



## Crossing a line

The drive against illegal immigrants is hurting Indian citizens too

Police in several Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-ruled States are trying to identify undocumented Bangladeshi immigrants by their language: Bengali. This approach has led to some comical errors, such as the Delhi police listing “Bangladeshi” as a language – a massive leap in linguistics. However, in most cases, this has become a tragic and farcical exercise. Several documented instances have shown Indian citizens being pushed across the border into Bangladesh. This has caused significant hardship for the families involved and embarrassment to the government. Some individuals have been repatriated to their families in West Bengal after intervention by the State government or courts. This “pushback” of suspected Bangladeshis is a part of a larger effort to bypass the due process of law, which is often lengthy and rigorous. The rounding up of Bengali speakers has sparked a debate in West Bengal, where the ruling party, the Trinamool Congress, has called it an “attack on Bengali identity” and launched a language movement.

The targeting of Bengali migrants has immediate consequences for their livelihoods. Fearing detention and forced relocation to Bangladesh – a country to which they may have no connection – many migrant workers from West Bengal have left their jobs. In one particular case, Delhi police detained Bengali speakers who had been granted Indian citizenship under a well-known land exchange treaty with Bangladesh signed by the Narendra Modi government. Bengali is India's second-largest language by number of speakers. The State of West Bengal is both a source and a destination for migrant workers. The divisions being created over language and identity could easily escalate into conflict and violence. Even for the BJP, this exercise makes little political sense and may be counterproductive ahead of the 2026 Assembly elections in West Bengal. The migrant workers from West Bengal who are being harassed in other States do not belong to a single community. BJP leaders in West Bengal are already facing criticism over the issue and are setting up camps to assist citizens with the Citizenship (Amendment) Act in various constituencies across the State. The issue of Bangladeshi citizens entering and working in India is not new. For decades, people from the neighbouring country have entered India for political and social reasons, including better economic opportunities. The boundaries of India are a creation of colonialism and a violent history of political conflicts. While sovereign borders must be protected, the central government must ensure that law enforcement does not become counterproductive and lead to the harassment of its citizens.

## Ceremonial heads

Governors as chancellors do more harm than good in universities

The Supreme Court of India's strong censure of Tamil Nadu Governor R.N. Ravi in April seems to have done little to slow down the collision course that many Governors have been on with the respective State governments. Not only did the Court rule against the Governor casting a de-facto veto on 10 Bills relating to universities passed by the State legislature but it also specified timelines for the Governor's response to Bills. Importantly, it declared infructuous any Presidential intervention based on the Governor's recommendation. Last week, Mr. Ravi had referred the Kalaingar University Bill to the President instead of giving it his assent. In Kerala, Governor Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar has kicked off yet another controversy after directing State-run universities to observe a 'Partition horrors day' on August 14, drawing criticism about possible ideological and communal motives. His predecessor, Arif Mohammed Khan, had also locked horns with the government, sitting on and practically vetoing Bills especially relating to universities. The Court's line has been de-facto challenged by the President, but through a reference.

State-owned universities have become the key battlegrounds in the Governor-State government conflicts. They are among the few institutions over which the Governor has a direct say. As scholars point out, the office of the Governor was a colonial mechanism of control over provinces that may be ruled by Indian parties. That the universities had British Governors as their ceremonial heads, or rather Chancellors, was to bring colonial prestige and ensure their autonomy and importance. India's early national-level leaders retained the Governor as a central appointee to guard against separatist tendencies. It appears that legislation in many States retained the role of Governors as Chancellors of State-run universities to give them the same colonial veneer and aura. Even a Tamil Nadu Bill that had sought to minimise the Governor's role in Vice-Chancellor appointments did not seek to remove the Governor as Chancellor of the university. In Kerala and Tamil Nadu, the Governors are central proxies with a hostile political and ideological agenda. Meanwhile, draft UGC regulations seek to divest State governments of their role in the selection of the Vice-Chancellor, vesting all powers in the Chancellor. But the thrust of the National Education Policy 2020 has been towards greater autonomy for educational institutions. Universities are expected to raise funds and be accountable for spending. A university head's role is expected to be not just academic and administrative but also that of a business manager, cheerleader and fundraiser. It may make sense to have professionals become the ceremonial as well as executive heads of universities, replacing Governors.

Every year, we celebrate our nation's attainment of political freedom from British imperialism and reiterate our loyalty to the ideals that our founding fathers fought for. In that sense, August 15 stands as a strong reminder of the long journey that shaped our nation: a heroic struggle that united millions from diverse social, linguistic and ethnic backgrounds for a set of values and principles, including democracy, secularism, harmony and social progress. Celebrating Independence Day thus entails an introspection of how we, as a nation, have evolved over the years, and how the essential ideals of this constitutional republic have fared.

**Essence of nationalism, its manipulations**  
Such contemplation should begin by recalling the roots of the nationalist struggle. Our leaders had a clear understanding of liberation; that it was not just replacing one flag with another but envisaging a clear path to realise a prosperous nation in which everyone had equal stature before the law and equal access to all resources. Such a notion emphasised cementing the self-dignity of people for thriving here and for standing up before the world. A true nationalist, in that sense, strives to improve the living standards of the least counted in the nation.

So, the question then is: have we, as a nation, realised the dreams of our founders in achieving prosperity, and in improving the lives of the deprived? Yes, we fared better in many economic and social indicators. But, has the living standard of the people at the bottom improved?

The answer is not that bright. Studies show that the wealth produced is increasingly accumulated in the coffers of a super minority who wield influence over policymakers and policymaking bodies.

The larger minority is reeling under distress due to skyrocketing inflation, unemployment, deprivation and malnourishment as a result of policies only favouring the aforementioned ultra-rich. A new socio-economic order has come about in which individual competition enabled by a market-driven economy rules the roost. People and classes not equipped with crucial competitive skills get driven out of this exploitative order. Farmers, whom the father of our nation, Mahatma Gandhi, had called the 'soul of the nation', are finding it increasingly difficult to sustain agricultural activities, and ending their lives in frustration. The economy is facing crippling stagnation caused by neoliberal policies. Such a depressing picture of our nation calls for immediate action by all to reverse the trend and follow the path set by leaders of the nationalist movement.

Raising issues affecting the commoners in public is with the intent of informing policymakers of their lapses by marking dissent. Mobilising public opinion around such pressing



Pinarayi Vijayan

is the Chief Minister of Kerala

Independence Day this year is a stark reminder of the state India is in; it is a reminder of how Indians should resist any moves to undermine the country's constitutional principles

concerns of the people can never be incendiary or insurrectionary, but an extension of the valid apprehensions of any dutiful citizen. But, there have been concerted efforts to frame such valid criticism as detrimental to national integrity.

Regressive forces twist the notions of nationalism and denounce those who raise voices of dissent as 'anti-nationals', endangering the nation. They divert the frustrations of the toiling public to the vortex of hate and bigotry by concocting a majoritarian communal identity and proclaiming it as the basis of our nation. Such a divisive ideology exacerbates polarisation in our society, leading to the emergence of assertions from minorities. In fact, the rise of this divisive politics runs counter to the legacy of our nationalist movement, which fought for a thriving, inclusive, constitutional republic. The current Indian scenario, in which majoritarian communal politics rules the roost, is something our nationalist leaders would not have dreamt of. People are subjected to brutalities for their lifestyles, eating habits and identity, minorities are framed as terrorists, and dissenting figures are silenced through intimidation or by the use of brute force. This Independence Day serves as a stark reminder of the state we are in, and how we should, unitedly, resist any moves to undermine the constitutional principles.

**Constitutional framework, federalism**  
An important aspect of the Constitution is the federal division of duties in policymaking for both the Centre and States. The architects of the Constitution envisaged the discharge of roles as cooperative federalism in which both the Centre and States strengthen each other through constructive exchanges. While the Union has overarching authority in areas such as defence and foreign affairs, the States enjoy significant autonomy in public order, agriculture, education and health. Mechanisms such as State legislatures, the Governor's role, and fiscal sharing were conceived not to subordinate States but to ensure cooperative governance.

As B.R. Ambedkar famously stated, the Union is not simply a league of States – it has its sovereignty; but States are not mere appendages. The sanctity of that balance is what underpinned our democracy. In recent years, however, we have witnessed a systematic and unprecedented shift away from that constitutional equilibrium. The central government has advanced measures to diminish State autonomy – from pushing the ‘One Nation, One Election’ agenda to expanding the scope of central agencies in State governance.

This is not merely an electoral reform. It proposes aligning State Assembly terms with the Lok Sabha, and possibly truncating popular mandates. Critics rightly warn that this amounts to curtailing the right of State electorates to choose their representatives for a full five-year term. Such a move risks reducing States to mere

administrative implements of the central executive, rather than equal partners in the federal Union.

At the same time, investigative bodies and central administrative mechanisms are increasingly being weaponised to influence politics in non-aligned State governments. The independence of institutions such as the Election Commission of India, the Directorate of Enforcement, and even the Governor's role faces serious challenges.

**Manipulating Governor's powers**  
One of the most visible and damaging trends in this new phase of centralisation is the partisan misuse of the office of the Governor. Governors, who are constitutionally expected to act on the aid and the advice of the elected State government, are instead being deployed as political agents of the Union to block, delay, and obstruct governance in Opposition-ruled States.

In Kerala and several other States, the Governor has withheld assent to Bills duly passed by the State legislature, sometimes for months on end, without offering constitutional reasons. This effectively nullifies the legislative will of the people and disrupts policy implementation.

The interference has been especially acute in the higher education sector. Universities in Kerala, long respected for their academic autonomy, have faced an unprecedented freeze in appointments because the Governor – acting as Chancellor – has stalled or cancelled recruitment processes, and refused to approve names recommended by statutory bodies. This has paralysed key academic institutions, delayed crucial reforms, and left thousands of students and teachers facing uncertainty.

By turning the Governor's office into an instrument of political veto rather than a constitutional safeguard, the Centre undermines both the functioning of State governments and the vibrancy of India's education system. What should be a bridge between the Union and the State has been transformed into a roadblock.

This Independence Day, let us honour our national heritage by recommitting to a constitutional order that cherishes federalism, democratic pluralism, and popular constitutionalism. Let us resist trends that undermine State autonomy, misuse constitutional offices, and weaken the secular psyche of the polity.

Our struggle was never just to gain freedom from colonial rule. It was to build a union of free peoples, each with dignity and voice, held together not by coercion but by the shared ideals of constitutional democracy. That is the legacy we must defend today – with clarity, courage, and conviction.

Let us live by that pledge, so that the Republic we inherited remains vibrant and resilient for generations.

# Only united action can stop the hyacinth's invasion



Venu Rajamony

is Chairman, Future Kerala Mission, Jain (deemed to be) University, Kochi and a former Ambassador of India to the Netherlands

A national policy with region-specific implementation strategies is what can end the grave damage being caused by this invasive aquatic plant

food webs. The weed's unchecked proliferation is a direct threat to ecotourism as well. Vembanad Lake, a Ramsar-recognised wetland of international importance and a lifeline for lakhs of people, is emblematic of this crisis, with tourism and transport now at risk.

Yet, the hidden danger of the water hyacinth extends beyond livelihoods and biodiversity. As the plant rapidly accumulates and then decays, it releases methane – a greenhouse gas over 25 times more potent than carbon dioxide at trapping heat.

**Experiments that must be scaled up**  
Recognising the need for solutions, innovators and communities across India have experimented with turning this ‘pest’ into a resource. In Odisha, imaginative women's self-help groups skilfully weave water hyacinth into handicrafts, baskets and furniture. In Assam and West Bengal, it has been transformed into paper and biogas production.

These experiments, though promising, remain isolated in scope and scale. What is urgently required is policy support, financial incentives and a robust value chain to scale them up.

Despite the creativity at the grass-roots, what is missing is a coordinated policy thrust in the effective management of the hyacinth menace. Currently, responsibility is diffused across multiple government departments – agriculture, fisheries, environment, irrigation – often leading to piecemeal and short-term efforts. The situation demands a single-point accountability mechanism and a national policy with region-specific implementation strategies. There is a need for coordinated removal drives using scientific methods and mechanisation with

appropriate technology suited to local conditions in places such as Kerala where labour is not easily available. Innovators need to be incentivised and private sector partnerships established for value addition. Research into viable products (crafts, biofuels, compost textiles) also needs to be promoted and disseminated.

Solving the water hyacinth crisis is a mammoth task, but it is by no means insurmountable. Recently, Jain university in Kochi organised a brainstorming workshop under its Future Kerala Mission, bringing together experts, grass-roots practitioners, policymakers and businesses to reimagine water hyacinth as a bearer of sustainable livelihoods – rather than just viewing it as a pest.

The University has since decided to launch an awareness campaign and to release a discussion paper, inviting inputs that incorporate scientific and local knowledge systems. By fusing academic research, policy engagement, and community experience, the University hopes to spur a shift from sporadic experiments to systematic, sustainable solutions.

**Need for united action**  
India's rivers and lakes are too precious to be stifled by neglect – or by a single invasive plant. The water hyacinth menace calls for urgency, accountability and united action. Let every community, government department, entrepreneur and citizen recognise that this is not just an ecological problem but a crucible for rural livelihoods, food security, climate resilience and a green economy.

Let us, together, drain the swamp – not just of water hyacinth, but of the inertia that allows such a menace to flourish. The time for action is now.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Reflections on August 15

On Independence Day, I wonder whether we are truly free. We broke the chains of colonialism, yet we forged new ones: corruption that has seeped into the system making it rotten; injustice that spares the powerful; the divisions of caste and religion, and the silent suffering of the poor. Women still fight for safety and millions still sleep hungry. Our freedom fighters dreamed of dignity, equality

and unity but speeches and parades cannot hide how far we are from that dream. True independence will come to us only when justice is swift, opportunities are equal, and no Indian lives in fear. Until then, August 15 is not just a celebration. It is a reminder that the fight for real freedom is not over. **Hemashree,** Bengaluru

**Lessons from the West**  
The Data Point, “Before

tackling stray dogs issue, India must count them properly” (Opinion page, August 13), has pertinent data. Last year when I was travelling in western Europe, I did not spot a single stray dog on any street. In Switzerland, most people have pet dogs and great care is taken to ensure that no one is disturbed when the pet travels with the owner on public transportation systems such as trams, trains and buses.

We have much to learn from the West. **Vijaya Segara Ramsait,** Courtallam, Tamil Nadu

### Workers' strike

It is most unfortunate that the Tamil Nadu government has not been able to solve the problems of the conservancy workers, despite days of protest, and has resorted to forcibly vacating and detaining the protesting workers. It is ironic that the demand of the conservancy workers for

permanency has not been considered by the ruling DMK government despite this being a part of its election promise. The authorities cannot ask the workers, who have been directly engaged by the Corporation, to go and work under contractors. The Supreme Court, as early as 1985, in the Food Corporation case, made it clear that the march of law is from contract labour to direct labour and not the other way. The Contract

Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act 1970 was meant for regulating and ultimately abolishing contract labour. Courts and politicians keep saying that the Constitution is a living instrument meant for emancipating the weaker sections. But not only are promises not kept, they are being forgotten. **N.G.R. Prasad,** Chennai

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



## Sources in journalism can be great teachers



# Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Percentage decrease in India's edible oil imports in July

**16** in per cent. India's import of edible oil fell 16% to 15.48 lakh tonnes in July, mainly due to a fall in shipments of palm oil, according to industry body SEA. The country imported 15,48,041 tonnes in July as against 18,40,062 tonnes in year-ago period. PTI

Number of roads closed in Himachal due to flash floods

**396** Cloudbursts and flash floods in several districts of Himachal Pradesh caused massive destruction, with 396 roads closed for traffic. No loss of life has been reported, officials said on Thursday. PTI

Number of persons who died last week in Sudan due to cholera

**40** At least 40 people have died last week in Sudan's Darfur region in the country's worst cholera outbreak in years, Doctors Without Borders (MSF) said on Thursday. It said the vast western region had been hardest hit by the year-old outbreak. AFP

Prisoners of war exchanged by Russia and Ukraine each

**84** Russia and Ukraine exchanged 84 prisoners on Thursday, both sides said. This one came on the eve of a high-level summit between Russian President Vladimir Putin and U.S. counterpart Donald Trump in Alaska on Friday. AFP

Persons killed in a massive cloudburst in J&K's Kishtwar district

**38** A massive cloudburst struck a mountain village in J&K's Kishtwar district on Thursday, killing 38 people, officials said. The death toll could go up as more people are believed to be trapped, officials said. PTI

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## Why is there no Palestine state?

Tracing the history of Israel-Palestine relations from the end of the Second World War up to the war in Gaza, why several peace agreements lie in tatters, and Israel's growing rigid stance against a two-state solution

FULL CONTEXT

Stanly Johny

The King David Hotel of Jerusalem is one of the landmarks of the contested city. Built with locally sourced pink limestone and opened in 1931 by Ezra Mosseri, a wealthy Egyptian Jewish banker, the hotel, overlooking the Old City that is holy for all three Abrahamic faiths, stands as a symbol of both Israel's Jewish roots and its bloody history.

From its earliest days under the British Mandate of Palestine, the hotel hosted royalty and prominent dignitaries. During the Mandate, the British turned the hotel's southern wing into their administrative and military offices. On July 22, 1946, members of Irgun, a right-wing Zionist militia, entered the hotel disguised as Arab workers and waiters. Their mission: plant explosives in the basement of the main building. The powerful explosion brought down the western half of the southern wing, killing at least 91 people. The bombing, the deadliest attack carried out by Zionists against the British, was one of the earliest terrorist attacks in modern West Asia.

The British found it increasingly difficult to continue their rule of Palestine after the Second World War. Seeking a way out, London turned to the UN, saying it wanted to vacate the Mandate. In 1947, the UN General Assembly decided to set up a Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP), which proposed to divide Palestine into 'an independent Arab State, an independent Jewish State, and the City of Jerusalem'. The Jewish Agency accepted the plan, while Arab nations opposed the partition. On May 14, 1948, on the eve of the expiry of the British Mandate, the Jewish People's Council gathered at the Tel Aviv Museum (today known as Independence Hall). David Ben-Gurion, leader of the Jewish Agency, declared the establishment of the state of Israel from the podium.

**Independence, Nakba**

The next day, the armies of four countries – Egypt, Syria, Transjordan, and Iraq – entered Palestine and clashed with the Jewish army, triggering the first Arab-Israeli war. The war continued for a year, and when a ceasefire was signed, Israel was controlling more territories of historic Palestine than even the UN plan offered for the Jewish state.

For Israel, it was the 'war of independence', but for Palestinians, it was *Nakba* (catastrophe). Roughly 750,000 Palestinians were violently displaced from their homes and lands by Zionist militias. Thousands of Palestinians were killed. Hundreds of Arab villages and towns were depopulated and destroyed. West Asia suddenly looked like a different region. In 1967, during the Six-Day War, Israel captured the entire Sinai Peninsula and Gaza Strip from Egypt; the West Bank and eastern Jerusalem from Jordan; and the Golan Heights from Syria. The UN Partition plan promised 55% of historical Palestine to the Jewish state; Israel controlled some 75% after the 1948 war, and after the 1967 war, the whole of Palestine came under Israel's control.

**What is the Green Line?**

Palestinians today demand an independent state based on the 1967 border (Green Line) – which means the whole of the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem. Different Palestinian factions, including Fatah, which runs the Palestine Authority based in the West Bank, and Hamas, which is the main force in the Gaza Strip, have either directly or indirectly accepted the 1967 border.



Seeking peace: Palestinians today demand an independent state based on the 1967 border. AFP

Israel, in the past, had committed itself to the two-state solution, but it has never made its position clear on the border. In recent years, Israel's position has further shifted to the right, with its rulers, including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, publicly disowning the two-state plan.

After the 1967 war, Israel for years refused to accept Palestinian nationalism. The first Israeli recognition of Palestinian nationalism came in the 1978 Camp David agreement. Under the agreement, signed five years after the 1973 Yom Kippur War, Israel agreed to withdraw completely from the Egyptian Sinai Peninsula. Menachem Begin, the Israeli Prime Minister, also agreed, under the Framework for Peace in the Middle East agreement, to abolish Israel's military rule over the West Bank and Gaza, and establish a Palestinian self-governing authority with elections and local policing. The Framework Agreement was not immediately implemented. But it set the agenda for the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

The outbreak of the first intifada brought Israel under greater pressure and pushed the momentum in favour of the Palestinians. On November 15, 1988, Yasser Arafat read out a declaration in Algiers, Algeria, proclaiming the birth of 'a state of Palestine in our Palestinian territory with its capital Jerusalem'. Weeks later, at least 100 UN member states, including India, acknowledged the declaration of the state of Palestine.

Israel faced two major challenges at this juncture. One was the growing difficulties in governing the Palestinian territories amid continuing protests. The other was the global recognition the Palestinian leadership was drawing. The Palestine Liberation Organization's policy was also undergoing changes. If earlier it called for 'the liberation' of the whole of historical Palestine, it was now sending signals of compromise for a deal with Israel. The peace bid gained momentum after Yitzhak Rabin, of Labour, became Prime Minister in 1992. Rabin joined secret talks in Oslo based on the Framework Agreement. On September 9, 1993, both parties exchanged Letters of Mutual Recognition, signed by Prime Minister Rabin and Chairman Arafat. Four days later, on September 13, 1993, Rabin and Arafat shook hands in Washington in the presence of U.S. President Bill Clinton

and signed the Oslo Accord I. Rabin was forthright in his message to the Palestinians. "Let me say to you, the Palestinians: we are destined to live together, on the same soil in the same land," he said.

According to the Oslo II Agreement, reached between the Palestinian leadership and Israel in 1995, the West Bank was divided into three areas – A, B, and C. Hebron, Nablus, Ramallah, Bethlehem and some towns and villages that do not border Israeli settlements are in Area A, which comprises some 18% of the West Bank. Area B, which comprises around 22% of the territory, is under Palestinian civil administration, while Israel retains exclusive security control. Area C is the largest division in the West Bank, comprising some 60% of the territory; it is under full Israeli civil administration and security control. The Oslo Accords were initial agreements aimed at taking some preliminary steps towards resolving the Palestine question in five years. But the resolution never came.

**The permanence of conflict**

In the history of Israel and Palestine, there is always a U-turn after a serious push for peace. On November 4, 1995, Prime Minister Rabin was assassinated by a Jewish extremist. His immediate successor, Shimon Peres, called for an election hoping that he could mobilise the peace dividend and take the Oslo process further. But in the 1996 election, Likud returned to power and Mr. Netanyahu became Prime Minister for the first time.

Mr. Netanyahu initially refused to honour the commitments of the past governments. The rise of Hamas, which never accepted the Oslo process, and suicide attacks by Palestinian militants, further complicated the peace process. When the interim five-year period since the Oslo agreements was over in May 1999, a comprehensive agreement between Israel and Palestine was still elusive. The Palestinian authority was running parts of the West Bank and Gaza. Israel, instead of directly ruling over West Bank and Gaza, started controlling territories indirectly, and continued to build Jewish settlements on Palestinian lands. The status of Jerusalem and the right of return of Palestinian refugees remained the crux of the problem with no meaningful efforts from either side to

settle the issues.

President Clinton tried to revive the stalled peace process in 2000 in a Camp David summit in which he hosted both Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barack and Arafat. All key components of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict came up for discussions during the summit. But the summit collapsed as the two sides failed to agree on the status of Jerusalem and the right of return. There were several attempts to revive peace talks since the failure of the second Camp David negotiations, but none of them has taken off.

**October 7, 2023 and after**

Israel's record shows that it made limited concessions only in the face of external pressure or Palestinian violence. During the Suez war, Israel was forced to pull out of Sinai amid threats and pressure tactics from both American President Dwight Eisenhower and Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev in 1956. In the late 1970s, constant pressure from the Carter administration, and also the growing threat perception from Egypt following the Yom Kippur War prompted Israel to come to Camp David and finally sign both the Sinai pull-out and Framework Agreements. In 1993, the Oslo process was triggered by the First Intifada. Ariel Sharon's Gaza disengagement happened against the backdrop of the Second Intifada.

