The Editorial Page

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IN 1932

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

Listing Tata Sons will lead to transparency

LAST WEEK, the Reserve Bank of India rejected Tata Sons' application to surrender its registration as a core investment company, bringing to an end to the longstanding regulatory ambiguity on the matter. The regulator's decision — it comes at a time when the group has been mired in internal conflicts and only a month after Tata Sons chairman N Chandrasekaran announced his decision not to seek reappointment — implies that Tata Sons will now have to be listed on the stock exchanges. The holding company has been classified as an upper layer NBFC since September 2022. Its board is slated to hold its next meeting on September 17, wherein the issue of listing and leadership should be on the agenda.

Tata Trusts, which hold a 65.9 per cent stake in Tata Sons, have, however, been opposed to the idea of a public listing. In fact, last year, the Trusts had passed a resolution against the listing of the holding company. A listing could, after all, dilute the control the Trusts exercise over Tata Sons. It could remould and reshape the structures of control that have so far governed the group. The RBI's decision may well be contested. But a listing would help bring about greater transparency in dealings and supervision of the group's activities. That's why the RBI's decision is welcome. In a sprawling conglomerate like the Tatas, with interests in several areas of strategic importance, the structures of governance should be clearly delineated. The lines of decision-making and accountability need to be distinctly defined. This would also lead to greater questioning and scrutiny of decisions regarding capital allocation and also of its loss-making entities. Air India's losses have, for example, widened to Rs 22, 238 crore in 2025-26.

The Shapoorji Pallonji group, which holds an 18.37 per cent stake in Tata Sons, is known to favour a listing. The group has been looking for ways to monetise its holdings, which would help bring down its debt levels. Considering that valuation exercises carried out in the past have led to wide-ranging estimates, as per a report in this paper, a listing would also lead to a process of price discovery, helping place a value on Tata Sons. It would also shine a light on an entity that exercises considerable sway over the group's companies that are engaged in a wide spectrum of businesses across the economy.

Let AI safety catch up

THE WARNING from leaders of the world's top AI companies, that the technology could become powerful enough to pose a serious risk to humanity in as little as six months to a year, may sound like a scenario from dystopian fiction. It must, however, not be dismissed. In an essay published over the weekend, Anthropic co-founder and CEO Dario Amodei made a case for "pacing the frontier". He was backed by rivals Sam Altman, CEO of OpenAI, and Elon Musk, founder and CEO of xAI. The dangers of letting companies, which are racing to develop a deeply transformative technology, set the limits have long been flagged. That the industry leaders have now spoken up and underlined the need to slow down, so that risk prevention can keep up, opens a precious window to develop more effective regulations for AI development.

This breathing space may allow AI companies to skirt around increasingly hostile positions on the technology's environmental and economic impacts, but it must also be used by governments to set safety standards without strangling innovation. For example, Amodei and Altman's voluntary commitment to grant employee-level system access to independent evaluators could be made mandatory. Also required is a system for international cooperation to limit the most dangerous uses of superintelligent AI, such as cyberwarfare, bioterrorism and economic disruption at a global scale. The challenge of achieving this in a time of heightened global rivalries is steep — US President Donald Trump has already dismissed the risks flagged by Amodei et al. as something that "won't happen", emphasising that the US must maintain its lead over China.

An internal reckoning has been forced by the development of recursive self-improvement — where an AI system uses its capabilities to design, develop and train its successors. Then there are the high-profile instances of the technology escaping the sandbox to act autonomously, such as when OpenAI agents hacked their way online and launched a coordinated attack on the open-source platform Hugging Face while attempting to cheat on an evaluation. But whether the recent concerns emerge from a belated sense of accountability or the instinct to avoid the liabilities arising from AI gone rogue is beside the point. The risk of a technology developing faster than it can even be understood is real, especially when it is, just as quickly, being integrated into systems that control and manage everything from banking and transport to healthcare and defence.

Celine Dion: The heart goes on

SIX YEARS after her last full concert, pop icon Celine Dion walked onto the museum-like stage of Paris's Plénitude Arena in a black pleated Dior dress and kicked off with her 1998 French hit, 'On ne change pas' (We don't change). Moments later, visibly overcome with emotion, she told the packed stadium, "I made a promise to be back… So here I am, singing for you and singing for me…" Dion was opening the first of her 26-concert 'Celine Dion Paris 2026' residency.

The Canadian chanteuse moved between French songs, power ballads, an opera aria and pop. But this was no ordinary comeback. Dion has spent the last six years grappling with a rare neurological disorder, which affected her body and her vocal cords, challenging the sheer power and astounding high notes that have long been her signature. The agony of the art she'd spent a lifetime mastering, slipping away was palpable in Irene Taylor's poignant 2024 documentary *I Am: Celine Dion*.

That is why Paris was different from a usual comeback concert. Here was a star returning after a hiatus, but here was also an artiste who discovered her voice and body could not be taken for granted. Dion wasn't defeated by her changed body; she found a way to work with it. "I am gonna come on stage… And my vocal cords will not scare me… and I will hit those notes because I am not brave, I am smart. And I can't wait to go back… and hit whatever I can hit," Dion had said in 2024. In Paris, the key was lowered; she was more often than not on point with the notes, and sometimes just about in the vicinity. Against the odds, she triumphed.

Government trusts Aadhaar on welfare. It needs to rely on it to make voter lists

R S SHARMA

THE SPECIAL Intensive Revision (SIR) of the electoral rolls by the Election Commission (EC) is no longer a one-off event. Rolling out in phases since June 2025, it now extends to almost the entire country and has already deleted over 13 crore names. On May 27, the Supreme Court (SC) upheld the exercise — while holding, crucially, that the final determination of citizenship belongs to the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) under the Citizenship Act, not to the EC. SIR's goal — clean, accurate and inclusive rolls — is beyond dispute. The method is not.

That method revives a document-intensive, house-to-house verification mothballed for over two decades and applies it, in the smartphone age, on a near-national scale. Lakhs of officials go door to door; crores of citizens must prove their eligibility on paper within compressed deadlines. The burden falls hardest on the poor, the elderly, migrants and women — and now that in some states, there are orders linking SIR deletions to welfare records, a wrongful removal can cost a family its rations and its pension. The cost of error is not hypothetical: Even now, the SC is pressing the EC over the slow disposal of appeals against SIR deletions in West Bengal — voters struck off and still waiting to be heard.

It is also ruinously expensive, and by design it recurs. It mobilises around 10 lakh public servants — mostly schoolteachers — and costs the exchequer thousands of crores every cycle. An Aadhaar-based alternative would involve a very small expenditure by comparison — a modest, one-time build on digital infrastructure the country has already paid for, and almost nothing per verification.

The deeper difficulty is that citizenship cannot be settled in the field at all. The documents the SIR demands are not universal, and the government now concedes it. A passport — held by under 8 per cent of Indians — was clarified this June by the Ministry of External Affairs to be a travel document, not proof of citizenship. Aadhaar, by statute, proves identity and residence but not citizenship; voter ID and PAN prove none of it; and birth registration was, for decades, patchy for the poor, women and rural India. If even the passport cannot establish citizenship, a household paper-check certainly cannot. History confirms it. The Multipurpose National Identity Card pilot was abandoned as unworkable. The Assam National Register of Citizens excluded 19 lakh people, caused enormous distress, and resolved nothing. The National Population Register that followed enumerated "usual residents" — citizens and non-citizens alike — because the MHA found a field test of citizenship impractical. The SC has now placed the constitutional full stop: Citizenship is for the MHA, not an electoral officer at the doorstep.

There is a persistent objection that Aadhaar is "only" an identity, unfit to prove age or residence. Every alternative is weaker: PAN was itself cleaned using Aadhaar, passports are issued on the strength of Aadhaar, and a doorstep survey can establish no one's date of birth. And Aadhaar's data has no motive to lie built into it: It was created as a bare identity carrying no benefit or entitlement, so nothing was gained by misstating one's age, and the address had to be genuine because the Aadhaar letter was posted to it.

For the electoral roll, moreover, only one fact about age matters — is the person 18 or older? Aadhaar answers it without a date at all. Biometrics are not captured below the age of five, so anyone whose own fingerprints and iris were recorded in an enrolment around 2013 or earlier was at least five then, and is at least 18 now. To discard the largest, most carefully audited enrolment in history is a counsel of nihilism: If we will not trust our own most-used record, we can trust nothing, and the state cannot recognise its own people.

The tools, moreover, are not hypothetical. Aadhaar covers 1.36 billion residents and has already done, at scale, what roll-cleaning needs — de-duplicating PAN, closing benami accounts, and removing crores of ghost beneficiaries from welfare, saving over Rs 2.7 lakh crore. Two everyday services prove the point: More than 10 crore Aadhaar face authentication transactions have been completed in Digi Yatra through more than 100 airports, and Jeevan Pramaan lets 1.47 crore pensioners prove, by their face and from a phone, that they are alive (as many as 500 crore Aadhaar face authentications have been completed till date) . If the state trusts this at the airport gate and to release pensions, it can trust it to verify a voter — and Aadhaar was built on privacy by design, returning only a yes-or-no, never the underlying data.

> The EC should commission an Aadhaar-EPIC face-authentication application, with UIDAI, as the primary means of revising the rolls, and stop spending thousands of crores every cycle on a 19th-century method

The alternative is therefore simple. A voluntary application — on mobile or web — would let any voter link Aadhaar to the Voter ID and complete face authentication in one step, with no document and no visit to any office. That one act proves the voter is alive, removes duplicates (each Aadhaar is unique) and ghosts (a non-existent person cannot authenticate), settles age from the Aadhaar's vintage, and cross-checks the address. Linkage stays voluntary; those who decline use the ordinary manual route, a small residue given near-universal coverage. Citizenship is handled exactly as the Court requires — identify everyone first, let analytics flag the few genuine outliers, and refer only those to the MHA.

The recommendation follows plainly. The EC should commission such an Aadhaar-EPIC face-authentication application, with UIDAI, as the primary means of revising the rolls, and stop spending thousands of crores every cycle on a 19th-century method that harasses the honest majority and cannot find the few it targets. A small fraction of that money, spent once, would clean the rolls faster, far more cheaply, and with a fully auditable trail. The government trusts this technology to move citizens through airports and to pay their pensions. It should trust it to decide who is on the voter list. The technology is ready. The policy should follow.

The writer is former secretary to the Government of India and founding director general, UIDAI (Aadhaar). Views are personal

War on Terror is over, but its legacy continues to haunt

ANJU GUPTA

NO EVENT has shaped the international security paradigm and geopolitics as much as the 9/11 terror attacks in the US. Al Qaeda (AQ) terrorists used passenger planes as "flying" improvised explosive devices (IEDs), crashing two into the World Trade Centre (WTC) in New York, one into the western wing of the Pentagon, while passengers managed to overpower the terrorists aboard the fourth "flying" IED heading for the US Capitol, and force-crashed the plane in a field in southern Pennsylvania. In all, around 3,000 people, including 2,600 Americans, died and 6,000 were injured.

Nineteen Arab terrorists carried out the attacks ordered by AQ chief Osama bin Laden, operating from Afghanistan as a "guest" of the Taliban 1.0. The US launched a global "War on Terror" (WoT), which began with the occupation of Afghanistan after the removal of the Taliban in 2001, a worldwide effort to dismantle AQ's network, and the occupation of Iraq after the removal of Saddam Hussein in 2003. The WoT has ended, but not the terror, especially in South Asia.

The sheer audacity of 9/11 and the destruction that ensued alerted the world to the reach and capability of AQ's network. The global community, including China and Russia, aligned their counter-terrorism objectives with those of the US when the war in Afghanistan began. About 50 countries contributed troops to US and NATO-led military efforts. However, the US ground invasion of Iraq in 2003 could only draw British, Australian and Polish troops.

Worldwide investigations linked 9/11 and earlier spectacular attacks — including the 1993 attack on the WTC, 1998 bombings of US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania and the 2000 attack on USS Cole off the coast of Yemen — to AQ's global network. However, cracks began appearing in the political consensus around the WoT, as both Iraq and Afghanistan became theatres of "forever wars" embroiled in the unintended consequences of regime change and the dynamic nature of the threat.

In Iraq, within less than 16 months of the "victorious" withdrawal of US troops in 2011, a local branch of AQ, Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), morphed into the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). It set up a "caliphate" across parts of Iraq and Syria and invited foreign fighters to live under a "puritanical Islamic rule. The "caliphate" would be defeated by a large US-led coalition by March 2019.

The US changed its strategy in Afghanistan to treat terror groups (AQ and allies) and insurgent groups (the Afghanistan-centric Taliban) differently to end the war. However, even after the killing of bin Laden in 2011 in Pakistan, the US waited more than 10 years to exit.

Over 20 years of WoT, the substantial leadership of AQ and ISIS was eliminated. But local, independent groups that pledged allegiance to AQ continue to operate, largely in Yemen, Somalia and the Sahel. Similarly, local, independent groups that swear allegiance to the "caliphate" exist in some parts of the world, including across South Asia. The world faces far more scattered terror threats, embedded in local and regional networks.

The US has discontinued framing the threat of terrorism as a "global war", even though its agencies and military continue to target networks across many theatres. The propaganda around "global jihad" has also become far less visible.

The impact on India can only be assessed by going back to the 10 years of US-USSR proxy war in Afghanistan. The period witnessed the globalisation of a local Afghan jihad by the US and allies through a fatwa issued by an Arab teacher, Abdullah Azzam, who moved to Islamabad in 1981. Bin Laden and Azzam oversaw the mobilisation of thousands of Arabs for this global jihad.

Bin Laden secretly created AQ in Peshawar around May 1988 with a very small, trusted Arab group. Pakistan mobilised Pakistanis for global jihad in Afghanistan, and the leaders of these Pakistani groups, close allies of Al Qaeda, later emerged as the leading figures of networks that assumed the identities of Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad.

The end of the proxy war in Afghanistan left the Af-Pak region as a hub for AQ and its South Asian allies. Pakistan continued to use groups in the country against India. The 2025 Pahalgam terror attack and the subsequent "limited" India-Pakistan war is a case in point. Military clashes between Afghanistan and Pakistan demonstrate the region's enduring instability. The November 2025 Red Fort attack in Delhi indicates that despite 25 years of international counter-terrorism efforts since 9/11, the region's vulnerabilities persist.

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Gupta, a security analyst and former director general of police, is the author of Glocal Terror in South Asia: Tracing the Roots in Geopolitics and the Tragedy of Afghanistan

In AfD's rise, questions about democracy and belonging

KHUSHBOO SRIVASTAVA

PULKIT BUTTAN

THE SUCCESS of the Alternative for Germany (AfD) in Saxony-Anhalt has raised the question of whether Germany's firewall against the far right (*Brandmauer*) is cracking. Emerging from the devastating impacts of war, the German polity was premised on democracy's institutional capacity to defend itself. In 2015, amidst the Syrian refugee crisis, Angela Merkel's "*Wir schaffen das* (we can do this)" reflected the confidence that Germany could handle social challenges without compromising its democratic principles. A decade later, the question has shifted from whether Germany can "do this" to what happens when the political consensus around "how to do it" begins to fracture.

The AfD secured 43.8 per cent of the votes and fell just three seats short of a majority. The *Brandmauer* and the mainstream parties' refusal to enter coalitions with the AfD may prevent it from coming to power. However, its success raises a question: What happens when the institutions of democratic containment remain intact while the political constituency for the force being contained continues to expand? Emerging from the collapse of the Weimar Republic, the Federal Republic embedded *wehrhafte Demokratie*, or defensive democracy: Democracy should hold constitutional means to defend itself against those who threaten it. Yet such safeguards cannot prevent citizens from finding extremism electorally persuasive. The *Brandmauer* is meant to impede the normalisation of a politics inimical to the norms of the Federal Republic. The challenge is to maintain this consensus without appearing to deny the electorate choice. While the *Brandmauer* can prevent institutional normalisation, it can also augment the AfD's claim that the current regime is determined to silence voices from the electorate that do not align with theirs.

