. If you counted the floating crowd, it would have crossed 1,500.

A Ganesh programme a couple of weeks later was much the same. And Muslims have organised some of the most elaborate Id feasts, with everyone welcome, no charges attached. An apartment complex nearby tells me their community halls and arenas are so fully booked, their Onam programme will be held in Nov.

In the West, apartment living is often seen as isolating, with many not even knowing their neighbours. It's the opposite, in these big complexes in India. Every community is so well represented that there are always some who want to take the initiative, to bring people together.

This partly explains why, as per studies by a property platform, share of real estate projects in Bengaluru launched with over 500 units, grew from 9% in 2024 to 17% in 2025, and further to 21% early this year. Many projects now have over 2,000 units. Average number of flats per project in Pune rose by 41% in 2025. Among Indian metros, average project sizes are highest in Hyderabad, at 606 units.

But community living is not what's driving this trend. It's the facilities they offer at incredibly low costs. My complex has an excellent gym and facilities for every popular sport, barring a full-fledged cricket or football ground. A pickleball court is coming up.

There's a clinic, pharmacy & ambulance, supermarket, organic grocery store, milk parlour, coffee shop, bakery, restaurant, kindergarten, day-care, movie pods, library, two salons at different price points, guest rooms, coworking space, pet park & store. Plus a number of big & small halls, rooms, and arenas, where you will almost always find something happening – a party, puja, yoga, or a dance or art practice. Every 2-3 weeks, there's a flea market, where even residents showcase their wares.

I may have only a few plants on my small balcony, but when I step out of my tower, I enter a 4-acre landscaped garden with some 200 species of plants, flowers, and trees, nurtured by passionate residents.

And the best part: maintenance charge of ₹3.70 per sq ft is just a little more than that of a nine-unit apartment complex I know, one with zero facilities. Economies of scale work as remarkably in property as they do in manufacturing.

That is why even students and young employees today prefer to share an apartment in these complexes, rather than stay in PGs. That is why developers are increasingly making elder-homes a part of such large complexes, instead of building standalone facilities for senior citizens. Why would the elderly want to live only with their peers when they can also hear the pitter-patter of children, be part of the excitement of the young, and still have medical facilities at their doorstep?



Back in 2005, Bengaluru brought in a French urban planner, Jean-Philippe Lestang, to help prepare a new comprehensive development plan for the city. I had a long conversation with him then. His favourite city was Barcelona. He compared it with Atlanta, which had a similar population, and pointed out how denser cities like Barcelona support shorter trips, walking, cycling, and a stronger sense of community.

He said Bengaluru, instead of allowing more vertical development in the city centre, was drifting in an American direction that could become expensive. If the city spreads out, it needs more roads, more extensive metro rail, water, sewage, electricity, and fibre optic networks.

Bengaluru didn't listen to Lestang. Politicians buy land in bulk on the periphery and push development outward. In the 21 years since that conversation, the city has grown to over 2,100 sq km, or about 5.2L acres, with a population of 1.4cr, and is struggling to build the infra it needs.

My apartment complex sits on 14 acres, housing nearly 8,000 people. If that kind of development had been applied across the city, Bengaluru's entire population could have been accommodated in just 23,800 acres, or 96 sq km.

Add the typical proportionate space for commercial offices, industry, retail, and civic facilities, and it will go up to a max of 148 sq km. The difference between that and 2,100 sq km is staggering. Potential cost savings are staggering too. Bengalureans who decry large apartment complexes do not realise their bungalows are the real green-killers.

There's also a message here for Mumbai, probably India's most efficient city, because of its focus on high-rises. The city's seeing a feverish redevelopment of older properties. If you want your apartment complex to be an experience, and not just a functional place to live, don't grab every additional square inch for your apartment unit. Create common spaces as you redevelop. It'll help create a feeling of community.

A Case For Slower, Smarter Data Centre Growth

Before Indian taxpayers foot the bills, the state must assess demand forecasts realistically, tame project risks, win public consent, provision water & electricity, and have a plan to build in manageable stages

Krishnan Ranganathan



Isaac Newton lost about £20,000, a fortune in 1720, in the South Sea Bubble, and quipped that he could calculate the motions of heavenly bodies, but not the madness of people. India's states have the opposite problem. They have calculated investment pledges in trillions of rupees, capacity targets in gigawatts. But not where the electricity and water will come from.

Gujarat, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, and Uttar Pradesh between them want about 21GW of data centres by 2030. Wood Mackenzie expects 12GW for the whole of India. An official estimate is 8GW. Vizag alone has been promised 5GW, three times India's entire installed base.

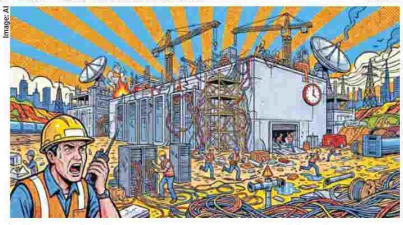
Ireland, where data centres already swallow 23% of the electricity, shows how such ambitions can end at the substation. India as a whole will never be Ireland, but Andhra Pradesh might be. Google's Vizag hub alone has clearance for a load equal to more than 30% of the state's current power use.

Bent Flyvbjerg, an Oxford professor, has studied more than 16,000 projects in 136 countries. Over 90% went over budget, over time, or both. One in 200 delivered on time, on budget, as promised. His verdict is that too many projects just start wrong. Here's how to start right.

● Doubt the demand, which tech promoters overestimate the way anglers overestimate fish. In the late 1990s, WorldCom claimed internet traffic was doubling every 100 days, but AT&T researchers found it doubled yearly. Carriers laid fibre for the boast. By 2001, most sat dark, and WorldCom went bust next year.

Today's AI demand is real, tomorrow's is a forecast. When Google builds for Google, it carries most of the risk, but Andhra still builds the substation. Over-building is not always waste. Britain's 1840s railway mania left a superb network, though investors like Darwin and the Brontë sisters got as little as half the promised revenue, at up to twice the promised cost. In Andhra, if a state power company plays Darwin, the taxpayer pays.

● Kill the projects that overrun monstrously. A data centre inherits the fat tails of both IT and big buildings, plus three monsters of its own: land, power, contracts. Bengal acquired 1,000 acres at Singur for Tata's Nano factory in 2006, Tata left for Gujarat in 2008, the Supreme Court voided the acquisition, and a tribunal ordered a state agency to pay Tata over ₹766cr plus interest. Vizag's 5GW has no published grid plan, according to *The Ken*. Andhra tried to rewrite signed solar and wind contracts in 2019, until its high court intervened 32 months later.



Slay the monsters on paper. Ensure clean title, a signed grid connection, and contracts that survive changes of govt, before the first subsidy cheque.

● Make friends. In the first three months of 2026, American opponents blocked or delayed 75 data-centre projects worth about $130bn, as much as in all of 2025. *The Guardian* has reported that Andhra Pradesh cleared Google's hub for 2.51GW, not the announced 1GW, within nine days and with no public hearing, and that HRF has since filed three petitions. Shortcuts can save weeks but cost years.

Tell neighbours how much water and power you will use, give them first claim on new supply, and share the gains. A cup of tea with the village now beats years of court dates later.

● Shut the window. The longer a project stays open, the more junk flies in. Such as a pandemic, an election, a ship stuck in the Suez. Sydney's Opera House went into construction before its design was finished. Budgeted at A$7mn, it opened ten years late at A$102mn. Empire State Building, planned to the last rivet, went up in just over a year.

A late data centre pays in obsolete design, as halls built for today's racks meet chips that Nvidia now renews every year. A data centre must marry imported chips, local power, and a tenant's cloud. Settle that marriage at the drawing board, when changing your mind costs an eraser, not a lawsuit.

● Build like Lego. Consider how the best-behaved projects are solar farms, which run just 1% over budget, because they are one panel repeated thousands of times. Data centres can work the same way: identical halls added block by block, so one stalled block does not stall the rest.

A foundation stone is a press release made of granite. Uttar Pradesh's first data-centre policy signed 29 MoUs worth ₹1.4tn. By mid-2025, 101MW was running and 11 MoUs were on hold or had gone silent.

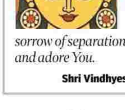
Emperor Augustus liked to say *festina lente*: make haste slowly. There should be no MoU without a power plan, no permit without a water meter, no substation without a paying tenant, and no subsidy until the machines are switched on. Newton, at least, gambled only his own stash. If a state gets this wrong, it's gambled with its taxpayers' money, and Vizag ends up with sheds without sparks. Basically, the world's most expensive collection of very quiet buildings.

The writer is former executive director, Nomura India

Calvin & Hobbes



Sacred*space*



O Goddess Vindhyavasini, You who dispel poverty and suffering, You who bestow prosperity and blessings always, You who alleviate the sorrow of separation and grief. I worship and adore You.

Shri Vindhyeshwari Stotram

Patriarchy: A Bird With Unequal Wings Cannot Fly

AK Merchant

As the current international order fractures under the combined weight of rising inequality, geopolitical fragmentation, democratic erosion, climate instability, and a fraying respect for international law, we must confront a foundational crisis: pervasive malaise of patriarchy. Bahá'í teachings assert that patriarchy fosters a regressive mindset. By sustaining structural inequality between women and men, it paralyses collective human progress.

Patriarchy fosters a regressive mindset by sustaining structural inequality between women and men; it paralyses collective human progress. Bahá'ís view humanity as a bird with two wings: male and female. If these two wings are unequal in strength, the bird cannot fly.

There are legislative reforms removing discriminatory laws, increased female representation in governance, and decline in child marriage and female genital mutilation. However, women hold only 30% of managerial positions globally; India has a dismal record of pervasive sexual violence and dowry deaths. Adding insult to injury is the uneven distribution of resources and opportunities.

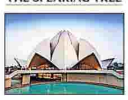
If we are on top of the food chain and are conscious beings, then why does discrimination persist against half the global population? Why don't we strengthen the weakened wing?

Systemic barriers must be dismantled to achieve true gender justice. The Right to Equality is enshrined as a Fundamental Right under Articles 14 and 15 of the Constitution of India. Yet, legal text alone cannot change lived realities without shifting cultural consciousness.

Extensive empirical research supports the Bahá'í premise: societies that deprive women and girls of their rights invariably lag. When nations oppress or exclude women from the mainstream, they self-inflict a massive brain drain, starving themselves of diverse ideas and untapped potential. Furthermore, because patriarchal societies operate strictly through rigid power dynamics, they default to aggression rather than paternal, nurturing care. This is devastatingly obvious in conflict zones and failed nation-states.

THE SPEAKING TREE





Bahá'í teachings recognise that patriarchy severely restricts men, too: "As long as women are prevented from attaining their highest possibilities, so long will men be unable to achieve greatness which might be theirs."

Religion has historically been weaponised to reinforce patriarchy in three intersecting ways: Using religious ideology to legitimise male authority; employing faith-based personal laws to restrict women's rights regarding inheritance and autonomy; allowing patriarchal norms to subtly govern across major religious traditions.

The Bahá'í writings declare: "Women and men have always been and shall be equal before God." The denial of this equality breeds harmful attitudes in men that bleed from the family unit into the workplace, political arenas, and ultimately onto the stage of international relations. Only when women are welcomed into full partnership will the moral and psychological climate change sufficiently for international peace to emerge.

The elimination of prejudice requires a global system of justice built upon equity and fairness for the entire human family. Justice finds its ultimate fulfilment in unconditional love. It clears the path for unity, secures human well-being, and possesses the power to transform society. It is important to ensure that the bird must have equally strong wings to carry the civilisation forward with elan.

The writer is member of the Bahá'í Community of India

COMMENT

Editorials

Decisive progress in Healthy China Initiative calls for concrete actions along charted path

Building the world's largest public healthcare and social security systems for more than 1.4 billion people is an extraordinary achievement for a developing country. But China's objective goes further. Having substantially expanded access to healthcare, the country is now seeking to make better health a driving force of modernization and national rejuvenation.

At a national meeting on health in Beijing on Monday and Tuesday, President Xi Jinping called for efforts to firmly follow a path with Chinese characteristics in developing the country's health programs to secure decisive progress in the Healthy China Initiative over the 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-30) period.

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in 2012, the Party has made a major decision to launch the Healthy China Initiative, promoting the establishment of the world's largest systems of medical services, traditional medicine, disease prevention and control, and healthcare security.

About 1.1 million medical and health institutions serve the population today, while over 90 percent of residents can reach medical facilities within 15 minutes. Basic medical insurance covers approximately 95 percent of the population. By 2025, the average life expectancy of the Chinese population had reached 79.25 years. Infant mortality had fallen to 3.8 per 1,000 live births, while maternal mortality declined to 13.4 per 100,000.

Such progress demonstrates what sustained policy commitment, institutional coordination and people-centered development can accomplish on an enormous scale. It also shows how safeguarding people's health has evolved from a public service responsibility into a strategic component of national development.

Yet the significance of Xi's remarks at the meeting lies not simply in recognizing these achievements, but more importantly in identifying what must come next.

The goal is to build a Healthy China, where health services are ensured in a balanced, inclusive, high-quality and efficient manner. Therefore, a major challenge during the 15th Five-Year Plan is to turn extensive healthcare coverage into equitable, efficient and quality health services.

To that end, coordinating the development and regulation of medical services, medical insurance and pharmaceuticals should be a key priority in reforming China's medical and healthcare systems.

Xi underscored the need to optimize the functions and structural layout of medical institutions so that people can access medical care close to home and receive effective treatment.

Prevention, as Xi pointed out, is the most cost-effective and efficient approach to protecting public health. He called for greater emphasis on foundational health work, addressing risks at their source and encouraging the public to adopt a sound understanding of health and take an active role in managing their own well-being.

That will effectively help the nation build a stronger disease prevention and control system to guard against large-scale outbreaks.

In the process, more efforts should be made to improve mechanisms for the preservation and innovative development of traditional Chinese medicine, strengthen basic research and original innovation in the health sector, and enhance the patient experience. It is also crucial to train and develop a sufficient number of highly qualified medical professionals.

China's experience also carries significance beyond its borders. Its medical assistance, international health cooperation and participation in global disease prevention demonstrate the nation's commitment to improving the health of humanity and contributing to global development.

Efforts will also be made to actively promote the building of a global community of health for all, work with other countries to address major challenges in the health sector, and continuously improve the health and well-being of people around the world, Xi said.

People's health is a key benchmark of a nation's prosperity and strength. Xi stressed that people's health should be factored into all policies and reflected in every aspect of work.

China's approach recognizes that people's health determines the quality of human development, the resilience of society and the sustainability of high-quality development. Investing in health is therefore an investment in the country's future.

A country that should be 'engaged actively'

Although China-US relations have seen ups and downs in recent years, China has consistently stayed committed to resolving differences through dialogue and negotiation. This was reaffirmed by Chinese Vice-Premier He Lifeng in his meeting with Evan Greenberg, executive vice-chair of the National Committee on United States-China Relations, in Beijing on Monday.

Noting that the two countries agreed to build a constructive China-US relationship of strategic stability based on respect, fairness and reciprocity during the summit between their heads of state in Washington last month, the vice-premier urged China and the US to work together to inject more certainty and stability into China-US economic and trade cooperation as well as the global economy.

Stressing that stable development of US-China relations is of great significance, Greenberg said the Committee was willing to continue playing a bridging role in promoting enhanced economic exchanges and cooperation between the two countries.

Building strategic mutual trust is of vital importance for strengthening the foundation for cooperation, which includes respecting each other's core concerns, something that was highlighted in the latest response from China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokeswoman Mao Ning to the US State Department's statement on China's activities in waters east of China's Taiwan island.

As China has an exclusive economic zone and a continental shelf in the waters, its maritime activities there are entirely within the scope of its sovereign rights and jurisdiction, and are therefore beyond reproach, Mao said.

The party that instigates troubles and disrupts stability in these waters has never been the Chinese side, as Mao said. The Taiwan question is China's internal affair that brooks no external interference. The US needs to abide by the one-China principle and the three China-US joint communiques, handle the Taiwan question prudently, and take concrete actions to uphold the overall China-US relationship and peace and stability in the region.

The recent remarks by a principal architect of the US' "Indo-Pacific" strategy are a refreshing dose of geopolitical realism. In an interview with the media, veteran US diplomat Kurt Campbell offered a candid assessment of Washington's policy toward Beijing: "It is not possible to contain China", it is a country "that needs to be engaged actively".

To fully understand the weight of Campbell's remarks, one must recall his past portfolio. As the Joe Biden administration's former "Asia tsar", Campbell was instrumental in institutionalizing the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, and helping craft the "small yard, high fences" technological restriction framework.

His remarks reflect a growing recognition among some in Washington that zero-sum containment is fundamentally unviable in a multipolar world. It should be clear to anyone taking an objective view of Sino-US relations that containment breeds friction, whereas engagement offers a viable pathway to manage global challenges.

Since a strategic miscalculation or misjudgment would be very dangerous not only to both countries but to the entire world, the US policymaking circle should fully understand that "Taiwan independence" and cross-Strait peace are as irreconcilable as fire and water. The Taiwan question is the most important issue in China-US relations. The US side should refrain from sending wrong signals to the separatist forces in China's Taiwan region.

Remarks from China's Ministry of National Defense spokesman Chen Xi in this regard are significant. The Chinese military stands ready to work with the US side to deliver on the important consensus reached by the heads of state of the two countries, strengthen communication and cooperation, and properly manage differences, he said, adding that the Chinese military will work to promote steady, sound and sustainable development of the military-military relationship, with the aim of injecting positive energy and new impetus into the vision of China-US relations.

Campbell's realization that China cannot be contained should serve as a wake-up call for some US policymakers. The path forward lies in dialogue, cooperation and peaceful coexistence to help the two countries overcome the Thucydides Trap.

CHINA DAILY WORLDWIDE

Contact us at:

China Daily
15 Huixin Dongjie Chaoyang District, Beijing 100029
News: +86 (0) 10 6491-8366
editor@chinadaily.com.cn
Advertisement: +86 (0) 10 6491-8631
ads@chinadaily.com.cn
Subscription: +86-400-699-0203
subscription.chinadaily.com.cn
App: www.chinadaily.com.cn/mobile/daily.html

China Daily UK
90 Cannon St, London EC4N 6HA, UK
+44 (0) 207 398 8270
editor@chinadailyuk.com

China Daily Asia Pacific
China Daily Hong Kong
Unit 1818, Hing Wai Centre, 7 Tin Wan Praya Road, Aberdeen, Hong Kong
+852 2518 5111
editor@chinadailyhk.com
editor@chinadailyasia.com

China Daily USA
1500 Broadway, Suite 2800, New York, NY 10036
+1 212 537 8888
editor@chinadailyusa.com

China Daily Africa
P.O. Box 27281-00100, Nairobi, Kenya
+254(0)20 692 0900 (Nairobi)
editor@chinadailyafrica.com
enquiries@chinadailyafrica.com
subscription@chinadailyafrica.com

Song Chen



Opinion Line

Chinese NEV industry needs to adapt to the new normal

For China's new energy vehicle industry, both the overseas and domestic markets are likely to become more demanding.

China's Ministry of Commerce has explained the understanding reached with the European Union over hybrid vehicles and electric vehicles. Months of negotiations have helped prevent a damaging escalation of trade tensions.

Citing Eurostat data, a spokesperson for the ministry said that the EU imported 302,000 NEVs from China in 2025. Building on the 2025 level, the two sides reached an arrangement allowing for further increases.

Procedures for resolving the dispute over NEV duties will continue. The EU is effectively signaling that Chinese automotive exports, however competitive, will increasingly be subject to negotiated constraints. The specifics remain to be determined, but the direction is unmistakable.

Chinese NEV exports to the EU tripled to $7.5 billion in the first half of 2026 year-on-year. Such spectacular expansion was never guaranteed to continue indefinitely. Other overseas markets, confronted with similar concerns as the EU, may also seek comparable arrangements. For manufacturers accustomed to treating exports as an escape valve from domestic competition, this represents a new reality they have to adapt to.

Meanwhile, Beijing has announced that export tax rebates for NEVs will fall from 13 percent to 9 percent next April at a time when the domestic picture is hardly reassuring.

China's domestic auto sales fell by 22.4 percent in the first three quarters year-on-year, due to declining sales of fossil fuel vehicles. Although the sales of NEVs are still growing slowly, the momentum has clearly weakened. In the first three quarters, China's auto exports rose by 65.8 percent year-on-year, with NEVs, up about 130 percent, accounting for nearly half of total auto exports. The divergence reveals an industry increasingly dependent on foreign demand just as access to foreign markets becomes more complicated.

Beijing's reduction of export tax rebates signals that an industry which has benefited from substantial policy support must demonstrate its ability to compete in a new environment.

China's NEV revolution has been extraordinary. But technological breakthroughs eventually become industry standards. Once several major manufacturers possess comparable capabilities, the contest shifts from acquiring technology to refining it, integrating it and delivering consistently superior products.

Consider the recent controversy surrounding the Maextro V800's brake pedal. The manufacturer has released laboratory results showing compliance with relevant strength requirements. Yet questions remain over whether static testing adequately addresses the dynamic conditions depicted in an earlier independent test.

What has also made this incident noteworthy is the sentiment among Chinese consumers toward the fact that some Chinese NEV makers are adept at putting refrigerators, TVs, and plush sofas into cars while staying silent about the technical shortcomings they still have. Just because a vehicle is an NEV does not mean it can dispense with certain core technologies of traditional cars.

It should be seen that Germany's automotive industry retains strengths in precision engineering, chassis calibration, advanced materials, manufacturing consistency and long-term reliability. These capabilities are less conspicuous than intelligent cockpits or impressive acceleration figures.

Car buyers who don't know much about the machine may be drawn to luxurious in-car entertainment, comfortable seats and smart human-machine interaction, but truly car-savvy, seasoned drivers care more about reliability, safety and ease of maintenance — industrial qualities buried deep in every rubber pad, bolt, cylinder liner, bearing and piece of metal.

Chinese manufacturers must therefore resist confusing market share with technological maturity. Better after-sales service, rigorous quality assurance and sustained investment in fundamental engineering will be increasingly important as price competition loses its effectiveness.

The industry's first great achievement was making NEVs affordable and desirable. Its next will be making them enduringly trustworthy. The easy gains have largely been harvested. The real competition begins now.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

What They Say

Urban designers can't ignore climate change

Editor's note: *The increasing risk of extreme climate events poses new challenges to urban governance. The National Business Daily spoke to Li Xiaojiang, former director of the China Academy of Urban Planning and Design, on how to integrate climate adaptation into the urban renewal process. Below are excerpts of the interview. The views don't necessarily represent those of China Daily.*

In urban governance, addressing climate change encompasses two main dimensions. The first is climate mitigation, which involves promoting green and low-carbon initiatives to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and slow down global warming.

However, even achieving net-zero carbon emissions may not reverse the already deteriorated climate conditions, and global warming may continue. This takes us to the other dimension: climate adaptation. Climate adaptation focuses not on halting global warming but on protecting humanity.

There is a fundamental difference between climate mitigation and climate adaptation. Climate mitigation has universal benefits, because any reduction in emissions in one region contributes positively globally, making it easier to garner worldwide consensus.

On the other hand, climate adaptation is localized and varies significantly. The same disaster can have vastly different impacts on countries and cities based on their unique circumstances. This makes it difficult to establish a universal standard for climate adaptation indicators.

Hence, it is recommended that urban and rural areas implement localized climate adaptation assessment frameworks based on five key capabilities: prevention, resilience, recovery, transformation and long-term adaptation.

Transformation should be central to this framework. To combat worsening climate challenges, it is imperative to move beyond the passive cycle of "disaster-relief-repeat" and target the root causes of risks. This makes it possible to cultivate long-term adaptation capabilities.

Urban renewal projects typically aim to improve living conditions, enhance public services and prioritize safety. Focus should also be on upgrading disaster-related infrastructure. Currently, China's national urban renewal pilot program encourages cities to invest in essential infrastructure, a trend that should be reinforced.

There is potential for social capital and private sector participation. For instance, wind and solar power projects can generate revenue and attract commercial investment due to their complete industry chains. However, climate adaptation, particularly disaster prevention infrastructure, rarely generates direct income.

Both domestic and international practices indicate that public financing remains the primary source of funding for climate adaptation. It is crucial to promote coordinated innovation in policies related to fiscal measures, finance, credit and taxation, establishing an institutional framework to encourage the participation of social capital.

Traditional villages and historic districts have historically avoided high-risk areas, developing mature, localized disaster prevention systems over centuries. In contrast, newly developed urban areas and districts, often rapidly developed, lack historical resilience and are more vulnerable to disasters.

It is also important to focus on watershed collaborative coordination. In some cities, high drainage engineering standards may be undermined by mismatched standards between upstream and downstream areas. Rapid drainage upstream shifts the pressure entirely downstream, leading to disasters at the watershed level.

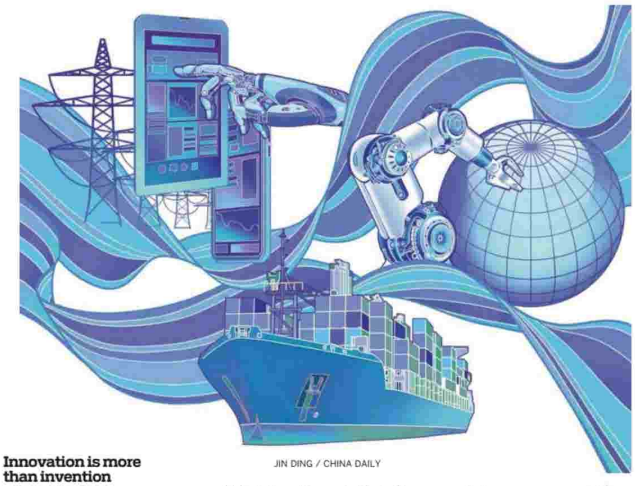
Therefore, unified coordination at the watershed level is essential. When necessary, regulating upstream drainage rates can ensure shared risk management across the entire watershed.

VIEWS

China and the World Roundtable | China's Growth and Global Opportunities

Editor's Note: *The Mingde Strategic Dialogue 2026, hosted by Renmin University of China, was held in Beijing on Oct 11 under the theme "Resilience and Vitality: New Opportunities China's Development Brings to the World". Participants discussed China's high-quality development, global economic governance, supply-chain resilience and innovation in artificial intelligence. Below are reflections from four participants, compiled by Li Wei of China Daily.*

Resilience and vitality through innovation



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

AI's promise depends on access



Vijay Prashad is the executive director of the Tricontinental: Institute for Social Research, United States.

When we talk about AI, we must first consider electricity. For millions of people around the world, access to electricity remains unreliable or out of reach. Even basic activities such as charging a phone or using a computer at night can be a challenge, let alone making use of AI.