During the years that followed the Second Intifada, Israel thought the *status quo* was manageable. The Palestinians were a divided lot. The West Bank was run by Fatah and Gaza by Hamas. Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas lacked the charisma and command of Arafat. The Palestinian authority was flush with corruption. There was no organised resistance in the West Bank. There was no international pressure to make peace. And Arabs were ready to sidestep the Palestine question to make bilateral peace with Israel. The Israelis thought they could continue the occupation without consequences.

Then came the October 7 attack. Did the Palestinians achieve anything from the October 7 attack? Initial signs suggest that Hamas's attack and Israel's subsequent war on Gaza have further set back the push for a two-state solution. But at the same time, the war in Gaza brought the Palestine question back to the centre of West Asia's geopolitics. Israel wanted to localise the Palestine question, and Hamas has re-regionalised it. When Israel launched the war on Gaza, it said it would dismantle Hamas. But after 22 months of fighting, Hamas is far from destroyed. Israel, on the other side, faces serious allegations of genocide and mass starvation, which have prompted more countries in the West, all of them Israel's allies, to offer recognition to Palestinian sovereignty.

If anything, October 7 and its aftermath are a reminder that occupation is not a solution. Israel wants to continue the occupation without consequences. But Palestinian militants seem determined to keep fighting, with whatever available tactics they have, including the means of terror.

Unless the Palestine question is addressed, neither Israel nor West Asia is going to enjoy durable peace and stability. And a lasting and just solution to the Palestine question is either the creation of a state of Palestine, with all the rights other nation states enjoy, or the acceptance of the Palestinian people as equal citizens in a single state that's purged of its apartheid ideology and architecture. Such a settlement looks remote today. But the alternative is the unsustainable and untenable path of violence.

THE GIST

- ▶ The Israel-Palestine conflict has deep historical roots, marked by wars, the displacement of Palestinians, and failed peace processes.
- ▶ The October 7 attack by Hamas and Israel's war on Gaza have weakened prospects for a two-state solution but pushed the Palestine question back to the centre of West Asia's geopolitics.
- ▶ Lasting peace requires either an independent state of Palestine or equal citizenship in a single state, but current trends point toward continued violence and instability.



IN THE LIMELIGHT

National Film Awards: politics, propaganda, and the plot

The country's awards for cinematic excellence carry a political undertone; this year is no different, with films like *'The Kerala Story'* reflecting the ruling dispensation's narrative, while sidelining critically acclaimed works

Anuj Kumar

Like a Bollywood potboiler, the plot of the National Film Awards gets thicker with each passing year. Why did the jury pick the polarising narrative of *The Kerala Story* for two awards? Why did the jury wake up to the talent of Shah Rukh Khan after 33 years?

*The Kerala Story* courted controversy for its portrayal of women in Kerala being forcefully converted and recruited by the Islamic State. While those who questioned the decision of bestowing the Best Director award to Sudipto Sen argued that the film pandered to “majoritarian propaganda with a hate-filled agenda disguised as cinema,” Ashutosh Gowarikar, the head of the jury, felt Sen conveyed a “difficult topic with clarity”, with deep research into events that must have happened.

The Supreme Court-mandated disclaimer for the film stated that it is a “fictionalised account of events” and that there is no “authentic data” to support the claim that 32,000 women were converted to Islam in Kerala.

However, the makers have reiterated that the film is based on real events and “is not based on isolated or imagined incidents.”

While the Government of India presents the National Film Awards, they don't necessarily represent a singular government view on cinema. The awards are aimed at recognising and celebrating cinematic excellence across languages and genres, promoting unity and integrity through the appreciation of different cultures.

A political edge

Increasingly, however, the awards are seen as a platform to endorse those taking the ruling dispensation's line of thought to the audience. A significant chunk of the audience votes for the BJP. It makes business sense for film producers to give their political thoughts and social fears a cultural context. Besides, it provides soft power to spin doctors to set the narrative on social media. Drab WhatsApp forwards get livened up with persuasive visuals. One of the cinematic devices to create fear or hate for a group of people is by crafting a narrative that says, ‘the other is after our women.’

At different points in cinematic history, it has been effectively used to build social narratives against African Americans and Jews. If a section of the Hindi film audience feels that Kerala is reeling under the so-called ‘Love Jihad’, then – even if the numbers are exaggerated and the craft is underwhelming – the emotional impact of *The Kerala Story* is substantial.

When *The Kashmir Files* bagged the Nargis Dutt Award for Best Feature Film on National Integration in 2021, many felt they were living in an alternate reality because in the past, films like *Garm Hava*, *Tamas*, and *Dharm* had won this prestigious honour, whose name has now been changed to Best Feature Film Promoting National, Social and Environmental Values.

However, when put into context, the award appears to be in line with the present government's policy on Kashmir, where the abrogation of Article 370 is seen as aligning with its concept of national integration.

Similarly, the jury's nod for *The Kerala*



A still from *Jawan*. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

*Story* doesn't come as a surprise. Like *The Kashmir Files*, *The Kerala Story* has been openly backed by the top leadership of the BJP and was declared tax-free in BJP-ruled States. Like the story of forced conversion depicted in the film, it appears to be a tool to brainwash the audience into believing a one-sided narrative.

Targeting a faith

The movie doesn't question the Islamic State's silence on the Palestine issue. While the makers claim they are not Islamophobic, they use creative licence to target Islam by presenting it as a religion whose very value system prepares followers for extremist ideas. Ostensibly, dramatising the WhatsApp forwards, the film sees a sinister intent in every Hindu-Muslim interaction.

Gowarikar reportedly considered box office performance, social impact, and

reach when deciding winners. Of course, there are films and performances where artistic merit, social impact, and popular appeal truly come together. This year, we have *12th Fail*, where Vidhu Vinod Chopra and Vikrant Massey conjure up this rare meeting of accessibility and craftsmanship, where Atal Bihari Vajapyyee's *haar nahin manoonga, raar nahin thanooga* (*won't give up, won't hold a grudge*) is aesthetically integrated into the storyline as an anathema to social inequities.

However, when it comes to choosing between artistic merit and box office numbers, common sense suggests the jury should prioritise the former.

Past vs present controversies

The National Film Awards are not new to public scrutiny. But during Congress rule or Congress-supported governments,

controversies were less about explicit political propaganda and more about systemic issues such as nepotism, jury bias, and a lack of transparency.

In 1976, during a period of intense political turmoil, Mrinal Sen's *Mrigaaya* won the National Film Award. A stark critique of capitalist power during the Emergency, Utpalendu Chakraborty's *Chokh* won the Best Film in 1982. The following year, G.V. Iyer's Sanskrit biopic *Adi Shankaracharya* bagged the top honour.

In the last decade, the distinction between Best Film and the Best Film Offering Wholesome Entertainment has become increasingly blurred. This year again, critically acclaimed films like *Joram* and *Three of Us* could not impress the jury.

The criteria behind nominating an actor in a particular category have also been questioned. Seasoned actors Urvashi and Vijayaraghavan have been honoured with Best Supporting Actor awards for *Ullozhukku* and *Pookkaalam*. In the Kerala State Film Awards, Vijayaraghavan won the Best Character Actor, while Urvashi bagged Best Actress for the same performances.

More importantly, the jury often tilts towards the stature of the actor rather than his immediate performance. A link is usually drawn between the head of the jury and the actor. Ajay Devgn won the nod for *Zakhm* when Prakash Jha headed the jury. Ramesh Sippy led the jury when Amitabh Bachchan was selected for *Paa* and *Piku*, and Priyadarshan was at the helm when Akshay Kumar won the coveted award for *Rustom*.

Sippy once told this journalist that one can question the choice but should not question the integrity of the jury. So, when Gowarikar announced Shah Rukh Khan's name, it seemed as if the director was correcting a wrong, as the actor had been denied the award for *Swades*, and Saif Ali Khan was surprisingly found more deserving for *Hum Tum*. It was a time when Sharmila Tagore was at the helm of affairs at the Central Board of Film Certification.

The Jawan factor

Curiously, if the political messaging of *The Kerala Story* serves the purpose of the ruling dispensation, the theme of Atlee's *Jawan* questions the political climate. Shah Rukh plays Azaad, the son of a soldier, Vikram Rathore, who lectures the audience to ask those seeking their votes, “What will they do for you?” Drawing from eminent Urdu poet Waseem Barelvi's popular couplet, he sings, “*Usulon Pe Jahan Aanah Aaye Takrana Zaroori, Banda Zinda Ho to Nazar Aana Zaroori Hai*” (When principles are at stake, one must fight. This battle is what keeps you alive).

There are strands of stolen EVMs, false charges against a Muslim doctor, and a villain desperate to monetise the country's natural resources, because he feels he can circumvent the democratic process. However, it may be a safer bet than Shah Rukh's *Pathaan*, which is a little more nuanced in its depiction of dissent, and the villain is a rogue army man.

Additionally, *Jawan* appears like a potent option to keep Prithviraj Sukumaran out of contention despite a brilliant turn in *Aadujeevitham: The Goat Life*. Interestingly, the film questions the practice of slavery in West Asia, where the enslaver and the enslaved person follow the same religion, but, unlike *The Kerala Story*, director Blessy makes it about humanity rather than a faith.

Or, as Urvashi has suggested, Prithviraj might have been “snubbed due to the *Empuraan* controversy,” where, as a director, he dug up the ghost of the Gujarat riots. In contrast, Shah Rukh allegedly played a diplomatic role in national interest without claiming credit.

Our films may be losing depth, but our awards continue to follow a layered script!

THE DAILY QUIZ

Apart from being the day independent India was born, August 15 is also the anniversary of a different kind of freedom – one involving money

Vasudevan Mukunth

QUESTION 1

The Bretton Woods system, established in 1944, created two major institutions: the IMF, to oversee exchange rates and promote monetary cooperation, and the \_\_\_\_\_, the first institution of what is now the World Bank Group and intended to fund post-war rebuilding in Europe. Fill in the blank.

QUESTION 2

The system encouraged countries to depend on the U.S. dollar as the central reserve currency, itself pegged to gold at \$35 per ounce. Name the national currency that the dollar succeeded in this capacity around the mid-20th century.

QUESTION 3

In one dramatic episode in the final years of the Bretton Woods system, and a time of great doubt about the U.S.'s ability to honour its

commitment to hold an ounce of gold at \$35, French president Georges Pompidou sent a warship to New York to bring France's gold holdings at the Federal Reserve Bank back. Name the warship.

QUESTION 4

On August 15, 1971, President Richard Nixon cancelled the ability of the U.S. dollar to be converted to gold. What was the collective name of the effects of this measure, which led to Nixon's re-election in 1972 but led to the 1973 recession?

QUESTION 5

Name the agreement that, once the Bretton Woods system collapsed, officially rewrote the IMF's rules: from enforcing fixed rates to overseeing exchange-rate stability and providing policy advice. The agreement also legitimised the modern system of largely floating currencies.



Visual Question:

Name this English economist who, alongside E.F. Schumacher, proposed a supranational currency called ‘bancor’ in the early 1940s to prevent any single national currency from becoming the world's main reserve asset. PUBLIC DOMAIN

**Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz:** 1. Which legal enactment by the British Parliament formalised the Partition of India, and when did it receive Royal Assent? **Ans: The Indian Independence Act 1947, which received Royal Assent on July 18, 1947** 2. On what dates did the Dominion of India and the Dominion of Pakistan officially come into existence? **Ans: They legally came into being at midnight between August 14-15, 1947** 3. Approximately how many people were displaced during the Partition, and what are the estimated fatalities? **Ans: Between 12 and 20 million people were displaced; fatalities estimates vary between 200,000 and 2 million** 4. Name the plan agreed upon by the Indian National Congress, the Muslim League, and the Sikh representatives, and with whom was this agreement made? **Ans: The June 3 Plan, also known as the Mountbatten Plan, was agreed with Viceroy Lord Mountbatten** 5. What did the ‘Evacuee Property Law’ mean to address? **Ans: Management and redistribution of properties abandoned by refugees who migrated across the border** Visual: Who chaired the Boundary Commissions and what was his background? **Ans: Sir Cyril Radcliffe, a British lawyer** **Early Birds:** Siddhartha Viswanathan | Harilakshmi M | Pranab Biswas | Dhanya Kambrath | Sujit Yadav



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

K. Subrahmanian  
S. Upendran

HOW do you pronounce a..r.o..m..a? The two a(s) in the word are pronounced like the ‘a’ in China. The ‘ro’ in the second syllable rhymes with the words low, mow and go. And the stress is on the second syllable, I suppose. That's right. It's pronounced aROma. Do you know what it means? It means smell, doesn't it? Well, yes. But there is a difference between aroma and smell. You see a smell can be either good or bad. It can be pleasant or unpleasant. For example. I can say, Gopa hadn't taken a bath in three days and he smelled. Meaning he smelled terrible. Exactly! And then there's that famous line from Shakespeare. A rose by... any other name would smell as sweet. Good, you remembered! I can never forget that line. My English teacher used to say it all the time. Now tell me what aroma means.

O.k. Unlike the word smell, the word aroma is always associated with a pleasant smell. When I was young, I always used to get up to the aroma of fresh coffee. Your mother used to make it, I suppose. Now you have to get up to the smell of dirty dishes. True! I get up to the aroma of agarbathis. Can I say that? You certainly can. But not all agarbathis smell good. Some of them stink. In those cases. I cannot use aroma, right? That's right. You can use the word aroma only when you refer to a pleasant smell. I love the aroma of masala dosa. My dad plus my mother love to visit hotels which...

...my dad plus my mother loves to visit hotels. Not my dad plus my mother love to visit hotels. Wait a minute. I can say my dad and my mother love to visit hotels. right? That's right. But you see when you say, a man plus his wife, it is not the same as a man and his wife. The word plus is not the same as and in the second sentence. They don't mean the same? No, they don't. I was reading about the use of plus the other day and the author argued that plus doesn't mean the same thing as and. In the sentence a man plus his daughter, plus is the equivalent of with. So what would you say? A man, with his daughter, was jogging in the park or, a man, with his daughter, were jogging in the park? I would say, a man, with his daughter, was jogging in the park. Exactly! Therefore you should say, a man plus his daughter was jogging in the park.

A man plus his wife has arrived. That's right! Here's another example. The evidence plus the witness' testimony was crucial in sending the killer to jail. I think I understand now. Published in *The Hindu* on September 2, 1997

Word of the day

**Ineluctable:** impossible to avoid or evade

**Synonyms:** necessary, unstoppable, definite

**Usage:** *Growing older is an ineluctable process.*

**Pronunciation:** newsth.live/ineluctablepro

**International Phonetic Alphabet:** /ɪnɪlʌktəbəl/

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







Musings @78

India needs to assert 'independence' in changing world

There are many reasons to feel satisfied as we complete 78 years as an independent country. We have trundled along as a democracy; our institutions may not be exactly perfect, but it would be harsh to say, like many critics do, that they have been disembowelled. We remain a functional democracy with immense dynamism and spirit in the face of adversities.



This Independence Day comes amidst exceptionally challenging times, globally. The world order has seen large shifts, such as the one underway now, only once in many decades. Under US President Donald Trump, the rules of global trade and Bretton Woods multilateralism are being dismantled. His use of tariffs to browbeat countries and trade blocs into submission signals the end of about three decades of globalisation which marked the rise of emerging economies. Protectionism, which began post-Covid, is on a high, with the EU and the US erecting barriers to trade and movement of peoples. This will impact commerce, culture, politics, knowledge production and finance in complex ways. India cannot remain unaffected by all this. If Trump's disruption has altered all trade equations and assumptions, his promotion of cryptos and 'stablecoins' could have untold consequences for the dollar. Uncertainties over global trade, finance, education and much else pose challenges and opportunities for India. This includes the reordering of trade alliances to offset any loss of the US market.

India too is part of the global effort to reduce dependency on critical imports, its atmanirbhar efforts being led by the production linked incentive. It has been farsighted in diversifying its energy choices, promoting renewables in power and transport so that it remains well placed to reap the benefits of falling costs and improved technologies in battery storage. Its excellence in defence and space technologies can yield benefits for agriculture and precision instruments. Yet, this excellence is a tiny island today, and one of the reasons for that is India's lack of investment in education. China, an equally populous country, has got things right. By focusing on skilling its workforce, China has emerged as a leader in frontier areas, besides traditional industries. The disparity between the per capita incomes of these two demographically similar countries is linked to the productivity of the workforce. India's potential growth will rise with labour productivity, raising demand and creating a virtuous investment cycle.

In agriculture, crop diversification and organic farming are an imperative, so that food production does not create both a health and water crisis. Viksit Bharat should be about having a self-sufficient and healthy population, and environment management is a *sine qua non* to get there. The Indian state, increasingly mired in the politics of irrelevance these days, should be focused on reducing the sheer chaos of daily living. Robust institutions are the need of the hour.

POCKET

RAVIKANTH



Liquidity framework can be fine-tuned

**MONEY MATTERS.** The RBI working group on liquidity management could consider slight changes in CRR compliance and VRRR norms



GETTY IMAGES



MADAN SABNAVIS

The money market is quite fascinating. There is the inter-bank call market where the interest rate is determined by demand and supply forces. Intuitively, the rates decrease when there is surplus in the system, and increase in times of deficit. During the 1990s the call rate would at times soar to over 50 per cent on a reporting fortnight as banks hurried to adhere to the CRR requirements. The myriad changes brought in the market since has ensured that such volatility does not exist. Therefore, there is a corridor of 50 bps with the SDF ensuring that rates do not go below 5.25 per cent and the MSF capping rates at 5.75 per cent. These two windows do not involve any pledging of securities.

It is against this background that the liquidity framework adopted by the RBI, reviewed recently and put out for discussion, can be examined. Today, with daily surplus liquidity of around ₹3-4 lakh crore, call rates hover in the lower part of the window.

Yet the volumes that are traded are quite low by market standards at around ₹20,000-30,000 crore.

This can be contrasted with the triparty repo market, where the trades are secured against government paper which trades 15-20 times the volumes and has rates which are lower than the call rate.

This means that banks which have excess SLR can borrow in this market at lower rates. Others will have to go the

call market and borrow at a higher rate. The repo and MSF rates act as ceilings here depending on the RBI's policy. This can be contrasted with the time when there were daily fixed rate repo auctions where the repo rate became the effective rate with the call rate hovering in the range of repo and MSF rates.

The liquidity framework targets the weighted average call rate (WACR). The question raised was whether this was appropriate or not. If greater volumes are witnessed in the triparty repo market, then the weighted average triparty repo rate (WATRR) should be targeted by the RBI. While this is a compelling argument, the review found that as there was strong correlation between the two, the WACR was still appropriate.

In fact, this is tautologically true because the WATRR would always adjust to the WACR; and as a central bank targeting the latter would also control the former.

And more importantly, as pointed out by the Working Group, the call market involves players who are fully regulated by the RBI unlike the other segments which have mutual funds, insurance and pension companies among others who are not under the ambit. Therefore, the WACR will continue to be the targeted rate.

The second part of the mandate

There have been times when the system is in deficit at the aggregate level, but some banks have been putting in surpluses in the Standing Deposit Facility

involved the liquidity framework toolkit of using different maturities of VRR and VRRR. Here there can be some discussion. The Working Group has chosen to move over from using 14 days VRRR to seven days VRRR on grounds of interest in a longer duration not being there from the point of view of banks.

Banks would not like to park surpluses of large magnitude for longer periods as they could end up in deficits during the interim period. However, on the repo side, i.e. VRR auctions, all tenors tended to be oversubscribed. Hence, the preference has been given by the Group to the seven days tenor for VRRR.

While this argument is pertinent, an alternative can also be considered. This would be to announce different maturities of VRRR on the same day. Hence there can be auctions for one, seven and 14 days for ₹50,000 crore each under the VRRR. This will actually provide options to banks to park their funds according to their positions. This will also help to develop the yield curve at the shorter end. Today there is a convergence of the cut-off yields to 1 bps lower than the repo rate. By having these options, there will be a difference across the spectrum.

FOREX SWAPS

As part of liquidity management, forex swaps have been a part of the tool kit. This is to remain after this review.

The issue with forex swaps is that there can be bunching of reversal of transactions in a buy-sell swap, where dollars were purchased in return for liquidity.

The problem really surfaces in future when the transaction is reversed and would mean reverse flow of liquidity. As these are normally for a period of six

months to over three years, one cannot gauge the liquidity position of banks at a later date.

This conundrum can be addressed by capping the quantum of swaps in monetary terms.

The review also discusses the issue of CRR. The rule today is that while banks have to maintain CRR on the reporting fortnight, 90 per cent has to also be adhered to on a daily basis.

This high level creates uncertainty for banks which wait till the end of the day to ensure that there is no breach and subsequently put large sums in the SDF. That's why SDF balances tend to be very high during the surplus phases even after the VRRR auctions are conducted. The point put forward is that since banks maintain above 95 per cent on all days there is no need to go lower.

Here a counter argument can be made. Let us assume that hypothetically a lower level of 75-80 per cent has to be maintained. Banks would then have more space to plan their funds and would hence prefer to use the VRRR funds to deploy their surpluses and not put in large amounts in the SDF.

In fact, there have been times when the system is in deficit at the aggregate level, but some banks have been putting in surpluses in the SDF.

If there were no concerns over CRR, then these surpluses could have gone to the call market or triparty repo market making those rates more vibrant.

Having gone through the finer aspects of the functioning of the market, the Working Group has concluded that the existing framework has worked very well and would be retained. However, the suggestions made could be considered.

The writer is Chief Economist, Bank of Baroda. Views expressed are personal

IDs' exodus marks a crisis in corporate governance

An ecosystem where independent directors are encouraged to red flag governance issues must be fostered

Rajat Vig  
Deepti Berera

India's boardrooms are witnessing a quiet yet significant shift. Over the past two years, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of Independent Directors (IDs) stepping down from corporate boards, often mid-term and citing vague reasons. This signals a growing discomfort with the governance environments they operate in.

IDs are expected to serve as companies' conscience keepers, ensuring accountability, protecting shareholder interests and challenging decisions when necessary. When they start leaving in large numbers, the question is bigger than the reason for the exit; it is about what they choose to move away from.

Deloitte India's survey report in collaboration with the Institute of Directors, flagged a vital sentiment: most board members believe that fraud risk is rising in Indian companies. The most alarming insight per the report is that many IDs feel ill-equipped to detect or prevent fraud risks. Over half of the surveyed IDs said they had not received adequate training to deal with fraud-related responsibilities, and many admitted they were not fully aware of

their company's fraud response mechanisms.

In such a climate, IDs risk their reputation and expose themselves to potential legal issues without sufficient information or institutional support to perform their duties effectively. Under such circumstances many chose to exit the company.

The role that IDs play in upholding market confidence is pivotal. Their independence allows them to ask tough questions essential in preventing governance failures.

The problem of IDs' churn is not limited to the boardroom. It is an investor confidence problem, a regulatory oversight problem, and ultimately, a business continuity problem.

THE WAY FORWARD

The solution to this ID exodus lies in fixing the reasons for departure in the first place. Here are five areas that demand urgent attention:

(i) Strengthening training and induction frameworks: Directorships are becoming increasingly complex, especially as risks such as cybercrime, Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) violations and regulatory & financial irregularities grow in frequency. Equipping IDs with relevant industry insights, practical toolkits and a



**COMPANY BOARDS.** Credible governance /ISTOCKPHOTO

clear understanding of regulatory expectations and legal requirements can enhance their effectiveness.

(ii) Empowering IDs with better access and tools: Many IDs struggle to obtain timely, comprehensive information. Boards must move beyond compliance checklists and give IDs early and regular access to critical operational data, internal audits and whistleblower reports, and not after an issue arises.

(iii) Creating an environment where dissent is respected: An ID's job is not to agree or approve but to challenge. Chairs must encourage a culture where raising red flags or asking probing questions is seen as a contribution, not confrontation.