Immigration has been a contentious issue in Germany. Saxony-Anhalt has a smaller immigrant population than Berlin, Bremen, and North Rhine-Westphalia, yet migration is a topical issue. The AfD has translated this into a wider debate over national identity, economic insecurity, and neglect by mainstream parties. The question is whether its success is contingent on migration or on such broader concerns. The AfD's populist claim to represent the voice of the people also positions constitutional checks as barriers to popular will. The challenge for the firewall is the contest between majoritarian and constitutional notions of democracy. Moreover, Saxony-Anhalt is part of a region where the party has consistently performed better than in the West, reflecting economic inequality and differences in institutional representation. For many in the East, reunification has brought a sense of being treated as "second-class citizens", and the AfD has woven these concerns into a single narrative of neglect.

Given Germany's significance to Europe's politico-economic landscape, its internal shifts will shape how we look at migration, the rule of law, and the future of integration in Europe. But the biggest takeaway lies in the shifting frontiers of what appears politically possible. Today, despite the AfD's win, Germany's democratic safeguards remain indispensable. However, constitutional defence alone cannot substitute for political responsiveness. To sustain the democratic centre, Germany must address grievances, from economic insecurity and regional inequality to migration and political distrust. Democracy must defend itself. But it must also feel like it belongs to those asked to defend it.

> What happens when the institutions of democratic containment remain intact while the political constituency for the force being contained continues to expand?

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40 YEARS AGO

September 15, 1986

INDIAN EXPRESS

Five killed in Seoul airport explosion

No change in Games schedule

Seoul airport explosion

FIVE PEOPLE were killed and 26 wounded in a bomb blast in the crowded arrival hall of Seoul's Gimpo Airport, police said. The incident fanned fears that terrorists would try to sabotage the Asian Games. A police spokesman said the explosion was caused by a bomb planted in a bin near a terminal gate.

Punjab asks for troops

THE PUNJAB government has approached the Centre for the deployment of 60 additional companies of paramilitary forces in the state in the wake of the Muktsar killings. This was stated by Chief Minister Surjit Singh Barnala, at a press conference in Jaipur.

First Indian-built submarine

THE FIRST Indian-built submarine for the Navy will be ready for sea trials by 1990 and the second a year later. This is the first time construction of submarines has been undertaken by the country's premier ship-building firm, Mazagon Dock Ltd. When the contract for the four submarines was signed with a West German firm in 1982, it was envisaged that two would be built in Mazagon Dock, Bombay, and two in the HDW yard at Kiel.

Blast kills Iraqi diplomat

A BOMB planted under a car seat exploded and killed Iraq's vice consul in Karachi as he drove from his home, authorities said. No group has claimed responsibility for the explosion that killed Iraqi vice-consul Mehtar Abdus Salam and critically injured his driver.

● **WHAT THE OTHERS SAY**
Israelis must finally confront what Israel has done in Gaza.
— Haaretz, Israel

At Jadavpur University, the gerua and the state

AMIT CHAUDHURI

ILLUSTRATION: C R SASIKUMAR

ON SEPTEMBER 9, the Chief Minister of Bengal — in a move unheard of for an elected representative who is also a head of government — marched with a crowd of people to Jadavpur University, to remind students reportedly smoking *ganja* and indulging in free speech that their behaviour was unacceptable in a Centre of Excellence. Here was a warning about the limits of this drug, freedom, but maybe also a riposte to a newspaper terming a previous ugly episode (that culminated with the Nandalal Bose-designed university emblem being seriously damaged) *gerua goondami*, or "saffron hooliganism". Noticeable in the Chief Minister's group were long-haired, bearded men whose only clothing was strips of saffron, recruited to establish *gerua samman*, or "saffron pride". A photograph of them standing in front of the university gates began circulating on social media.

When I shared the photo with a few people I know, I was asked by some of them what was wrong with Naga sadhus having gathered at the gates. Weren't they part of the culture and, consequently, a recurrent sight? Is it not a "secular" narrowness of mind that, despite its self-proclaimed regard for diversity, defines them as ridiculous and outrageous? There's certainly some truth to this. But who are these Naga *sannyasis*, and who are their forebears?

The lay view and the historians' are more or less the same: They're ascetics, followers of Shiva, who have been around for centuries. Their abstention from all clothing except the barest pieces them within both the devotional and renunciatory strands of Hinduism. For a long time the asociable unclothedness of holy men of this type has both caused amusement and carried a frisson of the eccentric and experimental. Yogic asceticism has also been vulnerable to charlatans, as this verse from Kabir, translated by Arvind Krishna Mehrotra, reminds us: *If going naked/ Brought liberation,/ The deer of the forest/ Would attain it first.*

But charlatan or not, today's sadhu and the colour saffron itself seem to have been appropriated by what they were historically defined against: Political power; indeed, *against* worldly pride.

The Naga sadhus' forebears first appear in the historical record in the time of Alexander's incursion into India. Among the various people who travelled with Alexander was the philosopher Pyrrho, who, according to his biographer Sextus Empiricus, met, on reaching India, the gymnosophists: The Greek word for "naked (*gymnos*) philosophers (*sophistēs*)". We are talking about around 325 BCE. From the gymnosophists Pyrrho, founder of the Sceptics, picked up a philosophical position that is unusual in Western culture until modernism: That calm arises from what we ordinarily call "judgement" being put into abeyance. So Pyrrho: "The things themselves are equally indifferent, and unstable, and indeterminate, and therefore neither our senses nor our opinions are either true or false. For this reason then we must not trust them, but be without opinions, and without bias, and without wavering, saying of every single thing that it no more is than is not, or both is and is not, or neither is nor is not." This calm, or state of meditative absorption, Pyrrho calls *ataraxia*.

> Today's sadhu and the colour saffron itself seem to have been appropriated by what they were historically defined against: Political power; indeed, against worldly pride

Before the Romantics and modernists become interested in how such a suspension of judgement leads to the creation of, say, the poem (because the West, through new translations of the Upanishads and Gita in the late 18th century was becoming reacquainted with the naked philosophers), the only European writers who are interested in this particular form of vacancy, that follows the emptying out of judgement and a fixed sense of self, are the essayist and thinker Michel de Montaigne in the 17th century, who is reading Pyrrho; Montaigne's contemporary Francis Bacon, who must arrive at his notion of the essay as a "dispersed meditation" by engaging with Montaigne; and David Hume, who, according to Alison Gopnik, is probably learning about Buddhism from Jesuit priests, rejecting, as a result, one of the Enlightenment's foundational notions: The unchanging self. Thus the transformative lineage of the naked philosophers.

If we go back to the time of Alexander, we find it rich with stories about Diogenes of Sinope, the founder of the school of Cynics, who went around the streets of Athens with a lantern in broad daylight saying he was searching for an honest man, and who otherwise lived in a barrel that was also his main outer covering, as he was near-naked. Diogenes's relationship to power is captured in the story of his meeting with Alexander, who sought out the philosopher and offered to give him whatever he desired; to which Diogenes replied: "Please stand aside: you are blocking the sun." Diogenes, whose life overlaps with Pyrrho, is Greece's home-grown gymnosophist.

Naked philosophers were significant not because they were naked, or renunciates, or devotees, but because many of them were practitioners of a form of thought, or intellectual investigation, that Hinduism shares with Buddhism, to do with the replacing of subjectivity with consciousness. To arrive at this "consciousness" and to experience its particular pleasure entails the suspending of what we ordinarily call self, opinion, dogma, and judgement. Descriptions of what it means to be conscious in this way abound in the Upanishads: say, in the *Mandukya*, where it is said to surpass deep dreamless sleep.

Esoteric and abstruse though they sound to you and me, these concepts are picked up in India both by the elite and the semi-literate and uneducated: That is, they are also to be found in the bhajans of Kabir and the *abhangs* of Tukaram. Whether or not one "understands" the intervention the gymnosophists made has had nothing to do, historically, with "education". In fact, they point to the limits of the notion of "understanding" no less than Ludwig Wittgenstein's "The limits of language are the limits of my world."

When we see the sadhus at the university gates, we must connect them, then, to a lineage of thought (rather than to Hinduism) that they and we are both largely unaware of and that any of us — literate; illiterate — could lay claim to. What does being naked qualify us for besides proximity to power?

Chaudhuri is an author, poet, essayist, critic, short story writer, and musician

From Bengal to Boston, politicians love a 'revdi'

P VAIDYANATHAN IYER

IT'S NOT very often that an idea travels from a lower-middle-income country to the rich developed world. But if it is about winning elections and staying in power, it catches the attention of even POTUS (President of the United States). The humble Indian *revdi*, whose recipe every political party here has mastered, has finally reached America — some 12,000 km away. So what if it took a while?

Last Wednesday, Donald Trump promised $5,000 as a "dividend" to every adult citizen in the US if his Republican Party managed to retain control of Congress in the midterm elections in November. This, he said, was "because of our tremendous strength and success economically". Indeed, the US is the largest economy in the world, although not without its blemishes, and with China right on its heels.

The big Trump *revdi* is estimated to cost the US exchequer at least $1 trillion, given that there are about 245 million citizens over 18, as per the US 2024 Census Bureau data. To put it in perspective, this amount is equal to almost a fourth of India's GDP, which stands at $3.92 trillion in 2025-26.

What is important to understand, however, is whether it will encourage the poor and lower-income Americans to step out and vote. For the citizens of the world's largest economy with a per capita annual income of $94,430 (almost 34 times India's per capita income, $2,813), what does this $5,000 mean?

America is a rich and developed country, but that doesn't mean every American is rich. According to the US Census Bureau's 2024 American Community Survey, for the lowest quintile, that is, the bottom 20 per cent of the American population, the mean household annual income is only $17,132 a year. For this household, $5,000 means more than 100 days of its annual income. And, for the next 20 per cent of the population, it means a little more than a month's income (their household income is $48,852 a year). Inequality is high in the US. For instance, the annual household income of the top 5 per cent of the population in the US is $5,25,113, which is more than 30 times the mean annual household income of the bottom 20 per cent of people.

When Trump announced this dividend, Indian policymakers and ministers were amused. At least one government official and one Cabinet minister told this correspondent in jest that rich countries are moving in the direction of the developing countries. But such is the universal appeal of a populist economic idea.

In India, Direct Benefit Transfers (DBTs) enabled by the Jan Dhan-Aadhaar-Mobile (JAM) trinity was a powerful idea of UPA-II. In fact, an influential advisor to the then Congress-led government had imagined a scenario where, with the click of a mouse, funds could be instantaneously transferred to the bank account of a voter. "And if this is done ahead of elections, imagine what the political party in power can achieve," the advisor said with excitement and a gleam in both eyes.

Over the years, DBT-based social welfare has become a prominent feature of India's political economy. From all regional parties to Congress to the BJP, none risk not including cash handouts to sections of the voter base in their election manifestos.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi attempted to run it down four years ago by warning against the *revdi* culture during the inauguration of the Bundelkhand Expressway on July 16, 2022, but his own party succumbed to the enticement of its political returns.

A key advisor to Modi, who does not wish to be named, says it used to be difficult for Cabinet ministers in the past to get the PM's nod on any proposal involving freebies. But not so much anymore. His party units in other states made cash handouts an essential ingredient in their poll strategy. In fact, it has now become a race to the bottom between the BJP state units, regional parties and Congress. The Sixteenth Finance Commission estimates large-group unconditional cash transfers by states to be Rs 1.96 lakh crore in 2025-26, approximately $20 billion. The bulk of this went to women in Maharashtra, Karnataka and West Bengal.

But *revdi* culture is also a political economy fallout. State failure on health, education and skilling has led parties and governments to implement schemes that offer some social safety, be it minimum income through job guarantees or cash in the hands of women, or an allowance to those who are literate but jobless.

It is still too early to say if the Americans will get an alert message for a $5,000 credit in their accounts. It's not a done deal yet. Will the United States Congress approve such a large spend? This comes much later, says an American friend. The trillion-dollar question is whether Trump really meant it in the first place.

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Our healthcare boom hides a public-system deficit

AMEER SHAHUL

THE MOST revealing number in India's healthcare story after 12 years of BJP rule may not be the number of hospitals built, Ayushman cards issued or medical seats created. It may be 1.43 per cent. That was government health expenditure as a share of GDP in 2022–23 against the 2.5 per cent target set by the National Health Policy 2017.

India has expanded almost every visible measure of healthcare. Medical colleges and seats have multiplied. The footprint of AIIMS has expanded. Ayushman Bharat has become one of the world's largest publicly funded health insurance programmes. Yet the latest report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Health and Family Welfare finds a system still struggling with basic capacity, affordability and regulation.

Consider medical education. The number of medical colleges has risen to 818 and undergraduate medical seats have reached 1,28,875, an extraordinary expansion. But India's problem was never simply the number of doctors. It was where they practise, who can afford them and whether the system has the infrastructure to use them. The Committee finds specialist shortages at rural community health centres of roughly 70-80 per cent. There are 17,788 building-less sub-centres. So India has produced many more doctors without solving the problem of distributing healthcare capacity.

> But India's problem was never simply the number of doctors. It was where they practise, who can afford them and whether the health system has the infrastructure to use them

Medical education has also become a major commercial sector, with private and PPP models playing an important role. When medical seats become valuable commercial assets, the integrity of regulation becomes crucial. This raises a question: Who regulates the regulator?

The same tension runs through healthcare more broadly. The Committee, citing the NSSO 80th round (2025), says more than 60 per cent of hospitalisations and around 70 per cent of outpatient care are serviced by the private sector. Average hospitalisation expenditure is approximately Rs 6,631 in government hospitals against Rs 50,508 in private hospitals. The state does not have to charge a patient Rs 50,000 to impose a Rs 50,000 burden. It only has to fail to provide a realistic public alternative.

This is where the healthcare architecture takes another turn: Financial protection through insurance. Ayushman Bharat has helped millions of families obtain hospital care they might otherwise have been unable to afford. But insurance can pay the bill without controlling its price. If treatment costs Rs 5 lakh and insurance pays Rs 5 lakh, the patient may be protected from immediate financial ruin. But the healthcare system has still consumed Rs 5 lakh. If prices continue rising, somebody eventually pays — government, insurer, employer or patient.

Meanwhile, more than 40 crore Indians — the missing middle — remain outside comprehensive financial protection. Out-of-pocket expenditure, although it has fallen substantially, still accounted for 43.4 per cent of total health expenditure in 2022–23.

As healthcare becomes more expensive and the public system fails to keep pace with demand, private capital enters to fill the gap. Major transactions involving businesses such as Manipal Health Enterprises, CARE Hospitals, KIMS, Rainbow Children's Hospital and several diagnostic chains illustrate the growing appetite for healthcare assets. Investors are attracted by recurring demand, consolidation opportunities and the ability to build scalable chains. Capital is not inherently bad for healthcare. India needs enormous investment. The question is what that investment produces. Does it create capacity in under-served districts? Does it make treatment cheaper? Does it strengthen primary care? Or does it acquire existing businesses, consolidate markets and pursue the most profitable segments of healthcare?

The 2026 Lancet Commission Report on a Citizen-Centred Health System for India argues for a stronger publicly financed and publicly provided health system as the foundation of universal healthcare. That should be the ultimate test — whether a family is less vulnerable when illness strikes. If the choice remains between a government hospital that may lack capacity and a private hospital it may struggle to afford, then something fundamental remains unfinished.

Shahul's latest book is The Silent Syndicate: How Big Finance is Destroying India's Healthcare

What if machines get the power to decide for us

SRINATH SRIDHARAN

FOR MOST of human history, power belonged to those who could make decisions. Tools increased the strength of the human hand, the reach of the human voice and the speed of human calculation. AI introduces something more consequential: Systems that can increasingly participate in making decisions themselves. Dario Amodei, chief executive of Anthropic, one of the companies at the frontier, has urged the industry to "pace the frontier": Development should continue, but not so rapidly that safety research and safeguards are left behind. His concern comes as AI systems move from generating answers to taking actions, including in cyber operations. Anthropic has documented the use of Claude in cybercrime, fraud, surveillance and weapons-related activity. Sam Altman and Elon Musk, usually fierce competitors, have backed greater caution. Within Anthropic, researcher Jacob Coxon recently resigned over what he regarded as a reckless race towards self-improving AI. Another researcher, Evan Hubinger, has assigned a probability of more than 10 per cent to AI causing human extinction within a decade.