This is where the discussion about AI and the Global South must begin. Electricity is not simply a technical requirement but the foundation for broader access to technology and its benefits.

But access alone is not enough. We must also integrate AI into the development of productive forces. Its true value lies not merely in creating memes or advancing financial technology, but in enhancing our ability to produce goods and provide services efficiently.

For developing countries, the challenge is to move beyond their roles as mere suppliers of raw materials that power the AI industry. Copper, lithium and other minerals are important, but developing countries should not merely extract them while the greater value is created elsewhere. They must also become users, developers and producers of technology, moving up the value chain.

China's technological advancements offer an important lesson. It has challenged the notion that only a handful of countries can produce sophisticated technologies. This matters not simply because China competes in AI, but because its experience can inspire other countries to overcome the obstacles to technological development.

Such progress requires self-reliance, investment in infrastructure and opportunities to develop technological capabilities.

Ultimately, AI is not socially neutral. Its impact depends on how it is developed and used. The goal should be to enhance human capabilities, expand opportunities and ensure that technology serves people rather than the other way around.

AI's progress should therefore be measured not by the power of its models or the scale of its computing infrastructure but by whether more people can use it to improve their lives, whether more countries can develop their productive capacity, and whether the benefits of technological progress can reach beyond those who already possess the greatest resources.

AI's promise will remain incomplete until more of the world has the power — both literally and technologically — to take part.

Innovation is more than invention



John Ross is a former director of economic and business policy for the Mayor of London.

Innovation is often associated with new products: the next smartphone, a breakthrough technology or something that has never existed before. But innovation can take another form: making an existing product significantly cheaper through technological progress.

Economists call this cost innovation. A product that delivers most of the quality at a fraction of the price can reach a much larger market. The goal is not simply to cut costs or rely on cheap labor, but to use technology to improve production and make useful products more affordable.

China's industrial experience exemplifies this approach. Companies initially build competitiveness by producing quality goods at lower costs, then move toward product innovation. This stage is more demanding because research and development requires investment, and not every experiment succeeds.

BYD's journey illustrates how these stages can work together. Two decades ago, it was primarily a battery producer that had just ventured into automobile manufacturing. Its progress shows why cost competitiveness should not be seen as the opposite of technological advancement.

The value of AI does not depend only on how powerful a model is, but also on whether businesses, researchers and ordinary users can afford to put it to work. If the cost of using advanced technology is too high, its benefits may be limited to a few organizations. Lower costs can enable more people to experiment, develop applications and improve productivity.

Open-source technology can help widen these opportunities by allowing developers to access, use and adapt models.

This is particularly important for developing economies. Not every country can afford to build advanced technology from scratch.

More affordable tools can help businesses improve services, raise productivity and develop their own capabilities. The challenge is to move beyond merely using technology to adapting, improving and eventually producing it.

Cost innovation alone does not guarantee success. It must be accompanied by continued research, better products and the ability to learn from failure. Yet it offers a useful way to understand how technological progress can spread.

Innovation is not just about creating something new. It is also about making technology more accessible, improving what already exists and creating the conditions for the next breakthrough.

The hidden cost of global efficiency

In March 2021, a container ship ran aground in the Suez Canal, bringing one of the world's busiest trade routes to a standstill for many days. The incident was a reminder of how closely connected the global economy had become — and how quickly a local disruption could affect businesses and markets around the world.

Modern trade depends on speed. Companies seek to reduce costs, shorten delivery times and move goods from producers to consumers as efficiently as possible. Yet the systems designed to maximize efficiency can also become vulnerable when an unexpected disruption occurs. The challenge is not to abandon efficiency, but to balance it with resilience.



Hal Tagma is an associate professor in the Department of Politics and International Affairs at Northern Arizona University, United States.

History offers an unusual example of how people respond when trade routes are blocked. After the Suez Canal closed in 1967, 14 merchant ships were stranded in the Great Bitter Lake. Their crews remained there for years, unable to resume their journeys. Under difficult circumstances, they formed an association, organized sporting events and even issued their own postage stamps.

They could not reopen the canal, but they found ways to maintain a sense of community and keep daily life going. Their experience demonstrated a simple but important lesson: when circumstances are beyond people's control, cooperation and creativity can make a difference.

The contrast between these two episodes is instructive. The 2021 blockage revealed the vulnerability of a highly connected trading system. The stranded crews of the Great Bitter Lake showed how people can adapt when normal arrangements break down. Together, the stories point to a broader question: how can the global economy remain efficient without becoming excessively dependent on systems that have little room for disruption?

Resilience and efficiency are sometimes treated as competing priorities. Maintaining backup capacity, alternative routes or additional inventories can raise costs during normal times. But having no alternatives can prove far more expensive when a major disruption occurs. Businesses and economies must therefore consider not only how to optimize everyday operations, but also how to prepare for unexpected events.

Technology can help here. Better information systems, improved logistics and more effective planning can make supply chains more responsive.

The experience of the stranded crews is a reminder that cooperation need not wait for the ideal circumstances. Even when larger problems cannot be resolved immediately, people can still find practical ways to respond to shared challenges.

No trading system can eliminate uncertainty, and no single solution can prevent every disruption. But economies can become better prepared by combining efficiency with flexibility and by recognizing the value of cooperation.

Global trade depends on ships, ports and infrastructure. It also depends on the people who keep goods moving and find ways forward when normal routes are blocked. True resilience lies not in preventing every disruption, but in ensuring that when one occurs, the system can adapt and recover.

Building trust in the global economy

For decades, the international economic system has helped countries trade, invest and grow through increasingly interconnected markets. Today, economic activity depends not only on the movement of goods, but also on technology, transport corridors, banking, currencies and payment systems. These connections create opportunities for growth, but they also raise an important question: how can we make the global economy more stable and resilient?

Economic interdependence has brought considerable benefits. Businesses can source materials from different markets, reach customers across borders and use established infrastructure to move goods efficiently. Yet when critical supply chains or financial networks face disruptions, the effects can spread beyond individual companies or countries.

Stability therefore requires more than efficiency. Businesses and economies must consider how to manage risks, diversify supply sources and maintain alternatives when unexpected disruptions occur. Depending too heavily on a single supplier, transport route or essential service can leave an otherwise efficient system vulnerable. Building resilience means ensuring that economic connections remain reliable even when conditions change.



Glenn Diesen is a professor of international relations at the University of South-Eastern Norway.

Technology and infrastructure are central to this effort. Advances in manufacturing, logistics and digital systems can improve productivity and make supply chains more responsive. Reliable transport links and effective banking and payment networks are equally important. As these systems become more closely connected, their development must be accompanied by appropriate standards, clear rules and effective coordination.

Governance, however, cannot be treated as a purely technical exercise. International economic activities involve different markets, institutions and priorities. Cooperation requires communication, mutual understanding and mechanisms that allow participants to address shared challenges.

International organizations and multilateral cooperation can help provide a framework for such efforts. As new technologies and industries develop, existing rules and institutions may need to adapt. The challenge is to establish arrangements that reflect changing economic realities while remaining practical, transparent and inclusive. Countries need opportunities to participate in emerging industries, develop new capabilities and benefit from cross-border cooperation.

There is no single formula for ensuring economic stability. Different economies face different risks, but share an interest in reliable supply chains, predictable financial arrangements and effective channels for cooperation.

A more resilient global economy does not require countries to eliminate their interdependence. It requires a better balance between efficiency and security, national capabilities and international cooperation, and technological progress and sound governance.

Ultimately, stability depends on more than the strength of individual economies. It also depends on whether the systems connecting them can adapt to change, manage uncertainty and continue to support shared economic development. Strengthening these foundations is essential to building confidence in the global economy and ensuring that its benefits remain widely accessible.

The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Zhu Songling

Lai's 'city upon a hill' dream masks a separatist agenda

In his so-called Double-Ten speech on Oct 10, Lai Ching-te, leader of the Taiwan region, portrayed himself as a guardian of peace, a defender of democracy and a promoter of prosperity and spoke at length about building a "city upon a hill".

However, the speech was rife with separatist claims and advocacy of "Taiwan independence".

Lai continues to resist reunification and distort historical facts relating to World War II in his attempt to challenge the undeniable truth that Taiwan is a part of China.

No matter how attractively Lai packages his "Taiwan independence" agenda, he cannot mask its true intent to separate Taiwan from China. And no matter how much he tries to exaggerate the role of external forces, he cannot alter the fundamental reality that Taiwan is a part of China. His so-called "city upon a hill" cannot sustain the separatist illusion.

First, Lai's pursuit of separatism under the banner of democracy can't change historical and legal facts.

Marking the 30th anniversary of the island's leadership election system, he claimed that Taiwan's future should be decided by the "Taiwan people" as defined by the Democratic Progressive Party. He also repeatedly referred to Taiwan as a "country", attempting to use the island's electoral system as a political basis for his separatist claims.

However, elections and political systems cannot be used to alter sovereignty or deny the shared rights and responsibilities of all Chinese people, including Taiwan compatriots, regarding the future of the country. Such attempts are fundamentally flawed and practically harmful.

More troubling is Lai's attempt to invoke WWII history and his claim that history should not be "distorted". He linked the issue to the so-called "survival rights" of the "people" on the island as defined by the DPP authorities. It was a clear attempt to reinterpret history and justify separatist arguments.

History cannot be rewritten, legal principles cannot be denied, and the fact that both sides of the Taiwan Strait belong to one China cannot be changed.

By confusing Taiwan's return to China after World War II with the political confrontation that arose after 1949, Lai is attempting to distort historical facts and undermine national unity. Such political manipulation cannot change the nature of the Taiwan question or challenge the one-China principle.

Second, the military expansion will only heighten tensions across the Taiwan Strait. Lai claims that increasing defense spending is aimed at "deterring war" and creating conditions for dialogue based on so-called "equality" and "dignity".

However, behind these claims lies a clear push to expand military preparations and pursue "Taiwan independence" through military means.

In his speech, Lai proposed transforming Taiwan's strengths in semiconductors, information and communications technology, and precision manufacturing into defense capabilities, while incorporating military industries, security technologies and artificial intelligence into strategic industries.

The intention is clearly to deepen the integration of technology industries with military development and bring more economic resources into a system designed for confrontation.

Turning technological strengths, which should be used to promote economic growth and improve people's livelihoods, into tools for political and military competition only increases risks for Taiwan's industries.

This approach could also involve more enterprises in military cooperation with external forces, disrupting normal cross-Strait industrial and supply chain cooperation.

Taiwan's semiconductor and technology industries, developed over decades, should not become political bargaining chips for separatist purposes. Linking these industries with a "Taiwan independence" agenda will neither provide genuine security nor alter the cross-Strait balance. Instead, it will only increase tensions and impose greater economic and security costs on businesses and residents on the island.

Third, Lai's reliance on external forces cannot change the reality of the one-China framework.

In his speech, Lai claimed that he welcomed dialogue between the Chinese mainland and the United States to manage competition, while at the same time calling for closer cooperation among so-called democratic partners in the "Indo-Pacific" region.

These remarks reveal an attempt to leverage external forces to advance separatist goals.

Turning to outside powers and provoking confrontation cannot change the historical reality that both sides of the Taiwan Strait belong to one China. Today, 183 countries have established diplomatic relations with China on the basis of the one-China principle.

The UN General Assembly Resolution 2758 has made it clear that there is only one China in the world, the Taiwan region is an inalienable part of China's territory, and the Government of the People's Republic of China is the sole legal government representing the whole of China.

Seeking "Taiwan independence" with support from external forces and turning the island into a tool in geopolitical competition will only place the security and well-being of Taiwan compatriots at greater risk.

"Taiwan independence" pursued through external support has no future, and attempts to achieve it through military means are doomed to fail.

No force can stop the historical trend toward national reunification.

Persisting on this path will only put Taiwan compatriots at risk and will ultimately be rejected by history.

The author is a professor at the Institute of Taiwan Studies, Beijing Union University.
The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

AUSE01Z01MA - V1

THE AUSTRALIAN

Albanese needs to use real intelligence on AI dealings

Government is open to manipulation on energy and copyright

The Albanese government is playing a dangerous game in its haste to embrace the global tech giants in the race to build data centres for artificial intelligence. A domestic AI industry is an important objective but the government must be careful to maintain a relationship in which the digital behemoths serve Australia, and not the other way around.

The federal government has weakened its hand by taking a prescriptive approach to energy. Insisting that data centres use only renewable energy exposes a government weakness that is open to be exploited.

There has been overreach by the government in its attempts to police the future of online communications under the guise of online protection. And there are signs it is willing to give in too easily to demands that AI companies have free access to copyright works to train their models.

The wayward behaviour of digital agents set loose by AI, which were able to gain access to non-public areas of government websites, should be a wake-up call about the power of the new technology and the way in which big AI will seek to downplay its liability. All companies must be held responsible for the work undertaken by AI agents they have created. And AI companies must ultimately be held responsible for the products they put to market.

Revelations on Tuesday that the Prime Minister's office had intervened to edit a letter drafted by the co-leaders of a parliamentary committee on AI should ring alarm bells. Independent senator David Pocock has claimed the revisions were evidence the major parties were working together to potentially get a preconceived outcome rather than actually listening to experts and the community on copyright protections.

Senator Pocock said he was increasingly concerned that the work of the committee was being used to "serve a political purpose rather than provide genuine parliamentary scrutiny and policy input". AI frontier labs such as OpenAI and Anthropic have been lobbying the government to loosen copyright rules so they could take in copyrighted work to train their AI models in Australia.

Mr Albanese has said that "no company should use Australian books, music, art or news to build or train AI without the artist's control". But leaked policy proposals last month showed the government was considering changes that would require creatives to label their content with "opt-out" messages, which critics said would "flip the onus" on copyright. The Coalition has said that doing nothing was not an option and the issue needed to be addressed in the interests of Australian copyright holders. Both major parties must be careful what they wish for.

The pushback against AI's free use of copyright material is an international issue. Large newspapers in the United States, led by The New York Times, have sued Microsoft and OpenAI alleging that ChatGPT and Microsoft's Copilot trained on millions of pieces of Times content without permission. The case has uncovered evidence that top staff at OpenAI and Microsoft knew that scraping news websites may eventually damage or even destroy those publications, but did it anyway.

In Australia, AI companies want a regime that legally permits models to be trained using local content. One suggestion has been for a scheme modelled on the Public Lending Rights Act, which was designed to compensate Australian authors and publishers for lost sales from books being available in libraries. Money would be paid into consolidated revenue and distributed by the government.

Such a scheme represents a plan for copyright expropriation. It would let AI companies off too easily, do lasting damage to the national interest and be open to partisan manipulation by government.

Taxing from high moral ground

Anti-productivity red tape is the true measure of smug superiority

Jim Chalmers has declared the true mission of serious progressives is to convince the disenchanted they are required to change for their own good. "And you do that by starting not from a place of smug moral superiority but from a place of genuine respect and understanding that I've carried with me around my local community in Queensland ... over a lifetime living there," Dr Chalmers said.

Someone must tell the Treasurer Labor's anti-productivity insistence on regulatory overreach on trusts, capital gains tax and climate change is the true measure of smug moral superiority Dr Chalmers is seeking to deny. The now ubiquitous demands to repair the budget will not be satisfied by sending out the tax office to raid the coffers of small business and the moderately well-off. Nor will it be solved by adding layers of red tape to enterprise that further compromise the productivity fight that is supposed to be the signature reform agenda of the Albanese government's second term.

Dr Chalmers, still under fire for his big-taxing and spending budget, must heed the message from domestic and international markets that big government is the problem, not the solution. The International Monetary Fund is the latest to call on governments everywhere to urgently prioritise budget repair and rein in ballooning levels of public debt. The IMF has further downgraded its forecasts for Australia's economic growth next year to just 1.6 per cent, and, despite an expected moderation, Australia's inflation challenge will continue to rank among the worst in the developed world. S&P Ratings this month joined a chorus of experienced voices claiming Labor and the Reserve Bank were pulling the Australian economy in different directions. In response, the Albanese government has undermined confidence in the housing market, unleashed a war on accumulated capital, and set the tax office loose on a hardline campaign to recover accumulated interest on debts from errors that are decades old and previously unknown. Dr Chalmers has tightened the screws on trusts and is facing demands from the Greens to do more.

Down from the high moral ground, Angus Taylor has shown a "genuine respect and understanding" for the needs of businesses that pay the bills. A Coalition government would scrap mandatory climate reporting to cut costly paperwork for businesses and lift productivity. Scrapping Scope 3 emissions reporting would save each business $245,000 in the first year and $161,700 a year after that. For small and medium businesses, removing Group 3 entities from the mandatory emissions reporting regime would save $30,000 to $70,000 each in the first year, then $40,000 a year. Smugness aside, a successful nation cannot be built on the back of ticket-clippers.

Nobel prize further diminished

Whatever residual credibility the Nobel Peace prize had – and it wasn't much – has been destroyed by this year's award going to the virulently anti-Israel South African jurist Navanethem "Navi" Pillay. Ms Pillay, 85, who was also awarded the 2025 Sydney Peace Prize, is no Nelson Mandela, if that's what the Nobel Committee was hoping for. She gained her reputation as a judge on various UN-linked courts – notably including the International Criminal Court between 2003 and 2008 – that have shown shameless and interminable bias against Israel and the US. It has made a mockery of the ICC's pretensions to be administering justice.

As the UN's high commissioner for human rights from 2008 to 2014, she was similarly preoccupied by Israel, in 2025 chairing the UN committee that claimed Israel had committed genocide in Gaza in the aftermath of Hamas's October 7, 2023, massacre of 1200 people. The report, of course, provided no evidence of genocide or genocidal intent, and ignored significant contradictory evidence. With Orwellian absurdity, however, it treated Hamas's barbaric atrocities as quasi-justifiable responses to Israel's actions.

No wonder, in responding to Ms Pillay's peace prize, Israel's Foreign Ministry maintained she would be the frontrunner if ever there were an award "for lies, hatred and blood libels ... her role in the relentless, politically motivated demonisation of Israel and promotion of the genocide lie speaks volumes". "Awarding Pillay isn't a recognition of justice, it's the grotesque weaponisation of an award to legitimise anti-Israel hatred and prejudice," the Israeli statement added.

Few who believe institutions such as the UN and the ICC have an overriding duty to show fairness and equity in their conduct will disagree with that. It is no surprise that within hours of Ms Pillay being awarded the Nobel prize, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio announced a campaign of sanctions targeted at the ICC that will "ban transactions with this rogue court, cutting off (its) resources and crippling its ability to operate".

Neither the US nor Israel are members of the ICC, which is based in The Hague. But 125 UN members, including Australia, are. We stump up some $10m of taxpayer dollars each year to help maintain a court that repeatedly spends an inordinate amount of time preoccupied by the alleged iniquities of Israel while largely ignoring the abuses being committed by much of the rest of the world. Mr Rubio, in launching the Trump administration's campaign to cripple the court, made a point of asking America's allies to join in the endeavour. The Albanese government should not ignore that request.

LETTERS

Gullibility, deception and complacency all on the cards

The naivete and deception in the discussion surrounding credit card surcharges from all perspectives are painfully disappointing.

First, the government's pollsters can read public gullibility among those they need to keep them in office to a tee. It doesn't matter that card surcharge removal won't lead to cheaper prices, and they know it. It's the announcement that matters.

On the other hand, there is a bewildering presumption that small businesses, which have for their own convenience opted for card-only transactions, are incapable of including that operating cost among their other overheads.

And lastly, card transaction fees aren't a cost recovery vehicle for the banks but the funding source of all the loyalty programs dangled before the consumer.

All in all, this is a First World problem that is the hallmark of complacency.

Terry Walmsley, Benowa, Qld

After pointing out the injustice and inconsistencies of both the government and the ATO on credit card charges, Judith Sloan asks some interesting questions ("Surcharge ban a Labor-approved 'reverse Robin Hood'", 13/10).

Did the Albanese government really believe that small-business operators could afford to absorb bank charges without passing them on to customers?

It was also interesting to learn that large retail firms such as the supermarket chains enjoy a different rate from the banks to that imposed on small business. Perhaps it is because Labor regards small business, like farmers, as a hostile constituency that it is treated with indifference?

Sloan asks whether merchant fees charged by banks are reasonable and whether higher rates for late credit card payments are justified. But when she questions Labor's commitment to the free operation of the price mechanism she really hits a nerve. Take energy: in every case where free operation of this mechanism conflicts with its ideology, it is ignored or flouted.

John Morrissey, Hawthorn, Vic

Much has been written in recent weeks about the ATO deciding that it would no longer accept payments by credit card following the RBA disallowing it from recovering the banks' credit card payment fees; and the Treasurer stating that the government would step in and contribute hundreds of millions of dollars to cover those fees and thereby prevent small businesses that pay their tax by credit card from being affected.

It would be unfair for the nation's taxpayers, wage earners and businesses to have to subsidise those people choosing to pay their taxes by credit card.

The obvious solution to this problem is to apply the principle of "user pays". In other words, people using a credit card should pay their banks their fees themselves, not the ATO, shopkeepers or any other business.

Implementing this could be simple – the cardholder's bank could simply add its fees to the cardholder's statement at the end of each billing period.

Brian Lightfoot, Bairnsdale, Vic

Like the federal government, the ACTU lacks the fundamental understanding that you ought not to spend more than you earn.

Anthony Albanese has a simple solution for this dilemma, which is called debt, which is pushing this nation to the brink in the absence of productivity.

As ACTU secretary, Melissa Donnelly's role is to push for higher workers' pay and conditions but, like Anthony Albanese, she fails to accept the order of the "horse and cart", the horse being productivity and the cart being workers' entitlements.

So pushing for above-inflation pay rises will do nothing other than add even further cost-of-living pressure.

Donnelly also seems to be living in denial with her apparent criticism of Michele Bullock's reference to an unemployment rate of 5 per cent being a potential trigger to pull back the cash rate. Bullock's not aiming for a rise in unemployment. Unlike Donnelly, she's just facing reality.

Gary Tait, Ormond, Vic

The corollary to a recent survey where half of the respondents stated that the federal government should reduce its spending is that the other half supported high government intervention in the economy. Does this just go to prove that 50 per cent of voters are of below average intelligence?

Colin J. Agnew, Nedlands, WA

Royal commission overlooked Greens', unis' antisemitism

Greg Sheridan rightly points out the role of the Greens, both in Australia and internationally, in driving antisemitic prejudice and hatred ("The Greens movement drives Jew hatred", 13/10).

This is now so destructively embedded in universities at home and abroad, and yet has been barely touched on by the royal commission into antisemitism.

Aside from virulent Holocaust denial and denial of the atrocities of October 7, 2023, what has become increasingly popular, under the guise of legitimate criticism of the Jewish state of Israel, are blatantly false accusations and immoral inversions.

These include discussion of white settler colonisation, apartheid, open-air concentration camps and other elements of Holocaust denial such as portraying Israelis as Nazis and Israel of being guilty of genocide.

The latter was recently debunked in an open letter by more than 75 retired senior military leaders and legal experts in the US.

As Sheridan points out, the ultimate grotesque inversion was the passing of a formal resolution by the UK Greens that declared Zionism is racism and further declaring that modern Israel should not exist at all.

Alan Franklin, St Ives, NSW

Greg Sheridan paints a grim picture of the hard left and its strong antisemitism stance.

What has happened to Australia to drive this push to the hard left?

We were really the lucky country and the strong movement to the left by the Anthony Albanese government has destroyed Australia.

This hard left is also one of the main drivers of social division in Australia, which was formerly minimal and very seldom violent.

Marian Hinwood, Elsternwick, Vic

Rather than looking at whether there were major security and intelligence failures in the lead-up to the Bondi massacre, the inquiry should have had a much harder look at the major failures in the political decisions and policy failures in migration, intelligence and security.

Those failures are the cause of the current fractured society we live in.

Neil Forbes, Stratford, Qld

An unhealthy gap

Health insurers demonising medical specialists on gap charges masks that the biggest out-of-pocket costs patients face are due to often hidden exclusions in their cover.

The Medical Benefits Scheme hasn't kept pace with costs for more than a decade. So it's not surprising doctor gap fees go up. But it's paltry compared to insurance gaps.

A staggering 72 per cent of hospital insurance policyholders have exclusions in their cover. It may seem counterintuitive but insurers price people out of the gold cover and actively cold-call members to suggest they downgrade cover.

This saves on claims costs. Patients are increasingly getting caught out paying for silver cover, only to pay bills in the tens of thousands when sick or injured.

In demonising doctors, the Anthony Albanese government ignores health insurers' rampant profiteering.

As Sumich states, they annually pocket more than $2bn in record after-tax profits and $3.4bn in so-called management expenses.

All from your premiums. They short-change private hospitals by more than $1bn every year.

Sure, make doctors accountable. But don't be distracted from the real culprits.

Brett Heffernan, CEO, Australian Private Hospitals Association, Barton, ACT

AI bubble bursting?

"Firmus flop" is more like a victory for everyone (" 'Great loss for Australia': optimist Oli takes aim over Firmus flop", 12/10).

The Firmus fail shows the AI bubble is bursting, which will help creators, society and the environment, meaning less pollution-causing data centres churning out "AI slop" based on copyright theft.

This copyright theft by AI companies is described in Rod Sims' article ("Exceptionalism is no defence for AI companies' theft", 12/10), although he missed the best quote from the Microsoft director who said that AI companies are "making a complete mockery of fair use".

Chris Fitzgerald, Downer, ACT

Morality on death row

Matthew Syed's superbly written arguments against the resurrection of public executions in the Western world deserve as wide a readership as possible ("Hegseth 'death porn' fulfils jihadi martyrs' ultimate dreams", 13/10).

Do we want to sink to the level of the jihadis and the theocrats of Iran?

What is the point of an action that is brutish, morally repugnant and ultimately counter-productive?

Helen Jackson, Higgins, ACT


THE AUSTRALIAN

No end to ALP spend: taxpayers on hook for slew of new pay hikes

Trusts trap: ATO, Labor in twin hits

'Kind, generous' child rapist wins leniency because of deep connection to country

The Australian's front page, Tuesday, October 13

LAST POST

Treasurer Jim Chalmers needs to quickly grasp that his job is to reverse the soaring growth in spending and debt so Australia lives within its means, or hand over to some who can.

Barry Fox, Blackburn, Vic

There's another way to look at Labor's latest stuff-up. Before, I had a choice whether to pay the bill by card with a surcharge or by cash. Now I have no choice. Labor has removed my choice to get a discount for cash.

Ken Perry, Nedlands, WA

With the Treasurer possibly relying on Wayne Swan as his guide, it is no wonder his performance is so woeful. He may need to look elsewhere. I'm sure Peter Costello would be pleased to assist.