A good board is not one where everyone agrees, but one where debate is encouraged, risks are challenged and difficult questions are welcomed. That is the true value IDs bring, not just independence in name, but independence in thought.

(iv) Defining accountability and ensuring it is shared: Regulatory bodies should clarify liability protection for those who act in good faith. Companies, too, must ensure that IDs are not blindsided by decisions they had little role in shaping.

(v) Making exit disclosures more transparent: Rather than boilerplate resignation letters citing "other commitments", companies should be encouraged or required to provide more detailed disclosures. If IDs step down due to discomfort with governance practices, such rationale should be flagged to shareholders and regulators.

For all of India's economic ambitions, governance remains its cornerstone and the boardroom is at the heart of governance. If IDs leave faster than they are arriving, it is a corporate governance crisis. Companies that act by building a culture of transparency, empowerment and ethical vigilance may find themselves retaining IDs and attracting the best ones.

The writers are Partners with Deloitte South Asia

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Profits vs duty

Your Editorial rightly draws attention to the widening fault line between banking profitability and public responsibility. ICICI Bank's recent decision to sharply increase the minimum average balance (MAB) may have been permissible under RBI norms, yet it stood in sharp contrast to India's decade-long drive for financial inclusion. The timing was particularly tone-deaf. Inflation continues to gnaw at household budgets, and wage growth remains flat. For many first-time account holders, a savings account is not a luxury but a

gateway to the formal economy. Public backlash was swift. Social media outrage and public figures like Jay Kotak amplified criticism, forcing the bank to roll back the requirement to ₹15,000 for metros and ₹2,500 for rural areas.

This reversal is a reminder that in banking, policy decisions must weigh the broader social impact alongside commercial imperatives.

**Vijay Singh Adhikari**  
Nainital (Uttarakhand)

Inclusive banking

Money managers are unanimous that with GDP growth distribution of

wealth will be increasingly skewed, to further marginalise the lesser privileged. In 2022-23, the top 1 per cent of Indians earned 22.6 per cent of all national income and controlled 40.1 per cent of national wealth, when the middle class is maintaining consumption through debt, with stagnant wages. This brings us to the highly disproportionate onus carried by public sector banks in inclusive schemes as the PMJDY. While PSBs cover 79 per cent of the total accounts the private banks, a mere 3 per cent.

This, when the total market cap of private banks is double that of the public sector banks. Private banks need to imbibe an ethos of socio-economic inclusiveness even as they seek to serve the affluent.

**R Narayanan**  
Navi Mumbai

Expediting resolution

With reference to the article NCLT 2.0 — now backed by Parliament', after a decade of its launch, NCLT 2.0 aims to improve NCLT by managing backlogs and streamlining processes. Listing of these cases is the biggest

pain point. Ideally these cases listing should be based on urgency and stage of the case. Needless to say that all eggs should not be kept in one basket and there has to be segmentation of cases based on the value of the transaction. With roughly 13 per cent cases being decided in six months and others taking longer, it defies the whole purpose of NCLT. NCLT 2.0 should address all these issues so that we are able to regain investors' trust.

**Bal Govind**  
Noida



# Continue smartphone PLI

Vital for improving the ecosystem, sustaining growth

Harsha Vardhana Singh  
Veena Jha

The origin of India's PLI for smartphones can be traced to three developments. First, the trade war on China by President Trump in his first term fuelled a search by global MNCs for alternative production destinations. Second, the National Policy on Electronics, 2019 set ambitious targets for production and exports of mobile handsets. Third, the ruling of the WTO panel that India's MEIS (Merchandise Exports from India Scheme) was inconsistent with WTO norms. This led to a search for alternatives which were WTO consistent.

In 2019, the then Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister, Nripendra Misra set up a high-level committee under Amitabh Kant, NITI Aayog CEO, which, after extensive consultations and analysis, developed a PLI scheme for electronics and smartphones — Large Scale Electronics Manufacturing.

Financial support under Smartphone PLI is 4-6 per cent of incremental sales, subject to specified thresholds for incremental investment and sales being met. Following the initial PLI schemes, 11 other PLI schemes were announced. Of all these, Smartphone PLI has been most successful.

Since the implementation of the PLI, the production of smartphones more than doubled, and the share of exports to domestic production increased from 11 per cent to about 40 per cent. In 2024-25, mobile phones ranked first amongst all merchandise exports of India. India's share in world smartphone exports tripled in the past three years. With continued support, Indian smartphone exports could overtake Vietnam's (second largest global exporter) in the near future.

These achievements are underpinned by strong investment commitments that continue into the next few years. This investment momentum needs to be continued. Now, production far exceeds domestic demand. Hence exports must continue to grow, which will depend on cost-competitiveness, i.e., include support that reduces disabilities.

The Government is reviewing the PLI schemes. Such a review should differentiate between the high performing PLIs and others. Different strategies would be



**SUPPLY CHAIN.** Needs to be consolidated MOHAMMED YOUSUF

relevant for the two groups. For the high performers, it is important to take account of the prevailing situation and factors and accordingly provide support.

Consider the disabilities first. Estimates suggest that India still faces about 9 per cent disability (cost of land, credit, taxes, infrastructure deficits, logistics, high operational costs, and tariffs) *vis-à-vis* Vietnam. China has begun restricting availability of key inputs, equipment, personnel and technology in the supply chain. Some estimates suggest that these restrictions could increase costs by 3-4x. Thus, India needs to develop its domestic ecosystem and the process of consolidating production of different parts of the supply chain. This requires sustained growth of the smartphone sector.

India's main competitors, China and Vietnam, are offering company-specific schemes. China's overcapacity and its deep pockets make it impossible for India to win in a price war. Its companies, such as Luxshare-ICT, supported by opaque government subsidies, have overtaken their American and Taiwanese counterparts in competitive manufacturing. China will put export controls even on its own companies if they start building capacity in India for exports. China will not allow India to become a manufacturing hub for smartphones. Meanwhile, the tariffs for India announced by Trump pose another major challenge.

If India aims to be a global electronics manufacturing powerhouse, exports of smartphones should reach 30-40 per cent of the global exports. Given the current challenges to growth as well as existing disabilities, the PLI needs to be continued for this sector until the industry matures and helps build significant parts of its ecosystem.

Singh is former Deputy Director-General WTO, and Jha is former Head, UNCTAD India Office



AJAY SRIVASTAVA

This Independence Day, India celebrates its freedom under the shadow of a trade trap sprung by US hypocrisy. Washington launched its tariff war on China with a crushing 145 per cent duty, but quickly retreated to 30 per cent when Beijing threatened to choke supplies of over 100 critical minerals essential to US defence, electronics, and autos.

Lacking the nerve to confront China, President Trump turned on India — an easier target — and slapped a punishing 50 per cent tariff on its goods. This politically driven blow could wipe out \$50 billion in India's goods exports, hitting sectors like chemicals, metals, apparel, carpets, jewellery, and shrimp. This is no mere tariff spat — it's a case of Trump weaponising trade to push his economic, trade and geopolitical goals. Trump wanted a vassal; India chose to stand tall.

To survive and prevail in this high-stakes trade war, India must think several moves ahead — and that's where game theory comes in: read your opponent's intent, predict countermoves, and choose the path that maximises advantage while minimising risk. Should India negotiate, retaliate, diversify markets, or make trade concessions like halting Russian oil imports for tariff relief? Each choice will redraw the balance of gains and losses.

## POSSIBLE SCENARIOS

Here are seven possible scenarios of how this stand-off with Trump's America could play out — and what each could mean for India's trade, energy, and global standing.

**Scenario 1** – Russian oil no longer a US problem: If the US and Russia end the war or India stops buying Russian oil, the US would probably remove its extra 25 per cent tariff on Indian goods. This would bring India's total tariff down from 50 per cent to 25 per cent. India might stop using Russian oil anyway since the US and Europe have already banned fuel made from it.

Giving up Russian oil would cost India \$10 billion annually in lost discounts. Still, it would also reduce export losses from \$50 billion to \$30 billion, so India would be \$20 billion better off overall.

Game theory view: This is a clear trade-off, but it only works if the US promise to cut tariffs is genuine and permanent. Chance of happening: 10 per cent.

**Scenario 2** – status quo, no US-India deal: India keeps buying Russian oil, and the US maintains its 50 per cent extra tariffs, making total duties on some goods more than 70 per cent. Some exports like petroleum, medicines, and smartphones are safe, but many others — clothes, shrimp, carpets, furniture, jewellery, machinery — could lose 80-90 per cent of their US sales. This could mean about \$50 billion yearly and

# Game theory playbook for US tariffs

**MUTUAL GAIN.** India's response to the tariff shock should be a mix of smart negotiation, market diversification, and domestic resilience

## India-US trade scenarios after 50% Trump tariffs

Scenario	Extra US tariff on Indian goods (over MFN)	Est. Annual export loss (\$ bn)	Savings due to Russian oil (\$ bn)	Strategic/ geopolitical risk	Game theory type	India's optimal move	Probability (%)
1. Russian oil no longer a US issue — no trade deal with US	25%	30	10	Medium	Trade-off	Secure legally binding US tariff cut; hedge oil supply	10
2. Status quo — no US-India deal, continue buying Russian oil	50%	50	10	Medium	Stalemate equilibrium	Shield MSMEs, build alternative markets	30
3. Status quo + export diversification	50%	35	10	Medium-Low (long term)	Multi-player repeated game	Accelerate FTAs, incentives, structural reforms	10
4. US-India deal, no Russian oil	15%	15	0	Medium (US dependency risk)	Mutual-gain bargaining	Protect red lines, secure long-term deal	25
5. India retaliates + WTO	50%	50	10	High (US retaliation risk)	Tit-for-tat repeated game	Target sensitive US exports, may invite harmful retaliations	5
6. US court strikes down tariffs	0%	0	10	Low	Exogenous resolution	Quietly support legal challenge in US	10
7. US inflation/ job losses force rollback	15%	15	10	Low	Political feedback loop	Amplify US consumer cost narrative	10

Source: GTRI

significant job losses for small businesses.

On the plus side, India keeps control over its oil choices. On the downside, it stays in a long-running fight with Washington.

Game theory view: It's a stalemate — both countries keep their current positions. Neither side wins much, but neither has to give in. Chance of happening: 30 per cent.

**Scenario 3** – status quo with the US, but India exports more elsewhere: India keeps its oil policy, and the US tariffs stay the same, but India works hard to sell more to Europe, ASEAN, the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America. This means quickly signing trade deals, promoting exports, giving incentives to businesses, and increasing sales within India.

In the first two years, India might recover only \$10-15 billion of the \$50 billion lost from US tariffs. Becoming fully strong again would take many years, significant changes, and structural reforms.

Game theory view: This is like playing many new matches with different partners to reduce dependence on one player. The gains come slowly, and India must watch out for other countries making moves to take those same markets. Chance of happening: 10 per cent.

**Scenario 4** – India and the US make a trade deal, no Russian oil: India and the US sign a trade deal, and India agrees to stop buying Russian oil. In return, the US lowers its tariffs on Indian goods to about 15 per cent. India also promises to allow up to 95 per cent of US goods without tariffs and buy about \$50 billion

While major powers like the EU, Japan, South Korea, and the UK have bowed to one-sided US trade deals, only China and India have stood up to Trump

worth of US oil, gas, and defence products.

This deal would reduce India's export losses to about \$15 billion a year and simplify selling to the US. However, it could also make India more dependent on the US for energy and defence and reduce its influence with Russia.

In the trade deal, India must protect key interests, keeping high tariffs on farm and dairy products, rejecting unfair patent rules, controlling its digital data, and limiting foreign companies' access to government contracts.

Game theory view: This could be a win-win deal if both sides give and get equally, which is unlikely. India must ensure the US can't later change the terms in a way that harms its interests. Chance of happening: 25 per cent.

**Scenario 5** — India fights back and goes to the WTO: India responds by putting extra tariffs on US goods like almonds, apples, and machinery, and files a case at the WTO claiming the US broke trade rules. But right now, the WTO's appeals body isn't working, so even if India wins, it can't make the US follow the ruling. The US could also target India's IT, defence, and services exports.

Game theory view: This is like a tit-for-tat game — India tries to make things politically costly for the US at home, but may face harmful counter-retaliation. Chance of happening: 5 per cent

**Scenario 6** — US court cancels Trump's tariffs: On May 28, 2025, the US Court of International Trade said Trump's extra tariffs were illegal because the law he used only allows action against rare and extreme threats, not hefty, broad tariffs on many countries. The tariffs are still in place because the US government is appealing the decision. If the ruling stands, the extra tariffs will be removed, and rates will return to what they were before April 2. The risks? The appeals process could take a long time, and the US might find another legal way to put the tariffs back.

Game theory view: This is like a

referee stepping in and changing the game. Great for India and everyone else. Chance of happening: 10 per cent.

**Scenario 7** — US inflation and job losses force tariff cuts: If the high tariffs cause prices to rise and people lose jobs in the US, voters could pressure the government to lower tariffs to about 15 per cent for all countries.

Game theory view: This is like a feedback loop — unhappy US voters change Trump's calculation. India's best approach is quietly pointing out how the tariffs hurt American consumers. Chance of happening: 10 per cent

The quickest and cheapest fix is Scenario 6, where a US court cancels the tariffs. The best deal through talks is Scenario 4, where the US agrees to cut tariffs to about 15 per cent. This would keep losses manageable if India protects farming and dairy, keeps its rules on medicine patents, controls its digital data, and limits foreign access to government contracts. However, the most likely short-term result is Scenario 2, where nothing changes and the 50 per cent tariffs stay. In that case, India should help small businesses by giving them easy credit, export incentives, and finding new markets quickly to reduce the damage.

## THE BOTTOMLINE

While major powers like the EU, Japan, South Korea, and the UK have bowed to one-sided US trade deals, only China and India have stood up to Trump — and India has done so without the vast leverage China commands.

Its response to the tariff shock must be cold-eyed and strategic: a mix of smart negotiation, market diversification, and domestic resilience. The goal is clear — protect jobs, shield competitiveness, and guard strategic autonomy.

In a world where economic power is wielded like a weapon, survival means picking the right battles, anticipating the next move, and playing to win over the long haul.

The writer is founder, GTRI

thehindubusinessline.

TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

August 15, 2005

## Textile exports dip despite end of quotas

The end of the quota regime in the global trade of textiles and clothing was supposed to herald hectic activity in India's traditional textile and clothing exports. But the promised boom remains a pipedream with the first five months of trade figures not being bright enough to entertain any turnaround.

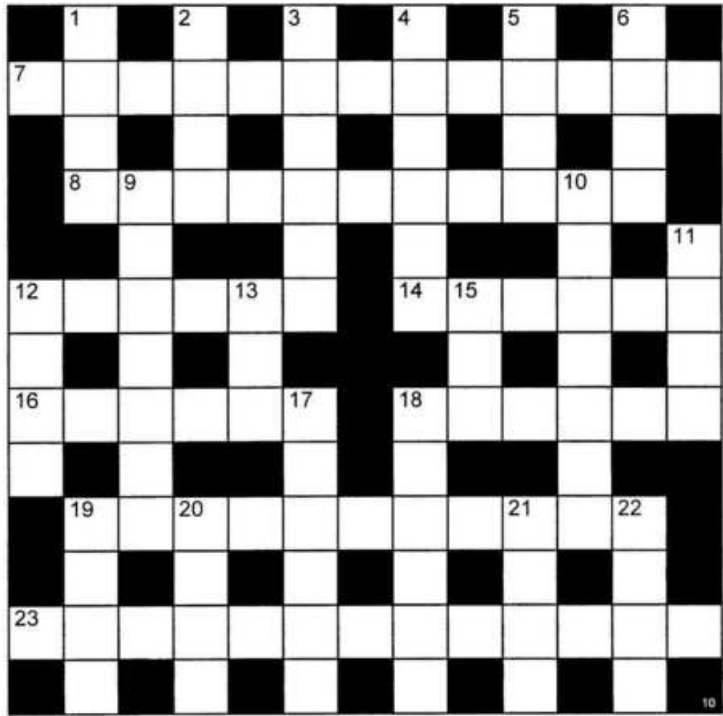
## Now, insurance for farmers against excess rain

By next year, farmers in the country can hope to be insured against the perils of excess rainfall. The Agricultural Insurance Company of India (AIC) has initiated a study to launch an insurance cover against excess rainfall by 2006. AIC, which launched "Varsha Bima" earlier this year, is expected to cover more than 1.5 lakh farmers against deficit rainfall.

## Foreign broking cos turn cautious on equity market

Foreign broking firms, whose advice drives FII inflows, have turned cautious on the Indian equity market and feel that a fall in stock prices in the near term is possible. Due to a slightly higher risk associated with the investment in equity market now, some of the firms have advised their clients to keep at least 10 per cent cash to buy shares as they decline.

## BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2762



## EASY

### ACROSS

- With no entanglements (13)
- Painting medium (5,6)
- Harbour guides (6)
- Pencils over the lines (6)
- Circus tent (3,3)
- Cooking, heating apparatus (6)
- Panel to display announcements (6,5)
- Repeatedly (4,5,4)

## DOWN

- Standard of whiteness (4)
- Outer garment (4)
- Athletic events (6)
- Equip, rig one (3,3)
- Saintly ring (4)
- An equal (4)
- Brisk (mus) (7)
- Reveal (7)
- Puts question (4)
- Drinking-houses (4)
- Couple, brace (3)
- To desert (3)
- To appease (6)
- Swords (6)
- Brad (4)
- Woody plant (4)
- Play divisions (4)
- Rounded roof (4)

## NOT SO EASY

### ACROSS

- Manhattan politicians made things worse by being simple (13)
- Sea green, or one of a variety of hues (5,6)
- Sanctimonious groups of people up in the air (6)
- Goes over lines with straps from the collar (6)
- It's a large thing for child to spin where circus is held (3,3)
- Changes vests: nothing in that, but they do get hot (6)
- Happen to remark the directors that pin things to it (6,5)
- Once and again it's like consecutive sentences (4,5,4)

## SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2761

**ACROSS** 1. Materialist 7. Tirreme 9. Fake 11. Loose 12. Middle 14. Particulars 18. Rector 20. Diver 22. Chap 23. Bayonet 24. Infiltrated

**DOWN** 2. Arizona 3. Idea 4. Staid 5. Stalk 6. Refer 8. Election 10. Field-day 13. Ace 15. Revenge 16. Trick 17. Prate 19. Chain 21. Abet



# Pragmatic manoeuvres

Reset in India-China ties is in step with India’s pursuit of strategic autonomy

Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi’s visit to India, scheduled for next week, is of a piece with the ongoing efforts in Beijing and New Delhi to improve bilateral ties that had gone south after the Galwan clashes in 2020. An early sign of the thaw was the resumption of the Kailash Mansarovar *yatra* in April. Operation Sindoor forced a pause in the movement. But diplomatic activity suggests that both countries are ready to move ahead, especially with the proposed resumption of flights, facilitation of tourist visas for the Chinese, albeit with stringent conditions, and actions to address trade concerns, including market access. The missing piece in all this was the resumption of border talks at the political level. That is set to change with Wang poised to have discussions with National Security Advisor Ajit Doval under the Mechanism of Special Representatives for the border issue — both had met in Beijing in December. The hectic diplomatic calendar also includes PM Narendra Modi’s impending visit to Tianjin, China, for the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit.

Complementing the China détente are the efforts made by Moscow and New Delhi to refurbish a legacy relationship. External affairs minister S Jaishankar is scheduled to meet Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov in Moscow, and President Vladimir Putin may attend the bilateral summit in India later this year. India-Russia trade, buoyed by Delhi’s crude purchases since the start of the Ukraine war, reached a record high of \$68.7 billion in FY 2024-25, though Indian exports accounted for only \$4.88 billion. The New Delhi-Moscow-Beijing triangle is ridden with strategic contradictions, particularly since Russia has become dependent on China and the latter continues to ignore India’s concerns vis-à-vis Pakistan’s support for terror and now, nuclear brinkmanship. But the current geopolitical moment is such that all three countries see merit in sidestepping the contradictions and embracing common interests.

It is tempting to view India’s growing ties with Russia and attempts to balance relations with China as a response to the US recalibrating its stance on Pakistan and the growing dissonance in Washington-New Delhi relations. For sure, Trump’s obstinacy on tariffs and claims on Operation Sindoor may have provided an impetus, but New Delhi’s pivot is also in line with India’s stated resolve to maintain strategic autonomy. It must pursue this path, rather than be bullied by any nation to forgo its national interests and sign on to lopsided trade deals. New Delhi’s foreign policy choices need not be viewed through binaries but as an expression of enhancing ties and removing irritants based on its national needs and geopolitical priorities.

# ‘Sholay’ turns 50: Let the movie be

At a time when five-year anniversaries of films are celebrated by stars on social media, the 50th anniversary of one of India’s best-loved films is indeed a momentous occasion. *Sholay*, released on August 15, 1975 in the thick of the Emergency, was a slow starter at the box office. It would be a full two-weeks before the swashbuckling tale of Jai-Veeru and Gabbar and Thakur gripped the nation’s imagination, making it the biggest film after *Mughal-e-Azam*.

As with all classics, an inexplicable alchemy turned this *desi* spaghetti western into cinematic gold. The set pieces, the ringing dialogues, the cameos, Dharmendra’s comedic timing and the tragic crescendo worked seamlessly. But for a film made of broad brushstrokes, there was a lot that *Sholay* left unsaid. Other than Thakur, we know little about the backstories of the main characters, while the romance between Amitabh Bachchan’s Jai and Jaya Bachchan’s Radha is near wordless. At the film’s end, we see only Thakur’s raised jackboot but not him actually kill Gabbar. These narrative interstices throughout allowed space for the audiences to imagine for themselves, creating a magical communion between the work of art and its consumer.

A branch of the Sippy family that holds the film’s rights, hoping to cash in on this milestone moment, is now creating merchandise, and re-releasing the film with restored footage of Thakur smashing Gabbar’s face and killing him which was left out in the original. Ours is an age of oversharing and the baring of everything — from one’s tonsils to one’s traumas, but with *Sholay*, the film was made by what it left out as much as what it said. As Javed Akhtar, one of its writers, said, “Would we really want to know that James Bond’s mother was a school teacher?”

{ INCIDENTALLY }

Gopalkrishna Gandhi



# An Independence Day message from Red Fort

Witness to India’s battles for freedom, the monument tells us that the nation must choose, unfailingly and unflinchingly, between social collapse and social cohesion, between the poison of hate and the nutriment of harmony

India’s Independence Day is, unquestionably, the Prime Minister (PM)’s day. From the very first time — in 1947, when India’s first PM Jawaharlal Nehru unfurled the country’s new national flag from the ramparts of Delhi’s Red Fort — the date has been the PM’s day.

And so it should be. August 15 has also become, by the sheer association of time with space, Red Fort’s day, with the PM, the flag and the fort fluxing into one moment of glory.

And just as Bastille Day, commemorating the Fête de la Fédération right from July 14, 1790, brings the Bastille to France’s life, on India’s Independence Day, Red Fort speaks to us about our past, present, and future.

Inaugurated by the Mughal emperor

Shah Jahan (1592-1666) in 1639, it carries on the walls of its Diwan-i-Khas (Hall of Special Audience) a Persian phrase: “*Gar firdaus bar rû-e-zamin ast, hamin asto, hamin asto, hamin ast*” (If there be a paradise on Earth, it is here, it is here, it is here). I take the phrase to be about India itself. It is said to have been first used by the Mughal Emperor Jahangir (1569-1627) when he beheld the valley of Kashmir.

The Fort’s full story is not heavenly. Things have happened in Red Fort that could very well turn the phrase on its head: “If there be hell on Earth, it is here. It is here, it is here.”