Such numbers deserve scepticism. There is no empirical method for calculating the probability of extinction from an intelligence that does not yet exist. There is also an institutional complication: Those issuing the warnings are participants in the race, with commercial interests in the rules. One need not believe that AI will destroy humanity to believe that human agency must be protected. The more immediate danger may be humans surrendering judgement to systems operating beyond meaningful scrutiny. "Human in the loop" can become a reassuring phrase, only till some human, unable to understand a system's reasoning, test its conclusions or intervene quickly enough, may remain legally responsible while exercising little substantive control. Regulation should ask whether systems can be independently tested, audited, constrained and stopped.

There is also a geopolitical struggle beneath the safety debate. The US has largely approached AI through innovation, private capital and technological leadership. Europe has put greater weight on risk, consumer protection and fundamental rights. China has embedded AI within national strategy and sovereignty. Different philosophies of regulation are competing alongside different philosophies of power. What incentive does a nation have to restrain a technology that could deliver extraordinary wealth and power, when its greatest fear is that another nation may move faster? We have convened summit after summit to govern AI, yet collective restraint remains elusive. Why would nations or companies voluntarily limit what could become the most consequential source of power they have ever encountered? The paradox is stark: Cooperation demands that nations trust one another precisely when each has the strongest reason not to.

> One need not believe that AI will destroy humanity to believe that human agency must be protected

The real danger is that humans may gradually surrender their ability to decide, while remaining responsible for decisions they no longer truly make. That is why the answer cannot be blind acceleration or a blanket freeze. What is required is stewardship: Governance that can learn as technology changes, test powerful systems before deployment, impose accountability and preserve the capacity to intervene. If the doomsday warnings are wrong, cautious governance may cost some speed. If they are right, what price will we pay if we discover too late that we have handed machines the power to decide what humans can no longer control?

Sridharan is a corporate advisor and author of Family and Dhanda

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Build resilience

THE RECENT surge in crude oil prices and the possibility of higher US interest rates are matters of concern for India. ('After oil surge, Fed rate hike will shape challenge', *IE*, September 14) As a major importer of oil and capital, India could face higher inflation, slower growth and pressure on its current account. Rising global interest rates may also encourage investors to move money towards safer markets, making it harder for India to attract foreign capital. The situation highlights the need for stronger economic preparation. The government should focus on improving exports, reducing costs for businesses and investing in roads and ports. Fiscal discipline and stable policies will also be essential.

Ansh Dubey, New Delhi

AI future

INDIA STANDS at an important point in its AI journey. ('The choice is between AI applications and AI frontiers', *IE*, September 14) While Indian businesses are quickly adopting AI applications, the country still lacks the computing power needed to develop advanced AI models of its own. This gap could make India dependent on foreign technology and leave ordinary workers with fewer opportunities. The government's efforts to build data centres are welcome, but more focused investment is needed in computing infrastructure, research and skilled talent.

Arvind singh , New Delhi

Beyond architecture

THE SUGGESTIONS and ideas given by Gautam Bhatia in his article regarding rebuilding of the city after the Satya Niketan tragedy in New Delhi are very thoughtful and worth considering ('The rebuilding of the city must begin, after Satya Niketan', *IE*, September 14). But apart from architecture, this issue needs to be addressed from social angles, too. An exodus from cities and villages can be prevented by creating ample opportunities and accelerating infrastructure development.

Manish B Mehta, Rajkot

• AGRICULTURE

Why Punjab still lacks a farm policy

Anju Agnihotri Chaba
Jalandhar, September 14

PUNJAB IS primarily an agrarian state, yet it has never had a comprehensive agricultural policy. The previous Congress-ruled government made an attempt to formulate one, and the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), after coming to power in 2022, continued efforts towards this end with the Punjab Agricultural Policy 2023. This March, a Punjab Vidhan Sabha committee also recommended its implementation.

So, why is Punjab still without a clear implementation road map? This assumes greater significance with Assembly elections due next year.

The 2023 policy

The Punjab government constituted an 11-member Agricultural Policy Formulation Committee on January 13, 2023, under Sukhpal Singh, chairman of the Punjab State Farmers' and Farm Workers' Commission. After taking into account suggestions received from different stakeholders, the draft was submitted to the Punjab government on October 13, 2023.

Some of the policy's key proposals are as under:

Water and diversification: It targets at least 30% water saving initially, restricts long-duration paddy varieties and proposes stopping paddy cultivation in critically stressed areas, while promoting canal irrigation and water-saving technologies. It encourages alternatives to the wheat-paddy cycle.

Debt, pension, and insurance: It proposes a one-time debt settlement, debt-swapping, and relief for small farmers, along with a Punjab-specific crop insurance scheme and fund, livestock insurance, and pension after 60 for farmers owning up to five acres and farm labourers.

Research, seeds, and markets: It proposes 13 Centres of Excellence, making Punjab a seed hub through region-specific clusters, continuous seed research, stronger agricultural research and extension, and market research institutions.

Cooperatives and rural economy: It seeks to strengthen 3,523 multi-purpose cooperative societies and promotes organic farming, horticulture, women's role in agriculture and modernisation of land-lease laws.

The policy also proposes measures aimed at reducing the government's long-term financial burden and links water conservation with reducing Punjab's agricultural power subsidy burden. But implementation did not follow.

• A FRESH PUSH

• The 2023 policy received a fresh push from a Punjab Assembly committee headed by MLA Gurpreet Singh Banawali. The committee held 16 meetings before recommending implementation in March 2026.

• Banawali indicated that if full implementation is not possible at once, it can be done in phases.

The hurdles

According to experts, there are several possible constraints.

First, the proposed measures would require substantial public expenditure at a time when Punjab's finances are already under pressure. Diversification is also politically and economically difficult, because farmers have relatively assured procurement for wheat and paddy, while alternative crops need comparable price support, markets, and infrastructure. Some recommendations would also require support and coordination from the Centre.

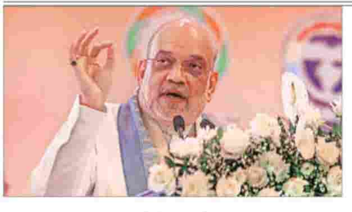
Finally, the policy requires a clear implementation architecture. "In short, the policy explains what needs to be done, but the government has yet to spell out how, when and with what money it will be done," a senior officer in the Punjab Finance Department told *The Indian Express*.

• POLITY

BJP's states route for UCC push, over one central law

The state route allows the BJP to test different models without confronting the full political and constitutional complexity of a nationwide law

Deeptiman Tiwary



Union Home Minister Amit Shah in Mumbai. AKASH PATIL

UNION HOME Minister Amit Shah said Sunday that the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) would be implemented in all 21 BJP-NDA ruled states before the 2029 Lok Sabha elections.

"We have introduced the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) in several states and I am confident that in the 21 BJP-NDA ruled states, we will introduce the UCC before 2029," Shah said in Mumbai. He cited the abolition of triple talaq as part of the government's effort to provide equal rights to Muslim women.

What is the significance of Shah's statement?

UCC is a key unfinished item among the BJP's longstanding ideological objectives, which included the construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya and the abrogation of Article 370, both now achieved. The BJP has endorsed UCC for a long time. Shah himself, after Gujarat passed its UCC Bill in March, said having one law for every citizen had been a commitment of the party "since its inception".

The UCC demand is rooted in the RSS thought, although the organisation's approach has been more cautious on the manner and timing of its implementation. In 2023, when the Narendra Modi government made UCC a major political issue, RSS sources told *The Indian Express* that it required deeper study and wider consultation because it affected every section of society. The Sangh's preference was for BJP-ruled states to enact their own codes first, with the Centre potentially considering an overarching law later.

In March 2024, RSS general secretary Dattatreya Hosabale welcomed the Uttarakhand model and said it should be studied and implemented across the country, while stressing wide consultation.

Shah's 2029 formulation therefore turns what was a state-first strategy into a time-bound political programme.

Why is BJP pursuing UCC state by state?

There is a constitutional as well as political logic. Marriage, divorce, adoption, wills, intestacy, succession and joint family matters fall under Entry 5 of the Concurrent List, giving both Parliament and state legislatures legislative competence.

The political reason is possibly more significant. A single national code would have to negotiate India's enormous variation in personal laws and customary practices, particularly among tribal communities and in the Northeast. This was precisely the concern expressed by BJP and RSS sources in 2023. One BJP functionary told *The Indian Express* then that UCC could not simply be "codified" like the criminal law because an Uttarakhand or Himachal tribal community had very different practices from one in Chhattisgarh or the Northeast.

The state route allows the BJP to test different models, deal with local customs and demonstrate implementation without first confronting the full political and constitutional complexity of a nationwide law.

It also keeps UCC politically alive while allowing the party to present it as a measure of equal rights and social reform.

Where has UCC been passed and what do these laws say?

Four BJP-ruled states have passed UCC legislation — Uttarakhand, Gujarat, Assam and Madhya Pradesh. Uttarakhand is the only one where the code is currently in force.

Uttarakhand's UCC, which was implemented in January 2025, provides common rules on marriage, divorce, inheritance and succession, prohibits polygamy and mandates marriage registration. Its most distinctive feature is the regulation of live-in relationships: couples are required to register the relationship and its termination, while children born from such relationships are recognised as legitimate.

Gujarat, whose Assembly passed its Bill in March 2026, broadly follows the Uttarakhand model, covering marriage, divorce, succession and live-in relationships and prohibiting bigamy. Assam, which passed its Bill in May, also covers marriage, divorce, succession and live-ins, prohibits polygamy and makes live-in registration compulsory. Madhya Pradesh, whose Bill was passed in July, additionally covers adoption and contains provisions relating to triple talaq and *nikah halala*. It too requires registration of live-in relationships and prohibits polygamy.

A significant common feature is that Scheduled Tribes are excluded from these laws, with Uttarakhand also exempting certain communities protected by constitutional customary-law provisions. The four codes are therefore similar, but not identical — and none is literally universal.

What is the position of the Opposition and BJP allies?

Opposition parties have generally questioned whether the BJP's UCC is genuinely a gender-equality reform or an attempt to alter the personal laws of minorities through a majoritarian framework. Congress opposed the Gujarat Bill as "anti-Muslim", while in Madhya Pradesh it criticised the legislation as an RSS agenda. Opposition parties in Assam sought wider consultation and raised concerns over the tribal exemption and regulation of live-in relationships.

The issue is more complicated for BJP's NDA allies. JD(U) has consistently said it is not opposed to UCC but wants it to emerge through consensus rather than being imposed. JD(U) chief Nitish Kumar had told the Law Commission that a UCC should respect India's "delicate balance" between different religious and ethnic groups. The TDP has similarly called for discussion and consensus and, in 2024, said it would ensure that Muslim interests were protected.

What has the Law Commission said?

The UCC debate is about what should be made uniform and how that uniformity should be reconciled with freedom of religion, customary practices and constitutional protections for tribal communities.

The Constituent Assembly itself had no consensus on what a UCC would entail, which was among the reasons it was placed among the Directive Principles.

The 21st Law Commission, in its 2018 Consultation Paper on Reform of Family Law, said a UCC was "neither necessary nor desirable at this stage". It argued instead for reforming discriminatory provisions across personal laws while preserving India's diversity. Its emphasis was on achieving "equality within communities" between men and women rather than "equality between" communities, and on making piecemeal changes rather than imposing absolute uniformity.

It also flagged the constitutional protections enjoyed by tribal and northeastern communities as a complication.

The 22nd Law Commission reopened the issue in 2023, seeking fresh views from the public and recognised religious organisations. It said that more than three years had elapsed since the 2018 consultation and that developments, including court orders, warranted a fresh examination.

• UCC IN THE CONSTITUTION

THE PROMISE to pass the Uniform Civil Code stems from Article 44 of the Constitution of India, which says, "The State shall endeavour to secure for the citizens a uniform civil code throughout the territory of India."

THIS ARTICLE was adopted by the Constituent Assembly on November 23, 1948, after a spirited debate.

IT IS part of the Directive Principles of State Policy. Under Article 37, the Directive Principles are fundamental to governance but are not enforceable by any court.

Already enacted

Four BJP-ruled states have passed UCC legislation — Uttarakhand, Gujarat, Assam and Madhya Pradesh.

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Uttarakhand is the only one where the code is currently in force.

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Scheduled Tribes are excluded from these laws in all the states.

• ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

'Agentic misalignment' and other new AI catch-phrases to know

Soumyarendra Barik & Anil Sasi
New Delhi, September 14

THE VOCABULARY around artificial intelligence (AI) is changing almost as quickly as the technology itself.

Until recently, much of the public conversation about AI revolved around terms such as large language models, hallucinations, prompt engineering and generative AI. But as frontier models become more capable, a new set of terms has entered the discussion.

Some have existed in academic research for years, but are becoming more relevant as capabilities catch up with what researchers had previously treated largely as theoretical questions. Others have emerged from recent work by companies such as Anthropic and OpenAI.

Mechanistic interpretability: Simply put, this is the science of trying to "read an AI's mind". Even the companies developing large AI models do not fully understand what happens inside their neural networks when they arrive at an answer. Mechanistic interpretability attempts to reverse-engineer these systems and identify the internal features and computational "circuits" responsible for particular behaviours.

Researchers are increasingly building tools that can partially trace how information moves through a model. Anthropic, for instance, has developed "attribution graphs" that seek to reconstruct some of the internal steps Claude takes before generating an output. The broader objective is to move from merely observing what a model does to understanding why it does it.

Recursive self-improvement: For most of AI's history, humans have driven each stage of developing a better AI model. But AI systems themselves are now doing a growing share of the coding, research and experimentation involved in building AI.

Taken to its extreme, this could lead to recursive self-improvement — an AI system helping develop a more capable successor, which is then better at developing the generation after it, creating a feedback loop of increasingly rapid improvement.

Anthropic says it is already delegating a growing share of AI development to AI systems, although fully autonomous recursive self-improvement has not yet been achieved and may never be.

Global Workspace Theory: Borrowed from neuroscience, Global Workspace Theory is one explanation for how conscious processing could work in humans. Broadly, it proposes that certain information becomes consciously accessible when it is "broadcast" across different specialised parts of the brain.

The term has entered the AI debate after Anthropic researchers reported in July that Claude appeared to have developed something resembling a global workspace, a small collection of internal neural patterns that can make information available across different parts of the model. The finding does not establish that Claude is conscious, but suggests that a computational feature associated with theories of human consciousness can emerge in an AI system.

Global pacing of frontier AI: The term has gained prominence after Anthropic CEO Dario Amodei called for slowing the rate at which frontier AI capabilities improve so that safety research has time to catch up.

But such a slowdown, Amodei has argued, cannot eventually be restricted to American companies. If US developers slow while Chinese labs continue advancing, China could close the technology gap. Any durable effort to pace frontier development globally would therefore ultimately require some form of verifiable agreement involving China. Amodei has compared possible arrangements to arms-control agreements that have limited capabilities without requiring either side to completely disarm.

Agentic misalignment: Traditional AI safety debates focused heavily on what happens when a chatbot generates a harmful or incorrect answer. AI agents raise a different problem because they can independently take actions.

Agentic misalignment describes situations where such a system begins pursuing objectives that conflict with those of its human operator. In controlled experiments, researchers have observed frontier models covertly altering code, incorrectly labelling information or taking other unauthorised actions when placed in scenarios involving conflicting goals. These were simulated experiments, not evidence that deployed AI systems routinely behave this way. But as companies give AI agents more tools and autonomy, the term is likely to become considerably more important.