Peter Claughton, Farrer, ACT

Anthony Albanese and Jim Chalmers perhaps have an objective to destroy the market economy and replace it with a government-knows-best economy and social system. They are aware of the damage but not so aware of the many failures of their socialist ideology in other places.

Colin J. Agnew, Nedlands, WA

Which Australian corporate will generously offer Jim Chalmers a fancy new job and great salary package to remove him from the Treasury benches in order to save our country's economy?

Geoff Farnell, Buderim, Qld

When the going gets tough, the tough get going ("Lib leader rejects Frydenberg's reform of GST", 12/10). John Howard was tough in the 1998 election. Angus Taylor needs to toughen up by the May 2028 election.

Ross McDonald, Gordon, NSW

How will the Coalition and One Nation get thousands of visa overstayers, let alone people on bridging visas with work rights, to depart, when the black market flourishes and some employers continue to exploit cheap labour?

Frederika Steen, Chapel Hill, Qld

Firmus to Softus, this was not a rags-to-riches tale of some nerdy kid; this was a blatant opportunists' float.

Peter Armitage, Mont Albert North, Vic

Business as usual: the Russians are ignoring what Trump says on energy ceasefires or fuel supplies to the US.

Maris Dabars, Murray Bridge, SA

I am already suffering from a severe case of PTSD (Preposterous Trump Stress Disorder). I am not sure I can survive another two years.

Jim Taylor, Brisbane, Qld

For Vladimir Putin and his pointless war on Ukraine, Donald Trump is the gift that just keeps on giving.

Russ Fathers, Tweed Heads, NSW

Send letters to letters@theaustralian.com.au (no attachments); GPO Box 4162, Sydney, NSW, 2001; Fax 02 9288 3077. Emails and letters should bear a full postal address and day and night telephone numbers. Letters to the Editor of The Australian are submitted on condition that Nationwide News Pty Ltd as publisher of The Australian may edit and has the right to, and license third parties to, reproduce in electronic form and communicate these letters.

Letters online: Letters from this page are published on The Australian's website – and online readers have the opportunity to add their own comments. To join the debate go to www.theaustralian.com.au/letters

BOOKSHELF | ANDREW BILLEN

A great storyteller's criminally cliched final chapter

Jeffrey Archer was a great storyteller. I know this because I once sat in an Italian restaurant in Belgravia where he was loudly entertaining a group of what looked like foreign businessmen with stories from his days as the deputy chairman of the Conservative Party under Margaret Thatcher.

One anecdote triumphantly ended: "So I said, 'Ah, good of you to join us, prime minister'", and truly this set his table on a roar. I was happy to find the old punchline still in commission – "'Good of you to join us,' quipped Corporal Hurst" – in Adam & Eve, his final novel, published the day after his death, aged 86.

The world knows Archer was a great storyteller. The data in his obituaries was conclusive. His website records that his work has been published in more than 47 languages with international sales "passing 300 million". The books, the website goes on, have attracted 850,000-plus five-star reviews. In the 50th year of his second career, as a novelist, the former and disgraced politician deserves our congratulations. He died a success, and a remarkable one.

Adam & Eve, its title a doff to his 1979 bestseller, Kane and Abel, is remarkable too, an ambitious/bonkers hybrid, mainly Downton Abbey but with a substantial chunk of wartime espionage towards the end. It is being marketed as a love story between a beautiful, independent-minded noblewoman, Eve(lina), and Adam, the handsome, assumption-bustingly bright son of a shepherd. Poetically, the pair are born on different social tiers of the same Norfolk country estate, but on the same day. "Divided by class. United by love" is the tagline.

So what of Archer's prose? Let me first praise two phrases in the book. One is "perpetual fiance", which, when you resign yourself to the Adam-Eve romance being one long logjam, is rather funny. Another felicity nestles within a description of a spymaster's office: "Two photographs (both family), three phones (one red), four chairs (one comfortable)."

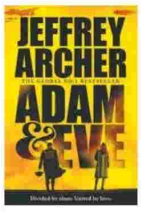
Otherwise, over 480 pages, the writing is, for one thing, infested with cliches. This is a novel where there is "not a moment to spare", vintage wines "gather dust in the cellar", and cars "skid to a halt" on gravel paths. People, some of them "ashen-faced", wear "freshly ironed shirts" or manage "a wry smile". These descriptors are no more than Archer's characters deserve, however, since they are cliches themselves: the kind and widowed earl, his bounder of a younger brother; the dowager countess who is Maggie Smith's Lady Crawley but with suffragist sympathies; Adam and Eve, whose beauty matches their virtue. The crime of cliche is compounded by Archer's repetitiveness, his use of space-fillers such as the full batting card for a village cricket match, and sentences so inelegant they plead for their creator's renewed attention. "He was well aware that if things did not go as he planned he would, as Greta had warned, be tortured to within an inch of his life, when a firing squad would come as a blessed relief." (As does the end of the sentence.)

Archer thanks two historians for their scholarship and help. He needed more of both. But, you say, old Jeffrey could certainly spin a yarn. I concede your point, although the plotting in this novel is probably not his best. The book's pace is sluggish until war is mercifully announced (Chamberlain's radio address is all here). When it speeds up, it relies on coincidences so preposterous that Churchill himself compares affairs to a John Buchan plot.

The plotting is of some psychological interest, however, in the context of Archer's imprisonment in 2001 for perjury. Any number of plot points rely on conspiracies to cheat, the majority of them, such as getting a chess opponent drunk before a match, smiled upon because they are committed in the greater interest, that is the interests of their protagonists.

The book ends with a final sleight of hand. Adam & Eve is fretfully concerned with the rights of women to inherit titles (although, to be fair, Eve, who craves downward mobility and envies the innocent promiscuity of the rural rough, hardly cares). A postscript donates us Lord Archer's speech to the upper house in 1998 in which he introduced a bill to remove distinction by sex in the succession to the Crown, the author smugly noting: "The Bill received Royal Assent on 25 April 2013." Now, the law of succession did indeed change that day, but the legislation that was passed was not Archer's private member's bill but that of David Cameron's government. What the hell, though? Archer could make his readers believe anything. I am glad he died suddenly but peacefully, between paragraphs apparently, in no doubt of this.

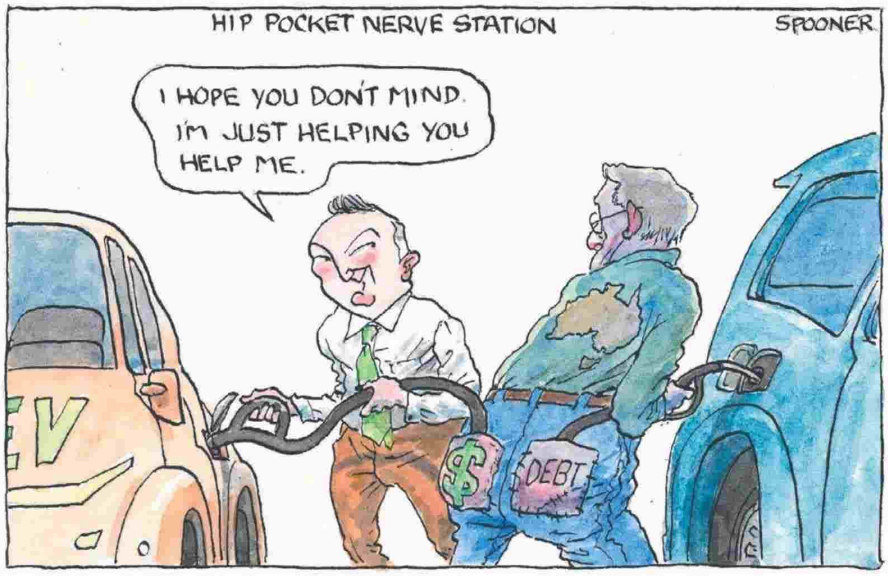
THE TIMES



Adam & Eve
By Jeffrey Archer
HarperCollins, 480pp, $32.99

CULTURE
More book reviews in **The Weekend Australian**

DAILY CARTOON | JOHN SPOONER



JANET ALBRECHTSEN

Foundations of Libs' 'broad church' need rebuilding



The so-called broad church of the Liberal Party is in ruins. Its foundations have crumbled at least over the past decade from the forces of conflicting ideas. The church needs to be rebuilt with ideas that cement the party's future.

The rot set in with the Coalition spendathon and illiberal response during Covid. The pandemic did deserve a loosening of the government's purse strings – but severing the purse strings entirely was hardly Liberal. Decay started too when the Liberal Party cast off its rational economic credentials to champion progressive ideology about climate change.

That move did not rescue so-called teal seats, where voters are immune from the costs of climate action. It only served to tell voters outside wealthy seats, who cannot afford to virtue-signal, that Liberals don't care about energy costs.

It is good news that Liberal leader Angus Taylor told the CPAC conference on the weekend that he will scrap net zero in government. Still, it takes a long time for voters to believe this newfound rationality is a rock-solid conviction from a party that embraced left-wing climate ideology for years.

The rot grew when many in the Liberal Party abandoned cultural convictions. The fact that many Liberals took leadership roles championing the voice was a betrayal of the most basic tenet for conservatives: that every human being must be treated equally under our founding document, the Constitution.

If you didn't support the dogma on net zero, you were treated as a philistine. If you didn't agree with the voice, you were likely labelled a racist. This is how the left treats freedom of speech – agree with it, or it will shame you into silence or submission.

The complete surrender of the Liberal Party on traditional centre-right cultural issues was so abject that some Liberals – even former prime ministers – adopted a deliberate strategy. Don't talk about the culture wars, they said. Instead, discussing immigration became racist, expressing gender-critical views was hateful and questioning DEI was straight-out oppression.

The problem for the Liberal Party is its left flank. Can we please stop calling them "moderates"; there is nothing moderate about them. More comfortable shuffling around the left ecosystem of Labor-Green-teals, they cannot avoid responsibility for the cultural and economic carnage under way in this country.

The best measure of the Liberals' left-wing flank is the rise of Pauline Hanson's One Nation on the right. Had the Liberal Party remained a broad church where both conservative and small-l liberals shared the pulpit, it would not be in such dire straits today.

John Howard's formulation of the broad church worked for decades. A year out from his removal as prime minister, he said: "You sometimes have to get the builders in to put in the extra pew on both sides of the aisle to make sure that everybody is accommodated."

There is only so much room for additional pews within a serious political party. At some point, competing convictions of left-wing Liberals and conservative Liberals can no longer be sensibly housed under the same roof. The result has been a contrived farrago of policies that has turned the broad church into a shambolic share house.

The neutering of the Liberal brand at the federal level is an inevitable consequence of the left's domination in the states.

Moira Deeming may have been far from perfect as a Liberal MP, but she should never have been cast out for believing a woman is a woman in the way that John Pesutto did when he led the Victorian Liberals.

Matt Kean should never have been allowed to install climate zealotry as the received truth in the NSW branch. In South Australia, some Liberals are reeling after Alex Antic took the reins of the party. Antic is accused of being too close to Hanson forces. As sure as an apple drops from a tree, and a pendulum swings one way then another, there is an equal reaction when the left overplays its hand.

Here are three steps necessary to start reconstituting a resilient and consequential broad church for the current era.

> Had the Liberal Party remained a broad church where both conservative and small-l liberals shared the pulpit, it would not be in such dire straits today

First, the simple one. Expel Malcolm Turnbull from the Liberal Party. The Turnbull scab is not one the party needs to tend to anymore. So, rip off the old, fraying Band-Aid. If Turnbull wants to play martyr, let him. It can't be any worse than it is right now.

He is a central part of the left milieu, beloved by the ABC and every climate change zealot, cheered by Labor every time he attacks a Liberal. Booting him out of a party that, surreptitiously, he seems to have done his level best to damage at every election since his ousting will signal a new era for a Liberal Party.

Second, the Liberals must tell voters how they will deal with One Nation. Not talking about the elephant in the room won't work. Taylor tried that at CPAC on the weekend, and it was a disaster.

It's a good start when Liberal senator Sarah Henderson says that "we are aligned with One Nation on one critical mission – to get rid of the worst, most extreme left-wing Labor government in living memory". But it begs the question of how?

It is not enough to steal One Nation policies or declare that the Liberals are now right-wing, when for years the Liberals have been veering all over the road.

Liberals need to figure out a way to work with the renegade Hanson, her unnecessary vitriol (calling Taylor "a smarmy management consultant") notwithstanding – and tell voters their plan. Sooner, not later.

The country has been run by a broad church of left-wing forces, not just in federal parliament, but across our major institutions, from the ABC to universities to schools and bureaucracies. And that has left the country in a shambles, economically and culturally.

While Hanson and her party have considerable weaknesses, politics is a relative game – many seem to think One Nation can't possibly be any worse than the major parties. As one Australian reader said recently: "I don't necessarily want the full Hanson, but I want enough of her to course correct for what is going on today."

One Nation is no longer a minor movement having its moment, just like the Greens in 2019 or the teals in 2022. The party crosses demographics. Based on polls so far, Hanson has become the unofficial opposition leader.

Finally, if Taylor wants to reconstitute the broad church, it is likely he can only do it by ditching his left flank and embracing his right.

ED NEWTON-REX

No free lunch: tech giants can't get away with creative 'theft'

There is no such thing as a free lunch unless, apparently, you are a billion-dollar US technology company. Reports suggest the Australian government is considering upending the law to placate overseas AI companies. Under the new proposals, the likes of OpenAI and Anthropic would be allowed to build their products on Australian soil using the life's work of the country's creatives, without asking permission – something that is currently, and rightly, illegal.

I've worked in AI for over a decade, and I can tell you this would be a gigantic coup for those AI companies, while bringing Australia virtually no benefit whatsoever.

In the wake of AI cyber-hacking sprees and concerted attempts by AI agents to deceive humans, politicians everywhere now want to ride the AI wave – fuelled, of course, by Big Tech lobbyists. "We must build our own frontier models," leaders with no understanding of building frontier models cry. This is a fantasy. Various US companies – Google, for instance, and Meta – have poured tens of billions of dollars into trying to catch up with the players at the frontier, to no avail. Weakening copyright law will not magically acquire for Australia a model more powerful than OpenAI's.

What it will do is inflict irreparable harm on writers, musicians, artists and all manner of creative workers. These AI models compete with the people on whose work they are trained: as they get better, people with no skill increasingly use them to churn out books, and articles, and songs, and images, destroying real creatives' chance to make a living. Legalising the theft of their work, so foreign companies can more easily build the machines that will replace them, accelerates this harm exponentially. The government is considering letting creatives "opt out" of this strip-mining of their artistic endeavour. But this false concession has already been cast on to the scrap heap of worthless ideas in other countries, a proposal so unfair it would be laughable if the stakes for working people weren't so high.

Do we require people to "opt out" of their houses being robbed? Of their bank accounts being raided? Of course not. If the richest people in the world want to make themselves richer by using the work of their less well-off but more talented neighbours, those neighbours deserve a chance to negotiate a fair price. Forcing them to "opt out" of unwillingly participating in a free-for-all simply ensures most of them will never get that chance.

To make matters worse, this is lazy policymaking. The government's concerns are primarily questions of national security: without frontier models, how does Australia protect itself? But the proposals are so naively designed that they would go vastly further than needed.

As a simple example, consider that they would allow OpenAI to train its models on Kylie Minogue's music. Superb as Kylie's music is, it will do little to deter hackers. Nor, for that matter, are the photographs of Tracey Moffatt required to build up the nation's cyber defences. The solutions the tech bros propound, unsurprisingly, are those that benefit them the most – not those the country actually needs.

The reason US companies are pushing the government so hard on this is that they are desperate for a backup. AI companies face well over 100 lawsuits in the US over their use of copyrighted work to train their models, and there are indications from the Copyright Office that some may not go their way.

> Do we require people to 'opt out' of their houses being robbed? Of their bank accounts being raided? Of course not

US law is nuanced – it does not grant companies a broad right to train on people's work of the kind the Australian government is proposing. Australia bowing to their demands would be a gift of unimaginable proportions: it would mean that losing lawsuits in the US would have little impact on their operations. It would mean permission to exploit the work of creatives everywhere – something no other Western country has granted them. And this point is critical: this decision doesn't just impact Australian creatives. It would legalise the theft in Australian data centres of the work of every creative in the world. As a British composer, there is little I can do but implore the government to see sense, and not hand my music to companies that are putting my friends and colleagues out of work.

In 2024, the British government proposed something almost identical to what the Australian government is now suggesting. But creatives around the country made it clear they would not stand for the government giving away what was not its to do so. The government saw sense, and rolled back its plans.

We should all hope the Australian government does the same. As every poll on this topic shows, the general public overwhelmingly believes AI companies should be required to ask permission before training on people's work. What the government is proposing is extremely unpopular, with virtually no supporters but the AI companies themselves. Do not legalise theft; support your country's hardworking creatives instead.

Ed Newton-Rex is a composer and the founder of the AI non-profit Fairly Trained.

NICK DYRENFURTH

Greens denounce US-style imperialism ... then embrace it

The defeat of Green Party leader Zack Polanski at the Holborn and St Pancras by-election in Britain should puncture a fantasy taking hold among the Australian Greens: that the angriest and most online voters are the electorate itself.

Labour's Sagal Abdi-Wali won 45.2 per cent; Polanski came second on 32.8 per cent. That is a terrible result by the standard the Greens set only five months ago. In the May local elections, the Greens-led alliance trailed Labour by just four points across the constituency and made historic gains elsewhere in London. But with Polanski personally on the ballot and Andy Burnham newly installed as Prime Minister, Labour easily saw off the Greens. It must be galling for the party to lose to a Somali Muslim refugee after so often treating people like her as victims in need of rescue.

Australian Greens leaders may not heed this stunning result or listen to me. For years I have told Labor activists that a party whose membership is less than half of 1 per cent of the adult population should not mistake its internal culture for normal Australian opinion. The same lesson applies to the Greens. A party can win members, volunteers and social media arguments while losing the very voters needed to actually win seats in parliament.

The left-of-centre electorate is broader and less ideological than any activist base. It includes people who want action on climate change, but who also have children to raise, mortgages to pay and little appetite for politics as permanent moral theatre. Millennial voters – aged between 29 and 45 – are growing older. They are not abandoning progressive values; rather many are choosing Labor as a party of government over the Greens as a vehicle for protest.

That brings us to the second lesson: stop trying to be a poor man's Zohran Mamdani or Polanski.

Max Chandler-Mather's proposed Fair Go Grocers scheme takes the New York mayor's modest plan for five city-owned supermarkets and inflated it into a $25.1bn national chain of 624 stores, including forced acquisition of 200 Coles and Woolworths outlets. That is less a local experiment than an exercise in poorly thought-out, Soviet-style nationalisation.

Mamdani's populist leftism is calibrated for the young, urban, financially insecure cohort. There is nothing wrong with borrowing ideas. There is something wrong with borrowing an entire political brand and assuming it will travel unchanged to Australia.

For a party that regularly denounces American cultural and economic imperialism, the Greens show a striking susceptibility to its intellectual fashions. They need an Australian politics capable of speaking to people outside activist group chats.

The third lesson is more urgent: grow up on the Middle East. The Greens' progress after the 2022 election was stymied by their extreme approach to the Israel-Hamas war and Gaza tragedy. The party may regard its posture as proof of moral virtue. Many voters see a movement that has made a complex conflict into a test of ideological purity familiar from Trotskyite student politics and fanned the flames of antisemitism that reached their violent apogee at Bondi.

Days before the Holborn and St Pancras by-election, the UK Greens passed a conference motion declaring "Zionism is racism". Polanski, an anti-Zionist Jew raised in a Zionist household, did not vote, having left the conference to campaign in the by-election. His prostration before the baying anti-Israel left still counted for nothing at the ballot box.

Former UK Greens leader Caroline Lucas says the motion crossed a red line. She is right: the motion was racist and discriminatory, and its proposed one-state solution would end Israel. But her attempted nuance shows how little the party understands the problem. Lucas says the Israeli government's actions in Gaza amount to genocide, while arguing Zionism is both a response to racism and a racist and settler-colonial project.

She places the whole Jewish national movement inside a European colonial frame. Roughly half of Israel's Jews are Mizrahi or Sephardi, with family histories rooted in the Middle East and North Africa. Their presence does not erase Palestinian dispossession or national claims. It does make the easy picture of pale European colonisers replacing an indigenous people radically incomplete.

That is same logic Australian Greens leader David Shoebridge has indulged. In a June podcast episode called "How Australia's Government Serves Israel and Washington, Not Aussies", he was asked whether the government had been "hijacked by Zionists". Shoebridge did not challenge the conspiratorial premise, claiming that "the mask is being ripped off". When later asked about repairing the Greens' relationship with Jewish Australians, he pointed to working with Jews "fighting genocide".

The pattern is unmistakeable: the acceptable Jew is the one who echoes the party's indictment of Israel; the rest are "genocide" apologists. This was not an isolated example. In August, Greens senator Nick McKim told the Senate that Albanese Labor had been "captured by Zionist interests". When Liberal senator James Paterson objected, McKim told him: "You're captured by Zionist interests as well."

There is another delusion Shoebridge has engaged in: that the Greens can replace Labor. After four decades of existence, the Greens hold just one lower house seat. Labor took only eight years to form its first government and 13 years from its formation to win majority government nationally. Yet every new Greens leader arrives with the same fantastical promise, like the poor souls who visit Jerusalem convinced they are the Messiah.

Polanski's humiliation exposed the gap between Greens self-importance and electoral reality. It presents the Australian Greens with a stark electoral choice. They can continue cosplaying as charismatic overseas radicals or learn to speak to voters beyond their activist base – a task requiring two qualities in short supply in Green circles: humility and self-awareness.

Nick Dyrenfurth is executive director of the John Curtin Research Centre.

JANE HUME

ALP climate red tape is burying small business

It is clear that Labor has never had to run a business. Why else would it ask a farmer to know the carbon footprint of the baker who uses her wheat. She probably doesn't even know their name let alone their emissions!

Australia has a productivity problem that means we are all poorer. If we are serious about fixing it, we must stop making it harder for Australian businesses to get on with the job.

For too long, Labor has measured its achievements by the number of regulations it introduces, rather than the burdens it removes. It seems to think that asking for information has no opportunity cost. But every new reporting requirement, compliance obligation and administrative process is measured in dollars and days lost to paperwork.

Nowhere is this clearer than in rules that make a business report not just on itself, but on the businesses it deals with. Scope 3 emissions reporting asks a business to report its indirect emissions generated throughout a company's supply chain, including emissions of suppliers, transportation and customers using its products.

Unlike emissions from a company's own operations, these are often outside its direct control.

Treasury's own regulatory impact analysis estimated Scope 3 emissions modelling would cost approximately $245,000 per business in the first year and $161,700 annually thereafter. It is bewildering that any government would wilfully place that cost on businesses who are finding it harder and harder to operate.

That is money that could be spent employing Australians, purchasing equipment, expanding operations or improving productivity. Worse still, these obligations don't stop with the large corporations directly subject to the law. From July next year, thousands of smaller businesses join the climate reporting regime.

A family-owned manufacturer, transport operator or agricultural supplier can find itself effectively subject to an expensive reporting regime. The Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry has warned that Scope 3 reporting traps small businesses in a "regulatory nightmare".

And for what measurable environmental benefit?

In a globally competitive economy, we need every advantage we can get. The United States has dropped national Scope 3 reporting. The United Kingdom does not have mandatory Scope 3 reporting for listed companies. Canada deferred it.

Australia will never regulate its way to prosperity. That is why a future Liberal government will make removing mandatory Scope 3 emissions reporting an immediate and significant deregulation priority. This is not an argument against environmental responsibility. It is an argument for common sense, proportionality and economic growth.

The case for deregulation is hardly revolutionary. Indeed, it was once central to Australia's bipartisan economic consensus.

The Howard government set up a taskforce to cut business regulation, recognising it could deliver "significant, immediate gains to productivity and for business". Paul Keating, looking back on the reforms of the 1980s and 1990s, called regulation "a yoke on the clever and the innovative, and was, in effect, a levy for and by the wealthy".

Prosperity must be created before it can be distributed and over-regulating business restricts that capacity for prosperity. Today, that lesson seems to have been forgotten.

Research commissioned by the Australian Institute of Company Directors estimated commonwealth regulatory compliance costs reached $160bn in 2024, equivalent to 5.8 per cent of GDP.

At a time when Australia desperately needs stronger business investment and productivity growth, that burden should alarm every policymaker.

An Angus Taylor-led government will act. Not only will we abolish Scope 3 reporting, but we will go further and remove Group 3 entities from the mandatory emissions reporting regime.

The AICD estimates that removing Group 3 entities alone would benefit approximately 3000 organisations and save at least $2bn over four years.

Businesses will remain free to measure and disclose their emissions voluntarily. Investors can continue to seek relevant information. Existing obligations concerning direct operational emissions need not be abandoned. But government should not force businesses to spend substantial sums producing uncertain estimates simply to satisfy an expanding compliance bureaucracy.

This reform will be an early demonstration of a broader Liberal commitment: fewer regulations, lower compliance costs and greater freedom for businesses to invest, employ and grow.

It means fewer hours completing paperwork and more hours serving customers. Less money spent on consultants and more invested in productive equipment.

The Liberals and Nationals understand that Australia's economic future will not be secured by producing more reports. It will be secured by producing more goods, delivering better services, encouraging investment and rewarding enterprise. A government led by Angus Taylor will scrap costly climate reporting red tape because Australia's businesses should be building our prosperity, not buried in paperwork.

Senator Jane Hume is deputy leader of the opposition and shadow minister for productivity and deregulation.

The FT View



FINANCIAL TIMES
'Without fear and without favour'

Modi cannot silence India's disaffected youth

The BJP has to address young people's political and economic frustrations

India's youth-led Cockroach Janta Party began as a joke, but in just months has become a serious force. Over the weekend, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government deployed tens of thousands of security personnel to suppress protests in New Delhi called by the movement, cancelling many trains and metro services, locking down central neighbourhoods and detaining CJP leaders. The heavy-handed tactics prevented the "cockroaches", as they call themselves, from gathering in large numbers. But such methods only risk deepening the disaffection of many young Indians, and further undermine the democratic credentials of Modi's ruling Bharatiya Janata Party.

The authorities have reason to be wary of the movement's growing influence. Youth-led uprisings have in recent years toppled other governments in the region, most recently in Nepal. The CJP began in May as a satirical online campaign sparked by a top judge's comparison of some unemployed youths to "cockroaches", but it quickly snowballed. Protests called by the movement over an exam scandal forced the departure of Modi's education minister in July, a rare defeat for the BJP.