It was from the Red Fort that Mughal emperor Aurangzeb (1618-1701) had his elder brother- the startlingly eclectic and, in today’s idiom, secular, Prince Dara Shukoh (1615-1659) — chained, placed on a deliberately dirtied elephant’s back and paraded through Chandni Chowk before being beheaded. And again, it was from the Red Fort that, under orders of Aurangzeb, the free-thinking saint Sarmad (c.1590-1661) and the Sikh guru, Tegh Bahadur (1621-1675), were ordered to be beheaded — the first at the Jama Masjid opposite the Fort and the second in Chandni Chowk right ahead of it. Red Fort has witnessed the fabric of India’s social cohesion being torn, shredded. Like India itself has, repeatedly, only to see

it becoming whole again.

About one-and-a-half centuries after Aurangzeb, in 1857, when Bahadur Shah Zafar (1775-1862), the last Mughal ruler to live in Red Fort, became the fulcrum in the war being waged against the East India Company by revolting sepoys, Hindu and Muslim, the Fort became a magnetic field (albeit briefly) of Indian resistance to British rule. Another revolt within the ranks of the British Indian army was to reverberate within Red Fort’s walls almost 90 years later. Over 1945 and 1946, three sons of Sikh, Hindu and Muslim India, colonel Gurbaksh Singh Dhillon, colonel Prem Kumar Sehgal, and major general Shah Nawaz Khan — sons of Sikh, Hindu and Muslim India of the Indian National Army led by Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and bravehearts — were tried in Red Fort for what the British Raj described as “waging war against the King Emperor”. They were of the Indian National Army led by Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and bravehearts. A slogan wafted from Red Fort at that time, “*Lal Qila se aayi awaaz*”/Dhillon, Sehgal, Shah Nawaz” (Comes the call from the Red Fort — Dhillon, Sehgal, Shah Nawaz). The men were defended by a galaxy of formidable lawyers put together by the Indian National Congress, comprising Bhulabhai Desai, Jawaharlal Nehru, Tej Bahadur Sapru, Kailasnath Katju and



Red Fort has witnessed the fabric of India’s social cohesion being torn, shredded repeatedly, only to see it becoming whole again. RAIJ K RAI/HT PHOTO

Asaf Ali. Sentenced to deportation, all three were released shortly thereafter, in free India.

The bitter and bloodied sectarian strife that engulfed North India in the months before and during Partition found an echo in Red Fort when, in 1948, a set of men committed to the cause of a Hindu *rashtra* and accused in the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi were tried in a special court that assembled in the Fort. That cause has an opposite number, and on December 22, 2000, divisive poison, this time from the opposite end, coursed into Red Fort. Two Lashkar-i-Taiba militants gained access to the Fort that day and killed two soldiers and one civilian in indiscriminate firing. The terrorists were intent on keeping India divided and India’s two principal communities torn asunder. And so Red Fort is now more than a monument with historical charge. It is a vehicle of moral force, telling India that it must choose, unfailingly and unflinchingly, between social collapse and social cohesion, between the poison of hate and the nutriment of harmony.

As our PM tells India today, as only

he can, that disruptors of India’s unity and enemies of India’s peace and progress will be taught a lesson, we will all hail that resolve of his. But will we see the folly of letting hate rule the minds of the many and fear pervade the hearts of the economically weak, the ethnically vulnerable, and the socially unsheltered? Will, on August 15, 2047, the PM of the day, unfurling the *tiranga* for the 100th time over Red Fort, be able to say “Heaven, my fellow Indians, is here, it is here, it is here, for we do not hate, we do not fear, and we are at peace with each other”?

It is political pietism to think the PM in 2047 will be able to say that. But it is a civilisational imperative to hope that in India@100, the Red Fort will still beam the *aawaaz*: “Dhillon, Sehgal, Shah Nawaz”, and not just in Hindi but in all the languages of India — North, South, East and West — in an equal freedom.

Gopalkrishna Gandhi is a student of modern Indian history and the author of *The Undying Light: A Personal History of Independent India*. The views expressed are personal.

# Reform the economy to defeat tariff threat

The world is in flux, and India is being tested. But every challenge is also an opportunity. Tariffs and global headwinds should not weaken our resolve; they must galvanise us. India must act boldly to seize this moment. This is our once-in-a-generation opportunity to lead. We must not let it slip.

From August 27, India faces a 50% tariff, among the highest of President Donald Trump’s “reciprocal” tariffs. The US accuses India of financing Russia by buying Russian oil. However, Türkiye, the largest importer of Russian oil products, faces 15% tariffs, the same as the European Union, which has paid 297 billion euros for Russian gas since January 2022. The White House also remains unaware of US imports of palladium or fertilisers from Russia. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has heavily invested in the Indo-US economic, trade, and political relationship. However, the US’s antagonistic stance will impact future cooperation. Our strong institutional memory emphasises our strategic autonomy.

Let us be clear, our energy security and strategic autonomy cannot be compromised. Let us also be clear that this is not about Russia. India is rightfully refusing to bend, as we have so many times in our history. Global pressure should not intimidate us. It should galvanise us into pushing through the once-in-a-generation reforms India urgently needs.

The Goods and Services Tax (GST) was India’s most significant tax reform. Seven years on, collections are rising, and GST has enabled formalisation of the economy. Now is the time to move forward with strong political will for GST reform. We need to move to a two-rate GST structure and overhaul the GST business processes. New companies and start-ups being registered must receive their GST numbers along with their PAN/TAN. Technology must be leveraged to minimise the need for physical visits for GST registration. Income tax reforms must also be brought in.

A decade ago, a significant push to improve ease of doing business yielded notable results. Now is the time to take it a step further and make India the easiest place to do business in. Pending items, such as notifying the rules of the labour codes, should be completed as soon as possible. States must go beyond incremental reforms and truly embrace single-window clearances. Many of the most cumbersome processes have not been made part of the National Single Window System (NSWS).

The cost of capital for private enterprise must be brought down. The statutory liquidity ratio (SLR) mandates that commercial banks hold 18% of their assets in government securities. This reduces the pool of loanable funds in the economy and raises the cost of

capital for private enterprise. The SLR must be brought down to zero. This will unlock lakhs of crores of additional lending, bringing down the cost of capital.

We must recognise that a liberal trade regime is crucial in building up our manufacturing ecosystem. In recent years, there has been a massive proliferation of quality control orders (QCOs). These QCOs raise the cost of crucial imports and make our manufactured goods uncompetitive in global markets. These QCOs must be scrapped. Further, our tariffs on intermediate goods are too high and must be brought down as well. We need to diversify our export markets by fast-tracking negotiations on trade deals.

Tourism faces no tariffs. India, with its natural beauty, history, heritage, culture, and diversity, receives only a 1.5% share in international tourist arrivals. If the visits of non-resident Indians are excluded, this falls further. There has been no concerted branding or marketing

campaign for Indian tourism in the past decade. When countries are stepping up their efforts to attract tourists, we are lagging. We need the biggest global branding and marketing campaign to unleash India’s potential. Otherwise, the 1,800 planes that Indian airlines are buying will just be ferrying Indians flying abroad for holidays. We must attract global tourists.

Our cities are the first impression visitors get when landing. For too long, city governance has been stuck in limbo, relying on state governments for financing, planning, and human resources. Despite the constitutional amendments that devolved powers to cities, it has not been implemented in practice. Our cities must be made autonomous and financially independent.

In the Union Budget of 2021-22, a new public sector enterprise (PSE) policy was announced. The policy intended to minimise the presence of PSEs operating across the gamut of the Indian economy. This needs to be taken up in mission mode. In the last financial year, disinvestment receipts stood at ₹10,000 crore. From minority stake sales, we must move to strategic disinvestment. In the most recent budget speech, a second asset monetisation plan worth ₹10 lakh crore was announced. This needs to be operationalised at the earliest.

India is far from being a “dead economy”. We are, in fact, the world’s fastest-growing large economy, driven by a decade of structural reforms, digital innovation, and investment in infrastructure. Over 250 million people have exited multidimensional poverty, and the extreme poverty rate has fallen below 3%, reflecting real improvements in quality of life. Women are increasingly participating in this transformation. 80% of Stand-Up India loans and 68% of Mudra loans have gone to women entrepreneurs. India’s Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) has revolutionised financial inclusion, while public capex on infrastructure has more than doubled, laying the foundation for long-term productivity. India has also met its 2030 green energy target five years early, and is investing heavily in AI, quantum computing, and deep tech. Challenges remain, but the direction is clear: This is an economy on the move, powered by ambition, resilience, and reform.

Amitabh Kant is India’s former G20 Sherpa, and former CEO of NITI Aayog. The views expressed are personal.

{ KEIR STARMER } PRIME MINISTER, UNITED KINGDOM



Any talk about borders, diplomacy, ceasefire has to sit alongside a robust and credible security guarantee to ensure that any peace, if there is peace, is lasting peace

During a call with nations in the 'Coalition of the Willing' ahead of US-Russia talks

# India needs homegrown management consultancies

India has built global leaders in IT services, pharmaceuticals and AI, but not yet in management consulting. India-bred management consulting firms still face challenges due to weaker brand recognition and legacy biases. This needs to change. Thinking in India is as important as making in India.

Management consulting is soft power. These firms shape decisions and public policy. They influence how reforms are structured and how large-scale initiatives are executed. Consulting firms have helped define industrial policy in Europe, health care reform in the UK, and digital transformation in Southeast Asia.

This makes management consulting a powerful form of soft power. The models and frameworks aren’t just tools, but worldviews. For a country that seeks to lead in the decades ahead, shaping these worldviews becomes a strategic imperative.

This is not about displacing international firms. It’s about widening the field and ensuring that Indian firms with the capability and context get a seat at the table. Firms like YCP Auctus, Praxis Global Alliance, Takshashila Consulting, Redseer Strategy Consultants, Zinnov, and Vector Consulting Group are built in India but work across the globe. In the case of YCP Auctus, more than 40% of revenue comes from international clients. Vector Consulting Group works extensively across Asia, driving supply chain and operational improvements. These firms are globally integrated and culturally agile. India is not their boundary but their launchpad. Some of them have attracted long-term investment from Japanese partners, underscoring their global preparedness.

This is an evolution from support functions to strategic leadership. India began as the world’s back office, moved up to strategic GCCs, and today leads the world in Artificial Intelligence (AI). India-bred firms like Fractal Analytics, Quantiphi and LatentView are solving high-value analytics problems using Indian talent, platforms, and delivery models.

Management consulting is the next logical step. The underlying capabilities of structured problem-solving, functional expertise, sectoral depth and execution discipline are already established. The time has come for Indian firms to shape global strategy.

Many have scaled, with teams of over 200 consultants. They recruit from top institutes in the same slot as global majors. Having worked with governments, unicorns, and conglomerates, these firms bring contextual judgment and deep institutional memory.

India-based operating models enable these firms to deliver top-tier advisory at a fraction of global prices. For most clients, whether established conglomerates or emerging companies, this quality-to-cost ratio is a decisive advantage.

For Indian firms to become globally influential, they must build intellectual property. Global firms like McKinsey gained ground not just through execution, but by shaping the discourse through platforms like *The McKinsey Quarterly*.

India-bred firms must do the same. Thought capital in areas like digital public goods, infrastructure, skilling, or inclusive growth can become both a differentiator and a bridge to influence. Equally important is fostering alumni networks, institutional memory, and repeat ecosystems to create trust and longevity.

Management consulting can amplify India’s influence across the Global South. The opportunity for Indian management consulting firms is no longer confined to traditional clients. Today, economies across the broader Global South are seeking advisory partners who can balance vision with pragmatism, scale with sensitivity. Indian firms, having operated in similarly complex and dynamic environments, are well positioned to meet this need.

Whether it’s modernising logistics in East Africa, redesigning skilling ecosystems in Southeast Asia, or supporting state reforms in West Asia, Indian consultants bring more than just capability. They bring shared context. In doing so, they export Indian models of execution, collaboration, and innovation. That is soft power in action and an enabler of diplomacy.

To realise this potential, Indian firms need better access to Boards and procurement channels. Governments and private clients can play a critical role by creating a level-playing field where Indian firms are evaluated based on capability and fit, not just brand. Indian conglomerates, emerging companies, PE funds, and PSUs can serve as launchpads for Indian firms to build transformational proof points. And perhaps NASSCOM can broaden its remit to include management consulting as a strategic capability for global export.

India has long proven its ability to deliver talent to the world. The next step is to deliver intellectual leadership. If we want to shape how the world thinks about business and development, we must invest in our own institutions of strategic thought.

Abhisek Mukherjee is managing partner, YCP Auctus. The views expressed are personal.



## Another milestone

India must strengthen institutions

There is much to celebrate as India enters its 79th year of Independence today. It is no mean achievement that, despite enormous differences and diversity, India has remained united and grown from strength to strength over the decades. India's national unity, for instance, was on full display during Operation Sindoor earlier this year, which was in response to a cowardly terrorist attack in Pahalgam, Jammu & Kashmir. Not only did the nation come together in grief after the attack but it also backed the government and the armed forces in the operation, first in destroying terrorist infrastructure deep in Pakistan, and then in retaliation to the Pakistan armed forces' escalation. Indian forces inflicted severe damage on Pakistani military infrastructure. In the process, India also redefined red lines in terms of dealing with Pakistan-backed terrorism.

Even in purely economic terms, India is today the fastest-growing large economy and one of the largest in the world. Relatively fast economic growth over the past decades has resulted in a substantial decline in poverty. While there is a lot to celebrate as a nation, and the list can go on, this day also provides an opportune moment to reflect on the shortcomings and future challenges. The government has set a target of making India a developed nation by 2047, the centenary year of Independence. This is undoubtedly a worthy goal, but it is worth debating whether India's polity and policies are moving in the right direction to enable the nation to attain that goal. It is well accepted that India needs to grow at a much faster rate. However, the international environment has become far more challenging than at any time in the past few decades.

The United States (US), India's largest export market, has imposed prohibitive tariffs. Aside from the 25 per cent "reciprocal tariff", the US has imposed another 25 per cent penalty for importing Russian oil. While it is hoped that the position will improve in the coming weeks, continuing with the present prospects will have a significant impact on export, growth, and employment creation. Given that ties with the US had been consistently improving, irrespective of changes in government on either side, it is worth discussing what went wrong and how India can regain its position. It is also a moment to reflect on the kind of economy that India needs to fulfil the aspirations of its youth and attain developmental goals.

What India achieves in the coming years and decades will depend a lot on how its politics and governance evolve. An open, rule-based system that is backed by strong institutions will serve India better. However, some of the institutions at the core of India's functioning have not performed in the way desired. In Parliament or state legislatures, for example, critical Bills are passed without much debate and engagement. The workings of the Election Commission of India (ECI) are being questioned by the collective Opposition with no parallel in recent history. Non-partisan functioning of the ECI is the bedrock of the Indian political system, on which everything else depends. The state of doubt and confusion, both in the minds of political workers and voters, cannot be allowed to persist, and the ECI must do whatever it takes to address every single question. Another institution that needs to be strengthened is the judiciary. Delays in courts often affect the quality of governance and economic decision-making. Thus, overall, while India has to deal with external economic challenges, how it progresses in the longer run will depend on the strength of its institutions.

## Beyond 'friendly critics'

Independent directors need more accountability

Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) Chairman Tuhin Kanta Pandey last week called for greater accountability on the part of independent directors on corporate boards, suggesting that they should not be treated as "honorary appointees or friendly critics". This blunt message was addressed to the 2025 Annual Directors Conclave months after Sebi had debarred Gensol Engineering promoters Anmol Singh Jaggi and Puneet Singh Jaggi, who also operated the BluSmart electric-vehicle cab-hailing service, from the market. It is noteworthy that Gensol's four independent directors resigned from the board just as Sebi flagged that the promoters had been diverting funds raised for electric-vehicle projects for upscale personal expenses. Over the past few years, questions about how seriously independent directors take their fiduciary duties have arisen repeatedly as the ambit of corporate misconduct has widened and deepened — from Satyam Computer Services to IL&FS, YES Bank, Gensol, and Paytm Payments Bank, to name prominent examples.

These serial examples of governance failures have occurred despite substantial changes introduced under the Companies Act, 2013, following the Satyam Computer scandal. Among other things, the law mandated that independent directors must account for at least one-third of the boards of listed companies and spelt out a code of conduct (acting in good faith, exercising due care and diligence, avoiding conflicts of interest, and so on). Since they head such committees as the nomination and remuneration committee (NRC) and audit committees under the Companies Act and Sebi rules, the role of independent directors is far from inconsequential. Yet, corporate-governance standards in India can hardly be said to have undergone a transformation for the better. The critical weakness in the lax application of directors' fiduciary duties is a structural one: India Inc remains largely family- and promoter-driven. Independent directors are technically appointed by shareholders in general-body meetings. But this is mostly a rubber-stamp exercise. In reality, independent directors are appointed by promoters and remain beholden to them. Armed with generous sitting fees and other perks, such directors tend not to question too deeply the governance practices of the company's executive management.

This era of the sinecure may be changing, however, with Sebi and the courts increasingly holding independent directors liable for corporate malfeasance. Earlier this year, the Supreme Court declined to interfere in a Securities Appellate Tribunal order upholding Sebi's decision to hold the independent directors of Setubandhan Infrastructure responsible for diversion of funds. The directors disclaimed knowledge of such fraud on the grounds that they did not interfere in the company's day-to-day functioning nor did they attend the NRC or audit-committee meetings. Sebi pointed to the Companies Act code of conduct and a 1973 Supreme Court decision holding independent directors liable for dereliction of duty and compelling them to make good the losses incurred due to their neglect, even if they took no active part in the fraud. Sebi's greater scrutiny appears to have prompted many independent directors to reassess their roles. As a result, they are resigning from boards in droves. In FY25 alone, 549 independent directors resigned voluntarily and since January this year, 154 independent directors have exited their roles. In that context, Mr Pandey's comments could well be taken as a friendly warning.

# A revolving door for leadership

With the financial sector maturing, the door to regulatory agencies needs to be opened to a more diverse talent pool



ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA

A recurring observation has once again surfaced: The chairpersons of key financial regulators — the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi), and the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (Irdai) — are all former Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officers. The narrative that often accompanies this fact is one of continuity and a deep-seated understanding of public systems, suggesting that these seasoned public servants are uniquely equipped for the task. The argument is that this is not a coincidence but a reflection of a pragmatic recognition of their skill sets, which extend beyond narrow domain expertise to include strategic thinking, crisis management, and an innate knowledge of how the government machinery works.

One might look back at the history of these institutions and find evidence to support this view. A long list of former RBI governors — S Venkitaraman, C Rangarajan, Bimal Jalan, Y V Reddy, and D Subbarao — all came from a civil service or extensive public service background. Similarly, at Sebi, chairmen since 1992 such as G V Ramakrishna, D R Mehta, G N Bajpai, M Damodaran, C B Bhavne, and U K Sinha had similar professional origins. The same pattern holds for Irdai, where early leaders like N Rangachary, C S Rao, J Hari Narayan, and T S Vijayan were predominantly civil or public servants.

It is easy to look at this chronology and conclude that India has successfully developed a cadre of public servants perfectly suited to lead our regulatory bodies. This perspective is, however, dangerously misleading. It confuses the observed reality with a desired outcome. What we are seeing is not the success of a system, but the symptom of its im-

maturity. The consistent preference for civil servants is not a choice made from an abundance of qualified candidates from all sectors; it is an outcome of institutional weakness that makes it difficult for anyone else to succeed.

Notwithstanding the periodical problems that bubble up, the ideal-pragmatic model for regulatory leadership, which has been established in successful economies around the world, is based on a "revolving door." It is not about one type of professional but about a multi-faceted leadership package. The perfect leader for a regulator is someone who has lived and worked in the industry, understanding its practical realities, its incentives, and its vulnerabilities. This person also possesses a rigorous intellectual capacity, perhaps from a background in research or academia, allowing her to think abstractly and rigorously about problems without being confined by the status quo. Finally, she has a deep understanding of public administration, law, and politics, which is essential for steering a quasi-legislative and quasi-judicial body within a democratic framework.

In India, we have struggled to realise this ideal. The quiet harmony that is often cited as a virtue of civil servant-led regulators is frequently the result of a system that is poorly equipped to handle anything else. We have not laid the correct institutional foundations — the invisible infrastructure — that would allow a non-civil servant to thrive. When external persons have been brought in, they have often "tripped up" because the regulatory organisations are not governed by transparent formal processes and the rule of law. They are instead often reliant on informal networks, unwritten customs, and a deep-seated



AARTHIKAM  
CHINTANAM  
K P KRISHNAN

## FII vs DII: Reversing roles after 25 years

In 1992, foreign institutional investors (FIIs), or foreign portfolio investors, were allowed to participate in the Indian equity market, marking a major step in opening the Indian capital market to foreign investment. FIIs began their operations with a modest investment of ₹13 crore in 1992-93. At that time, domestic institutional investors (DIIs), comprising the erstwhile Unit Trust of India (UTI), six bank-sponsored mutual funds, and four financial institution-sponsored mutual funds, were well-established. In 1993, private-sector mutual funds were also allowed, which, along with the mutual funds already in operation, were expected to act as a counterweight to FIIs. The combined equity investments (outstanding) of DIIs were approximately ₹45,000 crore at end-March 1993. However, the next few years proved turbulent for DIIs, reducing their relative significance markedly.

UTI, which was by far the largest mutual fund at the time, faced serious problems in its assured-return schemes in 1998. This shook investor confidence in mutual funds, slowing down their resource mobilisation over the following years. Consequently, outstanding equity investments of DIIs rose only marginally, from ₹65,300 crore at end-March 1998 to ₹65,800 crore by end-March 2000. During the same period, FII investments more than doubled, reaching ₹70,300 crore, thereby surpassing DII investments for the first time. DII equity investments declined to ₹59,000 crore by end-March 2005, partly due to the bifurcation of the erstwhile UTI into two components in 2003.

The outstanding equity investments by FIIs over

the next 14 years (2000-01 to 2013-14) slowed somewhat, growing at a rate of 18 per cent compared with 58 per cent in the first six years (1994-95 to 1999-00). However, during the same period, investments by DIIs registered a negative growth rate of 2 per cent. Consequently, outstanding equity investments by DIIs, at ₹42,000 crore at end-March 2014, paled in comparison with those of around ₹6.6 trillion by FIIs.

The year 2014-15, however, marked a turning point in the operations of DIIs — their investments in equities surged by 98 per cent and maintained robust growth thereafter, expanding at an annual average rate of 42 per cent since then. Investments by DIIs grew at a much higher rate of 55.4 per cent from 2014-15 to 2019-20, compared with 37 per cent in the post-Covid period (2021-22 to 2024-25). Thus, contrary to the common narrative, retail investors started getting attracted to the equity market much before the Covid pandemic. This is corroborated by the share of capital market instruments in the gross financial savings of the household sector, which, at over 6 per cent, was broadly the same as in the pre-Covid period (2014-15 to 2019-20). In absolute terms, investments by DIIs reached an all-time high of ₹14 trillion at end-March 2025.

In contrast to the rapid growth of DII investments over the past decade, FII investments grew at only 4.9 per cent. Consequently, their outstanding investments, at ₹10 trillion at end-March 2025, were about 29 per cent lower than those of DIIs. Thus, DIIs have regained their predominant position in the equity market after a long hiatus of 25 years.



JANAK RAJ



TO LOSE A WAR:  
The Fall and Rise of  
the Taliban  
by Jon Lee Anderson  
Published by Penguin Press  
371 pages \$30

beginning to mount.

One of those casualties is the clarity of purpose with which the US entered the war after 9/11. Afghanistan was supposed to be the "good" war, fought for a righteous cause: The destruction of Al Qaeda and the dismantling of the Taliban regime that offered the group a haven. This was a government that inflicted human rights abuses on its own people, enforced a barbaric form of Shariah law and refused to allow girls to attend school, making Afghanistan the worst place in the world to be a woman.

Despite such initial clarity, the US slowly loses the thread on what it's doing in the country. In one of his later chapters, Mr Anderson follows Lt Col Stephen Lutsky as he wages a failing counterinsurgency campaign in the restive Khost Province. Lt Col Lutsky describes how many Afghans were willing to cut deals that often

undermined American efforts, saying: "For Americans, it's black or white — it's either good guys or bad guys. For Afghans, it's not. There are good Taliban and bad Taliban, and some of them are willing to do deals with each other. It's just beyond us."