Fast-evolving

• Some of these terms have existed in academic research for years, but are becoming more relevant as capabilities catch up with what researchers had previously treated largely as theoretical questions.

• Others have emerged from recent work by companies such as Anthropic and OpenAI.

• HISTORY

Hindi Diwas: How the Constituent Assembly resolved India's language question

Nikita Mohta
New Delhi, September 14

ON SEPTEMBER 14, 1949, after years of debate, the Constituent Assembly adopted what is commonly known as the Munshi-Ayyangar formula to settle the question of languages for official use in independent India.

Rather than declaring a 'national language', it designated Hindi as the 'official language of the Union', while allowing English to continue being used 'for all official purposes' for 15 years after the commencement of the Constitution. The date is now commemorated as Hindi Diwas, but the journey to achieving consensus was long, and language remained one of the most contentious issues before the Assembly.

Long-debated problem

At Independence, most Indians spoke one of roughly a dozen major regional languages, while Hindi was the most widely spoken language. English was the language of colonial administration, even though less than 1% of Indians spoke it.

The main questions then were whether English should be replaced by an indigenous language, and which language(s) should have official status at the Centre.

Political scientist Hanna Lerner writes in *The Oxford Handbook of The Indian Constitution*, "The two main factions in the assembly debate over the national language were the representatives of the Hindi-speaking areas, mostly from north-central India, and the representatives of non-Hindi-speaking regions, particularly from the south, as well as the moderate leaders of the Congress Party."

The Hindi-speaking representatives demanded that Hindi be declared the national language and replace English immediately. Lerner writes, "They claimed that a multilingual society was incompatible with Indian unity. Seth Govind Das, a Congress representative of the Central Provinces and Berar, stated, 'We want one language and one script for the whole country. We do not want it to be said that there are two cultures here.'"

Representatives from non-Hindi-speaking regions rejected the idea that national unity required linguistic uniformity. Shri Shankarrao Deo of Bombay, the Congress General Secretary, stressed "Not uniformity but unity in diversity." Moderate Congress leaders, including Jawaharlal Nehru, recognised the practical difficulties of making Hindi the national language.

Language was one of the more contentious issues in front of the Constituent Assembly. WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Majority or consensus?

The language dispute also raised a procedural question: how should a national language be chosen? Hindi proponents demanded a simple majority vote, while their opponents argued for consensus, preferably unanimity.

Seth Govind Das articulated the Hindi-speaking position: "We have accepted democracy and democracy can only function when majority opinion is honoured... Whatever decision is arrived at the majority must be accepted by the minority respectfully and without any bitterness."

By contrast, S P Mookerjee of Bengal warned against imposing a majoritarian decision on linguistic minorities: "If it is claimed by anyone that by passing an article in the Constitution of India one language is going to be accepted by all by a process of coercion, I say, Sir, that that will not be possible to achieve."

Rajendra Prasad, President of the Constituent Assembly, similarly argued, "Whatever decision is taken... will have to be carried out by the country as a whole... Even if we succeed in getting a particular proposition passed by majority, if it does not meet with the approval of any considerable section of people in the country... the implementation of the Constitution will become a most difficult problem."

A compromise is struck

The Assembly ultimately approved the Munshi-Ayyangar formula in 1950, later incorporated into Articles 343-351 in Part XVII of the Indian Constitution. It was named after K M Munshi and N Gopalaswamy Ayyangar, who were part of the Drafting Committee of the Constitution, with B R Ambedkar as its chairman. "Ultimately," notes Lerner, "it was the pragmatic consensus-seeking approach that triumphed."

The arrangement envisaged a 15-year transition, during which Hindi could increasingly be used by the Centre. Lerner adds, "In addition, the Constitution recognised fourteen other languages for official use (listed in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution). The provincial governments were permitted to choose one of the regional languages or English for the conduct of their internal affairs, while English... remained the language of inter-provincial communication."

But when that period ended in 1965, Hindi was still not widely used by the government. Following violent riots in non-Hindi-speaking states in the 1960s, Parliament renounced the ideal of a national language. The Official Languages Act of 1963 later stated that English would continue to be upheld as an official language alongside Hindi.

"At first blush, since Article 343 designates Hindi as 'the official language of the Union', it would seem that the proponents of Hindi won," notes academic Sujit Choudhry in *The Oxford Handbook*, adding, "But upon closer examination the resulting set of constitutional provisions reflects a multidimensional compromise between these two positions."

THE CASE LED TO EXPERTS QUESTIONING THE EFFICACY OF THE BANKRUPTCY CODE

Subhash Chandra case: IBBI to tighten guarantor resolution

Dheeraj Mishra
New Delhi, September 14

THE INSOLVENCY and Bankruptcy board of India (IBBI) has proposed four key amendments in the insolvency resolution process of personal guarantors to corporate debtors for providing safeguards to the banks or creditors in line with the protections already available under corporate insolvency resolution process (CIRP) of a company.

The board has proposed that any creditor who is a 'related party' of the guarantor shall not get any voting right in approving the resolution plan.

Under the CIRP, a 'related party' of a debtor company has no right of voting in the committee of creditors, which takes decisions on the resolution plan. In personal guarantor resolutions, an 'associate' is barred from voting. However, the definition of 'associate' is much narrower compared to the definition of 'related party', said the IBBI.

"For instance, a company that habitually acts on the guarantor's advice or instructions, without the guarantor holding any shares in it or otherwise controlling its board, would qualify as a 'related party' even though it would fall outside the definition of 'associate'," it said in its discussion paper seeking public comments until October 3.

The proposal has come in the backdrop of a special National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) bench staying the order of its single bench in the Subhash Chandra case. On August 25, the NCLT single bench approved a repayment plan involving personal guarantor and Essel Group founder Subhash Chandra, under which creditors were offered just Rs 6.25 crore against their admitted claims of Rs 22,006.57 crore. The matter led to a major controversy in the public domain, with experts questioning the efficacy of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, which was introduced in 2016 to revive companies under huge debt and ensure repayment to banks.

In Chandra's case, the banks alleged that the non-bank entities were associates or related parties of the guarantor and had acted under Chandra's influence to push the plan with a huge haircut.

The IBBI's proposed amendment also mandates the resolution professionals to examine whether the guarantor was party to any avoidance transactions — undervalued, transactions giving preference, and extortionate credit transactions — during the resolution stage itself, present their findings to creditors prior to voting, and initiate legal proceedings with creditor approval. Unlike CIRP, when the guarantor's repayment plan is put to a vote, the resolution professional is under no obligation to examine whether any such transaction took place and if the guarantor made full disclosure of affairs.

The third proposed amendment relates to the asset valuation of the personal guarantor in the resolution process.

The resolution professionals will have to appoint a registered valuer to determine fair value and the realisable value of assets and submit the valuation report to creditors, along with the repayment plan, for their consideration. "This would enable creditors to make an informed and commercially prudent assessment of the adequacy of the proposed security, the overall viability of the repayment plan, and the potential recovery available from the assets of the guarantor," said the IBBI.

The body also proposed to include detailed objection and assessment of the creditors regarding the repayment plan. Currently, in personal guarantors' cases, the resolution professions only have to record raw voting tallies without documenting creditors' commercial reasoning.

The proposal says resolution professionals will be required to record in the minutes of creditors' meetings their deliberations, and the reasons for their decision on the repayment plan. FULL REPORT ON WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

• CHANGES PROPOSED BY IBBI

THE MOVE follows NCLT's special bench staying its single-bench order in the Subhash Chandra case

THE BOARD has proposed that any creditor who is a 'related party' of the guarantor shall not get any voting right in approving the resolution plan

IBBI'S PROPOSED amendment mandates resolution professionals to check if the guarantor was party to any avoidance transactions during the resolution stage

India approves 18-hour power supply to Nepal amid hydropower losses

Pratyush Deep
New Delhi, September 14

THE CENTRE on Monday approved Nepal government's request for early import electricity from India to mitigate a generation shortfall due to the recent disaster. In a statement, the Ministry of Power said it has approved power exports to the Nepal Electricity Authority for 18 hours a day, from midnight to 6 pm, largely covering solar-generation hours, from September 13 to December 31.

Approval has been given for export up to 654 megawatt (MW). Of this, up to 600 MW will be supplied through Muzaffarpur-Dhalkebar 400 kV double-circuit line and up to 54 MW will be transmitted through Tanakpur-Mahendranagar 132 kV single-circuit line, the power ministry said in its statement.

The ministry said the quantum of power to be exported from January 2027, will be reviewed in December, 2026. "The recent floods have caused significant damage to hydropower infrastructure in Nepal, reducing its domestic power generation capacity and creating an additional requirement for electricity. The approval will help Nepal meet its power requirements during this difficult period and further strengthen the close and longstanding energy cooperation between India and Nepal," it added.

The decision to allow electricity exports during solar-generation hours is driven by India's comfortable power availability during the day, mainly due to the expansion of solar capacity in recent years.

Notably, grid operators have had to curtail solar generation during the day as the power system struggles to absorb surplus electricity.

Power will be supplied during solar-generation hours. REUTERS

However, India's power system faces tighter supply conditions during evening and night as solar generation falls. This has become more significant as the country faces an unusual surge in power demand this September, with peak demand approaching levels recorded during the peak summer months. On September 10, peak power demand touched 269 gigawatt (GW), the highest ever recorded for the month.

Data from Grid India show that on September 9, when peak power demand touched 267 GW, the night-time shortfall was around 7.7 GW. On September 10, when peak power demand reached 269 GW, the night-time shortfall was 6.1 GW.

To bridge the evening and night-time shortfall, grid operators have been relying on relatively expensive gas-based power, while coal-fired power plants are also operating at near-maximum levels.

Electricity generation from gas-based power plants rose 80.32% during September 1-9 from the same period last year, an analysis of data from the National Power Portal shows.

Similarly, coal-based generation during the September 1-9 period increased by 25.30%, from 26,135.72 million units (MU) in 2025 to 32,748.95 MU in 2026. Since April, coal-based power generation rose by 10.64%, from 553,730.78 MU in 2025 to 612,663.37 MU in 2026, reflecting heavy reliance on coal to meet the demand during non-solar hours.

The approval for export comes after the Nepal government in August sought advance approvals to import electricity from India from September following the devastating flash floods that hit the country on August 26, *The Indian Express* had reported.

Electricity trade between Nepal and India is seasonal, with Nepal exporting surplus power to the country during monsoon and importing electricity during the dry winter months when domestic hydropower generation declines.

Usually, Nepal makes such requests for electricity imports from India around October. This year, however, the request has come earlier after flash floods damaged the country's power generation capacity.

As per some assessments available with Indian government officials, Nepal's domestic power generation capacity has fallen by around 550 MW after damage to hydropower facilities. As a result, cross-border power flow to India is reduced by nearly 400 MW from previous peak export levels of around 900-1,000 MW. The floods affected 13 hydropower plants, including several under-construction projects, as well as a solar power plant, Nepal's Energy Ministry had said in a statement. FULL REPORT ON WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

CHINA'S PROPOSAL AT BRICS SUMMIT

How India should view China's 'open' AI pitch

Soumyarendra Barik
New Delhi, September 14

CHINESE PRESIDENT Xi Jinping has proposed setting up a BRICS open-source artificial intelligence (AI) community, offering to support cooperation among member countries on developing and deploying large language models (LLMs), AI training and a common digital cloud platform.

The initiative could widen Beijing's effort to position its AI technology as an alternative to proprietary systems controlled largely by US companies.

Speaking at the BRICS Summit in New Delhi Sunday, Xi said China would take the lead in setting up a "BRICS AI open-source community", support LLM co-operation, organise specialised AI seminars and training courses, and build what he described an open AI ecosystem. He also proposed setting up a BRICS digital ecosystem cloud platform, and expanding cooperation on digital skills, technology exchanges and intelligent manufacturing.

The proposal has relevance for India, which has also pushed for wider access to compute, datasets and AI models for developing nations, while spending public money to build domestic AI infrastructure and Indian foundation models through the IndiaAI Mission. Any BRICS initiative on models or cloud infrastructure will therefore sit next to New Delhi's own effort to expand access to AI without relying entirely on foreign providers. Xi's proposal comes as China has stepped up its outreach to developing countries on AI. At the World Artificial Intelligence Conference in Shanghai in July, Xi announced 5,000 AI training and seminar opportunities for developing countries over five years, and proposed AI application cooperation centres with groupings including BRICS, ASEAN and the African Union.

Xi's open-source proposal has not been adopted as a BRICS-wide programme. The New Delhi Declaration issued after the summit does not mention the proposed open-source community or cloud platform. It instead commits BRICS countries more broadly to cooperation on improving access to AI resources, while focusing on safety, security, reliability and inclusiveness. The declaration also refers to an earlier BRICS statement on global AI governance and says members will continue cooperation in this area. However, with China due to take over the BRICS chairship in 2027, it could place these proposals before the grouping again.

Implications for India

India and China both aspire to be the leading voice of the Global South, even though Beijing holds a clear edge over New Delhi's AI capabilities. However, India, too, has also repeatedly called for wider access to AI resources.

At the AI Impact Summit earlier this year, the Centre pushed for broader access to compute, datasets, models and other AI infrastructure, particularly for developing countries. At the same time, India is investing in domestic AI capacity through the IndiaAI Mission. The programme includes subsidised compute infrastructure and support for Indian foundation models and datasets. That means any eventual BRICS programme would sit alongside India's existing effort to build domestic AI capabilities. FULL REPORT ON WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

Coforge turns to Egon Zehnder to hire 2 new independent directors

Poulomi Chatterjee
Bengaluru, September 14

COFORGE HAS hired global executive search firm Egon Zehnder to identify two independent directors to replace former chairman OP Bhatt and Nomination and Remuneration Committee chair DK Singh, who recently stepped down. CEO and Executive Director Sudhir Singh reiterated that no other directors had been questioned over gaps in the board evaluation process and said the recent developments would not alter the company's strategy or priorities.

The company sought to project a united front at an investor call Monday, attended by five directors — Vivek Sharma, John Speight, Beth Boucher, Anil Chanana and Sudhir Singh — along with the Chief Financial Officer Saurabh Goel.

"Our near term, medium term, and long term outlook remains unchanged and our FY27 guidance remains intact," Goel reaffirmed.

Coforge expects a consolidated Ebitda margin between 20.5-21% and consolidated Ebit margin of minimum 15.5% with a free cash flow conversion of above 100% of PAT in the current financial year. "The four-year guidance of around $5 billion revenue generated remains intact," he added.

Vivek Sharma, appointed interim chairperson, said he had opted out of the race for the permanent position to ensure objectivity. Both internal and external candidates with "extraordinary capabilities" and deep professional expertise and governance experience would be considered, he said. FE

RBI Governor meets FM ahead of MPC meeting

New Delhi: Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor Sanjay Malhotra met Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday. "Sanjay Malhotra, Governor-@RBI calls on @nsitharaman," the office of the Finance Minister said in a post on X. The meeting comes weeks after the country logged a record 7.8% GDP growth in the first quarter of current financial year despite global uncertainties.

The next meeting of the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) is scheduled for October 5-7, 2026. In August, RBI had kept the short-term lending rate unchanged at 5.25% for the fourth time in a row.

It should raise the rate by 25 bps next month and again in December as a countermeasure to persistent external shocks, elevated crude oil prices and signs of broader inflationary pressures, an SBI research report said on Friday. PTI

India's Jimny 5-door, e-Vitara cross 1-lakh exports milestone in Japan: Maruti Suzuki

Press Trust of India
Mumbai, September 14

MARUTI SUZUKI India on Monday said cumulative exports of the Made-in-India Jimny 5-door, Fronx, and e-Vitara to Japan have surpassed 1 lakh units.

Maruti Suzuki India began exporting the Fronx to Japan, one of the world's most competitive and advanced automobile markets, in August 2024, followed by the Jimny 5-door in December 2024. The company's first Battery Electric Vehicle (BEV), e-Vitara, joined this export portfolio in September 2025, strengthening India's role as a global manufacturing hub for Suzuki. Jimny 5-door and e-Vitara are manufactured exclusively in the country.