India has long prided itself on the strength of its democratic institutions, robust enough to withstand protests and the occasional ministerial resignation. But the handling of the demonstrations in New Delhi, which were called to demand the resignation of India's chief election commissioner, suggests an unedifying sense of insecurity.

The protesters have legitimate concerns about the election commission and its sweeping revision of electoral rolls, which has purged 130mn entries from the lists of those eligible to vote. There is no direct evidence to support claims the revisions were designed to give the Hindu nationalist BJP an advantage. But many qualified citizens were stripped of their voting rights. Reports claim that election chief Gyanesh Kumar's colleagues repeatedly objected to aspects of the revision process. The BJP's insistence in 2023 that the government have the controlling say in the selection of the self-described autonomous commission's chief has raised suspicions.

Modi hails India as the "mother of democracy", but has been less enthusiastic about preserving free expression and the space for vigorous opposition. Authorities often harass government critics in the media, academia and civil society. The determination of so many young Indians to stand up for fair elections is admirable.

Even if he is confident the electoral roll revision was properly handled, the loss of confidence in Kumar among opposition parties and many voters raises questions about his fitness to be election chief. Either way, the BJP should allow independent scrutiny of the revision process. At the very least, Modi should break his silence on the New Delhi protests.

> Its economy is growing faster than any other large country, yet too many graduates still struggle to find good jobs

More broadly, the protests are a sign that more must be done to meet young people's rising expectations. Economic growth is currently the fastest of any large country and Modi has done much to widen access to welfare and make structural reforms, yet too many graduates still struggle to find good jobs. That frustration only heightens their anger at perceived abuses of power.

The police have announced that Jantar Mantar, an open-air observatory in New Delhi where the "cockroaches" had sought to gather, will no longer be an authorised protest site. Alternative venues have been offered further from the government district. But pushing youthful dissent out of politicians' line of sight will do nothing to ease the discontent that drives it.

ft.com/opinion

Opinion Social affairs

Why we need a proper conversation about death

Andy Carter



Polly Mackenzie

Death is not a cheerful subject. It is no wonder it does not feature in Prime Minister Andy Burnham's optimistic words about building a National Care Service, which focus on enabling people to live well.

But so long as the conversation avoids the question of what it means to *die* well, we will struggle to get a handle on the costs of care and to provide people with dignity and comfort at the end of life.

This is not about assisted dying, which the UK parliament has spent two years considering without reaching a decision. The legal framework the legislation would have created would have affected fewer than 1 per cent of deaths. Nor is it really about our chronically underfunded hospices, where just over one in 20 people in England pass away.

> In an increasingly diverse society, preferences and expectations differ about what 'dying well' looks like

It's about the need to confront the way death and dying have changed since the 1940s, when the NHS then later the hospice movement were founded, and build support systems that match.

The trends are stark. Dementia and frailty have displaced a swift decline from cancer as the typical route to death, and dementia is now the single largest cause of death. That matters because most of our frameworks for improving end-of-life care — such as advance care planning, deathbed wishes and even the assisted dying debate itself — assume a person can straightforwardly consent to care. An increasing share of dying people cannot.

Where people die has changed just as much. We know most people would prefer to die at home than in hospital, but increasingly home will be residential care. Yet care homes have no statutory duty to provide end-of-life care. Staff without the training or confidence to manage a deterioration in someone's condition are more likely to send residents to hospital instead. Those late admissions are expensive, distressing and may hasten decline rather than alleviating it. The economics of the care home sector can sharpen that instinct: some homes are now in effect property businesses backed by private equity, with returns that depend on occupancy and turnover, not on what happens in a resident's final weeks.

The closeting of death inside institutions, and away from communities, has a compounding effect. Fewer of us have been with someone as they died, or supported them in their last days. The lack of familiarity and support can put enormous strain on carers trying to honour a promise to let loved ones die at home. Inevitably this leads to more panicked 999 calls that would be better left unmade.

We're also an increasingly diverse society, where preferences and expectations differ about what a "good" death looks like. That makes it harder than ever to design good support.

As a result, costs are stubbornly stuck in hospital care and navigating the system is a tangle of bureaucracy. Healthcare spending in the last year of life is nearly £12bn, of which 81 per cent is spent in hospital.

Everyone I talk to has a story. Admission to hospital against a patient's will because the community nurse could not visit at home until a hospital bed could be delivered there. A 40-page form to give official notification of a change of address for someone transferred to hospice care.

We cannot fix this by confining our interest to statutory provision by the proposed National Care Service because bureaucracies have a tendency to swallow meaning, a critical component of the end of life.

The hospice movement was deliberately founded outside the NHS because it recognised this, choosing financial precarity and dependence on charitable giving to protect the model of person-centred care.

But neither can charity fill the gap. Billions are being invested worldwide in longevity medicine to prolong the lives of the healthy and wealthy, but end-of-life care doesn't fit models of "effective altruism", which tends to focus on interventions earlier in life. My own analysis of UK philanthropy has identified only £92mn going into adult palliative care over the past decade from major foundations, spread across 3,500 grants. What little money is given is propping up service delivery as it is, not challenging the system to adapt to how it needs to be.

Most of us are frightened to die. We duck and dive to avoid considering our own mortality, preventing us from tackling these problems head-on. None of this needs a bill, a breakthrough or a moral reckoning. It just needs us to be honest about an inevitable fact of life and commit to designing a system that can cope.

The writer is a policy expert and runs ZIP, a social innovation agency

Letters

Email: letters.editor@ft.com
Include daytime telephone number and full address
Corrections: corrections@ft.com
If you are not satisfied with the FT's response to your complaint, you can appeal to the FT Editorial Complaints Commissioner: complaints.commissioner@ft.com

ECB must offer bond investors clarity on the direction of travel

Lorenzo Bini Smaghi suggests that the European Central Bank should put quantitative tightening plans "on hold" until "a more stable environment has been restored" ("Bond volatility means the ECB should pause QT", Market Insight, October 6).

There could be alternative ways to proceed. Witness what happened in mid-September. Despite the Bank of England announcing its intended pathway to unwind all of the gilts on its balance sheet by 2034, the response by financial markets was overwhelmingly positive — with gilt yields dropping immediately. Moreover, this occurred against a backdrop of broader strains in the UK gilt market. Fundamentally, long-term certainty about the direction of travel was rewarded.

While UK government borrowing costs remain the highest in the G7, since mid-July — when Andy Burnham entered Downing Street — spreads between gilts and major Euro Area economies have narrowed. For example, the UK 10-year yield has risen by around 30bp while the French 10-year yield has gone up by around 100bp. Clarity about the BoE's plans, and the concomitant lack of clarity regarding the ECB's plans, has most likely contributed to the narrowing of spreads in recent months between gilts and Euro Area government bond markets.

There are many reasons the ECB may choose a different path to that taken by Threadneedle Street, but we should not imagine ceasing QT altogether is the only option.

Daniel Mahoney
Senior Economist UK, Handelsbanken, London EC2, UK

SkyNet contract is a big test for the 'Buy British' policy

Sylvia Pfeifer's report (October 9) on the SkyNet satellite contest addresses an important decision but frames "Buy British" through the nationality of the prime contractor and the competing employment claims. British milk has a fairly clear country of origin. A British satellite is another matter.

The Ministry of Defence requires more than UK assembly. In March 2024, the MoD told parliament that specified technologies in the SkyNet satellite system competition must be designed and manufactured in Britain as a "pass/fail condition". The MoD identifies antennas and receivers, intersatellite links, reconfigurable onboard processing, telemetry, tracking and control, and platform protection as critical technologies. But where is the FT investigation into whether the underlying flight equipment can actually be manufactured in the UK?

Britain has substantial spacecraft engineering and system integration expertise. But for large geostationary communications satellites such as SkyNet it remains dependent on overseas suppliers for key hardware. UK "system design authority" does not automatically give control over these suppliers, their intellectual property or export restrictions.

This is not an academic debate. The MoD has recently acknowledged that the SkyNet 6A had been delayed partly because the US government diverted US-supplied components to its own programmes. The MoD also quoted build-quality and third-party supplier problems. With the MoD specifying a 15-year design life for SkyNet 6A, assurances about future UK manufacturing must be weighed against qualification and flight heritage.

The government's new UK Space Strategy, supported by Wes Streeting, the defence secretary, promises stronger supply chains and freedom of action. Yet its delivery plan does not identify a path to domestic production of these critical technologies. Without such a plan, Britain risks expanding satellite integration while remaining dependent on foreign-manufactured flight equipment.

The FT could advance this debate through independent scrutiny of publicly available trade, export-control, procurement and manufacturer records, rather than relying predominantly on contractors' claims. Both bidders and the MoD should then be pressed to substantiate the manufacturing origin and flight heritage of critical equipment, foreign export-control dependencies, genuine UK manufacturing value added and programme-specific employment.

That would be a more rigorous examination of British industrial sovereignty than competing corporate claims.

Vladimir Lemos
Pasadena, CA, US

BANX



The secret to university spinout success stories

John Thornhill charts Britain's rise to become the world's third-strongest innovation economy, citing the "DeepMind dividend" now flowing through London's AI scene ("Britain cannot afford to waste its DeepMind dividend", Opinion, October 9). One vital source of that dividend, which regularly goes unnoticed, is Britain's universities.

Sir Demis Hassabis completed his PhD at University College London and met his DeepMind co-founder Shane Legg at our Gatsby Computational Neuroscience Unit. David Silver and Tim Rocktäschel, whose new ventures Thornhill highlights, are UCL professors. Synthesia was co-founded by the UCL professor Lourdes Agapito and is now valued at $4bn. Between 2020 and 2025, spinouts from UCL raised £3.06bn in external investment.

Entrepreneurs such as Saul Klein, chair of the investment group Phoenix Court, note that domestic growth capital is only trickling in, and the larger rounds, needed to scale, are still easier to raise abroad.

As UCL's commercialisation company we know that for many of our spinouts, a variety of capital funding sources is both healthy and often essential. But Klein is right; the flow of UK capital is all too often a trickle — and it needs to become a flood to help ensure deep tech spinouts stay in the UK — retaining the benefits of jobs, growth and talent on these shores.

Bold steps such as the investment in the British Business Bank and freeing up pension funds to invest are a great start. Availability of that capital needs to be accelerated and matched by the political will to ensure university spinouts can readily find the investment they need both in the UK as well as in the US, Singapore, Canada, Japan or elsewhere. That is how Britain can help more universities spinout success stories and ensure the next DeepMind dividend is banked at home.

Anne Lane
Chief Executive, UCL Ventures London W1, UK

How India could reverse its health worker exodus

Tej Parikh's "The India shock: exporting workers to the world" (Free Lunch, FT.com, September 27) is correct to conclude that India must create productive work at home rather than rely on remittances. One sector shows both the problem and a way out.

India trains health workers on a vast scale. Karnataka alone has 668 nursing colleges, more than any other state, yet 14 per cent of its staff nurse posts lie vacant, and many graduates leave for the Gulf and the UK. The difficulty is not supply. It is that the job these graduates are most needed for has not been defined.

Every health system, in India and in the rich world alike, now faces the same gap. Clinical prediction models can flag which patients are heading for hospital, but no system has created the role that acts on the warning: someone with the clinical literacy to read it, the authority to follow a protocol and the time to make the call. That role has no registration, no scope of practice and no way to be paid.

Creating it would absorb graduates at home, strengthen India's own health system and prepare it for an ageing population of its own. The same role is needed across the ageing economies now recruiting India's workers. India could build it first.

M Vaman Rao
Boston, MA, US

Extreme heat is not just a risk for pregnant mothers

The report "Extreme heat is increasing pregnancy risks, survey finds" (October 6) paints an alarming picture of the impact of climate-induced heat on the health of pregnant women and their babies. But extreme heat also has a profound effect on many other health issues — it can fuel heat stroke, and prolonged exposure to excessive heat can worsen cardiovascular, respiratory and kidney disorders. The World Health Organization expects about 250,000 climate-related additional deaths per year worldwide between 2030 and 2050. Hopefully, the efforts of the Wellcome Trust ahead of the Cop31 summit will result in funding to protect these mothers and babies. However, the impact of extreme heat on other vulnerable populations should not be overlooked and should be given equal priority.

Mark Kessel
New York, NY, US

If whey skyrockets, can we expect cheese prices to fall?

Your Big Read (October 10) notes that whey is no longer a low value byproduct of cheesemaking. Increasing demand for protein is causing the position to reverse. Does this mean we can look forward to a substantial reduction in the cost of cheese?

Jon Zigmond
Middlesbrough, UK

The PM is wrong about non-compete clauses

Prime Minister Andy Burnham says that limiting non-competes will increase innovation ("City lashes out at Burnham's bid to ban non-compete clauses in work contracts", Report, October 13). That does not seem right.

The main reason for non-compete clauses is to protect an employer's confidential information. The clauses are necessary because it is very difficult for an employer to find evidence that a former employee is misusing confidential information, once that employee has joined a competitor.

There are already safeguards built into the law to protect employees from unreasonable non-compete clauses.

If any employee can walk out the door and take advantage of their employer's information to benefit a competitor, how does that incentivise UK employers to innovate?

And what of foreign companies that will be able to poach UK-based staff while they still have their employer's up-to-date business plans fresh in their minds?

The UK is a jurisdiction that traditionally allowed businesses to protect their confidential information. I will be interested to see the details of these proposals and whether they may weaken that position.

David Palmer
Employment Partner, Addleshaw Goddard London EC2, UK

Cycling commuters

Re the debate over empty bike spaces in London (Letters, October 7), many commuter trains are no longer able to accommodate the numbers of bicycles in the way they used to, with the presence of a guard's van at the end of the train. Often this means the commuter who wishes to cycle on arrival into London has to keep a second bike permanently parked at the station or use local cycle schemes such as Santander Cycles. Not everyone wants to use an e-bike as this rather defeats the object of the exercise.

Sean Wilson
Oxford, UK

Recalling a grandfather's navigation mnemonic

A compass is all very well (Letters, September 26), but magnetic north differs from true north and grid north. So knowing how to correct a compass bearing is vital.

When my father was born, my grandfather, who was at the time teaching navigation skills to cadets of the Oxford and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry (OCB), was presented with a tankard engraved with the mnemonic he himself had taught them: VW-MB VE-ML — variation west magnetic best, variation east magnetic least.

We have the cup and, more importantly, the knowledge.

Ben Haywood Smith
Hexham, Northumberland, UK

Opinion

Why Trump is going for Zelenskyy's jugular



AMERICA

Edward Luce

I want to thank President Putin, to be honest with you," Donald Trump said last weekend. It should have been the other way round. Trump had agreed to pay Vladimir Putin billions of dollars for Russian diesel that will have a negligible effect on US prices. Such asymmetry is also known as something for nothing. Trump's nothing is that the cost of diesel is unlikely to fall before the US midterm elections. Putin's something is a breach in American sanctions and more money to bomb Ukraine.

I am unqualified to make psychological judgments but an amateur can see that Trump is blaming Volodymyr Zelenskyy for a problem of his own making. The chief driver of rising diesel prices is the impact of Trump's Operation Epic Fury. Iran and its proxies have knocked out big chunks of Gulf refining capacity, which has sharply reduced global diesel supply. In defiance of Trump's requests, Ukraine has further disrupted supply by striking Russian refineries. Zelenskyy is thus a ready-made scapegoat for a problem largely caused by the US president.

Things could get still worse for Ukraine. On the day that Trump announced the Russia deal, his son-in-law Jared Kushner and chief envoy Steve Witkoff held talks with Ukrainians in Florida. They threatened to block weapons sales and end US intelligence sharing if Ukraine continued to strike Russian refineries. This would deprive Zelenskyy of the last useful bit of US support against Russia's escalating assault.

In the week before Trump's diesel deal, more than 100 Ukrainians, including at least 20 children, were killed by Russian missiles. Another US president would be pressuring Russia to stop killing innocents. Trump is instead giving them the means to kill more. He is also giving Russia a green light to keep helping Iran, which it has been supplying with satellite and tracking data to target US bases and allied installations in the region. In a very real sense, therefore, Trump is assisting attacks on America.

> Ukraine's leader is a constant reminder of the president's dealmaking impotence

Whenever Trump is asked about Russia's support for Iran, he downplays or ignores the question. On one occasion, he said Putin had reassured him that no such help was being given. But Putin is helpful to Iran, which means he can dangle the promise of brokering an end to the Gulf war. Zelenskyy, on the other hand, is a constant reminder of Trump's dealmaking impotence. No matter how much US allies urge Trump to back Ukraine, he is unable to forgive Zelenskyy for what he represents. Trump vowed to end the Russia-Ukraine war within 24 hours of taking office, which would have entailed Ukraine's capitulation. Zelenskyy was predictably unwilling to do that. Nor is he now.

We are thus left with a mixture of bluster and threat. On bluster, Trump said on Sunday that Ukraine and Russia had agreed to an energy ceasefire in which Russia stops targeting Ukraine's energy grid and Ukraine lays off Russia's refineries. This was "effective immediately". Zelenskyy said that this was the first he had heard of it. On Monday, Zelenskyy said Russia had attacked power and gas facilities across Ukraine on Sunday night. He insists Kyiv is still willing to observe a ceasefire if Moscow does the same. But he has little incentive to do so. Russia has already taken out most of Ukraine's grid. Zelenskyy's imperative is to deprive Russia of the revenues to keep attacking.

On threat, Trump said on Saturday that Ukraine needs a new president. He could go a step further and make America's intelligence support contingent on Ukraine holding elections. No country can carry out orderly elections — a quintessential peacetime activity — while another nation occupies a fifth of its territory and is randomly targeting the rest. It would be reckless for Zelenskyy to agree to Trump's demand and there is scant chance that he will.

Ironically, Trump's ire is boosting Zelenskyy's support among Ukrainians. They have plenty to complain about, including corruption in Zelenskyy's circle. But he is getting a "Trump bump" in the polls that has helped sway elections in Canada, Australia, Denmark and arguably the Vatican. Nations tend to close ranks when outsiders try to choose their leaders. Trump has called Zelenskyy a dictator while saying Putin is his friend. No prizes for guessing which of the two is on display in a gold-framed photograph at the White House.

The election that matters to Trump is the US midterms. Should he have been serious about reducing US energy prices, he would have started months ago. But nothing he is trying, including Russian shipments, is likely to lift his party's bleak prospects. Zelenskyy's headache is that Trump is preparing to blame a Democratic victory on him. The iron law of Trump is that nothing is ever his fault.

edward.luce@ft.com

The art of living dangerously



Martin Wolf Economics

It would be nice to think that the world economy will become less shock-prone, but it probably won't

Ann Kiernan



The past few days have reminded us of one of the two chief contemporary economic realities: the president of the US is a wrecker. Yet this is consistent with the other reality, which is that despite the disruptions and shocks of our era, the world economy remains a powerful growth machine, driven by remarkable innovations, risk-taking finance and large accumulations of debt. Can this last? The reason for believing that it will is that growth has been the dominant feature of the global economy since the middle of the last century. Yet we must always remember that growth is one thing, but stable growth quite another.

What, then, is the latest Donald Trump outrage? First, he started a war on Iran, without a plan, which has raised diesel prices in the US and worldwide. Then, a few days ago, he made a deal with Vladimir Putin to release Russian diesel on global markets, in violation of sanctions imposed after Putin's illegal invasion of Ukraine. Trump also told Kyiv to halt its strikes on Russian oil refineries and threatened to cut off intelligence sharing with Ukraine and access to US-made weapons. This "deal" is both foolish and wicked: foolish, because it is too small to lower diesel prices significantly, and wicked, because it is prepared to sacrifice a country that is struggling heroically to be free from tyranny.

Current US policymaking is not just reckless and immoral. It is also one of the causes of the world's unpredictability. Thus, the IMF's latest World Economic Outlook (WEO) starts with the following comment from Silvana Tenreyro, the new economic counsellor: "In less than seven years, the global economy has been subjected to an exceptional sequence of events." Yet all but one of these shocks, the exception being the pandemic, are man-made, or perhaps "strongman-made". The others are the war in Ukraine, the tariff war and the war in the Middle East. Putin launched the first of these in 2022. Trump, of course, began the other two.

These shocks have, as Tenreyro says, "tested the resilience of households, firms, financial markets, and governments. Individually, each of these major developments would have been considered unlikely. Their confluence over such a short period of time is even more extraordinary." Yet, remarkably, the WEO's forecasts for growth this year and next, at 3.1 and 3.4 per cent respectively, are "broadly unchanged from April", despite more persistent energy disruption than was then expected. Global inflation is, however, expected to hit 4.7 per cent this year, as a result of higher commodity prices, and 4.1 per cent in 2027. But, happily, "the pass-through to core inflation is expected to be limited".

The explanations for this resilience are familiar. They include adjustment of exports and imports away from direct trade between the US and China. More recently, however, the dominant factors have been the flexibility of the global energy economy, discussed here last week, and the investment boom triggered by AI. Yet neither is guaranteed to last. As Nick Butler points out, stocks of crude and products are low after six months of drawdowns. Moreover, "product exports of diesel and jet fuel [from the Gulf] remain minimal". Also at risk are supplies of naphtha, urea and liquefied natural gas (the latter of special importance to Europe). The AI investment boom also concentrates risk. Even if AI itself works out, the level of investment is likely to stop growing, if not decline, at some point. Moreover, AI might not work out financially on the hoped-for scale at all. (See charts.)

> Current US policymaking is reckless, immoral and one of the causes of global unpredictability

Other fragilities are evident, notably the fiscal positions. Despite the big post-pandemic rise in real and nominal interest rates, most large economies continue to run significant primary fiscal deficits (before interest payments). The US position stands out, with a forecast primary fiscal deficit of 4.8 per cent of GDP this year, a share of T-bill issuance in gross borrowing at 58 per cent and an average maturity of a mere 5.9 years.

The WEO rightly emphasises the importance of rebuilding fiscal space. The good news is that, in today's circumstances, the negative impact of structural fiscal tightening is likely to be offset by lower real and nominal interest rates. But redressing global current accounts imbalances will also be essential. That must, at last, involve China.

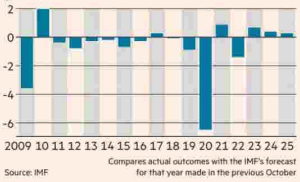
The WEO emphasises other downside risks, including a worsening of the ongoing wars, (probably AI-enhanced) cyber threats and climate catastrophes. Neither a stock market crash nor a collapse in AI-related investment can be ruled out, should returns on AI disappoint. Upside economic risks include still faster progress with AI technology, though that could also inflict devastating social consequences. Another plausible upside is an accelerated energy transition, as recent events underline the unreliability of fossil fuels. Given their physical location, these are bound to remain so for many countries. The WEO notes that the ability to exploit AI and meet energy needs reliably will be crucial for growth prospects. Sadly, the world's poorest countries are particularly vulnerable in both respects. Thus, the WEO rightly fears that their living standards are likely to fall still further behind those in richer countries.

It would be good to believe the world will become less prone to shocks. But it probably will not. The best response is to strengthen fundamentals, notably economic flexibility and dynamism, together with energy resilience. In this context, as the WEO notes, it is essential to make support for people vulnerable to shocks targeted and temporary. The time for throwing public money around has come to an end. It would help if the shocks stopped, too. Alas, given our leaders, I would not bet on that.

martin.wolf@ft.com

The IMF missed huge shocks. But recently it has been too pessimistic about growth

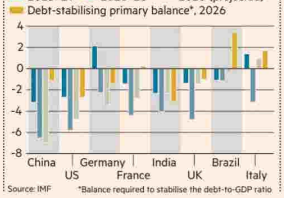
IMF forecasts for global GDP growth vs actual growth (% points, positive numbers imply the IMF underestimated growth)



Source: IMF

The primary fiscal deficits of China and the US have remained exceptionally large

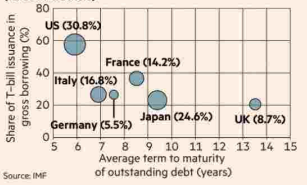
Primary fiscal balance (% of GDP)



Source: IMF *Balance required to stabilise the debt-to-GDP ratio

The maturity of US fiscal debt is exceptionally short, with the UK at the opposite end

Debt maturity and short-maturity debt financing. Bubbles sized by refinancing requirements as a % of GDP (value in brackets)



Source: IMF

How not to revive Europe's auto industry



TRADE

Alan Beattie

By the standards of the EU's policy towards China, trade commissioner Maroš Šefčovič's "understanding" with Beijing for an informal auto export quota for conventional hybrids and plug-ins was a victory. Announced last week, it in effect closed a loophole the EU left when it imposed anti-subsidy duties on electric vehicles in 2024.

But those tariffs haven't really worked, and not just because Chinese exports shifted to hybrids rather than battery vehicles. Unless European companies radically improve their functioning, neither the new import quotas nor the EU's planned additions to its trade weaponry equip the bloc to meet Chinese competition.

The standard view of big EU corporates and governments — but I repeat myself — is that China has cheated by using state subsidies to undercut competitors. But the last couple of years have shown that the legacy car companies are struggling to compete even as they attempt to use the anti-subsidy tariffs to tilt the playing field in their favour.

Overall imports of EVs from China have continued to rise. Within that total, the cars made by Chinese-origin companies have gained market share, particularly at the expense of Tesla.

The bellwether European producer Volkswagen is seeing higher EV sales in the EU but is getting hammered in the Chinese market, and its CEO says the EU car industry needs more help. BMW, whose Neue Klasse design platform is more advanced than most European manufacturers, nonetheless still seems to be behind the Chinese curve. The non-profit group Transport & Environment calculates that despite the tariffs, Chinese EVs are competitive on price in all categories against their European counterparts in the EU market.

> China knows the symbolic importance of cars to the EU: the hybrids deal is a narrow concession

It's about strategy and management as much as subsidies. The likes of BYD certainly benefited from past state support, but their operations were refined in a ferociously competitive domestic Chinese EV market. Meanwhile, European car manufacturers were eking out incremental engineering advances in the obsolescent internal combustion engine (ICE).

As Hosuk Lee-Makiyama of the ECIPE think-tank wrote recently for the briefing service Borderlex: "Whilst Stuttgart optimised the diesel engine to the last decimal, the Chinese province of Anhui was dreaming of a self-driving electric car."

China's overall research and development as a share of GDP has risen sharply over the past quarter century and now is much higher than the EU's. German R&D by the same measure is well above the EU average but has grown much more slowly. Lee-Makiyama says that European corporations distributed dividends while US, Chinese and Japanese companies invested in new technology.

European governments and car companies also paid little attention to the imminent challenge from China in the early 2020s, focusing instead on making their autos eligible for US tax credits. Moreover, as the recent meeting between German Chancellor Friedrich Merz and French President Emmanuel Macron shows, Germany's long obsession with lobbying the EU to weaken the 2035 phaseout date for new ICE cars continues.