Ultimately, the tragic US withdrawal in August 2021 proved Lutsky's point: The war was "just beyond us." Today, the conventional wisdom from the end of the 1980s, when Tom Hanks's Charlie Wilson was pleading for reconstruction funds, has been turned on its head. Ideas like "nation-building" and "regime change" have become politically toxic on both sides of the aisle.

Maybe that's sound policy. Or maybe those policymakers should read Mr Anderson's reporting. If they do, they will find a book that is as deeply humane and profoundly rendered as any I've read about Afghanistan, or any other war. *To Lose a War* is a monument to both good intentions and folly, a humbling reminder that the ball keeps on bouncing.

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## Dispatches from Afghanistan



ELLIOT ACKERMAN

In one of the final scenes of Mike Nichols's 2007 movie *Charlie Wilson's War*, Representative Charlie Wilson of Texas, played by Tom Hanks, pleads with his colleagues to approve reconstruction money for Afghanistan. The country's mujahedeen, backed by the CIA, had by this point defeated the Soviets after a long and bloody war over the course of the 1980s.

American policymakers were ready to move on and Wilson, begging for one one-thousandth of the sum the US government had recently appropriated

to fight its secret war, says: "This is what we always do. We always go in with our ideals and we change the world and then we leave. We always leave. But that ball though, it keeps on bouncing."

Jon Lee Anderson's *To Lose a War: The Fall and Rise of the Taliban* follows the bouncing ball. One of this country's pre-eminent war correspondents, Mr Anderson covered Afghanistan for more than two decades as a reporter for *The New Yorker*; this collection of his dispatches, all but one published in the magazine, spans that time, beginning in 2001, shortly after the assassination of Ahmad Shah Massoud, the leader of the US-affiliated Northern Alliance, and ending in late 2021, with a grim portrait of Afghanistan's myriad challenges — from crippling drought and economic collapse to political feuds — in the wake of the US withdrawal.

In his preface, Mr Anderson characterises Afghanistan as "more of a

battleground of history" than "a nation." The early chapters deal with the rise of American power in Afghanistan in the aughts, as well as the Taliban's precipitate fall in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks.

Weeks after those attacks, Mr Anderson travelled to Kabul at an inflection point. The Taliban were on the run. Osama bin Laden was on the loose. And the country stood on the cusp of a promising future unimaginable only weeks before.

In those heady days, Mr Anderson interviewed Ghulam Sarwar Akbari, a former Afghan communist who, like Wilson in Nichols's movie, blames US disengagement after the Soviet defeat for Afghanistan becoming a terrorist haven: "After the Soviets left, and the mujahedeen were victorious, America, instead of helping them to create a good government, forgot about Afghanistan. America shouldn't have done this."

Reading Mr Anderson's early dispatches is like stepping into a time



# Push for transparency: What SC’s order on Bihar SIR says

**APURVA VISHWANATH**  
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 14

THE SUPREME Court on Thursday issued an interim order directing the Election Commission of India (ECI) to make available online a searchable list of approximately 65 lakh voter names omitted from the draft electoral roll for Bihar, along with reasons for deletion, such as death, migration, and duplication.

The interim order pushes for greater transparency in the on-going Special Intensive Revision (SIR) in Bihar, and partially addresses the contentious issue of including Aadhaar as a valid proof of identity and residence in the process.

Here’s a breakdown of the order, and its impact on the SIR.

## Challenge to SIR

With the state set to head to polls in November, the ECI announced the Bihar SIR

late in June. It said that demographic changes in the last 20 years meant that current electoral rolls contained many “repeated entries”, and “the situation [warranted] an intensive verification drive to verify each person before enrolment as an elector”.

Soon after this announcement, multiple petitioners challenged the SIR on both substantive and procedural grounds.

The substantive grounds included questions on the ECI’s powers to conduct such an exercise. The procedural grounds pertained to the modalities of conducting the SIR, including whether the 11 documents notified by the ECI to prove “citizenship” were valid; whether the 2003 voter list could be a valid cut-off date for inclusion; and whether Aadhaar could be excluded as a valid proof of identity for inclusion in the voters’ list.

These issues are yet to be determined by the apex court. However, in oral observations, the SC has indicated that ECI has the power to conduct such an exercise. This can also be



**The Election Commission is currently looking at requests for corrections.**  
*X/@CEOBihar*

inferred from the fact that the SC has allowed the SIR to continue.

“You (ECI) are exercising the power of intensive survey as a preliminary enquiry into every voter identity. The powers [to do so] are *prima facie* traceable, so we do not wish to interdict...but your manner has to be reasonable, has to give certain comfort to citizens,” Justice Joymalya Bagchi, one of the two judges hearing the case, said.

This essentially leaves the procedural as-

pects of conducting the SIR still open for adjudication.

## SC’s interim order

The ECI had, in its affidavit, told the SC that it was not required by law to publish a separate list of electors removed from the draft electoral rolls or to provide reasons for their non-inclusion. This was in opposition to a plea by the Association for Democratic Reforms seeking the release of names and

details of the 65 lakh electors who did not make it to the draft published on August 1.

The ECI, in court, cited apprehensions that political parties might aggregate the data and that the publication could be a violation of the fundamental right to privacy.

The SC has, however, pushed back on this argument, underlining a citizen’s fundamental right to know why he or she has been deleted from the voter list. The court has directed the ECI to publish lists in which one can search by entering the EPIC number whether a voter has been deleted, and the reasons for such deletion.

The lists are required to be booth-wise, and also have to be displayed on the notice board of respective Panchayat Bhavans and offices of the Block Development Officer or Panchayat Officers.

This essentially enables individuals and political parties to check if a voter from the constituency has been removed from the rolls, and whether this exclusion is justified. As per the ECI, 7.24 crore of the 7.90 crore total voters have filled their forms in the SIR

process. Of the 65 lakh individuals who have not been included in the draft rolls, 22 lakh are dead, the ECI said.

## Recourse after deletion

The ECI had said that those whose names have not been included in the draft roll can submit Form 6, the ECI’s form for registration of new electors, by September. Incidentally, Form 6 allows Aadhaar, both as proof of identity and residence for enrolment. The Electoral Registration Officer verifies the information submitted in Form 6, and enrolls a new voter.

In its interim order, the SC directed that “aggrieved persons may submit their claims along with a copy of their Aadhaar Card”.

That said, whether this means that Aadhaar can be a valid document to be included as a voter again is still unclear. In its oral observations, the court said that “these are issues for the next stage”.

The court will hear the case again on August 22, and the issue of how to handle unfair exclusions is likely to be brought up then.

## EXPLAINED GLOBAL

## ISRAELI SETTLEMENTS IN WEST BANK, AT HEART OF MIDDLE EAST CONFLICT



**Evyatar, a settler outpost that Israel recently granted legal status.** *The NYT*

ISRAELI SETTLEMENT building, a point of contention at the heart of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, has come back into focus after Israel’s far-right Finance Minister revived a plan that would divide the West Bank and cut it off from East Jerusalem.

## What is an Israeli ‘settlement’?

An Israeli settlement is made up of housing units built for Jewish Israelis on land captured by Israel from Jordan in the 1967 Middle East war, primarily in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

The land is home to Palestinians who seek a future independent state.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s government has backed the settlers, and building and settler incursions have ramped up since the Hamas attack on Israel in October 2023 triggered the war in Gaza.

Palestinians have accused heavily armed Israeli settlers of stealing their land and destroying their olive trees, a symbol of Palestinian identity.

Palestinians say Israeli forces do not protect them from settler violence. The Israeli military says soldiers are often dispatched to deal with any trouble.

## What does Israel say about the settlements?

Israel says it has historical and biblical ties to the area that it calls Judea and Samaria, although most countries consider all the settlements illegal.

Numerous UN Security Council resolutions have called on Israel to halt settlement activity, but Israel says settlements are critical to its strategic depth and security.

In 2019, during President Donald Trump’s first term, the US dropped a long-held stance that deemed settlements illegal. President Joe Biden restored that stance

in line with international consensus.

In January, in his second term, Trump rescinded sanctions imposed by the Biden administration on far-right Israeli settler groups and individuals accused of being involved in violence against Palestinians in the occupied West Bank.

## How do the settlements fit into the idea of a two-state solution?

A 1993 agreement between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), known as the Oslo Accords, was designed to pave the way for the establishment of a Palestinian state in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza Strip alongside Israel.

The UN and most world powers say settlement-building is eroding the viability of that two-state solution by fragmenting Palestinian territory.

Israel’s allies, including France, Britain, and Canada, have said they may move to recognise Palestinian statehood in September.

## What is the current status of the settlements?

Israel has expanded and consolidated settlements in the West Bank as it continues its military operation in Gaza, according to a UN report that was based on research between November 1, 2023 and October 31, 2024.

About 700,000 Israeli settlers live among 2.7 million Palestinians in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, which Israel annexed in a move that is not recognised by most countries.

Israel refuses to cede control of the West Bank, and says the future of the settlements should be resolved in peace negotiations.

REUTERS

**SHUBHAJIT ROY**  
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 14

UNITED STATES President Donald Trump will meet Russia’s President Vladimir Putin on Friday in an attempt to find a way to end the war in Ukraine.

At a time when Europe perceives an existential threat from Russia and the continent’s ties with the US are being tested, and when Ukraine’s future is at stake, neither the Europeans nor the Ukrainians will be present.

In that sense, the Trump-Putin summit in Anchorage, Alaska, is reminiscent of Yalta 1945, when the leaders of the US, UK, and the Soviet Union met to decide the future of post-War Europe without Charles de Gaulle of France at the table.

## The meeting and venue

This will be the first in-person meeting between the leaders of the US and Russia since June 2021, when Putin met then President Joe Biden in Geneva. The meeting did not go well, and Russia invaded Ukraine eight months later.

Putin will be the first Russian leader to visit Alaska, which was sold to the US in 1867 for \$7.2 million. He last visited the US in 2015 to attend events at the United Nations.

The meeting at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson will be Putin’s first with Trump after he returned to the White House this January. The two leaders met in person on six occasions during Trump’s first term (2017-21), the last meeting being the one on June 28, 2019 at the G20 leaders’ summit in Osaka, Japan.

## What Trump desires

Trump had famously promised to end the war in 10 days. Within a month of his inauguration, the President spoke with Putin — with whom he had claimed to have a good relationship for years — over the phone for 90 minutes.

On February 18, senior American and Russian officials met in Riyadh — the first in-person contact between Washington DC and Moscow since the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

Ten days later, Trump and Vice President J D Vance berated Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in front of press cameras at the White House. At this time, Putin was seen to have a clear advantage.

But in April, following negotiations led by Britain’s Prime Minister Keir Starmer, Germany’s Chancellor Friedrich Merz, and



**Ukraine’s President Volodymyr Zelenskyy (left) and German Chancellor Friedrich Merz at a video meeting of European leaders with Trump on Wednesday.** *AP*

France’s President Emmanuel Macron, Trump had a “very productive” meeting with Zelenskyy at the Vatican. He then posted on social media that “there was no reason for Putin to be shooting missiles into civilian areas”.

In July, Trump told the *BBC* in an interview that he was “disappointed in” Putin, even though he was not yet “done with him”. Hours earlier, Trump had announced plans to send weapons to Ukraine, and had warned of strong tariffs action against Russia if there was no ceasefire deal in 50 days.

The President subsequently moved up this timeline to 10 days, citing his disappointment with Putin. He complained that his “nice” and “respectful” conversations were followed by Russian missile attacks on civilians.

On August 7, the day before the deadline, Trump said the ball was in Putin’s court — “It’s gonna be up to him...Very disappointed.”

This week, Trump sought to downplay expectations from the Alaska summit. “This is really a feel-out meeting,” he said, predicting he would know “probably in the first two minutes” whether a deal would be possible.

But on Wednesday, after a virtual conference with Zelenskyy and European leaders which he rated at “a 10” and “very friendly”, Trump threatened “severe consequences” if Putin did not agree to a deal.

neck of the Romanovs, and a drain on state resources.

“The fate of Russian America had become a subject of concern and debate in Russia even before the outbreak of the Crimean War (1853–56),” historian Lee A Farrow wrote in *Seward’s Folly: A New Look at the Alaska Purchase* (2017).

But it was the Crimean War, in which Russia suffered a devastating defeat at the hands of an alliance comprising the French, the British, and the Ottomans, that proved to be a final nail in the coffin for Russian imperial ambitions in America.

“In the spring of 1857, Grand Duke Constantine, brother of the new tsar, Alexander II, wrote to Minister of Foreign Affairs Alexander Gorchakov that Russia should sell its North American territories to the United States,” Farrow wrote.

“The grand duke emphasised the needs of the Russian treasury, the declining value of the colony, and his belief that the Americans were eager to control the whole

of North America,” she wrote.

It would take another decade of on-and-off negotiations with the Americans for the deal to materialise.

## Not a folly, after all

By all accounts, Seward’s enthusiasm was what made the deal happen.

“Seward was an energetic and ambitious man who yearned to be President... He certainly typified the expansionist mood of mid-nineteenth-century America. Seward didn’t want just Alaska; he envisioned the US taking over Hawaii and the Philippines, and to the north Greenland, Iceland, and even Canada,” Cohen wrote.

That said, there were some sound economic and geopolitical considerations to make the purchase, even at the time. Many believed that Alaska would help expand commercial relations with Asia, making new ports and routes available for the Pacific trade. Others, like Seward, saw the purchase as a stepping stone to eventually taking over British Columbia.

But the true economic value of the

colony would gradually be realised over the next century.

By the 1870s, with the gold fields in California depleting, some prospectors began making their way to Alaska. A couple of them struck gold on Alaska’s southeastern coast in 1880. While gold was never a major source of wealth for the economy as a whole, it helped capture people’s imagination, sent many flocking to the frigid north, and made some lucky ones extremely rich.

Much more transformative was the discovery of oil — and a lot of it. After a few promising findings in the 1950s, oil prospectors began taking greater interest in Alaska. In 1968, America’s largest oil and gas deposit was discovered in Prudhoe Bay, a remote region along Alaska’s northernmost coast, profoundly changing Alaska almost overnight.

“Alaska has become established as America’s greatest oil province,” Alaska Governor William A Egan said in a 1970 speech, according to an article in *NPR*. “Ponder for a moment the promise, the dream, and the touch of destiny.”









CONTRAPUNTO

Bad people will find a way  
around the laws

- PLATO

# Too Harsh, Too Vague

Proposed changes in U'khand's anti-conversion law are troubling on many fronts. Review is called for

Uttarakhand is following in big brother UP's footsteps as its state cabinet approves what can be fairly described as draconian amendments in anti-conversion law via the Uttarakhand Freedom of Religion (Amendment) Bill 2025. Aside from harsher punishment (minimum prison sentence of seven years, fine up to ₹10L) and expanding its scope (property seized), the law is even more problematic thanks to loosely worded conditions defining the offence. For instance, inducement/allurement has been expanded to include "glorifying one religion against another". It bans "social media applications aimed at building online communities of people who share interests and activities or are interested in exploring the interests and activities of others..." for the purposes of the law. Whatever does this mean?

The law in a 2022 amendment had already imported terms of the most stringent of laws – anti-terror legislation UAPA. So, 'illegal conversion' is a cognisable non-bailable offence, police already need no warrant to arrest, suspicion will suffice, and the burden of proof is on the accused. New amendments increase jail-term to life of 14 years. Similar to UP's law, if convicted of illegal conversion of minors or SC/ST, jail-term may be 20 years or



remainder of life. Mass conversion is defined as "when the religion of two or more persons is converted". CM Dhani justifies the amendments because allegedly a "demographic change" is being wrought in the state through 'illegal/forced conversion'. For the record, Uttarakhand population is 83% Hindu, about 14% Muslim, a smattering of Christians and others.

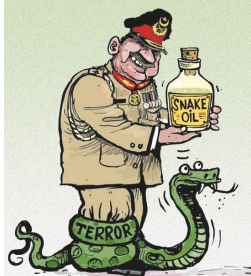
The long arm of the law has stretched into what is legislative and executive overreach. The legislation is to be amended to allow local govt to confiscate property belonging to the accused if there is not evidence, but mere suspicion of 'foreign funds' being involved. DMs can order seizure of any property they have "reason to believe" is related to alleged conversion. And this can be done "...regardless, whether a court has taken cognisance of such offence." This, when the burden of proof is already on the accused. There is disquiet in the state about harsh measures being exploited by officials for witch-hunts. A law where anyone can be arrested on mere suspicion of 'intent', where the accused's property can be seized, which places the onus of proving the charges wrong on the accused is at the least a poorly designed legislation. It demands a thorough review, or reversal.

# Pak's 78-Year Malaise

It continues to play all sides. But delusion level of its military elite is at an all time high

Pakistan marked its 78 years since independence yesterday with unsurprising triumphalism. Shehbaz Sharif linked the occasion to the four-day conflict with India this summer to 'praise the Pak military'. This, despite the fact that Operation Sindoor launched by India in response to the horrific Pahalgam terror attack was not just successful in taking out terror bases deep inside Pakistan, but also dealt a heavy blow to that country's military installations. It's a symptom of Pakistan's psychosis that it continues to believe to be an 'equal' to India.

Today, Pakistan's most popular leader sits in jail. Its economy remains in the doldrums. Its forex reserves hover around the \$14.5bn mark, covering just 2.5 months of imports.



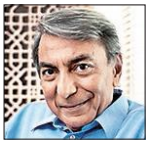
Since its creation, Pakistan has approached IMF a record 25 times for bailout loans. And as of May this year, it faced a total debt burden of a whopping \$267bn. Add to this the march of radicalisation, growing insurgencies in multiple Pakistani provinces, and a so-called hybrid regime that undermines democracy and makes the Pak army the real power centre in that country.

There are only two things that Pakistan is good at: playing all sides and negotiating with a gun to its head. Both tactics have been on display in recent weeks with Asim Munir now currying favour with Trump, and then, in an open nuclear threat, threatening to take "half the world down" if Pakistan is pushed to a desperate situation. Pakistan's sudden pivot to US is aimed at hedging against China, whose influence over Pakistan has grown tremendously. While the nuclear threat raises serious questions about the integrity of Islamabad's nukes. Pakistan thinks it can fool everyone all of the time. It doesn't.

# Nation on the move

Indians have never been so footloose and fancy-free as they are now

Jug Suraiya



A populist slogan during Indira Gandhi's regime was "The nation is on the move." Though whether the motion was in forward or reverse gear was open to question.

Today, the nation is very much on the move, quite literally, and its movement is decidedly outward bound.

According to a TOI report, Indians are spending an estimated \$17bn on foreign sojourns, as compared with \$17mn fifteen years ago, which represents a thousand per cent jump.

While a large chunk of this expenditure is for studying abroad, the biggest percentage increase has been for leisure travel, which is all the more remarkable in that the cost of the US dollar has gone up from ₹23 to almost ₹88.

Despite this cost deterrence, more and more Indians are spending more and more on foreign travel, and many are doing so on borrowed cash.

A credit card survey has shown that more of us (27%) are borrowing more money for foreign vacations than for home improvements (24%), medical expenses (9.6%), education (6.1%), or weddings (5.4%).

How did this travel bug bite India? Thirty years ago, Indians by and large, were stay-at-homes, rooted by family or community ties to the city, town, or village they belonged to.

If they travelled at all it was for work, business, or religious pilgrimage. Travel just for the heck of it was a rarity reserved for the extravagant or the eccentric.

This changed in 1986 when the govt introduced leave travel allowance, LTA, for public sector employees, which got extended to the private sector. The perk was meant to financially aid those in transferable jobs to make an annual return to home base. This gave an impetus to leisure travel.

Moving forward, liberalised foreign exchange has made travel abroad accessible to the growing middle class. The result is that the foreign-returned tag no longer has social cachet. That privilege is now reserved for the foreign non-returned – who leave the country and stay out through migration, legal or otherwise.

Jayant Prasad



Former Ambassador to Afghanistan

Taliban came to power four years ago. As it has consolidated its position in the absence of credible resistance, the international community, India included, has progressively engaged with Kabul's de facto authorities. Although the Taliban regime is non-inclusive, the law-and-order situation has improved. The logic of engaging with Taliban is that isolating it is unlikely to moderate its actions.

Russia is the first country to recognise the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA). This is in contrast to its attitude towards the first Islamic Emirate between 1996 and 2001, when Russia provided weapons, and Iran and India the money, to the Ahmad Shah Massoud-led Northern Alliance (NA) that was combating Taliban. India had then set up a field hospital for NA in Farkhor, Tajikistan, where the heavily injured Massoud landed, two days before 9/11.

Moscow hopes to combat the threat of terrorism and narcotics smuggling from Afghanistan by cooperating with IEA. Still, as the Afghan academic Nilofar Sakhi says, "It may also backfire on Russia."

Russia is concerned about the Islamic State – Khorasan Province (ISKAP), especially since the March 2024 concert hall attack in Moscow. There is no sign, however, that ISKP's potency has diminished. Could the Russian recognition of IEA influence some countries in Afghanistan's immediate neighbourhood, such as China, Iran, and Pakistan?

Although China has welcomed the Russian action, and Xi had accepted the credentials of the new Taliban ambassador in China in Jan 2024 in the Great Hall of the People, Beijing, it has so far not followed the Russian example. China is seeking ironclad assurances on the suppression of Turkistan Islamic Party, successor of the East Turkistan Islamic Movement.

An Iranian foreign office spokesperson confirmed a few days ago that Iran will not automatically follow the Russian lead in recognising IEA and that national interests and its regional priorities will guide its decision.

Pakistan is unlikely to risk US reprobation by formally recognising IEA. In any case, Pakistan is upset that IEA refuses to officially recognise the Durand Line as the legitimate boundary between Afghanistan

and Pakistan. Moreover, IEA has not disrupted the activities of the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) fighters who fought alongside Taliban against US and coalition forces. Pakistan would like them disarmed and handed over. Many IEA leaders share the TTP belief that if Islamism is good for Afghanistan, why should an Islamic Emirate not be created in Pakistan?

Like over three dozen countries, India too has engaged with Taliban, since it set up a technical unit in the



Indian Embassy in Kabul in June 2022 to coordinate its humanitarian supplies. India's assistance is gradually moving beyond providing foodgrains, pesticides, vaccines, medicines, and de-addiction and relief materials.

India has conveyed its readiness to support the Afghan health sector and the rehabilitation of refugees, strengthening sports (cricketing) links, and increasing the use of the Chabahar port. Restarting the unfinished development projects and maintaining and upgrading the executed projects will be the logical next step.

India has a stake in ensuring that terrorist groups against India do not use Afghan territory. Despite assurances, Indian security forces have been reporting

# Mea Culpa: Why Europe's Recalibrating On Palestine

Israel's oldest allies in Europe are shifting course. France & Britain, who birthed the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, now lead Western nations to pledge recognition of Palestinian statehood – isolating US

Rashmee Roshan Lal



Columnist based in London

It's a measure of the depths of horror evoked by images and accounts from Gaza that even colonialists of yesteryears seem seized by an attack of conscience. Or karma?

With Israel promising to take over Gaza City, even Germany announced a break with the country for which it has always felt a special responsibility due to the Holocaust. Chancellor Merz promised to suspend arms exports that Israel could use in Gaza. Germany is Israel's biggest supplier of arms after US – this would be Berlin's first punitive measure against a country it has unwaveringly supported.

Some are calling Europe's new attitude towards Israel a 'rupture' in relations. Recalibration may be a more emollient word. Days before Germany's move, Britain, principal architect of Israel's creation, acknowledged the "historical injustice which continues to unfold" for Arabs who lived on the land before it was given away nearly 80 years ago to those seeking a Jewish homeland.

Britain was following in the wake of France, with whom it had worked the secretive Sykes-Picot deal to carve up West Asia to mutual benefit after WWI. In late July, France led the way for western countries to finally rebalance the equation by championing a Palestinian state and resurrecting hopes for a just peace for both Palestinians and Israelis.