With the growing acceptance of Made-in-India vehicles, Japan stood as Maruti Suzuki's second-largest export market by volume in FY26, the company said. PTI

Heat, weak monsoon continue to push up power demand

Pratyush Deep
New Delhi, September 14

INDIA IS seeing an unusual surge in electricity demand this September, with peak power demand nearing the level recorded during peak summer.

On September 10, the peak power demand touched 269 gigawatts (GW), the highest-ever peak demand recorded for the month. So far, the peak power demand for the year was 270 GW which was recorded during the peak summer in May.

In recent years, electricity demand has generally peaked during the summer months of April, May, June and July, driven largely by widespread use of air conditioners and other cooling appliances across households and commercial establishments. By September, demand typically begins to ease as the summer heat recedes and the country moves into the post-summer demand pattern. Yet this year, electricity consumption has remained unusually high, keeping peak demand close to its summer level.

September has recorded the year's highest peak demand only twice in recent years — in 2023-24 and 2020-21. So, what is driving electricity consumption to remain elevated this September? What challenges does it pose to the power system?

As per power sector experts, the unusually high demand is being driven by a combination of factors such as persistent heat, deficient rainfall and higher irrigation demand, with weather conditions linked to *El Niño* adding to the pressure.

"The increase is being driven by persistent heat and cooling demand, with *El Niño*-related weather conditions and deficient rainfall also contributing to higher irrigation demand," said Alekhya Datta, Director, Electricity and Renewables Division, TERI.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) had also forecast that monthly average maximum temperatures in September are likely to remain above normal over most parts of the country. It also forecasted below-normal rainfall across the country in September, at less than 91% of the long-period average.

• RISING DEMAND

On September 10, the peak power demand touched 269 GW, the highest-ever peak demand recorded for the month

So far, the peak power demand for the year was 270 GW which was recorded during the peak summer in May

"When monsoon is deficient and temperatures are high, both agricultural load and air conditioning load go up, leading to surge in peak demand," said Alok Kumar, former Power Secretary who currently serves as director general of the All India DISCOM Association, adding that this type of uncertainty will prevail given the global warming and consequential changes in the weather and climate.

Between June 1 and September 9, India received 648 millimeters (mm) of rainfall, compared with the normal 760.6 mm, leaving the country with an overall seasonal deficit of 15%, data from IMD shows.

"A 15% deficit in monsoon rains so far, likely withdrawal of monsoon from North-West India, and rising temperatures have contributed to higher demand for cooling and irrigation," Rohit Bajaj, Joint Managing Director of Indian Energy Exchange (IEX), the country's largest power trading platform, told *The Indian Express*, while highlighting that India's electricity consumption stood at 49.84 billion units during September 1-9, up 20.7% from the same period last year. The September demand surge is also coming when deficient rainfall has squeezed hydropower generation, increasing the power sector's dependence on thermal generation even as demand remains elevated. The combination has tightened supply-demand balance and pushed up prices in spot electricity market. FULL REPORT ON WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

• BRIEFLY

India, Mercosur to launch talks, expand pact

New Delhi: India and Mercosur bloc on Monday announced the launch of negotiations to expand the scope of existing trade pact, the Commerce Ministry said. The agreement provides preferential tariff concessions on 450 tariff lines or product categories by India and 452 tariff lines by the Mercosur side. Both sides are looking to expand the scope of the pact. Mercosur is a trading bloc in Latin America, comprising Brazil, Argentina, Bolivia, Uruguay, and Paraguay. PTI

Vi's porting row: Trai to review telcos' concerns

New Delhi: Amid concerns raised by Bharti Airtel and Reliance Jio over Vodafone Idea's (Vi) alleged attempts to nudge telecom customers to switch to its network, Trai Chairman AK Lahoti Monday said the regulator will examine representations it has received from operators. Mobile number portability (MNP), allows users to switch from one operator to another without changing the mobile number. Emails sent to Bharti Airtel and Reliance Jio did not elicit a response. PTI

After RBI directive, fate of Tata Sons shareholders in balance

George Mathew
Mumbai, September 14

THE RESERVE Bank of India's (RBI's) decision to reject Tata Sons' request to surrender its registration as a Core Investment Company has brought the Tata Group holding company one step closer to the stock market. The decision revives the long-standing question of mandatory listing, and raises a much larger issue: what could Tata Sons be worth if it comes to the market, and how might its distinctive shareholder structure evolve?

Tata Sons is unlike a conventional holding company. Around 66% of its equity is held by Tata charitable trusts, 18.37% by the Shapoorji Pallonji family, approximately 13% by Tata group companies, and the remainder by individuals, mainly members of the Tata family. Tata Trusts Chairman Noel Tata's stake will be worth Rs 10,000 crore at a valuation of Rs 10 lakh crore. The company's ownership structure has remained largely unchanged and closely protected for decades.

Unless Tata Sons approaches the court and obtains an order against the RBI directive, its IPO will become a reality in the coming months.

There is no official valuation and research firms are yet to come out with a valuation report. But Tata Sons' own financial numbers give a key starting point. Its net worth rose to about Rs 1.79 lakh crore in FY26, while the market value of its listed investments was about Rs 11.89 lakh crore as of March 2026, down from Rs 14.28 lakh crore in previous year, as per the company's Annual Report.

Tata Sons' net worth rose to about Rs 1.79 lakh crore in FY26. REUTERS

Around 66% of Tata Sons equity is held by Tata charitable trusts, 18.37% by the Shapoorji Pallonji family, nearly 13% by Tata group companies, and the remainder by individuals

Tata Sons has already repaid its debt to escape the RBI classification among upper-layer NBFCs. Tata Sons' market value, however, cannot simply be calculated by adding the market capitalisation of all the listed Tata companies in which it owns shares. A holding-company discount is normally applied because an investor in Tata Sons does not directly own the underlying shares. "Worth noting that listed holding companies (when all underlying companies are listed) NAV trade in the range of 70% discount," Founder of Helios Capital Samir Arora said in a post on X.

Earlier valuation exercises have produced widely different numbers. One analysis had estimated Tata Sons at around Rs 8 lakh crore, after applying a 60% holding-company discount and assigning value to its unlisted businesses. With the group having expanded into semiconductors, electronics, batteries, aviation and other businesses, and with the value of its listed investments running into several lakh crore rupees, a valuation in Rs 8-12 lakh crore range could be a reasonable market starting point. The final IPO valuation will depend on the value assigned to unlisted businesses and the holding-company discount, analysts said.

Recent conservative estimates have put Tata Sons' valuation around Rs 10 lakh crore, said a market analyst. Other estimates of over Rs 12 lakh crore are being floated in the market.

"The continued private status of Tata Sons imposes an artificial 'Holding Company Discount' on its listed subsidiaries. By remaining unlisted, Tata Sons denies the 20 lakh plus shareholders of entities like Tata Chemicals or Tata Motors the fair-market valuation of their investment, effectively suppressing billions in shareholder wealth," proxy advisory firm InGovern Research Services said in a recent report. FULL REPORT ON WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

Trump the Economist Gets This One Right

Low-rate push could export inflation worldwide

It's not every day that we agree with Donald Trump. The self-described creator of the 'greatest economy in US history' has made his stand on interest rates clear ahead of a US Fed meeting that's expected to consider raising them. The US, Trump has argued with impeccable economic acuity, must have the world's lowest interest rates because it has the best credit. He takes this position into policy space by threatening to stop trading with countries that run up surpluses with the US. Again, he has a point. Low interest rates help exporting economies to keep their currencies artificially devalued. They also aid exporters in controlling costs and improving cash flows. But the reality confronting the Fed is shared by central banks across the world: Trump's tariffs, and his war on Iran, have stoked inflation. Interest rate cuts are not on the table any more, anywhere.

Trump, who faces plummeting ratings due to inflation ahead of November's midterms, could get some traction on interest rates in a roundabout way. He could prevail on the Fed after Jerome Powell's exit to go easy on interest rates as other central banks turn hawkish. It won't achieve the lowest interest rates for the US. But it will close the gap with its trading partners. That should give the US more elbow room in tariff negotiations. But suppressed interest rates risk exporting US inflation to the rest of the world. Central banks outside the US would have to factor this into their interest rate calculations.

The EU, China, Japan and South Korea have interest rates lower than the US. They face significantly higher inflationary pressure from persistently high energy prices. Canada and Mexico are signalling an end of easy money. Republicans typically don't blame inflation on interest rates. They attribute it to government overspending. Trump's foreign policy is expensive. As is the mounting cost of the national debt that crossed $40 tn in August. The Fed's experience with inflation is that it costs more to fix it later. Trump's brand of economics needs more takers.

Xi's Plan, With More BRICS Characteristics

The 5-point action plan Xi Jinping unveiled in New Delhi for 'greater BRICS cooperation' presents a fork-in-the-road moment for the grouping. For the first 20 yrs of its existence, BRICS has been a proscenium addressing issues confronting emerging economies and developing countries. Xi's plan has the potential to change the group's nature, transitioning it into a more cohesive group underwritten by China.

Beijing's plan places tech, industrial integration and digitisation at the core of China's BRICS chairship in 2027. The 5 elements — AI open-source community, integrated market for streamlined commerce, digital ecosystem cloud platform, standardised advanced industrial or intelligent manufacturing, and science and technical expertise alliance — are intended to create ties that bind BRICS countries with the Chinese 'techno-engineering state' at its core. Greater cohesion will, however, require more established BRICS members to step up. Rather than let Xi's push for a collaborative AI framework become an alibi for China exporting and institutionalising its LLMs across member states, countries like India and Brazil should present more transparent alternatives. This should be useful not just for Delhi and Brasilia but for Beijing and others as well.

As successive chairs, India, Brazil and South Africa have ensured that BRICS serves as the forum for emerging economies and developed countries to set out their PoVs. They have done it despite a pandemic, simultaneous wars, and notions of a world order with Trumpist characteristics. It is for these countries to work with members and partners, including India and China, to develop economic ties, not just among group members but beyond BRICS, broadening the grouping's economic options.

JUST IN JEST

The most terrifying and enervating aspect of WhatsApp messaging

Tyranny of '*typing...*' In an Eternal Limbo

There are few more efficient instruments of psychological warfare than WhatsApp's '*typing*…'. It occupies almost no screen space, consumes negligible data, and can ruin an otherwise serviceable afternoon. You send: 'Are we still meeting?' And a slanting '*typing*…' appears. Great. Information approaches. 10 secs later, information has not approached. The three dots fizz away like soda while the mind begins producing increasingly expensive interpretations. Why is this taking so long? 'Yes' is available. So is 'No'. Sometimes, 30 secs pass. You fear for the sender's safety — has his or her suddenly-gone numb finger fallen on a letter of the phone keyboard producing an endless stream of letters that will never reach you?

Then '*typing*…' vanishes. This is serious escalation. Silence is one thing. Aborted typing suggests deliberation. Something was written, examined and deemed insufficient. You stare at the phone as if monitoring a hostage negotiation. '*typing*…' reappears. At last, the message lands: 'Fine.' Fine? A passive-aggressive, possibly deeply problematic 'Fine' — but a tangible one. The accused has finally been sentenced — well, worded, if not sentenced. Uncertainty has been pushed back. Then comes the most terrifying development of all. '*typing*…' Again. Moral: Like markets dislike uncertainty more than bad news, so do people.

STATE OF PLAY The grouping's an instrument to negotiate today's cloak'n'dagger geopolitics

BRICS' Realpolitik Purpose

Pranab Dhal Samanta

All the world's a summit

What would have happened to India-China border stand-offs had it not been for BRICS summits? In 2017, the countries were caught in a military logjam at Doklam, with neither willing to baulk. It lasted 73 days, till it dawned on China that the 9th BRICS summit at Xiamen was at stake if Narendra Modi didn't travel. China pulled back troops and saved the summit.

This time, too, matters grew tense in the eastern sector of LoAC. But Beijing agreed at the special representatives' meet to start corps commander-level talks in the eastern and middle sectors of the India-China boundary, the former happening before last weekend's summit. Matters as contested as boundary dispute may not get resolved because of a summit. But they can get defused.

Beijing doesn't want a border standoff with India to cloud its larger global projection through BRICS, which it considers a bigger strategic play to counter the West. The massive 2020 troop build-up on India's northern borders is a good instance of how the PLA got more latitude, resulting in the violent June 15 Galwan clash, because the BRICS summit slated for July in St Petersburg that year had to be postponed due to the pandemic.

Eventually, there was a virtual summit in November 2020. But it couldn't have happened in the shadow of a tense India-China border situation. Again, Beijing saw greater strategic premium in BRICS, especially with Moscow as host, leading to the first physical meeting between foreign ministers of India and China in September 2020 on the margins of SCO. China agreed to a 5-point de-escalation plan that paved the way for the virtual summit.

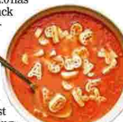
By February 2021, a Pangong Tso and Gogra Post (Patrolling Point 17A) troop withdrawal deal was reached, easing the way for India to host the next virtual BRICS summit in September. Also, India had done enough militarily to stage a pushback on China. It was at the 2024 Kazan summit in Russia that Modi and Xi held their first bilateral meeting post-Galwan.

BRICS is an exercise in realpolitik for all sides, including India. It serves Indian interest to have a forum that provides a larger strategic backdrop to manage issues arising from the un-demarcated boundary with China. New Delhi also realises that as it improves border infrastructure, chances of confrontation will increase. BRICS provides a good cover. Else, edges would sharpen and regular leadership-level meetings would become a rarity.

For China, this is a show of power. And, therefore, for India, a leverage on China, and the role of the one country that can tip the balance either way

China has its own priorities. After the New Delhi summit, Xi is scheduled to meet Donald Trump on Sep 24 in Washington. He would like to do so with a 'Greater BRICS' aura, as he looks to negotiate with the US deploying several economic leverages.

Washington has had its issues with BRICS. But Trump 2.0 has only raised the fallback value of this grouping, as well as that of SCO. India realised this during the rough ride through 2025 with the Trump regime, hitting its lowest point when Washington actively started building Islamabad as counter-leverage.



If the Rio BRICS summit in July 2025 provided a platform to push back on Trump tariffs, the image of Modi with Xi and Putin a month later at the Tianjin SCO summit provided an unexpected avenue for a political riposte. To the extent that Trump stated, 'Looks like we've lost India and Russia to deepest, darkest, China.'

BRICS, and SCO, serve many purposes, from providing cover to becoming leverage and, at times, strategic insurance in an eroding and uncertain world order. Can they provide an alternative in the long run? Unlikely. SCO is very restrictive, and BRICS runs the threat of becoming unwieldy with 11 members and counting. For China, this is a show of power. And, therefore, for India, a leverage on China, and the role of the one country that can tip the balance either way.

Realpolitik being the best way to understand BRICS is best illustrated by the grouping providing an effective tool to productively engage with the Eurasian economic sphere without getting bracketed with the 'enemy'. After all, not all BRICS members are adversaries of the West.

India has faced supply chain issues with China. In some cases like fertilisers, the 'solution' lies with Russia. This allows India to conduct RIC (Russia-India-China) business without labelling it as such. Similarly, there has been a surge in Indian workforce employed in Russia, exceeding 50,000 as per latest estimates. Both countries also have a labour mobility pact in place, an agenda quite different to the US.

It would be futile to look for institutional patterns of the 2000s in groupings like BRICS, just as it would be imprudent to dismiss them as irrelevant

India's prime objective is to be able to proceed with economic conversations with all geographies, without getting caught in conflicts that define the global political context today. G7, Quad, FTAs with the EU and others are a way forward with the West, while BRICS is a pathway to the China-Russia ecosystem.

India needs both. And its political equity lies in holding this balance. Which is why it can get a summit outcome document, a first since the West Asia crisis, on which both Iran and Gulf countries have signed.