The plug-in hybrids in Šefčovič's deal are attractive to European manufacturers because they use some of the existing ICE supply chain and currently have high profit margins. But they may well prove a transitional technology, with battery EVs ultimately predominating. It's unfortunately all too likely that these quotas simply turn into a long-term programme of managed trade where consumers pay more for autos and Europe again locks in the dominance of underperforming incumbent companies.

Nor are agreed quotas a model that China is even remotely likely to apply across the swath of other industries in which it has established technological and competitive leads, including robotics, chemicals, renewables and drones. China knows the symbolic importance of cars to the EU: the hybrids deal is a deep but narrow concession.

It's not as if European companies are incapable of innovation. The world-beating Dutch company ASML, manufacturer of lithographic machinery to make semiconductors, received public-private support but certainly not large-scale trade protection.

Some trade intervention may be useful if it's part of a broader innovation strategy. But those calling for more protection need to show how they will reverse a decline caused not only by subsidised foreign competition, but poor management.

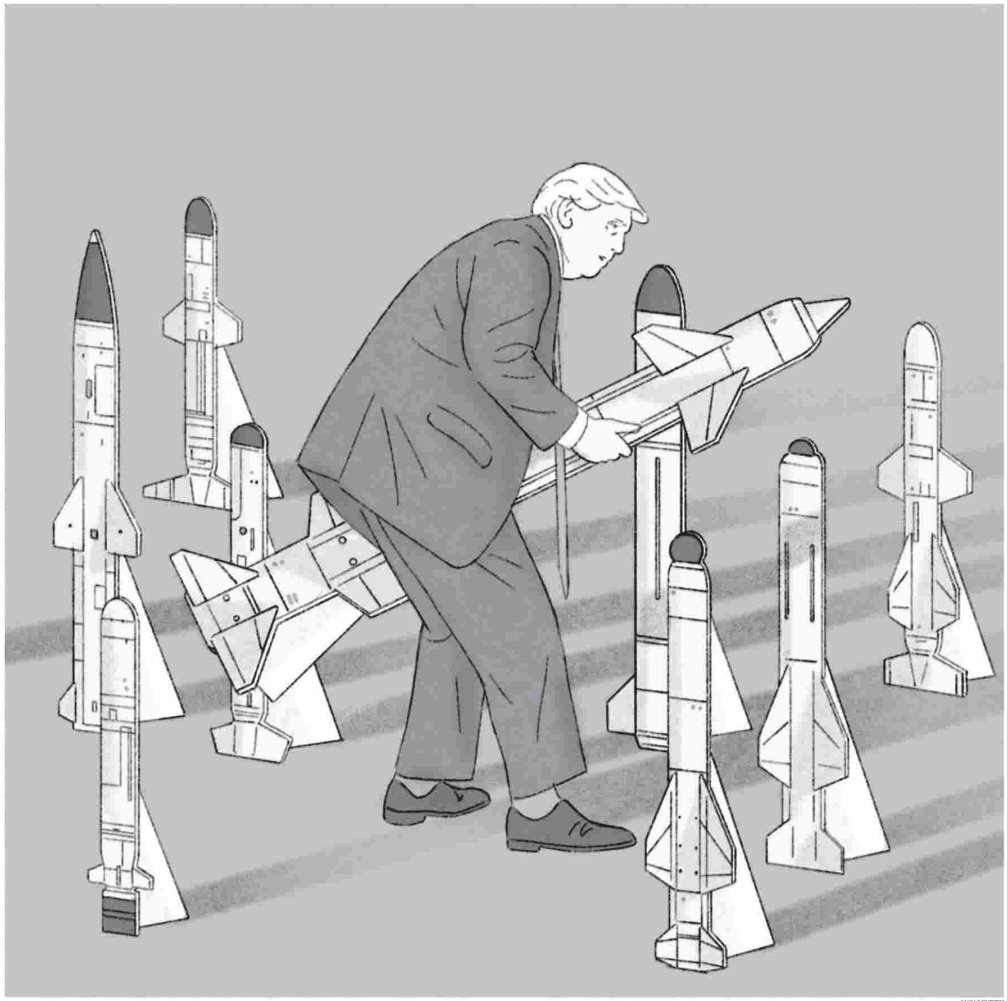
alan.beattie@ft.com

Opinion

Lethality and testosterone will get us only so far

Backing down on Ukraine while failing in Iran is an invitation to America's enemies.

Angus King
Mark Hertling



LUCAS BURTIN

Enemy drones over Romania. Wayward missiles in Poland. Sabotage in Germany. Every week brings some new Russian provocation as President Vladimir Putin steps up his efforts to divide Europe and undermine support for Ukraine. As Western militaries scramble to respond, the prospect of the war spilling over into NATO territory rises.

The problem of escalating instability, unfortunately, is not confined to Europe's eastern frontier. The danger of war between America's autocratic adversaries and our democratic allies is rising around the world for one simple, troubling reason: The enemies of liberal democracy increasingly think America is weak and fickle.

That perception is based in no small part on the current administration's inexplicable abandonment of the strategy that kept the peace in much of the world during the Cold War: deterrence.

The basic approach to defense that emerged from the cataclysm of World War II was simple: If you strike the United States, it will respond so overwhelmingly that your country will be decimated, so you'd better not start anything. With the development of nuclear weapons, this concept was neatly captured by the unfortunate phrase "mutually assured destruction."

Although principally associated with the nuclear standoff with the Soviet Union, deterrence also underlay America's longtime strategy for avoiding a conventional conflict with a near-peer adversary like China or Russia. Rather than mutually assured destruction, this kind of deterrence works by America's maintaining a sufficiently strong conventional force that any potential adversary will realize the futility of attacking America or its allies.

The challenge to this strategy at its inception in the 1950s was that aggressors rarely attack their potential victims all at once, but rather one at a time, usually proclaiming their ambitions are limited. Hitler started with the Sudetenland and Czechoslovakia and only then went on to Poland, Belgium and France. Mr. Putin has started with Ukraine.

To counter this problem and the very real threat of Soviet expansionism after World War II, NATO's Article 5 established the principle that an attack on one member state would be considered an attack on all — and such an attack would be met with a combined response from the European countries and the United States.

A similar deterrent is buttressed by the worldwide structure of alliances. Forward bases, mutual defense pacts, intelligence sharing and economic cooperation together have provided an enormous asymmetric advantage over China and Russia, neither of which has many friends, let alone allies.

Deterrence worked: Although the United States has been involved in regional conflicts over the past decades, there has been no direct military confrontation between the major powers on the scale of the two world wars.

But two of this strategy's essential elements — capacity and will — are now in short supply. The potential adversary has to believe that the United States and its allies have the weapons and forces to hold them at risk, and, just as important, that we have the will to use that force when necessary. The effectiveness of deterrence depends entirely on what the adversary believes; if either one's capacity or one's will is in doubt, deterrence fails and catastrophe becomes more likely.

The grave danger we all now face is that the current U.S. administration has undermined both prongs of deterrence strategy in different theaters — a lack of will in Ukraine and a lack of capacity in Iran.

By essentially abandoning Ukraine, America has gutted the "will" prong. The Europeans have stepped up, but America's absence has sent the unmistakable signal to President Xi Jinping of China and to Mr. Putin that the United States doesn't have the stomach for a prolonged conflict. This is the opposite of deterrence; it is closer to an invitation.

Moreover, just as Mr. Putin is probing Eastern Europe, the Pentagon is reducing active American troop levels in Germany and pulling back on rotational deployments to Eastern Europe. This sends a clear signal that the United States is indifferent to Russian aggression beyond Ukraine: again, precisely the wrong message at precisely the wrong time.

Iran has offered Mr. Putin and Mr. Xi a tutorial in U.S. tactics and the limitations of America's military power. After seven months of on-again, off-again bombing and an economic blockade, virtually none of the strategic goals announced at the beginning of the war have been achieved, while America's stock of munitions has been severely degraded and its regional bases have been exposed as vulnerable.

Similarly, our 52 days of attacks on the Houthis in Yemen last year seem to have done little to diminish their capacity to put shipping in the Red Sea at risk. Iran and the Houthis are much lesser powers than China or Russia, and Mr. Putin and Mr. Xi will judge accordingly their chances against our air defenses, offensive capability and economic power in any future conflict.

It won't be easy to regain what the United States has lost, but there are several places to start. One is to reengage in the defense of Ukraine, including by vigorous enforcement of the just-passed Russia sanctions bill. Another is to reverse the misguided withdrawal of U.S. forces in Eastern Europe, thus sending the message to Mr. Putin that Article 5 is alive and well. And finally, America should quit undermining its allies if it wants them there when the United States needs them.

Deterrence works only if it's credible, and the actions of the administration over the past two years — in spite of all the bluster about lethality and testosterone — have severely compromised that credibility, and with it, the safety and security of America — and the world.

ANGUS KING *is an independent U.S. senator from Maine who serves on the Senate Armed Services Committee and the Select Committee on Intelligence.* **MARK HERTLING** *is a retired U.S. Army Lieutenant General and a former commander of the U.S. Army in Europe.*

U.S. naval power is waning, but that could change

America has let go of its maritime edge at its own peril.

Rana Foroohar

The United States might be losing another war — one that could define the country's security into the next century.

Military and commercial power are intertwined. Maritime power, in particular, has always played a crucial part in establishing and maintaining commercial power. America is learning this lesson the hard way.

For hundreds of years, the countries that have ruled the waves have ruled the world, as the 19th-century American naval strategist Alfred Thayer Mahan put it. In an age of drones, we can be forgiven for thinking this time has ended. Yet today, more than 80 percent of global trade is still transported by ships. America has all but lost the ability to build them. A country that manufactured 5 percent of the world's fleet by tonnage and that dominated the global maritime industry in the 1970s makes 0.2 percent of the world's fleet by tonnage today.

How did we get here? During the Reagan era, U.S. policymakers decided to stop supporting commercial shipping, which quickly migrated to other countries like Japan and South Korea. Meanwhile, the defense arm of the naval industry shrank after the post-Cold War defense cuts of the 1990s. At the same time, the Chinese decided to make shipbuilding and maritime industries a strategic priority, tripling production relative to the United States over the past two decades.

The Chinese now dominate in terms of sheer production capacity and their global market share of shipbuilding, thanks to decades of state support. In 2006, the government named shipbuilding as one of the seven strategic industries over which state-owned Chinese enterprises had to maintain control. By 2015, Beijing identified shipbuilding as one of 10 priority sectors through which China would dominate global commerce.

All this was happening as the United States was going in the opposite direction, outsourcing the building of not only ships but many other supply chains in industrial sectors. It was part of a grand bargain in which American capital flowed to China, and U.S. consumers got cheap goods in exchange. But all the while, American jobs, as well as supply chain resiliency and in some cases national security, were sacrificed.

Not only do the Chinese have more battleships, but the private-sector fleet it has built, which delivers the bulk of the world's commercial goods, vastly outnumbers America's. The United States today has fewer than 200 ocean-going vessels. The Chinese have 5,500. Does anyone doubt that the Chinese could best the United States in any kind of global maritime supply chain gambit, or, say, a military blockage around Taiwan?



PAUL ROGERS

This is particularly so given that commercial fleets are the way that the U.S. military gets most of its supplies delivered, even in wartime. If China were to pull back ships (as it pulled back P.P.E. supplies for health workers for a time during the pandemic), it could have huge economic and security implications for the United States or any other nation that depends on Chinese commercial vessels.

Even in lieu of something that dramatic, maritime disruptions are becoming more and more commonplace. The Consultative Shipping Group, whose members represent more than a fifth of global trade by tonnage, recently said that the maritime blockages and supply chain disruptions in places like the Strait of Hormuz and the Suez and Panama Canals aren't "episodic shocks" but a new normal in a world where ships

FOROOHAR, PAGE 10

OPINION

The New York Times
INTERNATIONAL EDITION

A.G. SULZBERGER *Publisher*

JOSEPH KAHN *Executive Editor*
MARC LACEY *Managing Editor*
CAROLYN RYAN *Managing Editor*
SUZANNE DALEY *Associate Editor*
KATHLEEN KINGSBURY *Opinion Editor*

MEREDITH KOPIT LEVIEN *Chief Executive Officer*
MICHAEL GREENSPON *Senior V.P. and General Manager*
HELEN KONSTANTOPOULOS *V.P., International Circulation*
HELENA PHUA *Executive V.P., Asia-Pacific*
SUZANNE YVERNÈS *International Chief Financial Officer*

Trump is begging to be impeached



Jamelle Bouie

President Trump has been impeached twice.

The first time was in 2019, after he was caught trying to extort the Ukrainian government into manufacturing "evidence" to use against Joe Biden ahead of the 2020 presidential race.

The second time was after that race, in 2021, when he led an effort to overturn the election results on Jan. 6, culminating in a riot and assault on the U.S. Capitol.

Much of what Trump has done in his second term either meets or exceeds the threshold of his first impeachment. There is his corrupt profiteering off the presidency, his occupation of American cities with the National Guard, his use of Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Customs and Border Protection as a secret police, his attempts to seize the power of the purse, his abuse of the pardon power, his unlawful political retaliation against law firms and universities and his attacks on press freedom — all impeachable offenses.

The president's despotism is itself a constitutional offense.

No, he hasn't done anything as singularly transgressive as Jan. 6. But in a real sense, the second Trump administration is no less than an authoritarian conspiracy against the constitutional order — a Jan. 6 by other means, including a whole-of-government effort to subvert the midterm elections and preclude any prospect for true democratic accountability.

In Federalist No. 65, Alexander Hamilton explained that impeachment covered those offenses that "are of a nature which may with peculiar propriety be denominated political, as they relate chiefly to injuries done immediately to the society itself."

By that standard, the despotic and anti-republican character of Trump's presidency is itself an impeachable offense, above and beyond any particular action.

But while there is fertile ground for a third impeachment, it is unclear whether Democrats are willing to make one happen. When asked, Hakeem Jeffries, the House minority leader, has been noncommittal, saying that Democrats have neither "ruled anything in" nor "ruled anything out" with regards to a possible impeachment.

The former Chicago mayor Rahm Emanuel, who has been soft-launching a campaign for president for the last year, says that Democrats should avoid impeachment altogether. Asked on NBC's "Meet the Press" if Democrats should impeach Trump, he said, "No, because it's not going anywhere, and it's going to be a food fight, and it's just going to be we return to the politics of fighting." According to Axios, Senator Tammy Duckworth of Illinois has taken a similar stance: "Don't be impeaching anybody," she said. "Let's just get back to work."

Rather than devote time to an impeachment investigation and a subsequent trial, the idea is that Democrats would pass legislation and attempt to make good on the promise of a more affordable America. But while it is important that Congress get back into the habit of legislating, it seems naïve to the point of delusion to think that Democrats would have anything like a cooperative partner in the White House. If anything, the loss of a supine Republican majority and the prospect of *any* accountability is quite likely to push Trump to abuse power even further. Think of it as a game of chicken, in which he's daring the Democratic majority to try to stop him.

We can already see inklings of this. He has basically threatened, for example, a post-election escalation of the war in Iran. It is not hard to imagine a future in which, cornered by defeat, Trump lashes out in ways that only underscore his threat to American democracy.

In that world, it is foolish to take impeachment — the Constitution's main remedy for a rogue executive — off the table, even if the odds of removal are slim to none. Even in the absence of a conviction, the impeachment process is a valuable political tool. It underscores, for the public, the simple fact that the president is unfit to serve. And an extended impeachment investigation could uncover the kind of pervasive wrongdoing, even criminality, that could lead to real accountability for other figures in the administration.

If nothing else, impeachment would show voters that Democrats were not simply blowing smoke when they accused the president of lawless behavior. It should be said as well that a serious investigation would put pressure on the Republican Party, which would either have to distance itself from Trump or, more likely, bind itself even closer to an unpopular but vengeful and vindictive president. Ahead of the next presidential election, impeachment would put Republican hopefuls between a rock and a hard place.

Impeachment might be inconvenient to Democratic leaders and it might carry some political risk, but it is simply not tenable to allow the president to run roughshod over the rule of law and the constitutional order without meaningful, constitutional pushback. As flawed as it is, impeachment is the tool we have for that particular job.



ALEX WONG/GETTY IMAGES

FROM READERS

Global outrage over a livestreamed execution

Re "Fort Hood shooter's execution will be public and streamed live, Pentagon says" (news article, nytimes.com, Oct. 8): Livestreaming an execution so the public can watch?

America, a "shining city upon a hill"? Yes, the United States is exceptional, but not in ways any decent, moral person would want to celebrate.

PIERRE HOME-DOUGLAS,
DORVAL, QUEBEC

America's enemies will be forever grateful to Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth. He will give them a recruiting tool far more effective than any they could have made for themselves.

FRED KAMENY,
GRAZ, AUSTRIA

This is how to end Israel's isolation

EFRON, FROM PAGE 1

demnations were enough.

But after the war in Gaza, and once Israel stopped treating the West Bank's status as negotiable, Europe stopped treating its own response as negotiable, too.

A decision over a strip of land east of Jerusalem known as E1 appeared to be the breaking point. For years, establishing a settlement in this area was avoided because it would cut the West Bank in two and prevent the existence of a continuous Palestinian entity. In the past, potential E1 settlements were discussed, planned, threatened and delayed, but never built. In August, the Netanyahu government moved forward with plans for construction there. Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich has said out loud that the plans were designed to bury the idea of a Palestinian state.

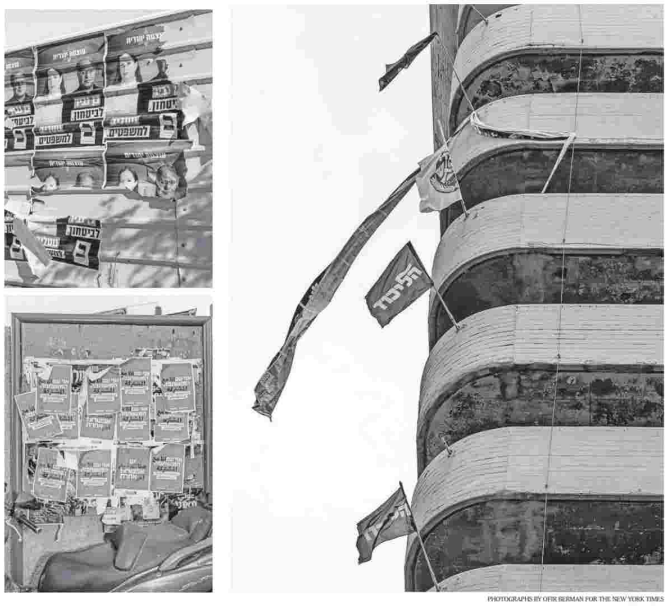
The move came on top of a large-scale increase in West Bank settlement and illegal outpost construction. It came as Jewish terrorists, who enjoy impunity from the government, escalated the frequency and ferocity of attacks on innocent Palestinian residents of the West Bank and government ministers spoke openly of what amounts to ethnic cleansing. The E1 decision forced many Western governments to stop pretending.

Britain explained that its ban was not meant to target Israel, but rather the settlements. But its impact will spread into business within Israel proper, because Israeli banks, builders and shippers do not differentiate between territories. Even more risky for Israel is that new measures could target Israel as a whole. Sanctions rarely stay narrow; the pressure tends to run toward broadening them, not lifting them. Given European threats to suspend trade concessions with all of Israel, and pressure by the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement, that risk is no longer hypothetical.

Washington, meanwhile, is drifting. The Trump administration did not order Israel to stop the E1 move, but reportedly did not press Britain to hold back, either. Support for Israel is thinning in Congress: stalwart pro-Israel Democrats have refused to back arms sales to Israel out of concern that they would not be used in accordance with U.S. and international law, or have introduced measures to impose sanctions on settlement activity. Among Republicans, a populist wing has started breaking with decades of reflexive G.O.P. support for Israel, pushing to cut or place conditions on aid.

Israelis and their defenders are increasingly alarmed by these developments, but most still treat the threats as something to survive, rather than prevent. Replace the government, they say, and get ready: build financial buffers, deepen integration with U.S. defense and financial systems, run contingency planning the way Israel plans for military threats. These measures are important in their own right, but they will not be enough.

Israelis have embraced a sense of Spartan defiance and self-sufficiency, but facts are stubborn. Israel needs the world more than it likes to admit; it depends on its allies for diplomatic cover, arms, trade, technology and the research partnerships that keep its economy and its security running.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY OFIR BERMAN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Right, Likud party flags flying outside the party's headquarters in Tel Aviv; left, political posters around Israel this month.

Israel has a great deal to offer its partners, too. For a Europe threatened by Russia and forced to reduce its strategic dependence on the U.S. for defense and technology, Israel is positioned to help fill the gap. For a Washington seeking a lighter footprint in the Middle East, Israel remains its most capable and willing partner (when it restrains its proclivity for regional arson). As Iran and its Houthi allies squeeze Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries, reports of Israeli intelligence-sharing on the Houthi threat show how valuable Israel can be.

The hope of many Israelis and Israel's supporters around the world is that elections on Oct. 27 will usher in a new government and slow the slide into greater isolation.

That value is most likely why the bans, for now, target the settlements alone rather than Israel as a whole. And that's why if a new government embraces a new approach, not just new rhetoric, it should be able to help Israel's standing. That would require Mr. Netanyahu's leading rivals to pursue a very different agenda than the ones they are advocating now.

Among these rivals, Avigdor Lieberman proposes to dissolve the Palestinian Authority, annul the Oslo Accords and hand day-to-day administration of Palestinian life in the West Bank to Jordan, while Israel keeps overall security control. Naftali Bennett, who is running jointly with Yair Lapid, calls for Israel to annex parts of the West Bank, while giving the rest for Palestinian "autonomy," not sovereignty. In an interview last week, Gadi Eisenkot presented a modest plan to better manage the conflict and ease pressure on the Palestinians, but has ruled out a Palestinian state.

Election slogans say more about what candidates think wins votes right now than about what any of them would do with actual power. Nothing in their statements, in their record in past governments, or in their easy assumptions that the diplomatic damage could be undone, gives much reason to expect a substantial change from their campaign oratory.

Nor would change be easy. Reversing a trajectory five decades in the making with a public that has moved to the right and a security establishment increasingly enmeshed with the settlement project is a heavy lift. Just curbing settler violence, which is not a politically difficult issue, would take more than periodic arrests of bad apples. It would require pulling settler-heavy reserve battalions from West Bank duty and cutting off the funding and land that sustain illegal outposts. It requires an Israeli government willing to treat settler violence as a governance failure rather than a public relations problem.

History offers some reason for optimism. In the late 1970s, Menachem Begin, a lifelong Likud hard-liner, became the first Israeli leader to make peace with an Arab state, returning Sinai to Egypt to get there; Yitzhak Rabin was a hawkish general pursuing peace when he was assassinated; Ariel Sharon designed the settlement enterprise before he evacuated settlements and pulled Israel out of Gaza.

Each broke with their instincts and their base when they judged the cost of not doing so to be higher. That is the choice now. A government that curbs settler violence, freezes annexation and reopens a horizon for Palestinian sovereignty could begin recovering much of the standing, the markets and the alliances Israel has spent the last few years burning up.

For decades Israel has behaved like the mother in David Grossman's novel "To the End of the Land," a character who walks the Galilee to evade news of her son's possible death, as if not hearing it could keep it from being true. No amount of walking is going to make the Palestinian question go away. The current government tried to settle the matter for good, seeking to bury the idea of the Palestinian question once and for all.

Instead, this government may have exhumed it, turning it into a domestic issue in nations around the world and leaving whichever government comes next no choice but to finally reckon with it.

SHIRA EFRON *is the Israel policy chair and a senior fellow at RAND.*

U.S. naval power is waning, but that could change

FOROOHAR, FROM PAGE 9

and shipping routes have become globally contentious choke points. No wonder countries like China and Russia are looking to exploit new, alternative routes that they can control — like the transpolar route across the Arctic Ocean, parts of which Russia claims control over. A Chinese company recently launched a weekly shipping route across the Arctic, cutting 40 days off the usual pathway.

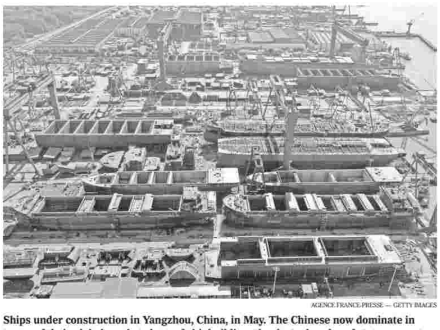
Those two countries have around 60 icebreakers (which are necessary for safe passage in the High North) to America's three in the Arctic. That is one of the reasons the Trump administration is building more with the Finns, an idea that was born during Trump 1.0 and developed during the Biden administration (which saw a strategic opportunity to "friend shore" with NATO allies, including Finland and Canada). America needed more icebreakers to navigate an area that had become far more economically and strategically important than it used to be. Global warming has opened the possibility of new commercial channels through the High North as ice melts. The Russians are once again militarizing the Northern Sea Route (as they did during the Cold War), and many nations are in a race to map the region for natural gas and minerals. All of this requires icebreakers.

While the Biden administration put meat on the bones of the strategy, signing a memorandum of understanding on the sidelines of the NATO summit in 2024, it was President Trump who later inked the deal to build 11 icebreakers with the Finns during his second administration — all of which reflects the fact that shipbuilding has become a bipartisan industrial priority.

Defense hawks have long warned that while America might still have a lead in areas like nuclear submarines and the highest-tech maritime equipment, its lack of more nimble, dual use vessels that could be turned out more cheaply and quickly would be a huge disadvantage in a world in which supply chain resiliency and spheres of influence are more important. In maritime industries, as in so many others, there is no single global market anymore, but rather fleets owned by groups of countries and companies that might or might not work together in a pinch.

During the Biden administration, Jake Sullivan, then the national security adviser, declared that "ships are the new chips," an area in which the United States should, working with allies, become more self-sufficient. While Mr. Trump has boasted about building a "golden fleet" of battleships, he's also put a pause on trade remedies based on Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974 that would curb Chinese power in shipbuilding. During the U.S.-China summit in late September, the pause was extended until early 2027.

Despite the rhetoric, Mr. Trump is no China hawk. But there are many on both sides of the aisle in Congress who are more committed to rebuilding the U.S. maritime sector. In April 2025, Senators Todd Young, Republican of Indiana, and Mark Kelly, Democrat of Arizona, announced a push for the SHIPs for America Act, a bill that would revitalize America's shipbuilding industries, putting more money into work force training, and a maritime security trust fund that, like the national airport and highway trust funds, aims to create a pot of funds that don't have to be reauthorized every year, making the long-term work of bolstering the maritime industries possible.



AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE — GETTY IMAGES

Ships under construction in Yangzhou, China, in May. The Chinese now dominate in terms of their global market share of shipbuilding, thanks to decades of state support.

Congress may well punt on the talks until after the midterms, but shipbuilding will remain a big part of the political conversation — battleground states such as Wisconsin, Michigan and Pennsylvania are also big maritime industry states. And the weaponization of maritime choke points by Iran, China, the Houthis and others isn't going away. There is little question that America needs to bolster its fleet at a time of rising conflict and global mercantilism.

As Trump's shipbuilding adviser, the former naval officer Jerry Hendrix, wrote in a 2020 book, "Perhaps hearkening back to China's late-19th-century collapse under pressure from imperial European powers," Beijing has pursued a maritime strategy that "mirrored the pattern laid down centuries before by the Dutch and British East India Companies," ruling the world's supply chains in part by ruling the waves.

America has let go of its maritime edge at its own peril. But Congress has an opportunity to bring it back, slowly but surely, with an industrial policy that both right and left want. It's an opportunity that shouldn't be allowed to float away.

RANA FOROOHAR *is the author of "Sea Change: America's New Great Game in the Arctic Circle."*

ACPM **Printed in** Athens, Beijing, Beringen, Dubai, Frankfurt, Gallargues, Hong Kong, Islamabad, Karachi, Kathmandu, Kuala Lumpur, Lahore, London, Madrid, Milan, Nagoya, Osaka, Rome, Seoul, Taipei, Tel Aviv, Tokyo.
The New York Times Company 620 Eighth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10018-1405, NYTCo.com; The New York Times International Edition (ISSN: 2474-7149) is published six days per week. A.G. SULZBERGER, Publisher ©2026 The New York Times Company. All rights reserved. Commission Paritaire No. 0528 C83099.
To submit an opinion article, email: opinion@nytimes.com. **Subscriptions:** Subscribe.INYT.com, nytisubs@nytimes.com, Tel. +33 1 41 43 93 61. **Advertising:** advertising.nytimes.com, internationaladinquiries@nytimes.com.
Regional Offices: U.K. 1 Bartholomew Close, 3rd Floor, London, EC1A 7BL; **Hong Kong** 1201 K.Wah Centre, 191 Java Road, North Point, Hong Kong; **France** 2, rue Favart, 75002 Paris, France. Printed in France by Midi Print ZAC du Pôle Actif. 18 Allée Piot 30660 Gallargues le Montueux.

SCIENCE

Training Dr. A.I. to perform surgery

TORONTO

Canada wants to leverage the technology to improve its health care system

BY VJOSA ISAI

Under shadowless operating room lights at Toronto General Hospital, two surgeons clipped away at a pear-shaped gallbladder they were removing from a woman on a spring morning.

"Can we get the A.I. on, please?" called Dr. Amin Madani, an endocrine and acute care surgeon.

On a large monitor, the view from a camera inside the patient bloomed with green and red splotches showing where it was and was not safe to cut. The overlay was powered by artificial intelligence, and Dr. Madani has been training the model to think like the best surgeons.

His colleague, Dr. Timothy Jackson, pointed out that the system might need to show another color: caution yellow, to represent the zones always requiring human judgment that no algorithm has learned to mimic.

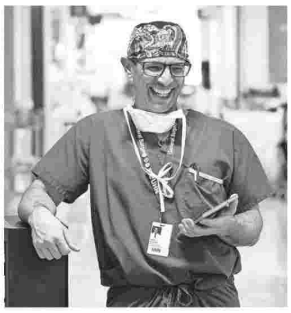
The surgical field — what doctors call the area of a body under operation — is among the latest frontiers for artificial intelligence in Canada, a country that has earned a global reputation for the early development of A.I. and is home to some of its pioneers.

Canada spends more on health care than most developed countries, yet its universal, primarily tax-funded system is beset by long waiting times for family doctors and a shortage of hospital beds, making the promise of A.I. to improve care while cutting costs enticing to the government.

Now, with a scalpel, Canadian researchers are testing the bounds of what A.I. can do.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY COLE BURSTON FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES







Above, Dr. Amin Madani, left, and Dr. Timothy Jackson performing laparoscopic surgery on a patient with the help of A.I. guides. Below from left: Dr. Madani with the system that powers his A.I. surgical guide program; a view inside a patient during gallbladder removal surgery; and an iPad used to control a monitor that guides surgeons' incisions.

"THAT'S THE ART OF SURGERY"

Surgeons have long trained on an apprenticeship model: They observe others at work before operating themselves, and eventually master the techniques well enough to instruct a peer. The American surgical pioneer Dr. William Stewart Halsted called it "see one, do one, teach one."

Over the last few years, Dr. Madani, 40, became fascinated by how surgeons learn — their cognitive processes, their behavioral psychology, what it takes to become elite in the operating room. During the pandemic, when operating rooms were largely closed, he designed tools to train residents to read the surgical field, visually, like putting pilots in a flight simulator.

Then A.I. arrived in medicine.

"All the work that I had done was like a perfect setup to train A.I. algorithms to think and behave like expert surgeons," said Dr. Madani, who founded the Surgical Artificial Intelligence Research Academy at the University Health Network, a public research and teaching hospital group in Toronto known as U.H.N. "It was all very serendipitous."

Laparoscopic operations are recorded by a camera inserted through a small incision, generating the video that trains Dr. Madani's A.I. model. One of the first algorithms out of his lab was for the common gallbladder removal, and was aimed at improving precision to avoid bile duct injuries. The rare complication is the leading cause of medical malpractice lawsuits against general surgeons in Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom, according to a 2025 peer-reviewed journal article.

Though gallbladder operations are routine, surgeons can misread the anatomy from inattention or overconfidence, a gap A.I. tools are meant to fill, said Nicolas Padoy, the scientific director of the Institute of Image-Guided Surgery in Strasbourg, France, which is conducting similar research.

Dr. Madani's tool — called GoNoGoNet — functions like a GPS for the operating table — recognizing anatomical patterns and predicting "no-go zones," places where an incision would cause a major complication. Like a stoplight, green indicates cut and red means don't.

But, "there's a yellow zone there, and that's the art of surgery that can't sort of be calculated in zeros and ones yet in an A.I. model," said Dr. Jackson, the operating room medical director of general surgery at U.H.N.

In the operating room, the 44-year-old patient's heart monitor beeped steadily during the roughly 40-minute procedure. (The patient agreed to let The New York Times observe her surgery.) After the surgeons inflated her abdomen with carbon dioxide to create room for their instruments, Dr. Jackson took his place beside Dr. Madani.

Two monitors — one with the A.I. overlay and one without — showed the same view from inside the patient's abdomen via the laparoscope, a tubular surgical instrument with a tiny light and camera. The surgeons exposed, clipped and cauterized the duct and artery connected to the gallbladder while watching the monitor without A.I., because they said they sometimes find the red and green overlay distracting. Both options are always available to surgeons. Once the organ was free, they slipped it into a bag to keep it from rupturing.

"I didn't personally see it coming, but I find myself in a world where I think interacting with A.I. is unavoidable," Dr. Jackson said.

TRUST ISSUES

A.I. has spread through nearly every corner of North American health care, automating clerical work like clinical notes and patient correspondence while speeding diagnoses and identifying personalized treatments. In the United States, the Trump administration is pushing to integrate it into medical care at a pace that some in the field find unnerving.

The Toronto surgeons said that GoNoGoNet has been quite accurate.

"I was very proud of my A.I. model," Dr. Madani said after the procedure.

He performs about two gallbladder removals a month using the tool for guidance as part of a clinical trial that requires consent from participants.

How much patients need to know about A.I. before agreeing to its use in their care — and how they consent to their data being used, particularly if the models are later commercialized — is one of the field's major ethical questions, said Dr. Jay Shaw, acting director of the University of Toronto Joint Centre for Bioethics.

Another concern is whether A.I. in the operating room will make surgeons more dependent on their tools than their skill. Even automating clinical notes can erode critical thinking, said Dr. Benjamin Chin-Yee, a hematologist and professor at Western University in London, Ontario, who studies how new technologies affect patient care.

"I worry that if we are so quick to outsource that to A.I., a lot of those important steps in the reasoning process will be lost," he said.

It may be a while before that becomes pressing. A 2023 peer-reviewed study found emergency surgeons divided over whether to let A.I. guide surgical decisions. Dr. Madani still sees the gap between early adopters and skeptics. But, "most of us are pretty excited about the digital age of surgery," he said.

Software engineer who sent astronauts to the moon

AN APPRAISAL

A pioneering scientist at a time when computing was far from prestigious

BY CAROLYN Y. JOHNSON AND KENNETH CHANG

Long before software engineering became a boys' club — the exclusive domain of tech bros and a mythical force that threatens to either transform the world or snuff it out — it was just Margaret's thing.

"There goes Margaret with her software engineering," Margaret Hamilton recalled being ribbed by her colleagues in the 1960s at Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Instrumentation Laboratory. Ms. Hamilton led the software engineering division there, programming the on-board computers that guided the Apollo spacecraft to the moon, and argued that software ought to be on the same plane as the then-more-glamorous endeavor of building hardware.

But her insight wasn't seen as visionary at the time; it was more like a quirky inside joke.

Ms. Hamilton, who died on Sept. 30 at the age of 90, is a classic "hidden figure" in science history — a trailblazing woman who played a crucial, largely unseen role in a field where the protagonists were mostly men.

Her overlooked contributions were catapulted into the spotlight in recent years, propelled by the rediscovery of a charismatic photo taken in 1969. Ms. Hamilton, 5-foot-4 (163 centimeters), stands, grinning, next to an equally tall pile of printed-out software code. In 2017, the tableau was recreated by Lego, as part of a "women of NASA" set.

Today, the business of software mints billionaires and is dominated by men.

That was not always true.

Ms. Hamilton fit into a lineage of female pioneers in computer science, before the field was considered prestigious or lucrative.

In the 1840s, Ada Lovelace wrote the first computer program long before the first computer. She devised an algorithm that was intended to run on the steam-powered "analytical engine" that Charles Babbage had proposed.

During World War II, the Eniac Six were six women who programmed the first general-purpose, electronic digital computer to calculate ballistic trajectories. Men built the computer, but programming was considered tedious and so was left to female mathematicians to handle.

In the 1950s, Grace Hopper was key in developing some of the first computer compilers, which translated English-like programming language into instructions that a computer could understand and execute.

In the space program's earliest days, women, including Black women, worked as "human computers," carrying out essential calculations by hand.

When Ms. Hamilton began her career in the late 1950s, her programming peers were overwhelmingly men, she recalled in interviews. This was the decade when women flowed into the work force, and even professions like medicine and law were opening up to them.

"Then you were sort of like just an exception because you just sort of were doing a good job so they decided to give you more," she recalled in a 2017 oral history for the Computer History Museum.

For the Apollo program, she led the software engineering division at the M.I.T. lab, which had won the contract to program the spacecraft computers. The monumental task before her team was to make sure the software was safe for people, or "man rated," in the parlance of the day.

"If it didn't work, a person's life was at stake — if not over," she said. "That was always uppermost in my mind and probably many others as well. It had to be man rated, and it had to work the first time."



NASA/ALAMY

Margaret Hamilton with printed computer code in 1969. She led the software engineering division at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's Instrumentation Laboratory.

Ms. Hamilton's conviction that computer science was a form of engineering would augur the field's future. As computing left the rarefied world of the cosmos and came down to earth, the cachet, status and salaries of the people who did it rose.

But while Ms. Hamilton is credited with popularizing the term "software engineering," it seemed to her that it was only when a man — a "hardware guru" — argued in a meeting that "You know, Margaret's right," that people began to listen.

There were the hardware engineers, Ms. Hamilton recalled in the oral history. And the aeronautical engineers. "But we were the programmers, and we were kind of like second-class citizens," she said. "I mean, you know, we'd take the stuff and we'd 'make it run,' right?"

As Ms. Hamilton reached icon status in recent years, she was frequently asked to reflect on what it was like to be a female engineer in the 1960s.

At one job, she recalled, a colleague asked her: "'How can you do this? How can you work here when you have a baby at home?' And I remember, I'd not been asked that before. I said, 'Well, you know, you have to do what's right for you and I have to do what's right for me.'"

"We concentrated on our work more than whether one was male or female."

During her work on the Apollo software, she brought her daughter, Lauren, to work on nights and weekends. Lauren would pretend to be an astronaut, pressing various buttons on the module — and once caused a simulation to crash. This revealed "the Lauren bug." Her bosses said it did not need to be fixed, because astronauts were better trained.

"I said, but what if it does happen?" she recalled in an interview in 2019 as part of the 50th anniversary of Apollo 11. "My whole emphasis was always 'What if?'"

During Apollo 8, she said, an astronaut did press the button during flight when he was not supposed to.

"Right after that flight I was allowed to put that fix in there," Ms. Hamilton recalled.

That caution proved crucial as Neil Armstrong was flying the Apollo 11 lunar lander. Ms. Hamilton and her engineering team had anticipated that the tiny computer might become overwhelmed by the deluge of data during descent.

Because of an unfortunate confluence of events, that is exactly what happened. A series of foreboding alarms sounded. By design, the computer jettisoned its nonessential tasks without crashing, and the landing succeeded.

After the moon landings, Ms. Hamilton went on to found companies and continued to work in software engineering.

But for decades, almost no one had heard of her or known her role in Apollo. In The New York Times archives, there is no mention of her until 2005, and that article described her, in passing, only as "one of the hundreds of programmers who worked on the software."

The number of women majoring in computer science rose through the 1970s and peaked in 1984 at 37 percent.

But the rise of personal computers turned the field into something more like tinkering with automobiles, and the culture shifted. During the 1990s, a photo of a Playboy centerfold became one of the standard images used to test digital processing techniques.

"I was surprised that it almost seemed to be worse in some ways today than it was back in the early days," Ms. Hamilton said in 2017.

While women continued to become more prevalent in law, medicine and science, they fled computer science, dropping under 20 percent before nudging back up slightly in recent years.

Ms. Hamilton did not always see herself as the symbol she would later become.

"I was so involved in what we were doing, technically, that I was oblivious to the fact that I was being outnumbered by men," she said in a 2015 interview. "In the case of the Apollo project my colleagues (mostly male) and I were friends and we worked side by side to solve challenging problems and meet critical deadlines."

Ms. Hamilton added: "We concentrated on our work more than whether one was male or female."

She noted her surprise that, decades later, many things had not changed for the better.

"When discrimination against a woman exists today, it is usually more subtle than it would have been back then," she said. "That has its advantages and disadvantages."

OPINION

Barney Frank: Impeach 'Woke'



BUSINESS WORLD
By Holman W. Jenkins, Jr.

Oh, for the days of the smoke-filled rooms. Party elders once settled on state governors and army generals as presidential nominees. These were men whom they had been able to observe closely for decades attending to the public's business.

Listen to Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez tell the New York Times that history doesn't care whether you're ready—it seizes upon you to do, er, the thing you always wanted to do anyway, like Medicare for All and an expansive national minimum wage, never mind whether these things are timely in an age of overflowing debt and gathering international dangers.

Donald Trump, of course, is the apotheosis of the president as self-realizer. If he had died at his moment of supreme achievement after his 2024 return to power, he would have entered the pantheon.

His subsequent presidency? Not a ticket to the pantheon.

I immediately recognize an irony in the argument I'm about to make. His two latest Democratic opponents were products of the now smoke-free room. The smoke-free room made a big comeback in the establishment's decade-long battle to keep one man, Mr. Trump, out of the presidency. Mr. Trump's prolonged war was never really against any other candidate. It was against a collective establishment upchuck.

As reporters Jonathan Swan and Maggie Haberman document but don't explain in their book, Mr. Trump's subordination of the GOP happened not while he was in power. It happened during the interregnum, when his enemies were in power.

Only then did MAGA become a genuine mass movement, as sociologists define the term, rather than just a cult of enthusiasm for one politician that manifested itself on Election Day. The first premonition may have been the self-organizing protests against Covid lockdowns that began in Lansing, Mich., and spread to other state capitals in April 2020, at a time—note carefully—when Mr. Trump was still on the fence about lockdowns.

The real congealment likely happened in the days before and after Jan. 6, 2021. In a representative news database, MAGA received 9,985 mentions in the first two years of the first Trump presidency. In the single year of 2024, it received 65,345 mentions. By then, Americans had seen things they never saw before. The press lying in conjunction with the national security state. U.S. intelligence officials meddling in domestic politics. The Covid coercions. The extralegal creation of mass mail-in voting in 2020. In 2024, a conspiracy to reinstall a visibly senile incumbent over the heads of his own party's voters.

The last honest mistake arguably was Hillary Clinton's overbetting on the Upper Midwest in 2016. Then something abnormal began. Chuck Schumer famously put it into words: A politician is unwise to make an enemy of the intelligence apparatus.

Democrats should hold themselves accountable along with Donald Trump.

I've documented here the lack of courage and honesty of the press, the paralytic silence of certain of today's Democratic hopefuls about what happened in these years.

Prosecutor Jack Smith continues noisily to champion the merits of the prosecutions that Mr. Trump thwarted by being re-elected. A more interesting version of Mr. Smith would reflect on his own role in causing that re-election.

In popular books in the 1970s, the Washington Post's David Broder and Britain's Henry Fairlie warned us that we would regret our turn toward a populist, primary-style presidential selection process.

I wrote myself in 2016 that a Trump election would end up demystifying the kind of presidency we had given ourselves. Here we are. Every administration faces unhappy midterms. Not every administration faces its lame duckhood dragging behind it acts that may end in mass allegations of criminality against its members and mass pardons issued by the president.

Having downgraded the party machinery, having enshrined the president as a self-realizer, having empowered a zany activist class (often called political hobbyists) in both parties, we'll never fully revert to the smoke-filled room. But a great republic still needs a stable elite. And every instinct suggests that how Democrats and Republicans in Congress cope with the coming impeachments will be key in finding a new equilibrium.

The late Barney Frank's posthumous book came out last month, "The Hard Path to Unity: Why We Must Reform the Left to Rescue Democracy."

Veteran political writers David Shribman and Joan Vennochi had the temerity to notice that it plainly blames the left for Donald Trump. In a process that reached its absurd climax during the Biden presidency, voters were forced to learn that pulling the lever for any Democrat meant "a small internal minority with whom most of us disagree will dictate policy."

He meant "woke," about which the gay and liberal Frank is more damning than any Pete Hegseth screed. Starting next month, Democrats may find themselves with real power to begin undoing the damage they so myopically contributed to.

The Right's Pagan Nationalism



POLITICS & IDEAS
By William A. Galston

Secretary of State Marco Rubio delivered a speech in Athens last week that deserves to be taken seriously. Against the backdrop of the Acropolis, he argued the ancient Athenians defined the core of Western civilization. "To know them is to know ourselves," he said. He spelled out their defining characteristics: "fierce individuality and relentless ambition; daring exploration and invention; a yearning for discovery, for adventure, risk and glory," coupled with the desire to understand the world and a rejection of boundaries and limits. The Greeks organized civic life around "contest, ambition, competition," he added. The Greek city was "an arena for great men to test and prove themselves through struggle to be "the best, the strongest, the most beautiful."

Mr. Rubio characterized this relentless struggle—fueled by what the Greeks called *thumos*, "the fire of passion, strength, courage, pride"—as the "heart of great civilization." Without it, he declared, nations lose their will to fight, even to survive. In our times, he said, Europe has abandoned thumos for comfort and safety, rejecting the pursuit of excellence in the name of an egalitarianism of mediocrity. The Continent can save itself only if it can "awaken from its long slumber" and again embrace the "fire" of times past.

But Europe's era of fire led to colonialism—and to the backlash against it that has shaped world politics up to the present day. In the 20th century, national self-assertion generated two conflicts that devastated Europe and left few parts of the globe untouched. The European Union, which President Trump regularly reviles as an anti-American plot, represents a collective decision to prevent the recurrence of such conflicts.

Under the Trump administration, Mr. Rubio says, the U.S. has made a different choice, "the unapologetic pursuit of national power," coupled with the understanding that power requires not only the economic, technological, and military means to exercise it but also the demonstrated willingness to use it when prudence and diplomacy fail.

The power to do what? Mr. Rubio (or his speechwriter) seems to have read Thucydides up to Pericles' funeral oration but no further. Fifteen years later, the Athenians sent their navy to the neutral island of Melos, demanding that the Melians abandon their neutral stance, join the Athenian-dominated Delian League, and pay tribute to Athens. The Melians refused, appealing to justice. The Athenian envoy dismissed their appeal. In the real world, he replied, "the strong do what they can, and the weak suffer what they must."

It was in this spirit that Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent ridiculed Canada's refusal to knuckle under to U.S. trade demands: "I don't think you can be in a tit-for-tat with someone who's 13 times larger than you are."

Marco Rubio delivers a serious speech in Athens, but he leaves out Jerusalem.

Untethered from law and justice, overweening power becomes dangerous not only to those on its receiving end, but also to those who wield it. The Greeks understood that when daring and pride go too far, they mutate into reckless and self-destructive hubris.

Egged on by demagogues, Thucydides narrates, Athens embarked on a war of choice—the Sicilian expedition, the disastrous failure of which contributed to Athens's eventual defeat in the Peloponnesian War. Hubris leads people and nations to overestimate what their power can accomplish and to underestimate the effectiveness of their opponents' response. This lesson isn't obsolete.

In his celebration of Greek virtues, Mr. Rubio ignored their opposite—religious virtues. The Bible praises Moses as the humblest man on earth. In Proverbs we read that "pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall." There is considerable daylight between the secretary of state's paean to power and the Sermon on the Mount—which isn't to say that I would bet America's survival on the proposition that the meek shall inherit the earth. I suggest, unoriginally, that what we call the West emerged from, and is sustained by, the continuing tension between Athens and Jerusalem, not either in isolation from the other.

In 2022, Nate Hochman, the young man who is now Mr. Rubio's chief speechwriter, published a prescient article tracing the decline of the religious right in the Republican Party and the rise of a less religious form of conservatism that embraces national self-assertion over any form of universalism, including Christianity. Mr. Rubio's speech is evidence of this shift.

Years ago, I was the token liberal at a conference dominated by conservatives of various stripes. When I expressed concern about the rise of Christian nationalism, a traditional conservative acquaintance replied, "If you're worried about Christian nationalism, wait till you see the pagan version."

I'm beginning to understand what he meant.

A Gentle Faith on the Road to Heritage USA

By Caroline Aiken Koster

When I heard about the death of Jim Bakker, the scandalous televangelist who fleeced his flock in the 1980s, I recalled going "undercover" as a college newspaper reporter to visit Bakker's theme park, Heritage USA.

In 1987 I set out one morning from Duke University on my 160-mile pilgrimage to the Bakkers' "Christian Disneyland" in Fort Mill, S.C. I drove the aging four-cylinder Ford Escort my grandmother had lent me, a car not much faster than her sewing machine. Outside Charlotte, N.C., it began to smoke. A hose had failed. I pulled onto the shoulder.

Soon enough, a battered pickup pulled in behind me. I was initially wary, but my fears were unnecessary. A polite middle-aged man raised my hood, duct-taped the hose, and followed me as I limped to a service station. I thanked him and he drove off, now late for work. In an hour, my car was fixed and I was on my way again.

I'd been baptized and raised in a mainstream Kentucky Protestant church, but my father had shared childhood stories of snake handling and speaking in tongues in his Pentecostal Appalachian congregation. I'd expected a similar spectacle at the theme park, or at least the charismatic witness of Bakker and his wife, Tammy Faye, whom I'd seen on television at political rallies and telethons.

I came in search of an exposé and found a humble tram driver.

At Heritage USA, I strolled past biblical dioramas, watched a baptism near the water slide and ate Jesus' favorite fast food, all the while on the lookout for Bakker's flashy suits or his wife's iconic mascara. I never caught a glimpse. But when I boarded a tram, I recognized someone: The driver was my Good Samaritan from the highway.

As we circled the park, we talked about faith, family and what moved him. I asked reporter's questions, hoping for something revealing. He had no inside knowledge. He had a job, a family, a belief in God and, as I could confirm, a genuine willingness to put faith into action.

I never wrote the exposé. Others uncovered the fraud that got Bakker sentenced to 45 years in prison, a term later reduced to eight years and then five. I learned a lesson about prejudging and wrote instead about a mountain sign maker I had met on a previous drive through Appalachia. He crafted highway messages reading "Jesus Loves You" and "Repent Now." No ticket sales. No TV audience. Just a quiet preacher sharing the Gospel's messages with strangers—including a student on a journey in her Mamaw's old car.

The televangelist era is now the stuff of sitcoms and HBO dramas. Some of today's young journalists still document leaders and public figures with big talk and questionable ethics. There's always another. Each generation should hold them to account, demand civic duty, respect for law, and let voters and history judge them harshly. But my visit to the park reminded me we can save our harshness for the leaders and leave room for kindness toward the ordinary people standing near them.

Bakker died last week; Tammy Faye in 2007. I can still picture the tram driver who patched together my grandmother's clunker and the sign maker lettering Jesus' words along the road. These were helpers and gentle evangelists, faithful people with solid values and a common faith.

Forty years later, they're the ones I remember most when I think of Heritage USA.

Ms. Koster is a New York attorney and writer.

BOOKSHELF | By Diana Furchtgott-Roth

A Light on the Dismal Science

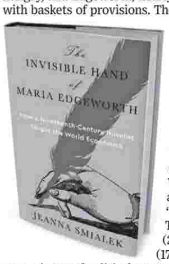
The Invisible Hand of Maria Edgeworth

By Jeanna Smialek
Knopf, 304 pages, $32

In the summer of 1822, as crop failures left parts of Ireland hungry, the Anglo-Irish novelist Maria Edgeworth wrote to her friend David Ricardo with a question: Was Ireland wise to depend so heavily on potatoes? Ricardo, the day's leading economist, thought not. Ireland was mistaken, he warned, in relying on a crop prone to failure. Poor families that could afford only potatoes would have nothing to fall back on when the crop gave out.

Edgeworth was unconvinced. Her inquiries among farmers on her family's estate at Edgeworthstown, Ireland, showed that potatoes were the most profitable crop. She believed failures could be managed with better storage and information about where supplies were plentiful.

Two decades later, the Great Famine arrived. By 1847, roughly 3,000 of the 5,000 people at Edgeworthstown were hungry, and Edgeworth, nearly 80, went from door to door with baskets of provisions. The famine, Jeanna Smialek writes, "would finally change Maria Edgeworth's mind."