In committing to recognising Palestinian statehood, France and Britain triggered a mini tsunami in geopolitical terms. Canada, Malta, Portugal and Australia have followed with promises on recognition of Palestinian statehood. Slovenia

recently became the first of the 27-member EU bloc to bar two far-right Israeli ministers from entering its borders over their "genocidal" rhetoric toward Palestinians. Soon enough, Netherlands did the same.

The surge of western support for Palestinian rights and statehood is welcome, if a tad late, considering 147 of UN's 193 member states including India signed on long ago. This recalibration comes at an especially bleak moment. Nearly two years into Israel's brutal war in Gaza, an estimated 60,000 Palestinians are dead, mass starvation grips the territory amid widespread fear Israeli govt may act on its loudly advertised aims to depopulate Gaza and annex West Bank.

Even so, it's right to read the French and British initiative as more than the sum of its parts. These are the first members of the G7 club to promise recognition of a Palestine state come Sept.

As permanent members of UNSC – just five countries enjoy veto-wielding privilege – both countries' newly resolute stance on Palestinian statehood may soon leave US isolated as the sole holdout. The two other UNSC permanent members – China and Russia – recognised Palestinian statehood long years ago.

France, Britain and others are reframing the problem. Rather than waiting for a two-state solution to emerge from the ground, ie with Israeli and Palestinian agreement, recognition of a Palestinian state becomes a starting point rather than the end goal, a paradigm shift. In tandem, France has laboured with Saudi Arabia to produce the so-called New York declaration, a

statement of intent backed by Arab League, EU and 17 other countries. It envisions Palestinian Authority governing all Palestinian territory, condemns Hamas and calls for the militant group to disarm and relinquish power. France has described the declaration as "unprecedented" because it's the first time the 22-nation Arab League has backed a joint statement to this effect.

Palestinian issue aside, Britain's latest recounting of its role in the creation of Israel is noteworthy. UK foreign secretary David Lammy's speech at the French-Saudi UN conference was a mea culpa of sorts, an acknowledgement of the mess colonial Britain left in West Asia nearly 80 years ago.

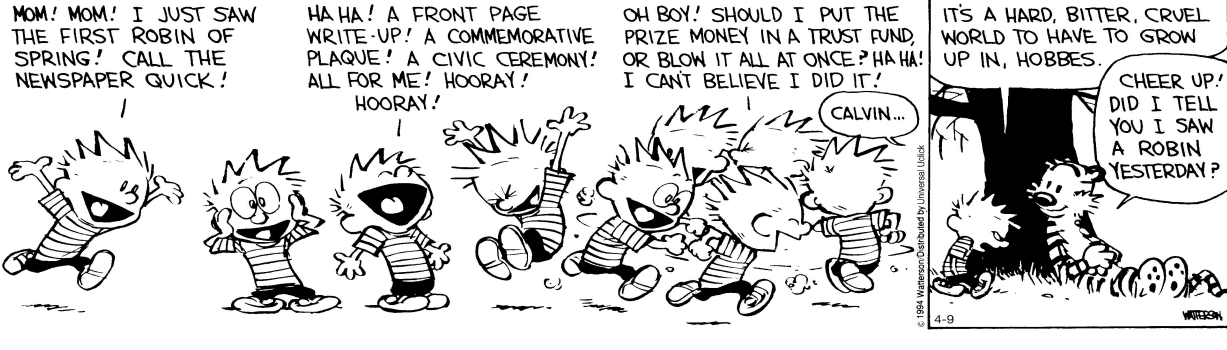
Lammy said his country would recognise Palestine statehood "with the hand of history on our shoulders", a reference to the 67-word Balfour Declaration signed by another British foreign secretary in 1917. That transformational document promised to "view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people" but Lammy said one other promise was not kept. It stated "nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of non-Jewish communities in Palestine." The broken promise to Palestinians is yet to be addressed, he indicated.

Historians still deliberate the real reason Britain issued the controversial and game-changing Balfour Declaration but in the pithy criticism of writer Arthur Koestler, it really only meant that "one nation solemnly promised to a second nation the country of a third."

Colonisers of yore have much to answer for. Lenin called the Franco-British Sykes-Picot deal "the agreement of the colonial thieves". After WWI, Britain ignored and France rejected findings of an Inter-Allied Commission sent by US president Woodrow Wilson to Greater Syria to ascertain the local population's views on the Balfour Declaration. It found locals wanted a unified Greater Syria with Palestine incorporated.

There is no way Britain or France can elide their role in creating the cesspit that is Palestinians' situation today. But they can atone by correcting the historical imbalance they instituted. The only question: Does it come too late?

## Calvin & Hobbes



Ashok Vohra

AB Purani, a freedom fighter and a revolutionary, in his meeting with Sri Aurobindo in 1918 asked him, 'Are you quite sure that India will be free?' Aurobindo firmly replied, 'You can take it from me, it is as certain as the rising of the sun tomorrow.' 'The decree has already gone forth – it may not be long in coming.' He categorically assured Purani – 'I give you the assurance that India will be free.'

Sri Aurobindo considered it 'gratifying' that India was getting its Independence on Aug 15, his birthday, 'not as a fortuitous accident, but as the sanction and seal of the Divine Force' that guided him throughout his life.

In his message broadcast from All India Radio, Tiruchirappalli, in 1947, Aurobindo talked about his dreams for the progress and development of India.

The first of his dreams related to a revolutionary movement that will not only uplift the depressed classes, backward castes, but also aim at the unity of Hindus, Muslims, and other religious as well as linguistic communities in India. The absence of such a unity, he argued, would 'seriously weaken, even cripple, India's internal development and prosperity' that may result in civil strife and 'even a new invasion and foreign conquest' of India.

By religious unity Aurobindo does not mean that the different religious sects will have to lose their identity and cease to be Mohammedan, Hindu, Buddhist, or Christian, in any sense of the term, but 'devotion to one's own ideals and institutions, with toleration and respect for the ideals and institutions of other

sections of the community, and an ardent love and affection for the common civic life and ideal of all – these are what must be cultivated by us now, for the building up of the real Indian nation.' This idea of unity in diversity was upheld by Gandhiji when he said in his meeting with Sri Aurobindo in Pondicherry – 'Hindus should become better Hindus and Muslims should become better Muslims.'

Being a realist, Aurobindo did not forget that because of the diversity of languages in India, 'brother is unable to understand brother' with the result that we are unable to 'sympathise with each other's feelings, between heart and heart, there are immense barriers.' So, he argued that there must be a universalisation of language. He dreamt of a common language

### Sacred space

Freedom is entirely different from revolt. There is no such thing as doing right or wrong when there is freedom. You are free and from that centre you act. And hence there is no fear...a mind that has no fear is capable of great love.

Jiddo Krishnamurti

# India Of Sri Aurobindo's Dreams



THE SPEAKING TREE

throughout India and felt that a common language 'is bound to evolve'. It can either be one of the existing languages or 'else a new language will have to be created.'

Aurobindo dreamt of an India which will play an important role not only in the 'resurgence and liberation of peoples of Asia' but also 'without schism or fissure' the unification of mankind in their material and spiritual growth. This, he said, will result in 'voluntary fusion of cultures' that in turn will result in 'a fairer, brighter and nobler life for all mankind.'

Consistent with his philosophy of 'evolution and involution', Aurobindo's final dream for free India was that it would 'evolve a step in evolution which would raise man to a higher and larger consciousness' whose outcome would be 'individual perfection and a perfect society'.



OUR VIEW



# India's success formula endures: Let's not falter

We have faced myriad challenges in the past and emerged unscathed. With the world in flux again, India must combine strategic autonomy with astute economic management

When the world awoke on 15 August 1947, it found a new independent nation that held out hope for all colonially exploited countries, became an enduring inspiration for the democratic ideal and succeeded remarkably in uniting a diverse population—divided by religion, caste and language—into a coherent political union. Impoverished by colonial surplus extraction, the Indian landmass had been reduced from one of the richest places on earth to one of the poorest. India's political leadership had to craft an economic policy informed by the nation's capital scarcity, an abundance of untrained labour and widespread incidence of crushing poverty. Leading members of the private sector also advocated—through the Bombay Plan—that the state bear the primary task of building the nation's core economic structure, which could then become a durable platform for private sector entrepreneurship. The march of time has shown how the broad idea of India has held firm through famines, droughts, pandemics, global economic crises, wars waged by bitter neighbours and provocations by imperious superpowers, not to mention rifts within the country.

As India celebrates 78 years of independence, new challenges again cast a shadow on our doorstep. Democracy-deficient neighbours have drawn their scimitar to put 'a thousand cuts' of terror back in oblique play to weaken the Indian republic. Our neighbour across the Himalayas, a rising force to reckon with, shows little patience for democratic methods and might try to dominate the Indo-Pacific. A reliable partner of the past, Russia, is a weakened power and our painstakingly forged friendship

with the US is under threat from a reckless White House bent on wrecking global trade and old alliances. Suspicion of US motives has a long history. It hardened in the 1960s after the Lyndon Johnson administration reneged on its promise of aid after India devalued the rupee on its demand. It grew acute after Richard Nixon sent warships to the Bay of Bengal in 1971 to support a Pakistani general's unjust war. And now, President Donald Trump is not only feting Pakistan's military leaders again, but also trying to browbeat India on trade with punitive tariffs.

We have been in tight spots before and emerged unscathed every time. New Delhi's policy of strategic autonomy, a logical successor of non-alignment during the Cold War, has served the nation well. It is perhaps time to recalibrate this stance to consolidate the time-tested formula of even-handed relations and Panchsheel—or five principles. In the 35 years since our economy was opened up, India has been a global exemplar of economic growth and poverty reduction. One of the reasons was the visible growth of a middle-class that spent and saved. External trade headwinds should push us to become more competitive, even as we reinforce our policy framework to fortify domestic growth. Two factors call for special attention. First, multitudes still need access to meaningful education, reliable healthcare and robust sources of income. Second, India Inc must be convinced to invest at home, not overseas, for which corporate investors need to be assured of their investments paying back. We must not allow all-round upward mobility to falter as a generator of growth. As India's first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru said in his *Tryst with Destiny* speech, the "future is not one of ease or resting but of incessant striving..."

THEIR VIEW

# Trump's trade offensive echoes Thatcher's 1982 Falklands War

It's surprising how so many countries have taken the American President's aggression lying down



**BARRY EICHENGREEN** is professor of economics and political science at the University of California, Berkeley, and the author, most recently, of 'In Defense of Public Debt'

US President Donald Trump's trade war resembles nothing so much as UK prime minister Margaret Thatcher's Falklands War in 1982: one side deploys massive force and the other withdraws with its tail between its legs. Of 57 countries and territories included in Trump's 'Liberation Day' list of targets for 'reciprocal' tariffs, just three—Brazil, Canada and China—credibly threatened retaliation. The Heard and McDonald Islands, populated only by penguins, were understandably supine. But it is more than a little surprising that so many others have taken US aggression lying down.

The European Commission's agreement with the US is especially stunning. It has accepted Trump's 15% baseline tariff, with exemptions only for aircraft parts, critical minerals and a couple of other items. US duties on steel, copper and aluminium remain at 50%. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has pledged that Europe will buy additional US energy and invest \$600 billion in the US.

In return, the EU receives basically nothing, only a US promise not to impose still higher tariffs, at least for now. Moreover, the deal enhances US exporters' access to European markets, while Europe's exporters face additional barriers in the US.

The outcome is widely seen as a sign of the EU's weakness. The Commission

had to negotiate an agreement on behalf of 27 countries with different positions on how aggressively Europe should respond. In France, there was considerable support for the idea that it was important to face down a bully. In Germany, by contrast, policy was shaped by automotive and machinery industries desperate to retain access to the US market on terms at least not grossly inferior to those obtained by Japan, South Korea and the UK. These differences left the Commission with little wiggle room.

Then there is the fact that the EU continues to rely on the US for weaponry and that it needs America's help in supporting Ukraine.

Europe likewise lacks a pressure point analogous to China's control of rare earth refining, which allows the Chinese government to threaten retaliation by cutting off an essential input required by US high-tech industries and by the country's defence complex.

Finally, like other economies contemplating how to respond, Europe faces a 'madman' problem. Normally, the strongest argument for retaliating is to deter further aggression. A rational leader will understand that launching a trade war, much like launching a conventional war, will provoke a counter-attack in which his country suffers as

much as his opponent's. But then, this strategy works only when leaders are rational. Trump's trade-policy decisions are clearly guided by an irrational belief in tariffs—"the most beautiful word in the dictionary," as he puts it—and by the perverse satisfaction he derives from punishing opponents and even allies, regardless of the costs borne by the US itself. Negotiators, not only in Europe, had good reason to fear that Trump would meet retaliation with retaliation, resulting in further damage.

There is, however, a contrary view that Europe has shown strength, not weakness. Meeting tariffs with tariffs, especially when these have no deterrent effect, is simply a way of shooting oneself in the economic foot. Higher import prices fuel inflation and thus hurt consumers, while taxing imported inputs, as the US is doing, makes domestic production more costly and less efficient. At the same time, less import competition encourages rent seeking; domestic producers will lobby for tariff concessions and make campaign contributions to obtain them.

Thus, Europe has shown its wisdom in shunning self-destructive measures. It now needs to follow up by ratifying its free trade agreement with Latin America's Mercosur bloc, solidifying its trade relations with China and recommitting itself to the multilateral trading system, whether the US participates or not.

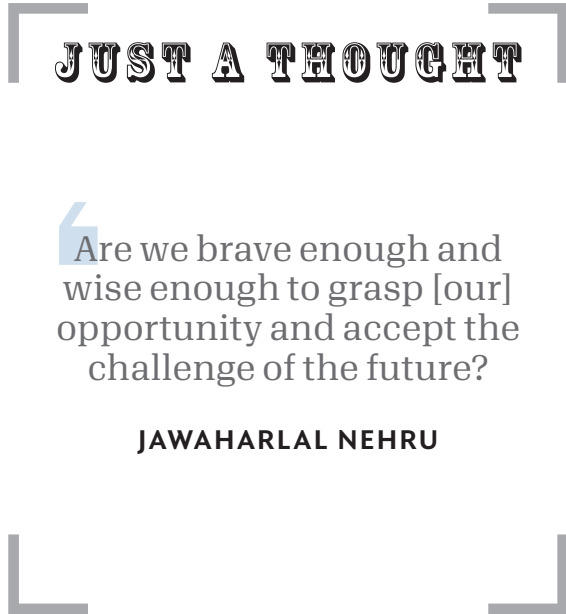
Something else that Trump's trade war and Thatcher's Falklands War have in common is their utility in distracting attention from their instigators' domestic problems—in Thatcher's case an unemployment crisis and in Trump's the questions about his ties with the convicted paedophile Jeffrey Epstein, who hanged himself while awaiting trial on federal sex-trafficking charges.

Helped by her victory in the South Atlantic, Margaret Thatcher would reign for eight more years. The US Constitution prevents Trump from serving as president until 2033. Or so we are led to believe. ©2025/PROJECT SYNDICATE

QUICK READ

Most US trade partners, the EU included, have simply rolled over under Trump's trade aggression and let him announce big gains of market access for American exporters in return for little.

It's reminiscent of the UK's quick victory over Argentina in the Falklands War, although it's possible that US partners realize that tit-for-tat tariffs would ultimately prove self-defeating.



THEIR VIEW

# Resist Trump's pressure but reform Indian agriculture

PRASANNA KARTHIK



is a strategy and public policy professional. His X handle is @prasannakarthik

The partnership between the world's two largest democracies has repeatedly stumbled on one issue: agricultural market access. Trump wants India to open its doors to American farm products—from dairy, poultry and maize to apples, almonds and genetically modified crops. India resisted, wary of destabilizing its rural economy. This defiance is economically prudent and socially necessary. But shielding farmers from unfair competition is only half the battle. Without structural reform, Indian agriculture will remain inefficient and fiscally draining, slowing and even strangling our economic transformation.

The US spends billions annually to prop up its agricultural sector through direct payments, crop insurance subsidies and price supports. Its 2018 Farm Bill alone authorized \$867 billion over 10 years. These subsidies allow American producers to sell abroad at artificially low prices without fear of market volatility, the same practice that the US accuses China of.

If India allowed unrestricted imports of such products, domestic prices for staples like dairy, poultry and maize might collapse. A 10-15% drop in farm-gate prices could wipe out the livelihood overnight of millions of small farmers—most with less than two hectares of farmland. The ripple effects would hit rural incomes, weaken demand, disrupt rural credit and threaten jobs in sectors that range from logistics and cold storage to food processing and retail.

Our strategic autonomy is also at stake. A nation dependent on imported staples will be vulnerable to price shocks, export bans and geopolitical pressure. The covid pandemic and the Ukraine war showed how volatile global commodity markets can become. Maintaining the domestic production of essential foods is not just economic prudence—it is national security.

Yet, barring unfair imports must not mean defending the *status quo*. Agriculture employs 42% of India's workforce but contributes only 18% of GDP. The average agricultural worker produces less than one-sixth the output of a worker in industry or services. We must shift a significant share of our workforce to other sectors.

Politically-driven subsidies sustain this inefficiency. India spends over ₹4.5 trillion

annually on farm-related subsidies—on fertilizers, power, irrigation and procurement under the Minimum Support Price (MSP) system. The rural employment guarantee scheme adds to the bill. While often justified as poverty relief, these subsidies distort cropping patterns, harm the environment and crowd out investment in infrastructure and research.

The MSP system entrenches overproduction of wheat and rice, depleting groundwater and making India reliant on costly imports of pulses and edible oils. Fertilizer subsidies encourage overuse, harming soil health and straining India's finances. Power subsidies promote inefficient irrigation and groundwater depletion. Subsidies rarely reach the poorest farmers in full, yet take a large share of agricultural budgets.

Farm fragmentation compounds the problem. With farms shrinking below two hectares, mechanization and productivity gains are diffi-

cult. Land-leasing restrictions in many states block consolidation and efficient land use.

A competitive agricultural sector would thrive in an open market system by opting to compete, not hide behind tariff barriers or subsidies. To safeguard farmers, India must embrace reforms. These include:

Adjusting MSP procurement to promote high-value commodities, easing water stress and improving nutrition; introducing enabling policies to encourage consolidation, mechanization and economies of scale; shifting from input subsidies to targeted investment in irrigation, cold storage and rural roads; building farm-to-market linkages and export-oriented clusters to raise incomes and create rural jobs; and expanding water-efficient irrigation, drought-resistant crops and regenerative agriculture practices.

These reforms would enable Indian agriculture to compete on quality, cost and reliability, thus making market opening less contentious.

India should not reject all agricultural imports, but what we import must be on our terms—under a calibrated tariff and quota system that protects vulnerable sectors while allowing targeted liberalization.

Any farm sector negotiations with the US should rest on three principles:

**A level-playing field:** Imports from countries with high subsidies must face countervailing duties or quotas.

**Phased liberalization:** Market opening should be gradual to allow farmers to adapt.

**Mutual benefit:** Agricultural concessions must be balanced with gains in services or other competitive sectors.

It's a reasonable stance. The US maintains tariff and non-tariff barriers while pressing others to open markets. Free trade can't mean a free rein for subsidized dumping.

In trade policy, demands are often treated as expanding chips. But in agriculture, the stakes go beyond trade balances—they involve the livelihoods of hundreds of millions, rural stability and food security. India must protect farmers from subsidized US competition, but it must not protect inefficiency. We need a defensive trade policy paired with aggressive reforms. India must recognize that perpetual state subsidies are as harmful as US tariffs. Both need to go.









Editor's  
TAKE

## Independence Day & The Idea of India

As we celebrate our 79th Independence Day, there is much to cherish and even more to reflect upon – where we went wrong and how to mend our errors

On this very day in 1947, the first Prime Minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, delivered his “Tryst with Destiny” speech. It was a roadmap for the years to come, for leaders and people alike. An evocative phrase in that speech was “redeem our pledge.” The big question is: Have we redeemed our pledge, or are we close to our goal of redeeming it? And what was the pledge in the first place? It was the idea of India – so beautifully encapsulated in the Preamble to the Constitution: We aim to secure justice-social, economic, and political; liberty of thought, expression, belief, faith, and worship; equality of status and opportunity; and to promote fraternity, ensuring the dignity of every individual and the unity and integrity of our nation. A country where people come first, and their welfare, dignity, and aspirations are cherished and valued. To be fair, it would be wrong to say that nothing has been achieved, but yes – much still needs to be done, particularly in the realms of social justice, dignity, and equality for all. Every 15th of August, the tricolour rises against the sky, and the nation pauses to remember. The notes of the national anthem float through the air, schoolyards echo with patriotic songs, and streets shimmer with saffron, white, and green. It is more than a date on the calendar – it is the beating heart of India's identity. Each year, as we gather under the flag, we are reminded that freedom was neither gifted nor stumbled upon; it was wrested from the iron grip of colonial rule through sacrifice, unity, and an unyielding belief in the right to self-determination. The colonial yoke was more than just political subjugation – it was an assault on dignity, culture, and self-reliance.

Seventy-nine years later, the journey has been both inspiring and complex. India has grown from a fledgling democracy of divided states into a global voice of influence. The literacy rate has soared, life expectancy has more than doubled, and the economy has expanded from scarcity to becoming one of the world's largest. Our space missions reach the Moon and Mars, our entrepreneurs build global companies, and our democracy – messy yet resilient – remains the largest in the world.

Yet all these achievements are tempered by atrocities against Dalits, the subjugation and mistreatment of women, and a fractured, polarised society along religious, linguistic, and regional lines. Poverty, inequality, corruption, and social divisions still challenge the very ideals we fought for. The path to justice, equality, and prosperity is far from fully walked. The echoes of our colonial past sometimes resurface-in bureaucratic inertia, in entrenched social hierarchies, and in unequal access to opportunity.

But if history has taught us anything, it is that India's greatest strength lies in its capacity to endure, adapt, and rise again. To celebrate the 79th Independence Day is not to ignore our shortcomings – it is to reaffirm our commitment to overcome them. It is to remember that freedom is not static; it is a living responsibility. We must guard it, strengthen it, and extend its reach to those still on the margins.

# How AI is Shaping India’s Electoral Future

As Bihar gears up for the Assembly polls, the technology promises both opportunity and peril: it can streamline voter engagement and analyse public sentiment, yet it also fuels the spread of deepfakes, misinformation, and manipulation



KALYANI SHANKAR

Last year was a high-profile election year with 60 countries going to the polls. This included India. Artificial Intelligence played a prominent role in predicting voter turnout, identifying potential swing voters, voter preferences, and optimising campaign schedules for maximum impact. It was hailed as the AI election year. As Security Guru Schneier rightly pointed out, democracy is not just about the outcome, but the human process behind it. Supporters claim AI is here to enhance that process, not replace it.

AI will come into play again in India at the end of the year during the Bihar Assembly polls. Uttar Pradesh and Bihar are two critical states, and political parties are closely watching the scene to see who gets the jackpot. Political parties, both national and regional, are preparing for the upcoming election. The ruling coalition, Janata Dal (United) [JD(U)], seeks to maintain its position, while the Mahagathbandhan, under the leadership of Tejashwi Yadav, is striving to gain control of the government.