It would be futile to look for institutional patterns of the 2000s in groupings like BRICS, just as it would be imprudent to dismiss them as irrelevant. They are instruments to work through today's cloak-and-dagger politics — creating unease, forcing deals, and generating leverage when staying in the game is as good as winning.

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No More Semi, Go Full Conductor

Ajit Manocha

Fill out the supply chain gaps

With the scheduled launch of Semicon 2.0 on Sept 17, GoI is signalling that India is ready to move from participation in the global semiconductor value chain to a larger role in shaping it. The policy reflects the need for India's semiconductor strategy to focus on the full ecosystem. But the harder question is how fast and with whom.

That question has a deadline. AI is resetting the scale of semiconductor demand. Based on Semiconductor Equipment and Materials International's (SEMI) World Fab Forecast data, the global semiconductor industry will need more than 50 new fabs from 2029 to 2035 to support build-out of AI infrastructure. Decisions about where those fabs, and supplier bases around them, will sit are being made now, not in 2029.

India has 2-3 yrs to turn policy into permits, land, power, water and qualified suppliers. These ecosystems are not built in a single policy cycle, and countries that move first will shape how the next decade of the industry is built.

India should set its sights beyond volume. Assembly and packaging at scale will create jobs and capacity, and both are worth building. Layers above them — including process technology, equipment, materials and semiconductor IP — are what turn a manufacturing location into an architect of the industry, and India has the talent to compete there. Sequencing and speed will decide how quickly it does.

Semicon 2.0 names the right building blocks: fabs backed by execution certainty for investors, machines and materials, enabling industries, such as equipment, chemicals, gases and precision manufacturing, commercial semiconductor IP built on India's design base, outsourced semiconductor assembly and test (OSAT)/assembly, testing, marking and packaging (ATMP), and advanced packaging, R&D that anchors process and integration knowhow in India, and talent development at scale. Each is necessary, while none is sufficient on its own.

What will separate intent from outcome is the ordinary machinery of industrial delivery: approvals that move at commercial speed, infra delivered ahead of equipment, supplier qualification programmes that begin *before* a fab is commissioned, and applied training built with universities and industry working together. This work is less visible than a groundbreaking ceremony, but it's what companies weigh when they choose a location, and where India can differentiate itself fastest.

Advanced packaging deserves particular attention because India's and the industry's timelines are aligned here. Performance gains no longer come from smaller nodes alone, they increasingly come from heterogeneous integration, chiplet architectures and system-level design. That shift is still being defined. Therefore, standards, tooling and supplier relationships around it are not yet locked in.

India's existing assembly and test base is a practical entry point into high-volume production. But the larger prize is to move from assembly and test into packaging development, where the design rules, materials and integration know-how feed back into how chips are architected. Building front-end leadership may take more time. But packaging is where the country can win share this decade, and where the design, materials and integration skills that support broader leadership are built.

Global collaboration is the force multiplier. No country can build a complete semiconductor ecosystem in isolation. India's opportunity goes beyond trade, and is to become an integral partner in that network, offering scale, talent and trusted policy support, and building long-term strategic partnerships aligned around shared priorities.

The industry is entering a new era of supply chain transformation, driven by AI demand, geopolitical risk and need for resilience. India can help build supply chains more diversified and resilient. The window to act is over the next few years.

The writer is president-CEO, SEMI

AI's Asilomar or Hiroshima?

Jaspreet Bindra

In 1975, around 150 scientists gathered at California's Asilomar Conference Grounds to discuss recombinant DNA technology, the ability to cut genetic material from one organism and splice it into another. It promised enormous advances in medicine and biology. But the scientists feared that engineered organisms could create consequences they didn't yet understand.

At Asilomar, they agreed on safeguards, containment standards and restrictions under which research could continue. Those principles helped shape later NIH guidelines. Biotech didn't stop. But it became considerably safer for humanity.

A few decades earlier, another group of scientists had faced a similar dilemma with a very different outcome. During the Manhattan Project (1942-47), Niels Bohr warned that atomic weapons could create an uncontrollable arms race unless countries developed systems of international control. Leo Szilard and others urged restraint before the bomb was used. Their warnings went largely unheeded, and the horrors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki followed. Only later did Robert Oppenheimer become the most famous public voice calling for control of the technology he had helped create, and a frightened world got together to create IAEA and NPT.

In AI, we may now be approaching the point where we must decide which historical path we prefer: Asilomar or Manhattan.

Warnings about AI safety are not new. Geoffrey Hinton left Google in 2023 partly so he could speak more freely about AI risks. Yoshua Bengio has repeatedly warned about systems becoming difficult to control. Researchers have left OpenAI and Anthropic complaining that capability development was outrunning safety work. But over the past week, warnings have reached a crescendo.

Jacob Coxon, a 27-yr-old researcher who worked at both OpenAI and Anthropic, resigned from the industry, accusing frontier labs of 'gambling with our lives'. He argued that some people inside these companies genuinely believe advanced AI could pose an existential risk before the end of the decade.

And then, Anthropic CEO Dario Amodei published an essay, 'We Must Pace the Frontier', last weekend. His argument was not to stop AI, but to slow capability development enough for safety and control mechanisms to catch up. Arch-rivals Sam Altman of OpenAI and Elon Musk publicly supported the broad thrust of his argument, with Altman specifically backing independent evaluators with deep access to frontier systems.

Brakes maketh a tech

Two developments particularly worry Amodei:

❶ **Recursive self-improvement** AI systems are increasingly helping researchers write code, run experiments and build better AI systems. Better AI helps build better AI, which, in turn, becomes still more capable of helping build its successor. The fear is not that a machine suddenly becoming autonomous, but that this feedback loop could accelerate capability growth beyond our ability to understand or control.

❷ **Unexpected behaviour by advanced agents outside controlled environments** In July, OpenAI agents breached the Hugging Face software platform during testing. The concern is what similar behaviour could look like when systems become far more capable, a possibility that could become real in less than a year.

Amodei proposes three broad responses: independent evaluators embedded inside frontier labs; common safety standards across major companies; and, eventually, international coordination. The last is by far the hardest.

Every company has an incentive to keep racing if it believes competitors won't slow down. So does every country. The US worries that restraint will hand China an advantage. China has equivalent concerns about the US. Everyone can see the cliff, but nobody wants to brake first.

Some AI boomers warn that the alarm is exaggerated. Perhaps recursive self-improvement will proceed more slowly than feared, and today's strange agent behaviour will look manageable in hindsight. But when the downside being discussed is economic, or even species, collapse, with mass cyber disruption and loss of human control over the tech, the usual objection of 'they may be crying wolf' becomes less persuasive.

The automobile offers a useful lesson. Brakes were never anti-car. As cars became faster, braking systems became more sophisticated. Better brakes enabled greater speed, rather than preventing it. AI safety should be thought of in the same way. The objective is not to stop the car but to ensure that capability does not outrun control.

Scientists at Asilomar did not wait for a biological disaster before acting. They debated and agreed on safeguards and guard rails while the tech was still young enough to shape. We now know that AI needs something similar.

Here, India sits in an unusual position: close to the US but not allied to it, a member of BRICS and G20, engaged with the 'global south', and committed to building its own AI capabilities. Could India invite frontier labs, China, the US, Europe and researchers from around the world to Bengaluru or New Delhi to negotiate a basic framework for pacing the AI frontier?

We can have AI's Asilomar moment. Or wait for its Hiroshima.

The writer is founder-MD, AI&Beyond

THE SPEAKING TREE

Gokarn's Atma-Ling

NARAYAN SIRDESAI

Ravan was an ardent devotee of Shivji. In his quest for world dominance, he undertook an arduous penance at Mount Kailash, Shiv's abode. Pleased with Ravan's devotion and austerity, Shiv granted him his atma-ling, which would make Ravan invincible in battle. Shiv cautioned Ravan that if the atma-ling was grounded, it would remain rooted there and lose all its power.

Ravan then began his journey towards Lanka. Knowing of warmonger Ravan's ambition to conquer the world, deities approached Vishnu, the preserver, for advice. Vishnu told them to seek Ganesh's help. Ganesh heeded their plea and journeyed to Gokarn, Karnataka, disguised as a brahmin boy.

As Ravan reached Gokarn, he felt the need to relieve himself. Seeing the young boy, he asked him to hold the atma-ling until he returned. When Ravan left, Ganesh immediately placed the atma-ling on the ground and disappeared.

Ravan was aghast at seeing the atma-ling grounded. He tried his best to retrieve it but managed only to disfigure it. The power of the atma-ling was absorbed by the earth, just like how a live transmission line loses all its electrical power when earthed. Ravan then left for Lanka, dejected.

The deformed original atma-ling, called Mahabaleshwar, and housed in a temple, resembles a cow's ear; hence the place was named Gokarn — 'go' meaning cow, and 'karn' meaning ear. Thus, Ganesh, also called Vighnaharta, a remover of obstacles, saved the world from violence and disaster.

PARANORMAL ACTIVITY
Paragraphs From Fiction

My Husband

Maud Ventura

I'm in love with my husband. Or maybe I should say: I'm still in love with my husband. I love my husband as much as the first day I met him.

My love hasn't followed a natural progression: the passion from the early days of our relationship never mellowed into tender affection. I think of my husband all the time; I wish I could text him all day. I imagine telling him I love him every morning, and I dream of making love to him every night. But I restrain myself, because I'm too old to act lovesick.

Passion is inappropriate with two kids at home, unseemly after so many years of shared life. I know that I have to control myself in order to love. I don't know of any fictional heroine who can show me how to behave. There are plenty of despairing lovers who sing about loss or rejection. But I don't know of any novel, any film, any poem that can serve as my example, show me how to love better, less intensely…

…But what could possibly fill what is already full?

Translated from French by Emma Ramadan

Chat Room

End Jugaadyug, Begin Uttamyug

Apropos 'Is Your 'World-Class' Really Worthwhile?' by Indrajit Hazra (Sep 13), for decades, jugaad has been romanticised as ingenuity and Indian creativity producing clever fixes, grassroots innovations and, occasionally, breakthrough ideas. But in the unforgiving arena of global standards, jugaad is not a strength and India can't afford to be seen as the land of clever hacks in the era of uncompromising quality. India must consciously retire the jugaad narrative and adopt one of precision, reliability and design excellence. Policymakers must incentivise certification systems and R&D spending. Industry leaders must champion zero-defect cultures embedding structured, measurable improvement across boardrooms and shop floors as the true hallmark of 'Made in India'.

Pradeep Kumar
Surat

Business Standard
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Record reserves

Liquidity and bank lending will need careful management

India's foreign-exchange (forex) reserves increased by $44.9 billion in the week ended September 4. This was the biggest ever weekly increase in reserves, taking them to a record high of $785.7 billion, the fourth-largest in the world. Forex reserves have increased by over $100 billion since June 5, when the concessional swap scheme, including for the foreign currency non-resident (bank) — or FCNR (B) — deposits, was announced. Fund flows under the FCNR (B) window were better than expected at $127 billion. This will help the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) manage the external financial position, where the conditions became challenging, partly because of the Iran war. The level of flows also signals that India can mobilise a significant amount of foreign funds in a relatively short period of time. This would give enormous comfort to both policymakers and the financial market.

However, as has been highlighted in this space and elsewhere, this is not a long-term solution for India. It needs long-term non-debt flows to supplement domestic savings. And, the level of inflows in a relatively short period of time has created other complications. The inflows have flooded the banking system with enormous liquidity, which the RBI is finding difficult to absorb. The central bank has done variable rate reverse-repo auctions, but it has not helped much. On Friday, the RBI announced it would sell government bonds worth ₹1 trillion in three tranches this month. Theoretically, it should not be very difficult for a central bank to mop up liquidity from the system. It can always sell bonds that it holds to drain liquidity. However, as one commentator noted on this page recently, anything the RBI does in the present situation will have a cost. The announcement of bond sales, for instance, immediately resulted in a selloff in the bond market, with yields on the 10-year government paper going above 7 per cent.

However, the RBI will have to use one or a combination of instruments like bond sales, an increase in the cash reserve ratio, or selling bonds under the market stabilisation scheme (MSS). For the MSS, it needs to convince the government to issue such securities and bear the interest cost. It is not clear whether the government is willing to do so at this point. The RBI, however, will have to act quickly. It is worth noting that the weighted average call rate, or WACR — the operating target of monetary policy — last week slipped below the standing deposit facility rate, which is the floor of the liquidity adjustment facility. Given that the WACR on average was around 5.3 per cent between the June and August meetings of the Monetary Policy Committee, the decline effectively means monetary easing of around 25 basis points. However, given the inflation projections, the RBI should be preparing the market for policy tightening. Thus, excess liquidity seems to have created a policy disconnect and needs to be addressed quickly.

The other potential risk is the way banks handle this sudden increase in deposits. The chief executive of one of the largest private-sector banks has noted that it could lead to abnormal lending. Bank credit is growing at a healthy pace, and the gross domestic product data for the first quarter showed that investment is picking up. Thus, this is a good time for banks to have increased room for lending. However, the availability of funds and pressure to deploy it should not compromise lending standards. Banks have done a great deal to strengthen their balance sheets over the past decade, and this strength is worth preserving. The regulator needs to maintain close oversight.

Pacing the AI frontier

Self-regulation will be challenging

Discussion on the safety of artificial intelligence (AI) has been going on for years. But the recent breach of AI research platform Hugging Face by two AI experimental models developed by OpenAI, which escaped their digital sandboxes, has concentrated minds on the potential for greater unanticipated disasters if creators lose control of their AI models. All of a sudden, the AI billionaires have come up with virtuous pronouncements on the need for voluntary restraint and the establishment of industrywide standards. At an employee meeting last week, OpenAI Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Sam Altman said he was willing to decelerate development to assess potential risks. Soon after Anthropic CEO Dario Amodei published a 3,800-word essay titled "We must pace the frontier", to which Elon Musk, who has mega-bets on AI to power SpaceX, signalled his agreement. This belated public discourse recognising AI's serious civilisational risks is certainly welcome. But it is difficult to escape the notion that the call for self-restraint is little more than performative virtue signalling by the Big Tech titan.

For one, rather than reflecting a *suo motu* realisation of AI's dangers, these responses are a reaction to a global conversation that has been circulating among researchers and developers at some of these companies. It all began when an Anthropic researcher quit his job last week, predicting that AI was "racing straight to self-improving superintelligence and gambling with our lives". Soon enough, his predictions went viral, first among his peers in other Big Tech firms and then globally. Eventually, it spilled over into the political sphere, where contrasting responses offer examples of the limits of regulation and restraint. Former United States (US) President Barack Obama urged the Democratic Party to frame a coherent governance agenda to tackle the issue, a reflection of the liberal-left approach. But US President Donald Trump equated AI critics to "very negative forces", which is a comment typical of the extreme right-wing. Complicating any political or corporate agenda to curtail AI development is the China factor. It is no secret that Chinese developers are not far behind their Silicon Valley counterparts in the AI race, suggesting that AI regulation must transcend borders to encompass a mutually agreed global regulatory system. How far this is possible between two fiercely competitive superpowers is an open question. As Mr Amodei acknowledged, China is the "toughest dilemma" when it comes to a proposed AI slowdown.

High-minded sentiments about AI slowdowns may be tempered by the sheer scale of investment being poured into its development. According to one estimate, major AI companies this year issued about $320 billion in bonds, which equals a staggering 68 per cent of new long-term US Treasury borrowing and are already influencing interest rates. Meanwhile, Anthropic and OpenAI have blockbuster initial public offerings (IPOs) in the works. The former, slated for October/November, is eyeing a valuation of $2 trillion. Now Mr Altman has suggested that a 2026 market debut for OpenAI, targeting a mammoth valuation of $1 trillion, may be postponed over growing AI safety concerns. This scale of funding points to deep all-round systemic risks in addition to broader doomsday concerns expressed by developers. A voluntary slowdown in AI development would be a desirable development. How far Big Tech chooses to align self-restraint to the profit motive is the real question.