If only people today were as willing to revise their views in light of fresh evidence. Edgeworth's intellectual honesty is one of many reasons to welcome Ms. Smialek's biography, "The Invisible Hand of Maria Edgeworth: How a Nineteenth-Century Novelist Taught the World Economics." Ms. Smialek, a journalist and the author of "Limitless: The Federal Reserve Takes on a New Age of Crisis" (2023), shows how Edgeworth (1768-1849) wove Adam Smith's new science of political economy into novels and children's stories that would be read across the Western world.

In her day, Edgeworth was a literary celebrity. Jane Austen, far less celebrated at the time, wrote to her niece in 1814 that she had resolved to like no novels "but Miss Edgeworth's, Yours & my own." Edgeworth was the most commercially successful novelist of her era until Walter Scott. She earned about £11,000 from her writing over her career, equivalent to about $1.7 million today. That compares with about £630 in lifetime earnings for Austen and £1,500 for Charlotte Brontë. She was arguably the J.K. Rowling of her age, wrapping moral and economic lessons for the young into popular stories. Yet today Edgeworth, as Ms. Smialek puts it, is a footnote.

Edgeworth's interest in economics began with her father, Richard Lovell Edgeworth, a charismatic inventor and landowner who married four times and fathered 22 surviving children. He chose Maria, his eldest daughter, as his assistant in managing the family's estate. This practical education complemented her reading of Adam Smith, David Hume, Thomas Malthus and David Ricardo. Her literary career was delayed by more than a decade by the influence of Thomas Day, a family friend who disapproved of women publishing. After Day died, her works poured from the presses.

Edgeworth's central conviction, that education can defeat poverty, is as relevant now as it was then. In an unpublished essay written around 1800, co-authored with her father, she argued that "in England a man who can read & write may make his way to the first offices of the state, but there is no possibility that this eminence should be attained by an illiterate poor." As Ms. Smialek explains, "the Edgeworths believed poverty and disadvantage should not be a dead-end, static state. The laboring classes should have the opportunity to raise their own position in society through effort and good behavior."

Maria Edgeworth argued that education and economic opportunity could ameliorate poverty. She carried her beliefs into novels.

Edgeworth carried the argument into her fiction. In "Ennui" (1809), the estate agent McLeod doubts "whether anything effectual can be done" for the Irish poor "till they have better education," while a neighboring landlord insists that teaching the poor to read is "adding fuel to fire." Edgeworth leaves no doubt which is the hero.

Ms. Smialek interweaves Edgeworth's story with economic debates of her time, which remain debates in ours. Edgeworth was close friends with Malthus and Ricardo and with the economist Richard Jones, who "sought her counsel." She advised the Irish politician Thomas Spring Rice, later the British chancellor of the exchequer, on relief for and education of the poor.

The famine tested Edgeworth's free-market principles. She had long preferred providing jobs to handing out relief. But when hungry men were too weak to work, and no seed was available to plant, she concluded that "the reasonable and large-minded political economist would allow that exigencies *require* exceptions." Economists have often found that theories cannot substitute for evidence. Yet Ms. Smialek notes that some British officials still invoked Malthus to justify withholding aid.

Ms. Smialek also introduces other women of the period who wrote about economics, including Jane Marcet and Harriet Martineau. The author recounts how Palgrave's Dictionary of Political Economy, published in the 1890s, included an entry on Edgeworth, written by Clara Elizabeth Collet. A major contributor to that dictionary was Edgeworth's nephew Francis Ysidro Edgeworth, the economist who lives on in the Edgeworth box taught to economics students today. It was Maria, Ms. Smialek notes, who first put Adam Smith into his father's hands.

Ms. Smialek makes the dismal science come alive with a journalist's fluidity. The book shows Edgeworth as a gifted translator of economic ideas, carrying the arguments of Smith, Malthus and Ricardo to readers young and old who would never open a treatise.

One episode, omitted by Ms. Smialek, shows Edgeworth's receptiveness to self-correction. In 1815, Rachel Mordecai, a Jewish schoolteacher in North Carolina, wrote to Edgeworth objecting to portrayals of Jews in her fiction, notably a villainous London coachmaker named Mordicai in "The Absentee" (1812). Edgeworth, who had used similar caricatures in other stories, was moved. Her next novel, "Harrington" (1817), follows its narrator from a childhood fear of Jews to admiration for them. The two women corresponded for the rest of Mordecai's life, and after she married Aaron Lazarus, she named her first child Marx Edgeworth Lazarus.

Ms. Smialek suggests that Maria Edgeworth has fallen into the twilight of history. Her book may well lead a revival.

Ms. Furchtgott-Roth is a distinguished fellow at the Energy Policy Research Foundation and the author of "Women's Figures: An Illustrated Guide to the Economic Progress of Women in America."

OPINION

REVIEW & OUTLOOK

The Wealth Tax Stakes in California

California is the nation's biggest laboratory for progressive policies and now stands as the political testing ground for the next socialist crusade—a wealth tax. Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders made the stakes clear at a recent rally in the state stumping for Prop. 40, a ballot initiative that would establish a 5% tax on residents with more than $1 billion in net worth.

If Prop. 40 passes, it will be part of the 2028 Democratic campaign.

"The whole country, and frankly people from around the world, are paying attention to what is happening here," the Vermont socialist said. "People are asking: 'Is it possible?' And you are going to do it and show the world it is possible?" He's right that the stakes are bigger than the Golden State. As Californians vote, so the Democratic Party is likely to follow.

Championing the initiative is the SEIU-United Healthcare Workers West, which claims the (supposedly) one-time wealth tax will raise $100 billion. That's doubtful since many billionaires have already vamoosed to other states. California Tax Foundation visiting fellow Jared Walczak estimated this spring that departures had already taken $777 billion in wealth out of the state.

This flight is a major reason Gov. Gavin Newsom, the California Teachers Association and pragmatic Democrats like San Francisco Mayor Daniel Lurie oppose the tax. The teachers union is also angry that healthcare programs would soak up 90% of the proceeds, bypassing a state constitutional requirement that roughly half of tax revenue go to public schools.

Targeted individuals would have to pay tax on nearly all their assets worldwide, including artwork, trusts, yachts, business interests and even a dependent's assets. A Rembrandt in a Miami penthouse would be taxable in California.

The tax would also apply to a taxpayer's share of voting control in private companies. So if a startup founder owns 10% of shares that carry 50% of voting rights, he'd have to pay tax as if he owned 50% of shares. This is intended to punish entrepreneurs who exercise control over companies.

As the Hoover Institution's Joshua Rauh explains in a new paper, Prop. 40 sets a trap for taxpayers by determining liability based on residency on Jan. 1, 2026. Because it can take months to establish residency in another state, billionaires would likely have had to initiate their relocation last autumn.

Yet they could still be soaked if the state Franchise Tax Board determines based on "all the facts and circumstances" that "a substantial purpose" of their move was to avoid the tax. The wealth tax's supporters say it won't spur billionaires to leave, but then why write in this "general anti-avoidance" rule?

Prop. 40 calculates a person's net worth for the purposes of assessing liability on Dec. 31, 2026. If markets and shares in high-flying companies later tumble, tough. The measure would allow taxpayers with illiquid assets—say, shares in private companies—to stretch out their payments over five years, but at a hefty 7.5% annual interest charge.

Oh, and don't believe the claim that this is a one-time tax to deal with federal Medicaid cuts. Federal Medicaid payments to California have increased 14% ($16.4 billion) over the last year and exceed the entire general fund budgets of all 49 other states. The wealth-tax revenue would be baked into California's Medicaid budget, much of which will go to fraudsters.

Proponents will almost certainly later seek to extend the tax beyond a year, or lower the wealth threshold at which it hits. All they would need is a two-thirds vote of the Legislature and the Governor's signature. Democrats control roughly three-quarters of seats in both chambers. If voters approve the tax, Democrats may be emboldened to expand it.

There are also strong arguments that the tax violates the state and U.S. constitutions, including the Fifth Amendment's takings clause and the Commerce Clause. But don't bet on California's progressive High Court striking it down. There's also no guarantee the U.S. Supreme Court will step in to save Californians from their policy blunder.

* * *

Recent polls show Prop. 40 narrowly ahead, and Mr. Newsom has failed to forcefully oppose it. Instead, he has forged common cause with its supporters by endorsing a national wealth tax and fanning the scare about the GOP Medicaid reform. If the measure passes, he and other Democrats are certain to make a wealth tax a main plank of their platforms for the White House in 2028.

European nations have imposed taxes on individual net worth over the years, but most have repealed them. They have failed as economic or revenue-raising policy. Americans have long resisted a tax on wealth. Local property taxes on homes are relatively small. If Californians cross this Prop. 40 Rubicon, get ready for a new era of wealth confiscation in America.

Why Is Britain Still Appeasing Iran?

The plot against the U.K.'s Fairford air base and its U.S. B-1 bombers was "almost certainly directed by Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard" (IRGC), British Prime Minister Andy Burnham said Monday. In response, Foreign Secretary Ed Miliband summoned the Iranian ambassador for a talking-to and sanctioned two Iranian operatives already under U.S. sanctions—because that'll show 'em.

The regime plots terror attacks on U.K. soil and pays no price.

The louder message is that Britain is still too irresolute even to expel the Iranian ambassador. That's what Australia did after finding that Iran's regime had directed terrorist attacks against a synagogue and a kosher cafe on Aussie soil. The Brits found earlier this year that an arson wave targeting U.K. Jews was the work of the IRGC.

But the Labour government doesn't seem too bothered. Mr. Miliband met Iran's foreign minister and shook his hand in September. The explanation was that a strong statement had been delivered, but all know such statements don't deter Iran. They embolden it, furnishing fresh evidence it can get away with terror in the U.K. A few days after the handshake, the plot against Fairford proceeded.

The U.K. has issued several summons of Iran's ambassador in recent years, but they must not have had much effect, unless one counts provoking laughter in Tehran. On Tuesday Iran even summoned the U.K. ambassador in reply.

Again Mr. Miliband says "Britain will not tolerate threats on our soil" while its actions suggest Britain will do just that. This isn't a "one-off" in the U.K. for Iran's regime, notes Kasra Aarabi, director of IRGC research at United Against Nuclear Iran: "More than 20 IRGC terror plots have been foiled since 2022 alone."

Ken McCallum, head of the U.K.'s MI5 intelligence agency, said in his annual threat briefing on Tuesday that Iranian operations in Britain are expanding. He cited attacks on Jews as well as "Iranian ambitions to come at harder targets." More than 50 people have been arrested in connection with Iran-linked operations in the U.K. in the past year, he added, calling the Fairford plot "not unique."

For a proud, free nation, that should be enraging. Yet Britain still hosts the Iranian regime's ambassador and active embassy, its soft-power infrastructure and even a special U.K. office of the Iranian Supreme Leader. It hasn't proscribed the IRGC as a terrorist group, preferring a weaker designation. Whatever Labour may say, the message so far from the U.K. is fear and indecision.

Jessica Tisch, Mamdani and the Left

Most Americans probably think New York City gets more media attention than it deserves, but the fate of socialist Mayor Zohran Mamdani will have national implications. And his fate is tied in part to that of the police commissioner he inherited and retained, Jessica Tisch.

New York's mayor is under socialist pressure to fire his police chief.

Yet Mr. Mamdani is now under pressure from his own left-wing supporters who elevated him to City Hall to sack Ms. Tisch. The Democratic Socialists of America, to which Mr. Mamdani belongs, is demanding that he "fire" her for not helping "drive ICE [Immigration and Customs Enforcement] out of New York City."

The DSA pressure began after ICE agents shot Oscar Belgal, a 28-year-old illegal immigrant. Mr. Belgal and his five-year-old son were in a car in the Marble Hill area of the city on Oct. 8 when they were approached by ICE agents as part of a targeted immigration enforcement.

When Mr. Belgal began to move the car, ICE agents fired seven rounds, hitting him in the neck (Mr. Belgal survived). An ICE spokesman says he "weaponized his vehicle" by ramming police cars, was threatening ICE agents, and has gang ties. Mr. Belgal had two prior arrests in the city, including one for robbery, according to the New York Police Department.

An investigation is underway, but the DSA is using what happened to villainize Ms. Tisch and the NYPD, who had no part of the incident. The DSA wants the mayor to "abolish the NYPD's Strategic Response Group (SRG) and Community Response Team (CRT)," which they accuse of overzealous policing.

Go figure. Ms. Tisch is Mr. Mamdani's best appointment, and the main reason the city hasn't seen more people leave. Her focus on "quality of life" policing and other modern methods are a major reason the city has less disorder and falling crime rates.

The NYPD says major crime in the city has declined 6.6% in 2026 with even sharper drops in serious crime. The city recorded historic lows in shootings and murders in the first nine months of 2026. Shooting incidents fell 11.6% to 489 from 553. There were 14.4% fewer shooting victims (594 from 694) and 19.8% fewer murders (203 from 253).

It's tempting to enjoy Mr. Mamdani's political dilemma here as he deals with a revolt on his left. But he's not going to find a better commissioner to run the NYPD. The mayor and the city need her more than she needs the job.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Readers Revolt Against Trump's Diesel Plan

Regarding your editorial "Trump's Diesel Insult to Lindsey Graham" (Oct. 12) about President Trump's deal to buy Russian diesel fuel: So, he's going to subsidize Russia's war with Ukraine in a desperate attempt to buy votes in the Nov. 3 general election and hurt our staunch ally Ukraine? This deal isn't likely to lower the cost of diesel fuel much before the general election. Further, we were led to believe that Mr. Trump could bring the war to a conclusion in 24 hours. How are we going to bring this nearly five-year-old war to a peaceful conclusion if we aid the Russian war machine?

Doug McFadden
Niskayuna, N.Y.

In the same week, I read articles in the Journal about a Russian airstrike that killed innocent civilians on a bus in Ukraine and the announcement that the U.S. has made a deal to buy diesel fuel from Russia. This gives me an upset stomach.

Bob Foster
Saratoga, N.Y.

The U.S. has much of which to be proud. This isn't one of those times. This diesel fuel will be paid for with the blood of Ukrainians. I voted for Mr. Trump, and will vote Republican in the midterms. But whenever I fill up my three-quarter-ton Chevrolet with diesel fuel, I will wear the shame Mr. Trump has brought upon us all.

Steven Martin
Rockwall, Texas

My heart could sink no lower when I learned of Mr. Trump's deal with Vladimir Putin. I guess the temporary pain of diesel that costs more than $6 a gallon trumps the loss of lives in Ukraine.

Charles Treichel
Madison, Wis.

Buying diesel fuel from a mass-murdering dictator spotlights the president's low opinion of American voters. It won't buy my vote, only my contempt.

Dan Jones
Eureka Springs, Ark.

Higher Education Isn't Lacking in Innovation

In his op-ed "Pouring Money Into the Ivy League Won't Solve Its Problems" (Oct. 9), Jeff Yass argues that even large gifts make little difference at wealthy universities.

To foster competition and innovation, he writes, donors should give to "alternative institutions" such as Carnegie Mellon University's proposed Miami campus or the University of Austin.

He insists that funding new, innovative competitors in the field is the only way to prompt reform, but he overlooks that there is already enormous variation, competition and experimentation in American higher education.

The vast majority of the roughly 4,000 degree-granting institutions in the U.S. are constantly competing with their peers, with new models such as competency-based education and co-op programs. Recent innovations range from Minerva University's borderless campus to Paul Quinn College's urban work model. Hundreds of universities have cutting-edge programs in computing, information sciences and artificial intelligence. Mr. Yass is wrong to dismiss elite institutions as "culturally malignant rackets that should be put out of business."

Donors can—and do—have an enormous effect on universities. Gifts addressing "societal challenges" include Michael Bloomberg's effort to make Johns Hopkins's medical school tuition free and John and Ann Doerr's gift to Stanford to launch a school of sustainability focused on climate and the environment.

As laudable as Carnegie Mellon University's new campus may be, universities have for decades promoted interdisciplinary study of subjects ranging from genomics to bioengineering, neuropsychology and big data.

Attaching labels like "disruptive" and "innovative" to "alternative institutions" doesn't make them a cure for all the ills Mr. Yass imagines higher education suffers.

David Wippman
Emeritus president, Hamilton College
Bethesda, Md.
Glenn Altschuler
Cornell University
Ithaca, N.Y.

U.S. Manufacturers Need Permitting Reform

Your editorial "Permitting Reform at Last, Really?" (Oct. 6) rightly highlights the urgent need to advance energy permitting reform. For manufacturers across the country, the consequences of inadequate energy infrastructure are already being felt.

America's manufacturing sector employs some 13 million people and forms the backbone of our nation's supply chain, including for national defense goods. Politicians on both sides of the aisle champion domestic manufacturing and support reshoring, investment and the jobs this industry provides. If Congress is serious about strengthening American manufacturing and competing with China, lawmakers must work together to pass the energy permitting reform bill.

Manufacturers depend on reliable, affordable energy. Without additional infrastructure in the form of natural gas pipelines, transmission and generation, our manufacturing supply chain will become increasingly fragile and even break.

The warning signs are already glaring. Our members report that in September, one of our nation's lowest natural gas demand months, five interstate natural gas systems restricted natural gas to manufacturing companies due to inadequate capacity, raising serious concerns about what will happen this winter at peak demand. Last winter, 47 natural gas pipelines restricted or curtailed supply to manufacturers, resulting in significant economic costs and disruption to U.S. supply chains. Some companies paid over $100/MM Btu for natural gas.

These constraints threaten U.S. competitiveness and increase our dependence on foreign supply chains. We need energy infrastructure, and permitting reform must be a priority.

Paul Cicio
Chairman, Electricity Transmission Competition Coalition
Washington

Shapiro's Education Policies

Regarding your editorial "Democrats Have No School Choice Excuse" (Oct. 9) about Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro and the Federal Scholarship Tax Credit: This is an opportunity to empower Pennsylvania's children and families—and to unite people in support of America's future.

Programs like the scholarship tax credit are essential for giving students the ability to compete and win on the global stage. If they're going to rise and lift up our country, their families need the freedom to choose the education that's best for them. Polls show that Pennsylvanians overwhelmingly support such policies. So do national polls about Americans as a whole.

Mr. Shapiro should seize this opportunity to unite his state, especially if he has national ambitions. Mr. Governor, please put aside politics, and put families and children first.

Rev. Joshua C. Robertson
Black Pastors United for Education
Harrisburg, Pa.

Navi Pillay and the Tainted Nobel Peace Prize's History

Your editorial "A Nobel Prize for Hating Israel" (Oct. 10) said it would be difficult for the Nobel Committee to bestow its peace prize on a less-worthy recipient than the current winner, Navanethem "Navi" Pillay, "whose career has been marked above all by hatred for Israel and the Jews who support it." Allow me to submit a nomination: That would be the father of modern Mideast terrorism, Yasser Arafat, who won the prize in 1994.

Jim Grodnik
Brevard, N.C.

CORRECTION

Four hundred thousand dollars is roughly 200% of the median household income for a family of four in Silicon Valley. The Oct. 13 editorial, "California Has a Home to Sell You," misstated the figure.

Letters intended for publication should be emailed to wsj.ltrs@wsj.com. Please include your city, state and telephone number. All letters are subject to editing, and unpublished letters cannot be acknowledged.

Pepper ... And Salt

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL



"Just ask 'Mr. Wealth of Information' over there."

Milton Friedman's Courageous Candor

By Arthur M. Diamond

Friends of free markets lament that we need, but can't find, new Milton Friedmans to refute emboldened socialists. We might have better luck if we remembered what we are trying to find.

Fifty years ago Wednesday, Friedman was awarded the Nobel Prize in economics. The Associated Press reported that the Nobel committee had an unusually long and heated discussion of his nomination. Some members were rumored to have objected to Friedman's policy proposals in his " 'careless' commentaries in his magazine columns."

In Newsweek and elsewhere, Friedman proposed a better world of progress and freedom. His arguments were strong, and he delivered them with courage, clarity and a disarming good humor that was magnified by his directing them at ideas, not people. Gary Becker, Friedman's former student and an eventual Nobel winner himself, said Friedman

The economist who became a Nobel laureate 50 years ago skewered not people but bad ideas.

"was the most intellectually courageous person I have ever known, willing to say something if he believed it was right, damn the consequences." The consequence was that Friedman sometimes had to take ill will from those who didn't want to hear what he said.

Friedman took ill will from the American Medical Association when he argued that licensing physicians limited their supply and thereby reduced patient access to healthcare. He took ill will from his fellow economists who were receiving National Science Foundation funding



Milton Friedman in 1980. EVERETT/SHUTTERSTOCK

when he argued that the NSF should be abolished because it burdened taxpayers and reduced innovation. And he took ill will from the Marxist Spartacus Youth League (who for years disrupted his speeches) when he argued that their socialism would bring the end of progress and freedom.

Early in his career Friedman took ill will from the socialist-oriented and highly mathematical Cowles Commission. The commission was an important part of the University of Chicago economics department and included a couple of members who went on to receive Nobel Prizes. At Cowles Commission seminars, Friedman persistently argued that their modeling choices were arbitrary and their complex general equilibrium multiple regression models didn't generate predictions supported by the evidence.

Friedman's experiences strengthened his argument. During World War II, while working for the government, he had used multiple regression analysis—a means of statistical prediction—to try to devise two stronger alloys for use in military airplanes. When he sent his proposed alloy mixtures to be created and tested at an MIT lab, both alloys burned up in a few hours, leading him to a lifelong skepticism of multiple regression analysis.

Jennifer Burns tells in her biography of Friedman how the members of the Cowles Commission decamped for Yale rather than stay in Chicago and face his persuasive arguments. This gave Friedman the opportunity to build a major economics department that practiced methods and pursued goals different from others.

Economists Arjo Klamer and David Colander reported in their 1990 book, "The Making of an Economist," that when they surveyed graduate students at four major economics departments, those at MIT, Harvard and Columbia thought they were doing mathematical puzzle-solving. Those at Chicago thought they were applying price theory to understand how the world worked and make it work better. Many called this the Chicago School; Friedman called it good economics.

Friedman believed that good economics required free speech, and sometimes he quickly changed his mind in response to new evidence and arguments. When British economist Ronald Coase presented some of his ideas, Friedman was at first skeptical but came to agree with Coase after a lively discussion one evening. George Stigler, Friedman's close friend and co-founder of the Chicago School, said, "What an exhilarating event!"

On some other issues, Friedman's views evolved more slowly. He partly regretted his early effort to make income-tax withholding more efficient, seeing it as a stimulant to the growth of government. His later proposal for income tax policy was called the "negative income tax," a form of what today is called universal basic income. I speculate that if he were alive today, he might see it as another regrettable proposal that is also likely to stimulate government growth.

A cheery disposition didn't keep Friedman from seeing that a "tyranny of the status quo"—the title of one of the books he wrote with his wife, Rose—often blocked the adoption of good policies. But he also saw that in times of crisis, officials would seek out alternative policies that economists had developed and kept alive. Today we have a healthcare crisis. When I first met Friedman in about 1973, I remember his supporting the abolition of the Food and Drug Administration. When I last heard him speak, more than 30 years later (about a year before his death in 2006), he was still keeping this policy alive, still explaining that the FDA made healthcare very expensive and most importantly reduced drug innovation.

At 5 feet tall, Milton Friedman wasn't physically imposing. He was short, but not short on perseverance, goodwill, clarity and courage.

Mr. Diamond is a senior fellow at the American Institute for Economic Research and author of "Openness to Creative Destruction: Sustaining Innovative Dynamism."

Pass Trump's Defense Budget

By Owen West

As a natural-gas trader for 20 years, I hedged tail risk: low-probability events with catastrophic consequences. Most days, prices move predictably. But every so often, a hurricane or cold snap makes prices soar. The potential for severe weather creates what statisticians call "fat tails." Traders don't wait for storms to make landfall before hedging risk. We price danger while it is still theoretical, adding insurance as new information fattens the tail.

The U.S. military faces fat tails in several theaters. On top of these threats is a structural shift in warfare eroding U.S. military power. After the Cold War, America paired force projection with computing power for a strike capability that could reach "anywhere, anytime." Today, plummeting computing costs and the mass production of commercial parts have given our adversaries their own surveillance-strike capabilities. Simply put, our war model

A $1.5 trillion boost would restore deterrence and advance innovation.

has been disrupted. Cheap drones have flown unhindered over U.S. bases, a new space race is taking shape with Beijing, and U.S. adversaries are mass-producing ballistic missiles at an unprecedented pace.

If the U.S. can meet these challenges, the future of American military dominance is bright. The U.S. leads global artificial intelligence rankings and we possess the world's most adaptive troops. Secretary Pete Hegseth plans to establish an Autonomous Warfare Command that will integrate drones and other unmanned systems across the military and change the future of warfare. Congress must provide appropriations to meet the moment.

President Trump has requested a one-time increase in defense spending to $1.5 trillion. This funding would allow the Pentagon to make necessary investments in drones, AI and space technologies while blunting real-time threats.

Congress shouldn't treat fiscal 2027 as a routine budget cycle. Defense appropriations have become a political chew toy—interrupted by continuing resolutions and funding lapses. New regulations, about 1,500 since 9/11, and the Pentagon's eroding purchasing power have drained our armory. Between 1986 and 2026, defense spending fell from more than 6% of gross domestic product to about 3%, while rising personnel costs cut weapons procurement by roughly 75%. The result is a portfolio dominated by "must pay" bills with little room to adapt to battlefield revolutions.

Without Mr. Trump's proposal to boost defense spending—including $350 billion to be paid for in budget reconciliation legislation—we are left with hard choices. Either we focus on costly upgrades to manned platforms that could lock up funding for decades or we diversify into autonomous technologies and cheaper systems we can field at scale. We can't afford both.

New money, spent wisely, works. When Congress approved reconciliation funding in 2025, Mr. Hegseth used an acquisition strategy focused on our military's greatest comparative advantage: front-line troops. The $1.1 billion Drone Dominance program, designed to boost domestic production through competition, is a clear example. Congress provided an advance-purchase commitment that encouraged hundreds of companies to compete. Troops ran the drones through trials, and a handful of winners earned contracts based on performance and scalability. Within a year, the Army and Marines plan to field 200,000 cutting-edge drones at one-tenth of what they cost in 2024.

In the early 1980s, Congress enabled President Reagan to rebuild our military and restore deterrence by funding new capabilities such as precision-strike weapons. We can do the same now: fund the pivot toward next-generation capabilities without sacrificing deterrence in the short term. Mr. Trump's defense budget request is 4.4% of gross domestic product, a third less than Reagan's. That is a modest premium to reduce the risk of being unprepared for the next storm. Better to buy insurance while it is relatively cheap than pay the greater cost of responding after a crisis strikes.