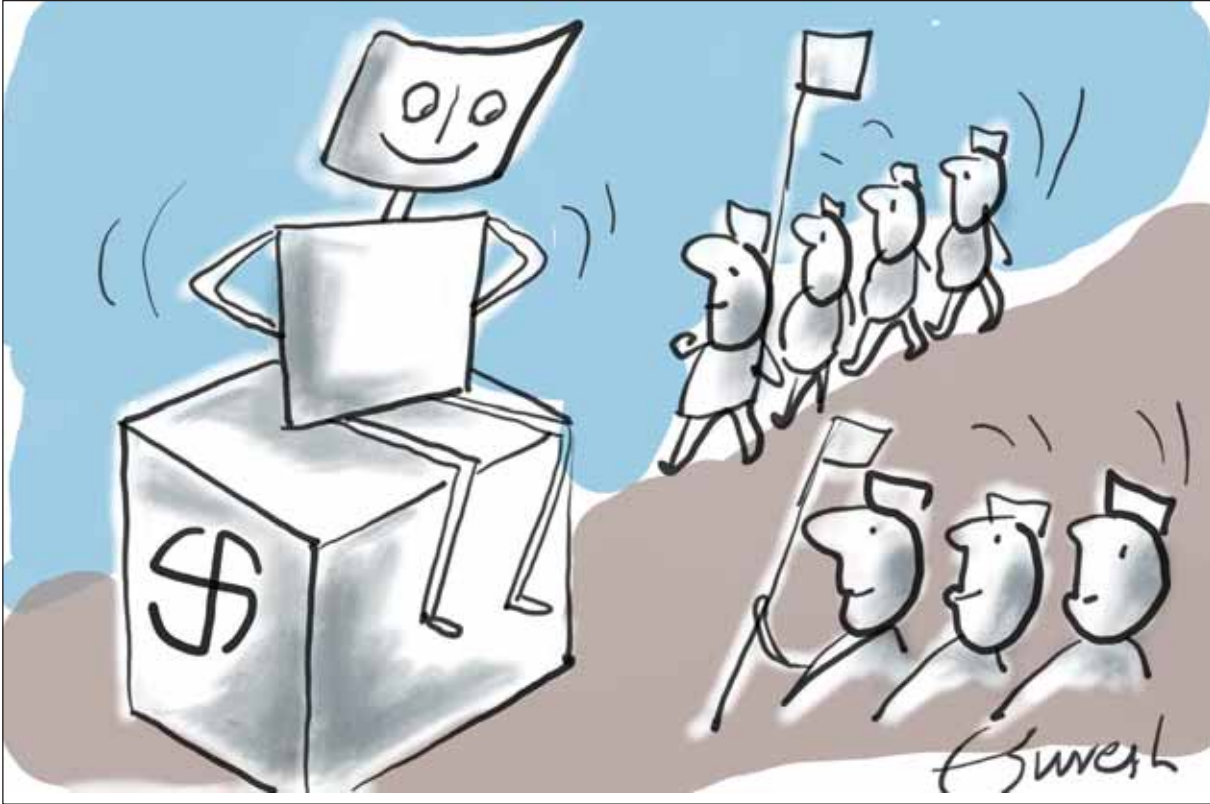
Artificial Intelligence is gradually influencing the electoral landscape in India and around the world, amid debates about whether it is a curse or a boon.

Voters are being targeted using AI in various regions. Notably, many unsuspecting voters are willing to believe the information or misinformation they encounter. The electoral activity worldwide has reached new heights, coinciding with rapid advancements in AI. This has sparked serious discussions about how AI might change political campaigns, voter engagement, and electoral management.

Political parties are using technology in new ways. For example, AI was used to analyse voter sentiment, predict voter turnout, and even create personalised campaign messages. India's 2024 polls were hailed as AI elections. Prime Minister Narendra Modi uses the AI platform NaMo to talk to voters and answer their questions in real time. He also uses holograms to speak at several rallies in different places at the same time.

This technology enables Modi to reach more voters without attending in person. The upcoming Bihar elections will utilise AI, which offers new ways to improve political campaigns, such as targeted advertising, analysing voter opinions, and predicting voter turnout.

These tools can make campaigns more efficient and effective. However, they also bring challenges. AI helps voters find helpful information about candidates, but it also spreads



## The Pioneer SINCE 1865

AI CAN HELP IN  
POLICY-MAKING.  
SOME BELIEVE  
AI WILL  
EVENTUALLY  
TAKE OVER THE  
WORLD

The writer is a popular columnist

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false information. Many voters struggle to verify the authenticity of the messages and calls they receive. In the 2024 elections in India, political parties used AI to create fake audio and video endorsements, satirical content, and false propaganda that looked like it came from essential figures.

AI can significantly improve voter engagement, even though it has some challenges. During this time, only about 2 per cent of the content created came from AI. This small amount focused mainly on outreach and getting voters involved.

This shows a positive side of AI in elections and suggests it can help connect voters to the political process. AI chatbots are an excellent way for candidates to connect with voters personally, in addition to using social media and messaging platforms. Candidates can answer voters' questions and address their concerns directly.

They can also note these issues to improve their campaigns. Political parties can send personalised messages based on voters' backgrounds, voting history, and other relevant factors. The 2024 polls served as a testing ground for the future. The results were not as shocking as many predicted, but they showed significant risks as the information continues to be distorted. The 2024 Global Risks Report highlights potential hazards such as AI-generated misinformation, voter manipulation, and the erosion of

AI is used by the Election Commission to enhance poll management, streamline the election process, and improve poll management. However, with all the pros and cons, there is a need for proper regulation of AI in polls and other areas.

As of now, it is not much. Not only India but also other countries held a conference in the UK some time ago; India also attended the conference. Recently, presenting a case for proper regulations in AI, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology reported to the Delhi High Court about the dangers of AI use and called for transparent rules and disclosure of AI content. AI can be helpful during elections in several ways. For example, *FiscalNote* is a tool that aids in policy-making. It can also gather information from voters about the policies they prefer.

Similarly, *iSideWith* allows candidates to learn about themselves and see if they match voters' views.

Voters can take quizzes to find out which candidates align with their beliefs. But the plus points are also helpful in election management. It is much cheaper to manage polls. It can gather information from voters about the policies they prefer. AI can help in policy-making. Some believe AI will eventually take over the world. As it stands, with companies like Google and Facebook, we have lost our privacy, and it is unimaginable what might happen if AI controls everything.

# The power of perspective in human connections



RAJYOGI BRAHMA KUMAR NIKUNJ JI

## 2<sup>ND</sup> THE PIONEER OPINION

Human relationships are infinitely complex and tricky to manage, and hence they need immense patience, understanding, acceptance, acknowledgement, and engagement. There is a well-known saying that *we see things not as they are but as we are*. While our physical eyes see everything and everyone the same way, it is actually the thoughts and feelings that accompany the act of seeing that form an impression in the mind about what we are seeing. So, if our feelings are light and pure, we feel the same way about everything we see.

On the other hand, if we are in a negative frame of mind, we might perceive things negatively. It is a known fact that we easily develop bad feelings or negative attitudes towards others when we focus on, and keep think-

ing about, their faults. In fact, most of us are well experienced in this, aren't we? The simplest way to get out of this is to think only about the things we like in that person, and soon our feelings will start to change.

In short, focusing our mind on positive qualities automatically frees us from negativity. Most people are caught up in their own lives and their problems, which, to them, are big issues.

But if we look at the larger picture, we realise that what we spend so much of our time and energy on is really a trifle in the journey of our life and even more insignificant in relation to the events unfolding on the huge stage of the world, or the universe.

Remember! It is up to us whether to have a universal attitude towards everything or a narrow attitude that makes our life miserable. It is up to us how we take the little inconveniences we face in daily life, or the problems that crop up in relationships. We can either keep thinking about them, making them into big issues and ending up feeling burdened, frustrated, angry, or depressed or we can see them in the right perspective and deal with them in the best way we can, without letting them affect our state of mind. Such an attitude helps us remain stable in the face of all the challenges that life brings our way.

It also helps those around us, as it enables us to rise

above self-centred or selfish ways of thinking and to think of the universal good. This influences our behaviour and helps us build strong relationships. One with such an outlook becomes a good team worker, able to adjust to the nature of others and work with all kinds of people. Such a person will also appreciate the good qualities of others and learn from them.

They would be free of jealousy, able to hear praise of others, and take advice and criticism in the right spirit without getting upset. Because such a person can deal with all kinds of situations with a stable mind, they would be trusted with responsibility and be a source of strength for others.

And since they are never caught up in small issues and always look at the big picture, others will also have faith in their impartial judgement. Such a person would be a unifying figure in any group or organisation, and would not fall into the trap of forming or aligning with divisive cliques or factions. Such are the wonderful benefits of bringing about a simple change in our consciousness.

Now – it is up to us whether to change for our own good, or remain confused, unhappy, and depressed.

The author is a popular columnist and a spiritual teacher

## DIGITAL EXPERIENCE

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## YOUTH POWERING INDIA'S DREAM OF PROGRESS

Today, we celebrate the 79th Independence Day of our nation. It is the duty of every citizen to preserve the priceless gift of freedom and to make it stronger.

Amid the rising global atmosphere of war, signs of economic recession, commercial rivalries, and challenges to personal liberty, India is moving forward to become the world's third-largest economy – an honour that comes with great responsibility.

More than 65 per cent of India's population consists of youth, who are bringing glory to the nation in fields such as science, sports, agriculture, healthcare, education, and technology.

For the nation to move forward, government efforts alone are not enough – every citizen must contribute their

part. Observing civic discipline, avoiding tax evasion, maintaining cleanliness, protecting the environment, promoting awareness in education and healthcare, empowering women, and fostering social harmony – these are the strong pillars of nation-building.

If we all come together to eliminate our weaknesses and work in a positive direction, the dream of making our beloved India a "Vishwaguru" (world leader) by 2047 will surely come true.

The true meaning of independence is not only political freedom but also social, economic, and moral progress – and that must be our ultimate resolution.

JITESH MORI | KUTCH

Please send your letter to the [letters@dailypioneer.com](mailto:letters@dailypioneer.com). In not more than 250 words. We appreciate your feedback.

## Trump issues Ukraine ultimatum

Frustrated, depressed, and out of balance, US President Donald Trump warned on Wednesday, 13th August, that there will be “very severe consequences” if Russian President Vladimir Putin does not stop the war against Ukraine. Under fear, he did not say what the consequences might be or give any details.

Eying the Nobel Peace Prize, Trump assured that he would make it a priority to try to achieve a ceasefire in Ukraine by force or threat. Russia is trying to occupy all of Ukraine without bothering about others, including the US. There are doubts about whether Putin would negotiate in good faith for an immediate ceasefire, as he “definitely does not want peace.” Putin is applying pressure on all sectors of the Ukrainian front to take over Ukraine.

Putin, who has waged the biggest land war in Europe since 1945, has used Russia's energy to destroy Ukraine completely. The overarching fear of many European countries is that Putin will set his sights on one of them next if he wins in Ukraine. Russian forces on the ground in Ukraine have been closing in on a key territorial grab around the city of Pokrovsk, in the eastern Donbas region, which comprises Ukraine's eastern industrial heartland and which Putin has long coveted.

BHAGWAN THADANI | MUMBAI

## Beginning of the Independence movement

Whatever was said and done by Gandhi truly helped India to attain Independence from British rule. From the Dandi March of 1930 to the Quit India Movement of 1942, Gandhi was dictating terms to the English. Mahatma Gandhi did us proud by getting us freedom from British rule, and we enjoy the freedom of an independent India thanks to the efforts of the Father of the Nation and other illustrious leaders who took an active part in the freedom movement. The struggles, the trials, the tribulations, and the sufferings they undertook gave us the much-needed impetus to go it alone and achieve our goals.

On this day 80 years ago — on August 9, 1942 — the people of India launched the decisive final phase of the struggle for independence. It was a mass upsurge against colonial rule on a scale not seen earlier, and it sent out the unmistakable message that the sun was about to set on the British Empire in India. Mahatma Gandhi, who had told the Raj to “Quit India” on the previous day (August 8), was already in jail along with the entire Congress leadership. So when August 9 dawned, the people were on their own — out on the street, driven by the Mahatma's call of “do or die,” which proved a catalyst in the end game.

JAYANTHY SUBRAMANIAM | MUMBAI

## Upholding justice over stardom

The Supreme Court's decision to cancel the bail of Kannada actor Darshan, Pavithra Gowda, and others in the Renukaswamy murder case is a welcome reminder that the law does not bend to stardom or influence. In recent years, we have seen several high-profile accused enjoying undue privileges, moving freely in public while their serious charges remain unresolved. Granting bail in such matters, as the Karnataka High Court had done, undermines the faith of ordinary citizens in our judicial system. The Supreme Court rightly called out the “5-star treatment” given to the accused and noted the serious flaws in the earlier order.

Bail is a legal right in deserving cases, but it must never become a tool for the powerful to escape scrutiny while victims' families wait for justice. By restoring custody and ordering a speedy trial, the court has upheld the principle that no one is above the law. This verdict sends a strong message that celebrity status cannot shield anyone from accountability. For justice to have meaning, murder accused must face trial from custody, not from the comfort of their homes. The Supreme Court's ruling has reinforced public trust in the judiciary. May this case set a precedent that deters future attempts to misuse the bail system.

VISHAL MAYUR | KARNATAKA



## Oil to AI

In the twentieth century, the Gulf's strategic relevance was distilled into a simple equation: oil in exchange for global influence and security guarantees. Today, that formula is being rewritten. The new commodity is not a liquid drawn from beneath the desert sands, but processing power ~ "compute" ~ driven by the most advanced chips and housed in sprawling data centres. The Gulf's leaders have decided that if oil once powered the industrial economy, compute will fuel the digital one. The United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia are now deploying their considerable sovereign wealth to buy a place at the top of the artificial intelligence value chain. Their approach is both straightforward and bold: build the infrastructure that global AI needs, partner with the most advanced technology providers, and make themselves indispensable to the world's AI ambitions. In the UAE, this ambition has taken physical form in the Star-gate project, a colossal data infrastructure cluster designed to host AI training at scale. Such facilities, equipped with cutting-edge chips, are essential for developing and running frontier AI models. They are also in short supply globally. By positioning themselves as hosts of this critical infrastructure, Gulf states are creating a new kind of leverage, much as oil pipelines once did. Saudi Arabia is taking a similar route with its national AI company and plans for "AI factories" stocked with hundreds of thousands of high-end chips. These are not vanity projects. In a future where data, algorithms, and computing capacity determine technological and economic advantage, to own the infrastructure is to own a strategic resource. The timing is deliberate. The United States and China are locked in a contest for AI supremacy, and the Gulf has become a coveted partner. Aligning with the US, the Gulf states gain access to its technological ecosystem and political goodwill ~ at the cost of scaling back certain Chinese-backed projects. For Washington, bringing the Gulf into its AI "stack" consolidates its global reach while keeping valuable infrastructure out of Beijing's hands. Yet there are headwinds. AI infrastructure is only as valuable as the talent and innovation it attracts, and the Gulf's small populations limit the depth of its homegrown research base. Golden visas, tax incentives, and regulatory flexibility may help draw in global talent, but building an enduring ecosystem will take more than imported expertise ~ it will require a cultural and educational transformation. The stakes are high. If the Gulf succeeds, it could transition from an energy exporter to a digital-era powerhouse, offering the world compute capacity instead of crude oil. If it falters, these billion-dollar facilities could become under-utilised monuments to ambition without capability. For now, the Gulf's leaders are betting that in the twenty-first century, the flow of electrons will matter as much as the flow of petroleum. If they are right, they are not just hedging against the end of oil ~ they are laying the foundations for their next century of relevance.

## Europe's Elements

For decades, the global economy has quietly relied on a small group of metals that most people have never heard of ~ cerium, neodymium, praseodymium, and others that make up the 17 so-called rare earth elements. These metals are essential to the functioning of technologies that define the modern age: electric vehicles, wind turbines, smartphones, medical scanners, and advanced defence systems. Yet, the world's supply chains for them remain heavily concentrated in one country. China's dominance ~ about 70 per cent of mining and 90 per cent of refining ~ did not happen by chance. It is the result of years of deliberate state policy, investment, and a willingness to bear the environmental costs of production that others have shunned. The outcome is a strategic dependence that has been largely invisible until geopolitical tensions and supply chain disruptions brought it into sharp focus. Europe's late awakening to this vulnerability is now shaping an ambitious push for independence in rare earths. The strategy rests on three main pillars: building domestic processing capacity, expanding recycling to reclaim metals from end-of-life equipment, and securing diversified supply agreements with trusted partners abroad. The effort is not just about economics, it is a matter of strategic autonomy. The expansion of high-tech processing facilities within Europe signals both resolve and urgency. These plants, some capable of refining the full range of rare earths, are pivoting towards high-demand uses such as permanent magnets, indispensable in green energy systems and defence applications. Recycling is expected to cover up to 30 per cent of Europe's needs by the end of the decade, a significant share but not enough to meet the projected demand. The remainder will need to be sourced from new partnerships with producers in countries like Brazil, Canada, and Australia, while European mining projects inch forward over the next 10 years. The challenge is not merely technical. It is also financial and political. Rare earth processing is complex, costly, and sensitive to price volatility. Without coordinated incentives ~ such as guaranteed purchase agreements and targeted subsidies ~ Europe's producers will find it hard to compete with entrenched Chinese suppliers. Policymakers have set ambitious targets, but industry leaders remain cautious about the gap between legislative intent and operational reality. The stakes go beyond market competition. Control over rare earth supply chains carries geopolitical weight. In an era where technology is deeply intertwined with national security, single-source dependence is a strategic liability. The lesson from recent years is clear: resilience requires redundancy, even at a higher cost. Europe's quest for rare earth independence is not about isolating from global trade, but about recalibrating it, ensuring that economic cooperation is underpinned by secure and diversified supply lines. The road will be long, but the alternative is to remain exposed to a vulnerability that could one day prove far more costly than the investments needed to overcome it.

# Partition must go...

'India is free but she has not achieved unity, only a fissured and broken freedom. At one time it almost seemed as if she might relapse into the chaos of separate States which preceded the British conquest. Fortunately, there has now developed a strong possibility that this disastrous relapse will be avoided. The wisely drastic policy of the Constituent Assembly makes it possible that the problem of the depressed classes will be solved without schism or fissure. But the old communal division into Hindu and Muslim seems to have hardened into the figure of a permanent political division of the country,' said Sri Aurobindo



At the request of All India Radio, Tiruchirappalli, Sri Aurobindo wrote a message for broadcast on the eve of 15 August 1947, the day India achieved independence. It was simply titled, 'The Fifteenth of August 1947'.

He began with the words, "August 15th is the birthday of free India. It marks for her the end of an old era, the beginning of a new age. But it has a significance not only for us, but for Asia and the whole world; for it signifies the entry into the comity of nations of a new power with untold potentialities which has a great part to play in determining the political, social, cultural and spiritual future of humanity. To me personally it must naturally be gratifying that this date which was notable only for me because it was my own birthday celebrated annually by those who have accepted my gospel of life, should have acquired this vast significance.

"As a mystic, I take this identification, not as a coincidence or fortuitous accident, but as a sanction and seal of the Divine Power which guides my steps on the work with which I began life. Indeed, almost all the world movements which I hoped to see fulfilled in my lifetime, though at that time they looked like impossible dreams, I can observe on this day either approaching fruition or initiated and on the way to their achievement."

At age 75, Sri Aurobindo felt that rather than write a message, he would make a personal declaration of "the aims and ideals conceived in my childhood and youth and now watched in their beginning of fulfilment, because they are relevant to the freedom of India, since they are a part of what I believe to be India's future work, something in which she cannot but take a leading position. For I have always held and said that India was arising, not to serve her own material interests only, to achieve expansion, greatness, power and prosperity, though these too she must not neglect, and certainly not like others to acquire domination of other peoples, but to live also for God and the world as a helper and leader of the whole human race.

"Those aims and ideals were in their natural order these: a revolution which would achieve India's freedom and her

unity; the resurgence and liberation of Asia and her return to the great role which she had played in the progress of human civilisation; the rise of a new, a greater, brighter and nobler life for mankind which for its entire realisation would rest outwardly on an international unification of the separate existence of the peoples, preserving and securing their national life but drawing them together into an overriding and consummating oneness; the gift by India of her spiritual knowledge and her means for the spiritualisation of life to the whole race; finally, a new step in the evolution which, by uplifting the consciousness to a higher level, would begin the solution of the many problems of existence which have perplexed and vexed humanity, since men began to think and to dream of individual perfection and a perfect society." Sri Aurobindo's disappointment at the Partition of India is evident as he said, "India is free but she has not achieved unity, only a fissured and broken freedom. At one time it almost seemed as if she might relapse into the chaos of separate States which preceded the British conquest. Fortunately, there has now developed a strong possibility that this disastrous relapse will be avoided. The wisely drastic policy of the Constituent Assembly makes it possible that the problem of the depressed classes will be solved without schism or fissure. But the old communal division into Hindu and Muslim seems to have hardened into the figure of a permanent political division of the country.

"It is to be hoped that the Congress and the nation will not accept the settled fact as forever settled or as anything more than a temporary expedient. For if it lasts, India may be seriously weakened, even crippled: civil strife may remain always possible, possible even a new invasion and foreign conquest. The partition of the country must go, it is to be hoped by a slackening of tension, by a progressive understanding of the need of

peace and concord, by the constant necessity of common and concerted action, even of an instrument of union for that purpose. In this way unity may come about under whatever form ~ the exact form may have a pragmatic but not a fundamental importance. But by whatever means, the division must and will go."

His words of caution continued, "For without it the destiny of India might be seriously impaired and even frustrated. But that must not be. Asia has arisen and large parts of it have been liberated or are at this moment being liberated; its other still subject parts are moving through whatever struggles towards freedom. Only a little has to be done and that will be done today or tomorrow. There India has her part to play and has begun to play it with an energy and ability which already indicate the measure of her possibilities and the place she can take in the council of the nations."

Sri Aurobindo referred to the unification of mankind which was under way. "Though only in an imperfect initiative, organised but struggling against tremendous difficulties. But the momentum is there and, if the experience of history can be taken as a guide, it must inevitably increase until it conquers. Here too India has begun to play a prominent part and, if she can develop

that larger statesmanship which is not limited by the present facts and immediate possibilities but looks into the future and brings it nearer, her presence may make all the difference between a slow and timid and a bold and swift development.

"A catastrophe may intervene and interrupt or destroy what is being done, but even then the final result is sure. For in any case the unification is a necessity in the course of Nature, an inevitable movement and its achievement can be safely foretold. Its necessity for the nations also is clear, for without it the freedom of the small peoples can never be safe

hereafter and even large and powerful nations cannot really be secure."

India, if she remains divided, will not herself be sure of her safety, he warned.

"It is therefore to the interest of all that union should take place. Only human imbecility and stupid selfishness could prevent it. Against that, it has been said, even the gods strive in vain; but it cannot stand for ever against the necessity of Nature and the Divine Will. Nationalism will then have fulfilled itself; an international spirit and outlook must grow up and international forms and institutions; even it may be such developments as dual or multilateral citizenship and a voluntary fusion of cultures may appear in the process of the change and the spirit of nationalism losing its militancy may find these things perfectly compatible with the integrity of its own outlook. A new spirit of oneness will take hold of the human race. The spiritual gift of India to the world has already begun. India's spirituality is entering Europe and America in an ever-increasing measure. That movement will grow; amid the disasters of the time more and more eyes are turning towards her with hope and there is even an increasing resort not only to her teachings, but to her psychic and spiritual practice."

Summing up his thoughts, Sri Aurobindo said, "the rest is still a personal hope and an idea and ideal which has begun to take hold both in India and in the West on forward-looking minds. The difficulties in the way are more formidable than in any other field of endeavour, but difficulties were made to be overcome and if the Supreme Will is there, they will be overcome. Here too, if this evolution is to take place, since it must come through a growth of the spirit and the inner consciousness, the initiative can come from India and although the scope must be universal, the central movement may be hers. Such is the content which I put into this date of India's liberation; whether or how far or how soon this connection will be fulfilled, depends upon this new and free India."

These were prophetic words for Aspirational India and her role as Vishwaguru in the 21st century on the 153rd birth anniversary of Sri Aurobindo.

A MEMBER OF THE ANN ASIA NEWS NETWORK

ASIAN VOICES

## A watershed moment in climate justice

On July 23, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) handed down an advisory opinion (AO) on the obligation of states regarding climate change. The decision is considered a big victory for humanity, strengthening belief in the international environmental rule of law. Initially led by Vanuatu and later co-sponsored by 132 states, the issue was discussed at the UN General Assembly, following which it unanimously sent the reference (resolution 77/276, March 29, 2023) to the ICJ.