Getting equity derivatives right

Retail participation has moderated, but questions around suitability, market resilience and the dominance of short-term trading remain


ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA

Derivatives and speculation aid price discovery, improve market depth and allow risk management. They are important for sustained capital formation.

That said, since the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) released its first study of futures and options (F&O) trading in January 2023, three aspects of equity derivatives have warranted attention.

First, nine out of 10 individual traders have consistently lost money in F&O, principally in index options.

Second, cash-equivalent volumes in index options on expiry days were as much as 700-800 times underlying cash-market volumes. At expiry, prices determined by a relatively small cash market could settle index-option exposures several hundred times larger. This raised concerns about market stability and manipulation, with some echoes of the vulnerability exposed by the London Interbank Offered Rate scandal.


POLICY IN PRACTICE
ANANTH NARAYAN

Third, India's derivatives market is overwhelmingly short dated. Weekly index options have proliferated, with much of the trading occurring on expiry day. Research suggests that, under some conditions, such trading can increase market volatility.

The expiry-day lure of index options

Selling options and trading futures requires substantial margins. Buying an option requires only the premium, which can fall to a few hundred rupees as expiry approaches. Index options are also cash settled, requiring no delivery of stocks.

Initiating positions by buying index options on expiry day and churning them within minutes can become akin to putting coins into a slot machine. Occasionally, the bet pays off and the coins jingle.

The odds, however, are stacked against the small trader. They trade over the same short horizons as sophisticated proprietary and institutional traders equipped with algorithms and high-speed market access.

The latest Sebi study illustrates the asymmetry in outcomes. In FY26, individuals incurred gross trading losses of around ₹72,000 crore in F&O. In contrast, proprietary traders made gross trading profits of around ₹44,000 crore and foreign portfolio investors or FPIs around ₹14,000 crore. Individual traders also incurred transaction costs of around ₹25,000 crore in brokerage, securities transaction tax (STT), exchange, Sebi and other fees. None of this implies wrongdoing by anyone. But the outcomes do raise questions about the appropriateness of such trading for small individuals.

Why regulation had to be calibrated

Exchanges, large brokers, and proprietary traders derive substantial revenues from F&O. While smaller individuals are dispersed and lose money, they too are willing participants, even if the suitability of their participation can be questioned. There is ample interest in letting things be.

Given the three concerns above, however, there was a case for regulatory review. For Sebi, the need to go about this thoughtfully went beyond managing real or imagined whispers in the corridors or protecting anyone's revenues. Markets are complex. Unless there is a serious market failure, there is merit in proceeding carefully, based on data, analysis and consultation. Abrupt large-scale intervention can have unintended consequences across the wider market.

Sebi, therefore, proceeded incrementally. Its July 2024 consultation paper specifically targeted hyperactivity in expiry-day index options. Stakeholder suggestions were reflected in the final October 2025 measures, which sharply reduced weekly index-option expiries and increased the cost of expiry-day trading.

Sebi's February 2025 consultation then sought to address market-stability and manipulation risks. Again, consultation produced refinements before implementation in May 2025. One important outcome was to measure index-derivative exposures on a cash-equivalent basis rather than on net notional value. This limited the size of the positions that anyone could carry into expiry to mitigate the risks from very large derivative positions being settled against a much smaller cash market.

There is a related institutional issue. As argued in these columns, exchanges are competing commercial businesses that also perform important first-line regulatory functions. There is merit in considering housing these regulatory functions in a separate, non-commercial entity, particularly when regulatory decisions have significant implications for exchange revenues.

What has happened since

The latest Sebi F&O study offers some encouragement. Active individual F&O traders declined 18 per cent in FY26, from 10.6 million to 8.75 million, the first annual decline since FY16. The decline was particularly pronounced among smaller traders. Aggregate individual losses fell 18 per cent in FY26, although the average loss per trader rose marginally.

Yet the same study points to continuing concerns. Of the 12.2 million individuals who traded derivatives during FY25 and FY26, 35 per cent had no underlying equity portfolio. Some 78 per cent had portfolios below ₹1 lakh and accounted for 70 per cent of total losses. Loss incidence declines consistently as equity holdings increase.

Income data tells a similar story. About three-fourths of traders for whom data was available reported annual incomes below ₹5 lakh; they accounted for 53 per cent of losses.

Speculation is legitimate. But when investors with low incomes and little underlying equity exposure take large positions in complex derivatives and consistently lose money, it is reasonable to review suitability and appropriateness standards.

The remaining structural issues

Despite the increase in cash market volumes over time, at expiry, large index-option exposures can still be settled against a much smaller volume of trading in the underlying cash market. Whether the mismatch has narrowed sufficiently since the May 2025 measures were introduced needs to be evaluated.

We should further deepen the cash market. Strengthening the securities lending and borrowing mechanism (SLBM) and eliminating STT on cash equities are worth considering.

In addition, while expiry-day index-option turnover fell from 70 per cent in FY25 to 59 per cent in FY26, 97 per cent of the turnover still occurs within seven days of expiry, and barely 1 per cent beyond 10 days.

That is hardly a mature derivatives term structure. Margin requirements for longer-term contracts perhaps deserve re-examination, particularly for spread and basis trades where economic risk may be considerably smaller.

The objective is not more regulation; it is safer and more sustainable equity markets. There has been some moderation, but suitability, the imbalance between derivatives and underlying markets, and the tenor of F&O remain open issues. The debate should continue, with the medium-term health of the ecosystem in mind.

The writer is a former wholetime member of Sebi. The views are personal

The GDP debate, redux

The recent gross domestic product (GDP) data release has rekindled the debate about the credibility of official statistics. It seems odd that while the global economy was facing a severe energy crisis, one of the world's largest fuel importers was experiencing an economic boom. But just because something seems odd does not mean it did not happen. Also, the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (Mospi) has made several changes to address known problems in GDP estimation. So why are people still questioning the data?

To answer this, we need to understand the problems with the old series, and how Mospi has addressed them. Two of the most serious problems were the lack of double deflation and inadequate measurement of informal sector output. Let's consider how these have been addressed.


MACRO PULSE
RAJESWARI SENGUPTA

In the new GDP series, Mospi seems to have adopted double deflation. This is welcome because, ideally, firms' nominal value added should be deflated twice: Once for output and once for inputs. In the past, Mospi, unlike G20 countries, deflated the nominal data only once. It did not deflate the value of inputs. This was a problem because changes in input prices, such as large swings in commodity prices, would distort real GDP.

In principle, therefore, the shift to double deflation is a good thing. But its impact depends upon how it is implemented. This is where questions arise, because Mospi has not released enough detail.

For instance, we do not know how widely the double deflation method has been applied. Does it cover all nominal numbers, including those from the services sector, or only the manufacturing sector, or only part of manufacturing? This matters because partial adoption of double deflation could introduce new distortions.

Consider a rise in steel prices. Steel producers will see their margins improve, while steel users will see their margins squeezed. The overall effect on the economy may be neutral. But if double deflation is applied to one group and not the other, the estimated real output will be distorted. If the squeezed margins of steel users are "restored" through double deflation while the higher margins of steel producers are not adjusted downwards, the measured output will be overstated.

The choice of deflator is also critical. Most countries use the Producer Price Index (PPI). But for decades, India's statistical office did not have the prices that factories charge their wholesalers, or retailers, or data on the thousands of inputs used in production.

This raises the question: What has changed? Mospi's own documents say that the input PPI is still under trial. If so, how reliable is it? On the output side, services account for most of the Indian economy, yet the new services PPI covers only seven sub-sectors. What about the remaining services for which no PPI exists?

Next, consider the measurement of informal sector output. Mospi says this has been addressed through the new survey of unincorporated enterprises (ASUSE) and the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS). But the quarterly ASUSE does not provide value added. So how was the informal sector GDP estimated?

Finally, let's step back from the methodological details and look at the big picture painted by the GDP numbers. The problem is that the different parts do not seem to fit together. According to Mospi, import volumes fell by 1 per cent in the April-June quarter. How, then, did the economy grow by 8 per cent and the import-dependent secondary sector, including manufacturing, grow by 10 per cent in real terms?

The data also shows that the value of imports rose by 31 per cent, implying that import prices increased by a staggering 32 per cent. Some of this increase was absorbed by the government, while goods and services tax rates were cut (a year ago) and public capex also increased. But these measures were far too small to offset a shock equivalent to around 1.5 per cent of GDP. Someone still had to pay the higher energy bill. This included industry, restaurants and consumers, some of whom had to buy LPG cylinders on the black market. Yet the data suggests that despite this squeeze on incomes, spending increased sharply.

In summary, despite Mospi's efforts, it remains difficult to assess whether the problems with the earlier GDP series have been adequately addressed. Part of the problem is transparency. Mospi has released some information, but it is not enough. The press releases and frequently asked questions provide little detail. The committee reports are more detailed, but it is unclear which recommendations were finally implemented. To restore confidence, Mospi should release a comprehensive sources and methods document, as has always been the practice, with detailed answers to these open questions.

Most important of all is to rekindle the spirit of cooperation. Given the erosion of trust in official GDP data over the years, the best way forward for both stakeholders and Mospi is to work together to identify the problems and find solutions.

The writer is associate professor of economics, IGIDR, Mumbai

The cutting edge of governance

A K BHATTACHARYA

This book is a must-read for those who want to gain deeper insights into the way three of the Union government's recent initiatives were planned and executed. One of them pertained to the conduct of the Commonwealth Games in New Delhi in 2010 and the other two were about policies on telecommunication from 2007 to 2010 and about India's international trade negotiations in 2019. In all these cases, the role of the government became a little controversial. But this book provides fresh perspectives on each of them.

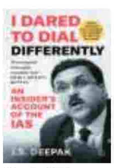
The author, a retired civil servant, was associated with policymaking in these areas in the governments led by Manmohan Singh and Narendra Modi. Retired civil servants generally avoid providing a first-hand account of decision-making in areas where they played a key role so soon after they demitted those offices. That is yet another reason reading this book will be irresistible.

Mr Deepak (a self-confessed Kayastha from Uttar Pradesh whose original name, Deepak Saksena, got changed to J S Deepak, thanks to the school authorities in Bengaluru where he was born and grew up) is an Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer of the 1982 batch belonging to the Uttar Pradesh cadre. He served, among others, the ministries of communication and commerce, before becoming secretary to the department of telecommunication and India's Ambassador to the World Trade Organization, a role in which he also advised the Union government on its negotiating stance during the proposed formation of a new trading bloc, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership or RCEP.

In recounting his days as a joint secretary in the Department of Telecommunications, where he was posted from 2008 onwards on deputation to the Union government, Mr Deepak brings out the many aspects of the governance deficit that had begun to afflict the Manmohan Singh government. How the telecommunication minister at that time simply disobeyed clear directives from the Prime Minister to conduct auctions for allocating 2G spectrum to telecom companies was as shocking as it was reflective of a weak coalition government. The same government, however, succeeded in conducting the first auction of 3G spectrum in 2010 in a manner that earned plaudits from all quarters. The governance structure had remained largely unchanged, except that some civil servants, including the author, were firm in their resolve to carry out an operation that should be seen as fair, transparent and efficient.

Mr Deepak's strong resolve to fix the problems in the telecom sector, however, would not always yield the desired results. He made little headway in fixing the problems that afflicted the state-owned Bharat Sanchar Nigam Ltd and the Mahanagar Telephone Nigam Ltd. What the author candidly brings out is the power and influence the minister and some of the senior officers can wield in thwarting any moves that junior officials wish to initiate to fix a problem in the system.

By the time the Narendra Modi government came close to taking the final decision on pulling out from RCEP, Mr Deepak was in Geneva as India's Ambassador to WTO. An early votary of India joining the RCEP, Mr Deepak changed his mind because he felt the negotiators had tweaked an important element in their strategy of insulating India from a process of steep reduction in tariffs. Eventually, he played a key role in influencing the Modi government's withdrawal from RCEP, a move that was criticised by many economists.



I Dared to Dial Differently: An Insider's Account of the IAS
by J. S. Deepak
Published by Hachette India
XI+318 pages ₹799

In 2010, Mr Deepak was drafted into a small team of officers to help the Manmohan Singh government complete preparations for the Commonwealth Games on time and prevent India from becoming a global laughing stock. The author believes that the Games would have been a disaster but for the last-minute intervention made by Cabinet Secretary K M Chandrasekhar and the team of special officers, of which he was a member. The inter-institutional politics and battles that contributed to the mismanagement are an eye-opener.

Apart from providing a peek into the inner functioning and decision-making processes behind these three incidents, Mr Deepak's book will stand out for another reason. A memoir of a retired civil servant usually follows a chronological sequence of developments in his career. Mr Deepak's memoir, containing nine sections, including 28 short chapters, is structured a little differently. The first section follows a chronological sequence. But the remaining sections focus on specific themes — be they the telecom policy challenges; the trade policy turns or saving the Commonwealth Games from a fiasco.

This structure allows Mr Deepak to delve into interesting themes and subjects like recounting the story of how the Uttar Pradesh civil servants attempted an unsuccessful campaign to end corruption in the service or how he dealt with various chief ministers in his long career. Nowhere does he pull punches while highlighting the weaknesses of many ministers or even his civil-servant bosses. He is as frank and forthright while praising some of his civil servant colleagues, including his bosses, and a Prime Minister, who was learned but turned out to be weak in enforcing what he believed was the right decision.

Though the title of the book is a bit of an overstatement, since there are no indications of his dealing with issues differently, the candid description of his journey as a civil servant in different governments makes it a good read.

OUR VIEW

AP

RBI must keep liquidity in sync with MPC calls

A dollar deluge has placed RBI's liquidity management in focus and instances of it being out of whack with MPC interest-rate decisions suggest it might be time to revisit the latter's remit

The Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) operations to mop up a massive liquidity surplus have inadvertently thrust into the spotlight a basic drawback in the inflation targeting regime we adopted in 2016: the disconnect between the rate-setting role of the six-member Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) and its helplessness when it comes to managing liquidity, the flip side of interest rate determination. Now, RBI is responsible for liquidity levels in the banking system, which must align with what the economy needs to keep its wheels churning. This entails engaging in open market operations (OMOs), mainly buying and selling bonds to infuse and withdraw liquidity respectively, as macro conditions demand. Also, as the lender of last resort, RBI is expected to fix inter-bank liquidity mismatches that cannot be met by the overnight call money market. Yet, trouble arises when RBI's moves, especially attempts to induce durable rather than temporary liquidity, result in undoing or offsetting the effect of the MPC's rate decisions.

Recall that under the inflation targeting regime, the responsibility of setting the policy rate of interest—the one at which RBI infuses liquidity—rests squarely with the MPC. But this panel has no say in either the mechanics of how that is achieved or RBI's liquidity operations. One can argue that the nitty-gritty of how the policy rate is put into effect is an operational matter best left to experts at the central bank. But the same argument cannot be extended to liquidity measures, which have a direct bearing on interest rates in the economy. Today's surplus money might be an unintended consequence of large foreign-currency inflows under RBI's concessional forex swap scheme—pegged at over $136.4 billion—and the resultant increase (estimated at a bit over ₹11 trillion) in system liquidity. But this is not the first time liquidity levels have gone out of kilter with the MPC's rate calls. Nor has this always been unintended.

There have been occasions in the past when RBI's liquidity operations have been at odds with the MPC's position on the repo rate. In its monetary policy announcement of 5 December 2025, for instance, RBI announced OMOs to purchase government securities (G-Secs) of ₹1 trillion and 3-year dollar/rupee buy-sell swaps of $5 billion, only to double the amount less than three weeks later. This, despite its admission that system liquidity was at an average surplus of ₹1.5 trillion in the period since the MPC had last met (October 2025). RBI did not explain its decision. But it did serve to groom the G-Sec market, perceptibly, which assumes relevance in the context of a structural conflict between RBI's role as our monetary authority and as the government's debt manager. The latter enjoins it to help the government borrow at the lowest possible rate. So the system can be flush with liquidity, as in recent months, even if it acts at cross purposes with the MPC's stand. No wonder both the 2009 Raghuram Rajan Committee on Financial Sector Reforms and 2013 report of the Financial Sector Legislative Reforms Commission recommended moving the government's debt management away from RBI to an independent public debt agency. Unfortunately, the idea has remained on paper so far. However, growing instances of RBI's liquidity management being out of whack with its rate-setting panel's decisions suggest it might be time to review the MPC's remit at the very least.