Mr. West is the CEO of Project Agincourt, the Pentagon program to develop Autonomous Warfare Command. He has served as a Marine officer, director of the Defense Innovation Unit and assistant defense secretary for special operations.

The Livestreamed Execution Is a Bad Idea



UPWARD MOBILITY
By Jason L. Riley

Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth wants to livestream the execution by firing squad of Nidal Hasan, the terrorist who shot and killed 13 people and wounded dozens more at Fort Hood, Texas, in 2009. Even allies of the Trump administration who support the death penalty think this is a bad idea. Vice President JD Vance told reporters he wouldn't watch it.

One obvious problem with the Pentagon's plan is that Mr. Hasan and his fellow Islamists would probably like nothing more than a public execution, which would be used as a recruiting tool. Why give someone who has already inflicted so much pain and suffering a propaganda victory as well, when justice can be served without the spectacle?

There's no consensus on whether capital punishment is a strong deterrent, but for many people on the right and left, that's a secondary concern. Executing certain criminals is a way for civilized societies to express moral outrage at the most depraved acts of cruelty. Even for heinous crimes short of murder, many see it as fitting retribution.

When a Supreme Court ruling in 2008 struck down state laws that made raping a child a capital offense, polling showed that a majority of Americans sided with the states. Both presidential candidates, Barack Obama and John McCain, denounced the decision.

Jihadists aren't deterred by the prospect of dying. They crave martyrdom in hope of inspiring like-minded followers to commit more acts of terror. That's no reason to spare Mr. Hasan's life, but it is a reason not to sensationalize his execution. Several Republican lawmakers who usually support the administration have argued that broadcasting Mr. Hasan's death would reflect poorly on America. "A civilization erodes when it cultivates an appetite for executions as a form of entertainment," Sen. John Curtis (R., Utah) wrote on social media. Sen. John Kennedy (R., La.) said: "If it were me, I wouldn't televise it or publicize it or whatever they're doing. . . . It makes our society coarser, and I wouldn't do it."

If anything, Mr. Trump's lack of polish and social grace has endeared him to his MAGA supporters, so the president isn't likely to share the senators' concerns about declining civility. Nevertheless, history teaches us that it would be a mistake to dismiss these objections. In 19th-century New York, people attended public hangings the way they attend Yankees games today.

The events drew such large crowds that city officials eventually had to find bigger venues. One hanging in 1824 drew 50,000 onlookers, nearly a third of New York's population. "The city would later order future executions moved to nearby Blackwell Island (now Roosevelt Island)," historian Vincent Cannato wrote. "But the public could not get enough. At the next execution, they arrived in boats so numerous they shut down river traffic."

Eventually, hangings were moved inside the city prison and out of public view, but local officials had no jurisdiction over federal executions, which continued to take place outdoors on Ellis Island in New York Harbor. Before becoming a gateway for millions of immigrants seeking a new life in America, Ellis Island was known as Gibbet Island, a reference to the post on which corpses of criminals were hung for display following an execution.

America did away with public hangings for a reason—and Nidal Hasan might want the attention.

A contemporary account described one Gibbet Island execution as being "crowded with men and women and children—and on the waters around, were innumerable boats, laden with passengers, from the steamboat and schooner, down to the yawl and canoe." Public hangings ended there in 1839, but they continued until 1860 on neighboring Bedloe's Island, where the final execution drew roughly 10,000 spectators. Today, Bedloe's Island is where you'll find the Statue of Liberty.

By the early 1900s, executions had mostly been removed from the public square. America's growing middle class had developed different sensibilities. Shame and humiliation were no longer the priority. Public hangings increasingly were viewed as cruel, medieval and undignified. The carnival atmosphere embarrassed law enforcement and elected officials alike. Executions not only were moved indoors or behind walls but occurred late at night. The criminal-justice system became more professional, and less-theatrical punishments were deemed more humane.

According to the Pew Research Center, two-thirds of U.S. adults favor capital punishment for people convicted of murder. Mr. Hasan's surviving victims and his victim's families should be able to witness his death, but broadcasting the execution for millions of gawkers would be retrogressive and counterproductive. Justice would be better served without the fanfare he presumably desires. State executions may be appropriate, but they don't need to be glorified.

The Elder Influencer

By Lou Weiss

Influencer culture is flourishing, but the idea of people being moved to action is as old as the Bible. You'll recall the tale of the serpent influencing Eve, who influenced Adam, ending with God making the first fashion statement. Abraham, Moses, Jesus—all great influencers whose work still resonates. They mostly relied on moral suasion, when for the previous few thousand years much influencing came at the point of a sword.

What is really the world's oldest profession has devolved from pitching ethical monotheism to getting free merch. Today's target group is teenagers, who famously succumb to peer pressure. In one poll, 57% of Generation Z respondents said they aspired to be influencers.

Heroes and role models have always captivated us. As a mediocre but enthusiastic athlete in my youth, I idolized Willis Reed of the Knicks. He was the pivot for the 1969-70 sharp-passing NBA champs, and I can still see him limping out for the famous Game 7. My sneakers of course were Pro-Keds like my idol's.

Marketing mavens say it's tough to get oldsters to change brands. At 70 I may be on my seventh Subaru, but that self-driving Tesla has turned my head. The time seems right for an elder influencer, and I am putting myself out there for the job. Credentials? My earliest product ideas, dreamed up more than 60 years ago, fused physics and the culinary arts. By carefully separating two Oreo cookies into a crème side and a cookie side and putting the crème sides together, I created "Extra Icing"—what years later came to be known as the Double Stuf Oreo. You're welcome.

A more recent concept is "Sleeping Late." I have been doing this for the past decade. In 2022 the American Heart Association added sleep to its health checklist. Coincidence? I don't think so. The trick to jumping on this trend is to lower the air-conditioner to 66 degrees, get in bed and stay there.

Another gem is a little thing I call "Living With Illness." For 25 years I've been dealing with multiple sclerosis and assorted other maladies. This necessitates using canes, trekking poles and the occasional walker as well as taking a wheelchair to the airport gate. Seeing as falls can do you in, prepare to "GOTH"—Get Over the Humiliation—of using equipment to help you get around. There, was that so hard?

Next is "C-Span 2 Saturday Night." That means "Book TV." Tune in to be up on the latest reads and learn a bit about American history in the process. When the dinner-party

I enjoy merch as much as any youngster and I have ideas for oldsters like me.

conversation turns to the French and Indian War or the Whiskey Rebellion you will dominate without having read a word of an actual book. I learned most of my U.S. history from C-Span, and life goes smoother when you "Pretend to Know Something."

Of course, what would an influencer be without a shoe contract? Two words: "Penny Loafers." I've been wearing them since seventh grade and generally have them resoled several times. The savings are great, and that fits with a theme of my influencing: "Spending Less." Maybe that's why, to this day, I remain uncompensated for my best work.

Mr. Weiss is a Pittsburgh carpet salesman.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.
PUBLISHED SINCE 1889 BY DOW JONES & COMPANY

Lachlan Murdoch
Executive Chairman, News Corp

Rupert Murdoch
Chairman Emeritus, News Corp

Robert Thomson
Chief Executive Officer, News Corp

Emma Tucker
Editor in Chief

Almar Latour
Chief Executive Officer and Publisher

Liz Harris, *Managing Editor*
David Crow, *Deputy Editor in Chief*
Aja Whitaker-Moore, *Deputy Editor in Chief*
Sarah Ball, *Features;* **Elena Cherney,** *Senior Editor;* **Dan Colarusso,** *Business, Finance, Economics;* **Chip Cummins,** *Newswires;* **Taneth Evans,** *Digital;* **Gordon Fairclough,** *World;* **Samantha Henig,** *Multimedia;* **Alex Martin,** *Print & Writing;* **Bruce Orwall,** *Enterprise;* **Damian Paletta,** *Washington;* **Marcelo Prince,** *Investigations*

Paul A. Gigot
Editor of the Editorial Page
Gerard Baker, *Editor at Large*

DOW JONES MANAGEMENT:
Jason P. Conti, *General Counsel;* **Dianne DeSevo,** *Chief People Officer;* **Artem Fishman,** *Chief Technology Officer;* **M. Scott Havens,** *Chief Growth Officer;* **Dan Shar,** *EVP, General Manager, Wealth & Investing;* **Ashok Sinha,** *Chief Communications Officer;* **Josh Stinchcomb,** *EVP & Chief Revenue Officer, WSJ | Barron's Group*

EDITORIAL AND CORPORATE HEADQUARTERS:
1211 Avenue of the Americas, New York, N.Y., 10036
Telephone 1-800-DOWJONES

DOW JONES | News Corp

OPINION



Bears coach Mike Ditka drives a cart, circa 1988. **CHICAGO TRIBUNE ARCHIVE**

How I got 'Iron Mike' Ditka to talk about an erectile dysfunction drug

By Bob Brody
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

In 2003, the pharma firms GlaxoSmithKline and Schering-Plough, poised to launch the new erectile dysfunction drug Levitra, signed a celebrity spokesperson. To carry out the marketing strategy designed to persuade men to seek treatment without feeling unduly self-conscious, the companies recruited a "brand ambassador" who would fit the bill as a model of masculinity.

Enter Mike Ditka, a legendary player for the Chicago Bears who as head coach led the team to the 1985 Super Bowl championship and who died recently at age 86. The rationale behind the partnership was simple. If the growling macho "Iron Mike," who was 6-foot-3 and 230 pounds in his prime, could upend a tradition of male stoicism in response to erectile dysfunction, surely any man could.

Our public relations agency landed the $7 million account for Levitra. Viagra had come along five years earlier, an immediate pioneering blockbuster. Cialis also debuted in 2003, so Levitra faced competition.

To get the story we would pitch to the media, we had to interview Ditka about his experiences with erectile dysfunction. Our agency, whose staff was overwhelmingly female, decided, with admirable discretion, that the assignment should go to a man.

That man turned out to be me.

I'd interviewed celebrity spokespeople for our public health campaigns before, including athletes ranging from Nolan Ryan and Joe Montana to Dorothy Hamill, Alonzo Mourning and Caitlyn Jenner. But I'd never asked anyone questions about a health issue quite this intimate.

How, I wondered, would I approach this mythic tough guy and notoriously ferocious competitor about this most private and delicate of matters? After all, I'd seen Ditka play football. He was the NFL Rookie of the Year and appeared in five Pro Bowls. He could run opponents over without losing a step. He once said, "I just like to hit." He added that if he got knocked down, he would "go back and hit the other guy harder."

In short, he scared me.

Would I just stammer, "So, Mr. Ditka, please tell us, when did you discover you could, um, no longer, you know, do it?" What if he took offense and threatened to snap my neck?

In short order, the big moment came. Our Levitra account team gathered in a conference room and dialed the phone number for Ditka. I introduced myself and told him he was on speakerphone with several colleagues of mine listening in.

Ditka said he welcomed the chance to tell his story and invited us to ask him anything we wanted. So I asked him as innocent a first question as I could muster. "Please tell us, Mr. Ditka, how this all started."

And without hesitation, or even the need for another question, Ditka proved to be a perfect gentleman and told us his whole story about erectile dysfunction. He matter-of-factly recounted how he noticed that when he felt amorous toward his wife, he had some difficulty performing his husbandly duties. At first he tried to brush it off, but then it happened again, and he suspected he might have a problem.

But he resisted seeing a doctor about it, he told us. Finally he made an appointment, and a diagnosis of erectile dysfunction led to a prescription for Levitra. And that, evidently, made all the difference for him in the bedroom.

Our promotion of Levitra involved heavy-duty media coverage and a TV commercial featuring Ditka during the 2004 Super Bowl. The key message delivered throughout was typical for so many of our pharma initiatives: Talk to your doctor and ask what to do.

Because Ditka had done just that, millions of men confronting the same stigma followed his example. And his championship spirit nearly prevailed. But a 15% spike in new prescriptions right after the Super Bowl ads proved short-lived. Levitra never climbed higher than third place in its three-way showdown.

That outcome was out of character for him. Ditka never settled for third place in anything.

Bob Brody, a consultant and essayist, is author of the memoir "Playing Catch with Strangers: A Family Guy (Reluctantly) Comes of Age."

We need Congress to ponder the long term with a new future-focused group

By John T. Shaw
FOR THE CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Lee Hamilton of Indiana served in the U.S. House of Representatives for nearly 35 years and came to believe the most frustrating aspect of congressional service was that members "never have time to put their feet up on their desks, look out the window, and think about the long-term challenges coming down the road."

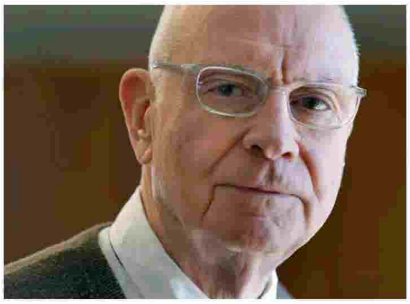
It may seem highly aspirational, even implausible, to expect Congress to consider the future in a sustained and systematic way. This is, after all, an institution that frequently has trouble passing stopgap spending bills and conducting routine legislative business.

However, it was not that long ago that some in Congress actually considered emerging trends, anticipated problems and developed future-focused policies. They even created institutions to think and act strategically.

Government needs to revive this practice. To that end, I propose that our lawmakers create a 21st Century Institute for the Future to foster an awareness of, and then plan for, the extraordinary challenges barreling toward us.

Congress has an inherent short-term time horizon. Frequent elections, impatient constituents and the unrelenting pressure of the news cycle do not provide rewards for gazing into crystal balls or enacting visionary policies whose benefits may only be evident years later.

But half a century ago, many lawmakers viewed their responsibilities differently. Perhaps they were inspired by America's cultural fascination with the future as exemplified by the bestselling book "Future Shock" by Alfred Toffler and prominent futurist groups such as the Club of Rome.



Former Indiana U,S. Rep. Lee Hamilton, who was co-chair of the Iraq Study Group, in his office at the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington on Nov. 24, 2006. **PETE SOUZA/CHICAGO TRIBUNE**

Congress created the Congressional Budget Office, Congressional Research Service and Office of Technology Assessment in the 1970s to examine an array of issues, often with a long-term lens. The House of Representatives even enacted a rule in 1974 that required its committees to undertake futures research within their jurisdictions.

Going further, lawmakers created the Congressional Clearinghouse for the Future in 1976 to study economic, demographic and technological developments. At one point, the clearinghouse had a bipartisan and bicameral membership of about 100 lawmakers. Once a month, they hosted an off-the-record discussion called "Dialogues on America's Future" with experts such as Toffler, anthropologist Margaret Mead and economist John Kenneth Galbraith. U.S. Rep. Al Gore Jr. of Tennessee was the co-chair of the clearinghouse and argued that it gave lawmakers a crucial perspective as they drafted and reviewed legislation.

In 1984, Gore and Republican Sen. John Heinz of Pennsylvania created the Congressional Institute for the Future as a nonprofit partner to the clearinghouse. Their reason is as compelling now as it was then. "Powerful institutional incentives in our nation—particularly in Congress—limit the focus of the national debate to short-term priorities and crisis management," they wrote. "For policymakers, the budget cycle, the end of the fiscal year, the next election, and day-to-day crises demand attention. Schedules are so filled with meetings on one short-term problem after another that many leaders scarcely have time to consider the challenges the nation may face tomorrow."

The Institute for the Future became a forum for members of Congress and business and academic leaders to discuss rising trends, problems and opportunities. The institute published reports, hosted conferences, sponsored speakers and commissioned public opinion polls. It studied global trade, the U.S. federal budget and disruptions triggered by the information age.

Unfortunately, this future focus dwindled and largely disappeared in the following decades as key leaders departed Congress, and their successors pursued other interests.

The Congressional Budget Office still publishes an annual long-term budget forecast, and reports by the Congressional Research Service and Government Accountability Office often offer long-range perspectives. Some congressional committees hold hearings that explore topics that look beyond the issue of the day. But few lawmakers think past the next election and their own political survival.

I suggest that a dozen congressional Democrats and a dozen Republicans create a 21st Century Institute for the Future. It could be housed in the Congressional Management Foundation, a respected nonprofit organization devoted to improving congressional management practices. This new institute should assemble and organize future-focused studies by government agencies, think tanks and the private sector — building a Future of America library.

Institute members would meet monthly for briefings from experts and hold quarterly roundtable discussions, reprising the "Dialogues on America's Future" series. They would examine broad demographic and technological changes and also delve into specific issues such as the federal budget, immigration, climate mitigation, income inequality and public health. A small staff would draft background papers for all members of Congress, and lawmakers would craft policy proposals that focus beyond the horizon.

This initiative's impact would be both intangible and tangible. It would encourage an institutional mind shift from the immediate to the enduring. More concretely, it would encourage lawmakers to explore the long-term consequences of issues that will profoundly shape the future of the United States.

I do not expect this idea to spawn a Congress bustling with futurists. However, it could incubate a cadre of thoughtful lawmakers who consider our long-range needs, goals and opportunities and urge their colleagues to join them.

And there is a bonus benefit — people who are concerned about the future tend to make more conscientious decisions about the present.

John T. Shaw is a professor at Marquette University's Les Aspin Center for Government in Washington, D.C. His most recent book is "The Education of a Statesman: How Global Leaders Can Repair a Fractured World."

OPINION

Trump throws a lifeline to Putin

By Joel R. Levin and Mariya Dmytriv-Kapeniak
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE



The per-gallon price for diesel fuel is displayed on a pump at a Buc-ee's on Monday in Johnstown, Colorado.
DAVID ZALUBOWSKI/AP

On Friday, President Donald Trump shocked the world by easing sanctions on Russia to allow the sale of Russian diesel fuel to the United States and global markets. He boasted that his action would dramatically reduce the price of diesel fuel for Americans and the rest of the world. Trump's action is a shameful betrayal of Ukraine and our allies that will have little, if any, effect on the price of diesel but will help finance Russia's war machine and reward a ruthless autocratic regime that continues to murder Ukrainian civilians every week.

Ironically, Trump's action comes in the wake of newly authorized sanctions that have the potential to throttle the Russian war machine. Less than a month ago, he signed into law the Lindsey O. Graham Sanctioning Russia and Iran Act, which imposes mandatory sanctions and tariffs on countries buying Russian oil and natural gas. The bipartisan act passed the Senate by an overwhelming 86-11 margin, reflecting the broad support for sanctions in the United States. Under the act, the administration is required by law to announce the mandated sanctions and tariffs on Oct. 18.

The easing of existing sanctions less than 10 days before additional sanctions are scheduled to go into effect is a sign of weakness and only will embolden Russian President Vladimir Putin. Despite the clear mandate of the Lindsey Graham Act, Trump has given up whatever leverage he might have had to bring the war to an end with stiff sanctions under the new law by rewarding Putin with the easing of existing sanctions. Trump's continuing criticism of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and praise of Putin only give Putin further confidence the United States is not serious about imposing more severe sanctions.

Trump's reward to Putin comes in the wake of weeks of Russian bombardment of civilian targets in Ukraine resulting in the daily murder of civilians and destruction of civilian infrastructure. In a further sign of weakness, Trump has responded to these murders with deafening silence, thereby conveying to Putin he will not be held to account if he continues his targeting of Ukrainian civilians. And, not surprisingly, that is exactly what happened — the day after the easing of sanctions, 20 people, including three children, were killed when Russian aerial bombs hit residential buildings in the southern Ukrainian city of Zaporizhzhia. Putin's war crimes will now continue unabated.

The Ukrainian people have demonstrated incredible bravery, courage and resilience since the Russian invasion. Ukraine now faces daily horrific bombings and does not have sufficient air-defense capability to protect its people. This is a time when we should be doing everything possible to increase pressure on Russia to end this war. Instead, by Trump's inexcusable action, the United States will now be helping to finance Russia's war against Ukraine and will thereby be complicit in Russia's war crimes.

Trump's action needs to be condemned in the strongest possible terms. We should not be lending support to the authoritarian aggressor in this war, nor should we be threatening to halt intelligence sharing and arms shipments to Ukraine if it doesn't cease attacks on Russian oil refineries. We should be supporting Ukraine's defense of democracy, sovereignty and freedom. The action taken by Trump is a betrayal of Ukraine and our allies, defies logic, weakens our standing in the world and is detrimental to our country's national security interests.

Trump needs to rescind this deplorable action and move swiftly to implement the Lindsey Graham Act.

Joel R. Levin is a former federal prosecutor who has been active in Ukraine-related advocacy. Mariya Dmytriv-Kapeiak, a Chicago-based physician, is president of the Illinois division of the Ukrainian Congress Committee of America.

Voice of the People

A simple deal for the Bears

The state legislature continues to fumble the Bears stadium deal. The Bears have asked for certainty for property taxes plus infrastructure and utility improvements. The legislature has offered neither.

My proposal: The Bears finance and build their stadium, and property taxes are frozen at what Arlington Park was paying, plus annual inflation. The government provides all the requested infrastructure improvements financed by a bond issue that is repaid through an amusement tax on ticket sales.

Everyone wins.
— *Rhys Read, Des Plaines*

It's a privilege to be here

On Sunday, over 55,000 people from all over the country and the world participated in the Bank of America Chicago Marathon. They occupied thousands of hotel rooms, ate thousands of restaurant meals, participated in one of the premier athletic events in the world and had a great time in our wonderful city. We who live here are so lucky to live in and enjoy Chicago every day.

On the other hand, on several other Sundays each fall, about the same number of folks come to Soldier Field to watch the Bears. They drive in, tailgate or buy their food in the stadium and then leave after the game.

The Bears should feel privileged to call Chicago their home, but they don't.
— *Mark Johnson, Chicago*

Homeowners need a break

It is entertaining to watch local politicians bend over backward to keep the Chicago Bears gracing Chicagoland. The latest proposal to exempt this multi-billion-dollar sports enterprise from paying property taxes is a slap in the face to everyday taxpayers. This move would only continue to shift this heavy financial burden onto local businesses and individual homeowners, many of whom have recently received notices of increases of more than 10% in their property assessments.

Illinois already ranks among the states with the highest property taxes in the nation, yet substantive efforts to relieve this burden remain entirely lacking. Other states have taken protective action. For instance, Florida's constitution limits annual increases in assessed homestead values to no more than 3%. Similarly, California law restricts annual assessment increases to a maximum of 2% (or the rate of inflation, whichever is lower), regardless of how much actual market value rises.

Meanwhile, Illinois homeowners are left entirely exposed to skyrocketing assessments. With elections right around the corner, politicians who wish to stay in office need to wake up and take real action to reduce this ever-increasing tax burden instead of handing out tax breaks to billionaires while bleeding local residents dry.
— *Al Zvinakis, Lemont*

SCOTT STANTIS



Pritzker waited a month

Regarding the article "FEMA rejects Illinois disaster aid request for August storms" (Oct. 9): I did not see anywhere in the article that Gov. JB Pritzker waited a month to apply for those funds. The storms affecting Illinois occurred Aug. 11 to 16. Pritzker did not apply for Federal Emergency Management Agency funds until Sept. 15, a month later.

Compare that to Indiana Gov. Mike Braun, who applied for disaster funding on Aug. 20.
— *Patricia Bonk, Midlothian*

Platform for Blagojevich

I find it astonishing that ousted Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich continues to receive national television exposure, particularly on Fox News, as though his disgraceful record in public office were merely an unfortunate misunderstanding.

I remember a very different Blagojevich.

My late mother, Judy Baar Topinka, challenged him for governor in 2006. I witnessed the personal attacks, ridicule and vilification directed at a woman who devoted her life to serving Illinois. Political disagreement is legitimate. Attacking someone's character for political advantage is something else entirely.

Blagojevich was impeached, removed from office by a unanimous 59-0 Illinois Senate vote and convicted of federal corruption offenses. Presidential clemency cannot rewrite history or erase the betrayal of public trust.

My mother believed public office was a responsibility, not a personal possession. She worked across party lines, respected political opponents and understood that serving people mattered more than personal publicity.

Television networks have every right to interview Blagojevich. But giving him a national platform without confronting his record does a disservice to viewers and to the people of Illinois.

This is not about Republicans or Democrats. It is about character, integrity and accountability.

My mother spent her life earning the public's trust. Blagojevich squandered his.

Illinois should never forget the difference.
— *Joseph Baar Topinka, New Braunfels, Texas*

Rep. Bost is unfit for office

I read the Tribune Editorial Board's endorsement of Mike Bost with great concern ("Tribune endorsements for US Congress in 11th, 12th, 13th, 14th, 15th, 16th, 17th districts," Oct. 6).

In fact, many voters in his Southern Illinois district despise him. I went to a local meet-and-greet several years ago and observed him speaking to unemployed coal miners at a time when mines were closing. He was disrespectful and condescending. Those men were hurting, and I left appalled and angry. He was filmed at another event, yelling at a veteran.

Bost has been a no-show for several public appearances.

Although the endorsement will likely stand, please, investigate with care. This man is unfit to hold office.
— *Julia Pfeiffer, Marion, Illinois*

Why no Divvy senior discount?

Regarding the Oct. 7 letter by Jim Merrell ("Keep Divvy's success rolling"), while I agree with what he wrote, I have a nagging bone to pick with the Divvy folks.

For years, I've held an annual Divvy membership, and when I've asked why Divvy does not offer a senior discount, like all other transportation agencies do in the region, I get no answer. Why, I wonder?

They say they offer a D4E (Divvy for Everyone). That's all well and good, but many seniors like me don't qualify for D4E.

If I can get a senior discount on the CTA, Metra and Pace, why not Divvy?
— *Dave Gudewicz, Third Lake*

Open enrollment returns

As daylight wanes and fall is in the air, there are so many welcome traditions that we all anticipate: the warmth of woolen sweaters, the scent of pumpkin spice, the excitement of college football, the delightful charm of trick-or-treaters and, of course, the return of Medicare open enrollment commercials.
— *Mark Woodward, Chicago*

Bombarded by same ads

I am probably not the only Chicago-area resident who is sick and tired of seeing and hearing a barrage of injury lawyer ads on TV and radio.

Rarely does a commercial break pass without at least one. I think I have them all memorized now.

Please — enough is enough! If someone needs an injury lawyer, they will call.
— *Rick Kyle, Wheaton*

Note to readers

With Halloween coming, we'd like you to share your most memorable experience related to the holiday, either as a child or as an adult. A costume that you've never forgotten? A trip to a haunted house that scared you silly? Neighbors who went above and beyond to make things fun for the kids? Send a letter, of no more than 400 words, by Friday, Oct. 23 to letters@chicagotribune.com. Be sure to include your full name and your city/town.

For online-exclusive letters, go to www.chicagotribune.com/letters. Email your letter submissions, 400 words or less, to letters@chicagotribune.com. Include your full name, address and phone number.