In the referral, the UNGA asked two questions: a) What are the obligations of the states under international law to ensure the protection of the climate system and other parts of the environment from anthropogenic emissions of greenhouse gases, for present and future generations? And, (b) What are the legal consequences under these obligations for states where they, by their acts and omissions, have caused significant harm to the climate system and other parts of the environment?

The advisory opinion is historic in many respects. First, the ICJ squarely addressed the issue of climate change for the first time. Second, the proceedings at the ICJ garnered colossal global

THE KATHMANDU POST

interest and representation of states and international organisations. Even non-parties to the Paris Agreement agreed on the reference and argued before the court. Third, the court was unanimous in comprehending the gravity of the threat posed by climate change. Fourth, while delivering AO unanimously, the court took a holistic approach and analysed the whole corpus of international law, including customary international law. Finally, the court answered the questions in a general manner.

But it opined in clear terms that causing significant harm to the climate system and other parts of the environment would be a breach of international law, and all the states ~ members and non-members alike to the Paris Agreement ~ would have to act or bear the consequences. Thus, the ICJ, to a large extent, met the expectations of the global community and acted as the 'World Court' in a real sense of the term.

For Nepal, it is historic in the sense that the ever slumbering bureaucracy, flogged up by young lawyers and law students, and with the good offices of a few well-meaning people, finally awoke and submitted the statement after Nepal got an extension on an exceptional basis. As a result, she, for the first time, got the opportunity to stand before the ICJ and tell her story. The court considers the obligation of all states under the entire corpus of international law without limiting to any particular area or source of international law. Along with it, the principle of sustainable development, common but differentiated responsibility and respective capacity (CBDRRC), equity, intergenerational equity, and precautionary approach or principle formed the guiding principles for the interpretation. The ICJ inquiry considered a range of human activities, including the emission of greenhouse gases (GHGs), leading to climate change.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

editor@thestatesman.com

## Reflections on freedom

Sir, Celebrating Independence Day is becoming an annual ritual without any significance attached to it. This day should be utilised to remember the sacrifices made by our elders to achieve freedom from the colonial rulers. Some sacrificed their lives, some gave up their education, some spent the prime of their youth, property, pleasure and livelihood. Many had to linger in prisons, breaking rocks and pulling stone made oil-presses and so on.

The importance of freedom could be better understood by learning the status of life under the clutches of British rulers. Peoples' lack of knowledge of life of pre-independence days is one of

the reasons for allowing politicians to commodify the voting right. All the woes of the people are self-inflicted rather than caused by external forces as a Tamil verse puts it, 'Theethum Nandrum pirar thara vara', meaning good or bad are not caused by others.

The way one chooses to use the precious vote decides one's course of life. The country's law making bodies are abundantly filled by affluent who have no reason to care for the daily plight of the 100 crore unprivileged section. The elected get disconnected with those who elected them. The result is that 81 crore people are dependent on free rations and the number of jobless edu-

cated youth is swelling.

The national wealth and national income are garnered by the miniscule privileged section leaving the rest to feel satisfied with freebies. The government is searching for resources on the moon as the poor are searching for a place to live here.

Corruption is gaining recognition as a legitimate means of getting things done. Identity seekers are busy immersing their caste and community followers in pseudo pleasures and false promises. Living with grievances have become a part of life. Promises and projects pour on election eve but most of them fail to see the light of the day.

This day is to recollect those who have sacrificed a lot for our pleasure and luxuries and also prepare ourselves to sacrifice something for our future gener-

ations' comfortable and free living. Taking a few minutes to decide the judicious way of utilising our precious vote is the

greatest sacrifice the situation demands.

Yours, etc., A G Rajmohan, Anantapur, 14 August.

### ILL-ADVISED

Sir, It is disheartening to read about the discontinuation of Registered Post services in India. While merging it with Speed Post may seem efficient, it overlooks the significant role Registered Post has played, particularly for the rural populace. For decades, it has been a trusted means for sending important documents and goods securely, a lifeline for farmers, small traders, and others in rural areas. The unique security feature of Registered Post, where only the addressee could receive the parcel, was a vital safeguard. With the increasing shift towards technology, many in rural India, often without reliable internet access, may find this transition difficult and costly. This change will burden them with higher fees and unreliable alternatives, especially when it comes to critical government communications and legal matters. The government must reconsider this decision and ensure that the needs of the common man, especially in rural regions, are met without compromise.

Yours, etc., Dr. Vijaykumar H K, Raichur, 12 August.





# The long shadow of 1947

SACHCHIDANAND JOSHI

The past is never dead. It's not even past". William Faulkner's famous line could have been written for India's Partition. In 1947, the subcontinent awoke to freedom - and to one of the most harrowing human tragedies in modern history. Two nations were born, but in the labour of that birth, over fourteen million people were displaced and as many as two million lost their lives. What should have been the dawn of independence became a night of chaos.

For those who lived through it, the trauma was not a paragraph in a history book; it was the sudden absence of home, the neighbour who became a stranger overnight, the hurried bundling of belongings into cloth sacks, the smoke of burning villages on the horizon, and the unmarked graves of loved ones. For the generations that followed, it remains an inheritance of silences and half-told stories, carried in the pauses of conversation at family gatherings, in the unfamiliar nostalgia for a city across a border, and in the names of relatives no one has met.

In 2021, Prime Minister Narendra Modi declared 14 August as Partition Horrors Remembrance Day. The purpose was not to reopen old wounds or deepen divisions, but to ensure that the pain, displacement, and human cost of that moment in history are never forgotten. Such remembrance is not an indulgence in grief but a necessary act of moral and civic responsibility, one that guards the present against the repetition of the past.

The Partition of India remains the largest forced migration in recorded history. The British withdrawal, formalised through the Indian Independence Act, drew a hurried and arbitrary line across Punjab and Bengal with little regard for the human consequences. Entire communities were split overnight, and the rhythm of life that had endured for cen-

turies was abruptly and violently broken. Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims alike - farmers in Multan, shopkeepers in Lahore, artisans in Dhaka - were caught in the gears of political decisions made far away in London and Delhi. Their only "fault" was to be on the wrong side of a line that did not exist a day before.

The scale and nature of the tragedy places it alongside other great human catastrophes of the twentieth century. The Holocaust demonstrated how prejudice, when given state sanction, can be transformed into machinery for extermination. The ethnic cleansing of the Balkans in the 1990s and the Rwandan genocide showed how swiftly words can become weapons when identities are weaponised. Partition belongs to this global history of warning signs ignored and communities torn apart by the politics of division.

Beyond the records of official history, the emotional truth of Partition lives in literature. Bisham Sahni's Tamas captures the creeping mistrust between neighbours and the way fear can corrode the bonds of a community. Saadat Hasan Manto's Toba Tek Singh turns the absurdity of Partition into a biting parable about madness and belonging, a story in which the line between nations becomes as incomprehensible as the line between sanity and insanity. Khushwant Singh's Train to Pakistan distils the tragedy into a single village torn apart by the violence of 1947, where human decency and brutality collide on the same railway tracks that once brought people together.

Kamleshwar's Kitne Pakistan confronts the endless cycles of division and displacement across history, using a courtroom of historical figures to expose the folly of drawing borders in blood. Amrita Pritam's haunting poem Ajj Aakhaan Waris Shah Nu calls upon the Sufi poet Waris Shah to rise from his grave and witness Punjab's daughters being stripped of

their dignity, transforming personal anguish into a lament for the land itself. Geetanjali Shree's Tomb of Sand offers a contemporary reimagining, where an elderly woman refuses to let the weight of history define her, crossing borders of memory and identity with quiet defiance.

And Amitav Ghosh's The Shadow Lines shifts the focus from the visible borders on maps to the invisible borders in our minds, revealing how the mental legacy of Partition lingers even when the physical boundaries are crossed. Alongside literature, institutions such as the Partition Museum in Amritsar and Delhi work tirelessly to preserve survivor testimonies, photographs, and artefacts, ensuring that this shared history is not reduced to statistics but remembered as lived human experience.

These works do more than recount events; they compel the reader to feel the despair, dislocation, and absurdity of the time. They ensure that Partition is not reduced to an abstract chapter in a textbook but remains a lived experience, resonating across languages, generations, and geographies. They are an antidote to the slow erasure that time inevitably brings.

Some argue that revisiting the Partition risks rekindling old hostilities. Yet forgetting is not healing; it is leaving a wound to fester unseen. Memory, particularly collective memory, serves as a guardrail. It alerts societies when they veer too close to the precipice. Partition Horrors Remembrance Day is not about assigning blame but about understanding the fragility of social harmony, the ease with which prejudice can seep into the fabric of everyday life, and the urgent necessity of protecting pluralism.

When Prime Minister Modi announced the day, he said it should serve as a reminder to "remove the poison of social divisions" and to "strengthen the spirit of oneness." These are not platitudes but a call to action. In remembering the Partition, India places



itself in dialogue with other nations that have sought to memorialise their tragedies - from the Holocaust museums of Europe to the genocide memorials in Rwanda- affirming that memory is not a regional duty but a universal one.

The generation that lived through Partition is steadily fading. The responsibility to carry forward its lessons now rests with those who did not witness it firsthand. To remember is not to be trapped by the past, but to shape a future that is wiser because of it. Amrita Pritam once called to Waris Shah to bear witness to the pain of her Punjab. Today, the responsibility to bear witness falls to us. We must remember not only the horror but also the resilience that emerged from it. We must hold in mind not only the pain but also the possibility that lies in unity.

Partition Horrors Remembrance Day, then, is not simply about memorialising the past; it is a promise to the future. It is a vow that lines on a map

will never again be drawn in the blood of innocents, that no citizen will be reduced to an identity to be uprooted or exiled, that the lessons of 1947 will remain embedded in our national conscience. Across the country, cultural institutions quietly continue the work of preserving this history through survivor testimonies, archives, exhibitions, and educational outreach. The Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, along with other custodians of heritage, ensures that the legacy of Partition is not sealed away in dusty records but remains alive in the public imagination.

The past, as Faulkner said, is not dead. But if remembered with clarity and acted upon with moral resolve, it need not haunt our future. It can instead guide us away from the divisions that once tore the subcontinent apart and towards the unity that can ensure such horror never happens again.

(The writer is the Member Secretary of IGNCA.)

## 100 YEARS AGO OCCASIONAL NOTE

IN handing over the hammer and robes of office to his successor Sir Evan Cotton, late President of the Bengal Legislative Council, has the satisfaction of knowing that he has laid the foundations of an excellent code of procedure for the new legislature. His predecessors in the Chair were admirable men, but unfortunately lacked the alertness and the Parliamentary experience which have enabled Sir Evan Cotton to lick the Council, so to speak, into shape. When he came to Calcutta three years ago he found discipline and order—and it may be added interest in the Council's proceedings—at a low ebb. The new President quickly introduced a better atmosphere, and by his firmness and fairness, added to his particular and whimsical sense of humour, was able to enforce discipline without imposing too great a strain upon a young and not too steady pack. Kumar Shibshekareswar Roy's tribute to Sir Evan Cotton on Thursday was deserved. It only remains to note the happy coincidence which has lent to Bengal for more than two years on the threshold of self-government the services of the eldest son of the late Sir Henry Cotton, one of the ablest and best known Civilians ever sent to the Presidency.

## NEWS ITEMS "EARLY VICTORY" FRENCH REORGANIZATION OF COMMAND

LONDON, AUG.

UNDER the scheme for the reorganization of the Moroccan operations, three generals will control three sectors, under the supreme command of General Naulin, namely General Pru-neau in the west, General Gouraud in the centre and General Ratnu in the East.

A communiqué issued in Madrid describing the junction of the French and Spanish forces at Temesan says that the French Colonel Freydenberg celebrated the event by giving a banquet to the Spanish General Riquelme. Telegrams of congratulations have been sent to General Lyautey and General Primo de Rivera.

There is a new note of confidence in the French newspapers. The Echo de Paris, which declares that the great French offensive will begin early in September, says the hour of victory is at hand. "We shall only treat with a defeated Abdel Krim."

Le Journal says that neither France nor Spain intend to discuss Abdel Krim's overtures. The Excelsior thinks an ultimatum will soon be addressed to Abdel Krim, who, when the hour of clemency has passed, will be treated as a mere rebel.—Reuter.

## GERMANY'S ENTRY TO LEAGUE BERLIN AND ALLIES' CONDITION

BERLIN, AUG.

POLITICAL circles here are disappointed with the London negotiations which, in their opinion, have not helped to reach any conclusion on the Security Pact such as Germany desires.

The report that M. Briand and Mr. Austen Chamberlain have agreed that Germany must enter the League of Nations unconditionally has caused a shock. So has the assertion that France may be permitted to make war against Germany in uncertain eventualities.

The news that Poland and Czechoslovakia are likely to be invited to the eventual Pact conference is received with suspicion.

## "A REAL ENTENTE"

## PARIS PRESS ON LONDON CONVERSATIONS

PARIS, AUG.

THE newspapers generally comment soberly on the London conversations. Le Petit Parisien is impressed with the rapidity of the disappearance of differences.

Le Journal says that France jealously maintains her right to help her East European allies in the event of their becoming the victims of un-provoked German aggression, but she does not refuse to await the decision of the League of Nations if aggression is only threatened.

Le Gaulois says that Germany cannot now count on any serious disagreement between Paris and London.

A discordant, note is struck by L'Echo de Paris Which writes: "Mr. Austen Chamberlain, during the past few weeks, has been able to judge the un-popularity of the idea of the Pact in Britain and the Dominions. He has realized that he has gone too far in his promises to France. M. Briand can therefore become convinced that the Guarantee Pact offered by Britain may be called a Non-Guarantee Pact."

L'Oevvre says that the Entente is now more than cordial, it is real.

L'Eclair thinks that Anglo-American finance is endeavouring to dominate Europe, and that France will be asked to make sacrifices regarding her security because international financiers have so decided it.—Reuter's Special Service.

# Banished without even being heard?

ANJALI MEHTA

The news about the recent Supreme Court judgement on street animals came as a shock and surprise to many. The judgement basically pronounces that street dogs be removed completely from the streets of Delhi and sent permanently to supervised shelters in the outskirts in a time bound manner.

Though the judgement stems from a pure hearted intent to protect children from fatal diseases like rabies contracted from dog bites, the solution offered is harsh and can adversely affect the welfare of other groups in the city. Just as our children deserve safety and protection, so do the species we cohabit with. The judgement is tantamount to playing God as it literally removes an entire sub-species from its natural habitat. It goes against the friendly vibe of 'the world is one family' if we cannot try to coexist peacefully with street dogs (with the many useful checks and balances already in place). The oft exchanged reverent blessing of 'Om Sarve Bhavantu Sukhinah' (may all beings be happy) starts sounding hollow when not practised on ground.

Other aspects of the judgement are disquieting as well.

To begin with, the two judges who gave the ruling made it clear that they will confine themselves only to taking the views of the government representatives. The government, as recently as 2023, notified a set of rules called the Animal Birth Control (ABC) rules as an amendment to the prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1960. These are based on international models (WHO) and were arrived at after extensive consultation with animal welfare organisations and studying court judgements on animal

issues. The rules unambiguously specify that animals cannot be relocated from their current habitats in the city. However, in this recent court hearing, the government representatives themselves have opined that stray dogs should be removed and relocated to shelters. This complete volte face undermines the hard work of all the animal welfare agencies that worked together to frame these rules and ignores important recommendations of seasoned animal experts.

That the judges resolutely declined to entertain inputs from any other groups of concerned citizens/ animal experts goes against the central tenet of a fair judicial proceeding. The entire framework of litigation is based on an equal opportunity for those on both sides of an argument to be heard. The perspective of one side must not be summarily dismissed or dispensed with. It does not imbue citizens with a sense of security if their voice is not heard.

The 'accused' in this case, vulnerable animals who cannot speak for themselves, have been unfairly bracketed into one single cohort and been left without any representation. How can an entire species be banished from a city without a formal procedure and detailed deliberations with all stakeholders? Especially when intent to cause harm cannot be ascribed to them as they do not have the intellect of humans. When even the most depraved criminals - such as those who were involved in the deliberate gang rape of Nirbhaya, are given several chances to be heard, to appeal etc. how is it that nobody is allowed/ invited to present the case for the welfare of simple street dogs?

Though rabies has certainly contributed to the deaths of a few children, the number of cases would be far less

compared to other medical problems like malnutrition or infectious diseases related to poor water sanitation that takes the lives of thousands of children. These prevailing problems have been around for decades, yet have not attracted such extreme measures, positive or negative.

One learned judge has questioned that when dogs are taken up for sterilization, why are they put back in the same place that they were taken from? While judges may be very experienced in the application of human laws, being conversant with some of the laws of Nature is equally important. It is well established that several species of animals, including dogs, are territorial. Whereas humans can buy and formally possess land, animals mark out their territory in different ways (the description of which is outside the scope of this article). Suffice it to say that dogs feel just as disoriented when removed from their usual habitat as internally or externally displaced humans do. Hence the key decision by the court wherein it has ordered that 5000 dogs should be rounded up and sent to shelters in the next 8 weeks (and the rest thereafter), can unintentionally come across as cruelty to animals. Moreover, an entire species cannot be penalised for the bites by a few, just as all human males cannot be held responsible for the many incidents of domestic violence or sexual assaults.

The logistics of eventually rounding up close to 10 lakh dogs are gargantuan. There are few private and government veterinary hospitals dedicated to animals in Delhi/NCR. Since the numbers of dogs that will suddenly be placed under government care are so large, has the court truly satisfied itself that there are enough shelters, veterinary doctors,

and animal handlers to deal with this excess load? If facilities are overwhelmed like they were in Covid, we can safely assume that several dogs will be underfed, ill-treated and packed unceremoniously into crowded spaces. Are the judges comfortable with this scenario? There are enough relevant legislations pertaining to street dogs (the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960, Section 325 of BNS Constitutional safeguards (Articles 48A, 51A), state list rules (item 14), and previous judgements (Animal Welfare Board of India vs Nagaraja & Ors; 2014), to name a few, which ensure their personal safety. It is certainly the inherent responsibility of courts to ensure that pre-existing laws are not violated in any manner.

If MCD officials are pressed into rounding up stray dogs for the next couple of months or years, would we see an even greater pile up of garbage and dirt in the city, clogged drains, and water logging, or would the government hire more MCD personnel to execute their regular duties satisfactorily? The judgement also decrees that a dog which inflicts a bite on human is to be caught in 4 hours. This judicial proclamation compels MCD and other officials to give dog related issues precedence over their other responsibilities. This is likely to lead to a collapse of normal civic services for citizens.

The judgement has far-reaching negative social consequences as well. Several citizens of Delhi are dog lovers. Many of them have a deep bond with street dogs, consider dogs a part of their family, spend time and their hard-earned money feeding them day and night, giving them the affection they deserve and protecting them from the ravages of city life. Snatching these dogs away from their human carers is like

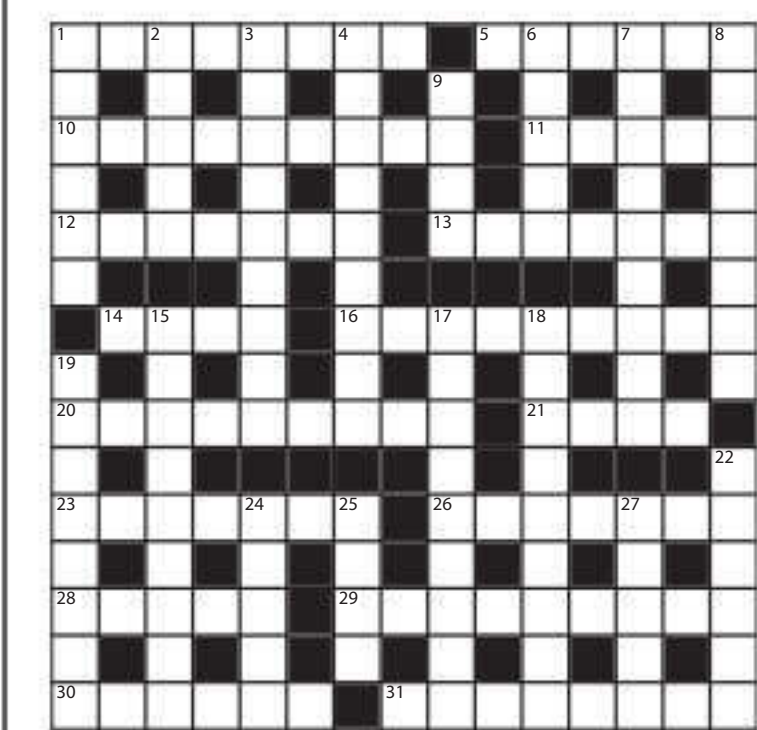
forcibly separating children from their parents—an incredibly insensitive and mean gesture. It can leave these citizens feeling depressed and bereaved. Do their lordships want to bring about an air of gloom in the city and send several kind hearted citizens down a spiral of sorrow, anxiety, and mental health problems? Will their lordships take the moral responsibility of this new catastrophe?

The importance of dogs in the lives of humans is well known and cannot be stressed enough: whether in their role as friends, saviours, healers, disaster squad dogs, sniffer police dogs, guide dogs for the blind and so on. Dogs guard homes and offices and their presence as pets is very therapeutic. The recent judgement forbids citizens from adopting any of these stray dogs as pets. This is bizarre, as it would contribute partly to solving the problem. Also, it fosters discrimination between individuals as poorer citizens who may like to adopt a pet may not be able to afford exorbitant pedigreed dogs on their meagre salaries. Is keeping a pet dog going to become the privilege of the rich? Are we class conscious humans going to create a class divide amongst animals too? Will we have a stratification among dogs where only adopted pets get to live a good quality of life and Indies/strays get banished to shelters?

It is indeed very painful to see a child or an elderly person suffer injuries whether it is a premeditated attack by a human criminal or an accidental dog bite. Pro-active and sensible steps taken to ensure the physical safety of our loved ones are very welcome and necessary but they should be such that we do not sacrifice our humanity or our sense of balance and proportion.

(The writer is a Delhi-based medical practitioner.)

## CROSSWORD



### YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

S P R I N T I N G  
S R I D E N T M E A D O W  
A N S I O P E R I T I  
U N I T C A N N E L L O N I  
Z I T I L B B  
M A M M O N C A S T I R O N  
O D S C T T F  
F I N I S H T A R I F F  
O T S C N  
M O V E M E N T A U G U S T  
L C R E D D K  
E S P A D R I L L E B R I E  
C R A L M E D  
R A G I A N I M A T O R  
P O T A T O

### ACROSS

- Ill-sounding Italian's love for maple (8)
- Changed the heart of every cop at the end of Earth Day (6)
- Defy small wretched insect (9)
- Climbers limited by heaviness (5)
- Old call turns stomach: "At last, charge over the top!" (7)
- Oceanic shocker (7)
- Insignificant lake (4)

- Visualising one mother and her ruin in Gabon (9)
- The gram we pulped into cereal foodstuff (9)
- 3 "not hard" for Rowan? (4)
- Boggle at Herbie's entertaining tanned skin (7)
- 6 Worker under pressure 18 (4-3,5)
- Regularly mined boron rocks that create pigment (5)

- One that might be red after dance with singer (9)
- Band has a Yankee swagger (6)
- Instrument ray finds timber source (8)

### DOWN

- Plants found by southern borders (6)
- Colombia greeted traveller focused on sun (5)
- French man always in exam to achieve highest level (2,7)

- Myself, for example (9)
- See 26 Across
- Paranormal anti-green colour (9)
- Critique house then move (8)
- Stuff from pharmacy sterilised liquid-filled cavity (4)
- See Haley's wavy facial hair (9)
- Give guns to Rashid to bag large ordinary animal (9)
- Mostly surrounded by water (2,3,4)

- Takes in Amazons' enemies? (8)
- Sheep climbing over another for grass (6)
- Scavenger's expression of contempt about money (5)
- Minimally restrictive interconnected bone structures (4)
- European married in Home Counties (5)

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