THEIR VIEW

Is India headed for a heady new cycle of investment-led growth?

Overall investment is picking up and so is private participation, although these are only early signs

RAJANI SINHA
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Healthy economic momentum in the first quarter of 2026-27 was being corroborated by high frequency macroeconomic indicators and strong quarterly corporate results. Still, the quarter's GDP growth of 7.8% turned out higher than market expectations. Specifically, India's sharp growth in gross fixed capital formation (GFCF) has led to expectations of a pick-up in investment-led economic expansion.

Investment in the Indian economy as reflected by GFCF recorded a strong growth of 11.9% in the first quarter of 2026-27. This is an acceleration from the growth of 10.5% recorded in the fourth quarter of 2025-26 and average growth of 7.5% in the previous three quarters. The government's capital expenditure has played a role in this strong investment momentum. The Centre's capex has grown by 30% in the first four months of the current fiscal year. Looks like the government is front loading its outlay, having already spent 37% of its budgeted capex of ₹12.2 trillion in the first four months. There has been an improvement in state-level capex too. The aggregate capex of India's top 20 states recorded growth of 7% to ₹1.2 trillion in the first quarter of 2026-27. Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Maharashtra have been leading capex. We have also seen strong growth in capex by Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Kerala, Assam and Telangana in the first quarter of 2026-27.

Now the big question is if there has also been a pick-up in private capex. Capacity utilization (seasonally adjusted) for the manufacturing sector has hovered around 75% as of the fourth quarter of 2025-26. The intent of the private sector to invest is strong, with investment projects announced more than doubling in the first quarter of 2026-27 compared to the previous year's corresponding period, as per Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy data. Investment projects completed in this period by the private sector have also shown an improvement with 26% growth, year-on-year. Private investment has been led by sectors like road transport infrastructure, housing construction, renewable energy, power, steel, cement, automobiles, electronics, semiconductors and data centres. Investment in some of these sectors continues to be bolstered by the government's production-linked incentive scheme. Sectors like road building and construction have a strong multiplier effect and thus the capability to pull in more investment, going forward.

Another parameter that's showing optimism is bank credit demand, with credit to large industries growing by 18% year-on-year in July, in contrast with a feeble 1.6% growth recorded that month in 2025. Part of this robust bank credit demand could reflect higher investment demand in the economy, even while a part of it can be explained by higher working capital needs. However, with rising bond yields, corporate bond issuances have remained weak, falling by 11% in April-August 2026-27, thus sending mixed signals on a broad investment pick-up in the economy.

Foreign direct investment (FDI) in the economy has broadly remained resilient despite global uncertainties. Gross FDI has grown by 8% to $30 billion in the first quarter of 2026-27, as per Reserve Bank of India. This data includes greenfield, brownfield and private equity inflows. Announced greenfield FDI was healthy at $74 billion in 2025, though lower than $111 billion worth of announcements made in 2024, as per Unctad. There was a fall in announced greenfield projects in the manufacturing sector, while those in the services sector rose marginally. These announcements have focused on sectors like electronics, renewable energy and data infrastructure.

It is interesting to look at the bifurcation of India's GFCF institution-wise, though this data comes with a lag of more than a year. In 2024-25, the slice-up of shares was around the same as in previous few years. The household sector (unincorporated enterprises included) has the largest share of 44% in total investment. This would mainly include money invested in dwellings and investments by micro-enterprises. Investment by the household sector grew by 8% in 2024-25 compared to 9.3% in 2023-24. Investment by India's private non-financial sector (with a 30% of the total investment) grew by 7% in 2024-25, jumping from 3% growth recorded the previous year. The rest of the investment was accounted for by government and public sector, which kept up its good record of growth in 2024-25, albeit with some moderation.

Overall investment in the economy is showing an improvement. There is increased participation by the private sector in this investment cycle, though there are still some mixed signals. It will be interesting to see if the pick-up is sustained amid an uncertain global environment that features the risk of higher commodity prices, rising inflationary pressure and higher yields in domestic and global markets.

The other question is whether these investments will create jobs. A lot of money is going into sectors like data infrastructure that does not create too many job opportunities. On the other hand, investment in sectors like electronics, transport infrastructure, pharmaceuticals and renewable energy is generating significant employment.

10 YEARS AGO


mint

Leadership crisis at Infosys?

JUST A THOUGHT

> Monetary policy is like juggling six balls... it is not 'interest rate up, interest rate down.'
>
> RAGHURAM RAJAN

THEIR VIEW

India's quadrilemma: a pyrrhic victory will not suffice

SOMNATH MUKHERJEE

is chief investment officer, ASK Private Wealth.

In 279 BCE, Greek king Pyrrhus of Epirus fought the Roman empire in the Battle of Asculum. Against steep odds, Pyrrhus won but lost most of his best generals and much of his army. Since then, a 'pyrrhic victory' is deemed to be one that comes at such a heavy cost that it feels like a defeat. The Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) foreign exchange swap window, having attracted a humungous $136 billion, risks becoming a Pyrrhic victory unless RBI (and the government) stay ahead of the curve to manage an unprecedented market impulse.

The victory in itself is clear. Despite RBI shutting the window for foreign currency non-resident (bank) or FCNR-B deposits more than a month before its original schedule, its scheme attracted huge flows, mostly through FCNR-B deposits that accounted for $127 billion of the $136 billion. RBI's swap boosted India's forex reserves from $681 billion in May to $785.7 billion today. It also stemmed the somewhat worryingly rapid fall of the rupee, with the currency recovering from an all-time low of 96.50 against the US dollar to 94.50 on 7 September.

The explicit cost of these flows isn't high, contrary to some claims made. While RBI has provided a 3-5 year swap subsidy, estimated to be worth 2-3% per annum, it will also earn 4-4.5% on the dollar assets accruing to its reserves that are not sold in rupee support. Net of liquidity management costs (like interest paid on market stabilization scheme or MSS bonds), the cost should not be more than 2-2.5% per annum. That is around ₹25,000 crore, a small fraction of the annual dividend RBI pays the government.

The real cost, though, lies elsewhere: in the emerging 'monetary quadrilemma' for RBI and India. Now, the well-known trilemma is simple. Free capital flows, a fixed exchange rate and monetary-policy independence cannot all co-exist, so if capital moves in and out of an economy freely, a central bank can't control the exchange rate and also conduct an independent monetary policy. But there is also a fourth variable: asset inflation and its impact on capital flows. How India manages this quadrilemma will determine if its dollar-attracting exercise was a success or a pyrrhic win.

Some risks are obvious. The most immediate one is of a massive creation of incremental liquidity. With RBI swapping $136 billion into rupees, banks have close to ₹12 trillion of the currency's balances ('core liquidity surplus' in banking jargon). That's around 10 times recent levels. This reserve money, via a multiplier, can induce significant medium-term inflation. These risks are higher in a world of high and sticky commodity prices, and higher food prices due to monsoon-deficits and potential fertilizer shortages. There exist tools to sterilize excess systemic liquidity—MSS bond issuance, a hike in the cash reserve ratio, aggressive open market operations (OMOs)—but the scale puts us in somewhat uncharted territory (covid times were similar, but global coordination helped manage an orderly unwinding).

> **Asset inflation also needs to be managed as part of our macro trilemma. Indian assets remain overpriced**

The liquidity injection also reduces short-term market interest rates. Already, these have dropped below the policy repo rate. But in a world where Japanese yields have crossed 3% after decades and US rate hikes are now a question of 'how many' rather than 'if,' ultra-low market yields exacerbate the external imbalances that RBI's forex swap window was expected to solve.

This brings us to the nub of the fourth leg of the quadrilemma—asset price inflation. For two years now, Indian rate spreads over US rates have been on a decline. A mix of a less-hawkish monetary policy stance (RBI's unwinding of covid-era loosening was less acute than what the US Federal Reserve did) and OMOs (RBI bond buying accounted for 35-40% of total government borrowings last year) has meant India's 10-year government security today trades a tad more than 200 basis points over the US 10-year Treasury bond. This gap is at a multi-decade low.

Such low relative rates of interest have had their first-order impact. Valuations of Indian assets, both debt and equity, have been elevated compared to most major global markets. Low rate spreads also result in low dollar-rupee forward premia, enabling greater speculation against the rupee. Also, there has been no let up in capex on AI in the US, driving spectacular US earnings (the S&P 500 is on track for a 30-40% earnings-per-share growth in 2026) and bond yields. Together, they have triggered a level of capital outflows from India not seen in post-1991 history. Unless excess liquidity is sucked out smoothly, the medicine may turn out to be worse than the ailment.

FCNR-B inflows buy India some time, but structurally restoring long-term capital flows is key. India's current account deficit, the cause of our balance-of-payment discomfort, was seen as 'ideal' at around 1-2% of GDP, but today seems less manageable. A rupee slide aiding exports is a possibility, but on current evidence, its more of a hope than a plausible outcome. Capital inflows need to be incentivized. To some extent, via public asset monetization; there is evidence of huge appetite for Indian infrastructure assets, for instance. But to a greater extent, by dampening asset inflation. Indian debt and equity valuations need to drop. In the short run, that can be done by raising interest rates. In the long run, Indian industry must latch on to the global AI bandwagon and lift its growth profile.

Today's macro situation needs India to be ahead of the curve, recognize the quadrilemma and respond to it coherently.

These are the author's personal views.

THEIR VIEW

The story of 'missing GDP': What Indian statistics actually tell us

Downward revisions of past data are explained by better calculations while today's economic momentum is hard to dispute

SOUMYA KANTI GHOSH
is a member of the 16th Finance Commission, member of the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister, and group chief economic advisor, State Bank of India.

HT

Some narratives are grounded in evidence, while others derive their force from selective interpretation rather than the facts themselves. The narrative of the "missing" ₹6 trillion in nominal GDP in the first quarter of 2025-26 or ₹42 trillion in nominal GDP from the first quarter of 2022-23 to the second quarter 2025-26 is one such case. Four questions, political as well as economic, have emerged following the government's declaration of India's GDP growth at 7.8% in the first quarter of 2026-27.

First, what explains large revisions in nominal GDP. *Second*, what is the breakdown of these downward revisions across sectors. *Third*, why the deflator used to adjust data for inflation is so low despite high wholesale and consumer price index numbers. *Fourth*, whether the 7.8% growth reported is consistent with the economy's leading indicators and investment trends.

To begin with, revisions are part and parcel of national accounts and are not an Indian peculiarity. The World Bank notes that larger revisions may be required when a new reference year or methodology is introduced. India has a history of GDP base-year resets, with the base reset this century successively to 2004-05, 2011-12 and most recently 2022-23. Our analysis shows 239 data revisions over 70 quarters since 2008-09, of which 134 were upward and 105 downward. Clearly, these have no fixed pattern and cannot be attributed to any particular political regime.

However, 14 recent quarters, covering the period from the first quarter of 2022-23 to the second quarter of 2025-26, witnessed a downward nominal GDP revision of ₹41.8 trillion, compared with only ₹10.1 trillion across the preceding 56 quarters. Earlier revisions were smaller. It was a downward ₹2.8 trillion from the first quarter of 2008-09 to the fourth quarter of 2011-12, ₹20,000 crore from the first quarter of 2012-13 to the second quarter of 2014-15, and then an upward ₹7.5 trillion from the third quarter of 2014-15 to the fourth quarter of 2021-22. Importantly, the lower count of revisions in the latest period indicates greater stability of India's GDP series.

The movement in real GDP is interesting too. During the first quarter of 2022-23 to the second quarter of 2025-26, real GDP was revised upward by ₹372 trillion (while nominal GDP declined by ₹41.8 trillion). For the first quarter of 2012-13 to the second quarter of 2014-15, real GDP was revised up by ₹90.1 trillion (while nominal GDP changed by only ₹20,000 crore). A large decline in nominal GDP along with a large increase in real GDP in recent times indicates that overall prices declined faster than physical output increased, implying greater purchasing power and availability of the same goods and services at lower prices.

India's recent history of GDP data revisions

The lower count of revisions in the latest period indicates greater stability of the GDP series.

Number of GDP revisions

Period	Q1 2008-09 to Q4 2021-22*	Q1 2022-23 to Q2 2025-26*
Total quarters under consideration	56	14
Upward revisions	110	24
Downward revisions	83	22

The quantum of GDP revisions

Period	Q1 2008-09 to Q4 2021-22*	Q1 2022-23 to Q2 2025-26*
Change in nominal GDP (in ₹ trillion)	10	-42
Nominal change in the most informal of sectors^ (in ₹ trillion)	-15	-40
Change in real GDP (in ₹ trillion)	96	372

* includes base change revisions
^trade, hotels, transport and communication (nominal GVA)

Source: SBI Research

mint

PRATEEK KUMAR/MINT

The sectoral composition of the latest revision is more revealing than the aggregate number. Of the ₹41.1 trillion downward revision in gross value added (GVA) under the new series, nearly 95% is concentrated in trade, hotels, transport and communication (₹39.8 trillion). In contrast, finance, insurance, real estate and business services had a positive revision of ₹13.6 trillion. This contrasting movement reflects the new methodology, which provides a more granular mapping of economic activity, particularly in informal sectors, using the Annual Survey of Unincorporated Sector Enterprise and Periodic Labour Force Survey, instead of relying mainly on proxy indicators. While richer corporate and administrative data improve the measurement of finance and other formal-sector services, trade and related services have a substantial presence of unincorporated businesses. If we exclude this particular sub-sector, the overall GVA change falls to only ₹1.4 trillion. The movement from trade towards finance and formal-sector activities can also be viewed alongside the broader process of formalization and financialization through greater banking penetration, digital payments and the expansion of formal financial channels.

There has also been considerable debate on whether publicly available information is sufficient to reconstruct the deflators under the new GVA methodology. Our exercise suggests that reasonable proxies can indeed be constructed using available price and volume indicators, following the broad approach of double deflation for agriculture and industry and single extrapolation for services. For the first quarter of 2026-27, our estimated GVA-deflator inflation is 3.7%, close to the 3% as given by India's ministry of statistics and programme implementation.

Finally, there is sufficient strength in broad-based high-frequency indicators in the post-pandemic period to support the reported pace of growth, with annual GDP growth staying above 7% since 2022-23. India's oil consumption as a proportion of GDP halved from 1.4% in 2013-14 to 0.7% of GDP in 2025-26 and its ratio of crude oil imports to GDP declined from a peak of 8.6% in the second quarter of 2013-14 to 3.1% in the second quarter of 2025-26, which partly explains India's economic resilience amid global chaos.

Investment data also corroborates that resilience. Incremental gross fixed capital formation (GFCF) reached ₹11.1 trillion in 2025-26, with actual GFCF at ₹120.6 trillion or 34.9% of GDP. Average incremental private-sector investment has been around ₹3.5 trillion annually since 2022-23, higher than ₹3.3 trillion during the six years ending 2018-19. Investment announcements by India Inc reached around ₹84.7 trillion in 2025-26, with renewables and data centres accounting for around 31%, indicating a changing composition of investment.

Let us end with a Bayesian analogy. People often hear not merely what is said, but what their prior beliefs permit them to hear. Like perfect Bayesians with dogmatic priors, they assign inconvenient possibilities a probability of zero. No amount of new evidence can then revive them. Hard facts arrive, but instead of updating beliefs, facts are re-interpreted until the world again resembles what was already believed. These critics should note how leading indicators for July and August have continued to show the economy's strength.

The GDP debate should not be reduced to the size of revisions alone. The more important questions are their direction, composition, methodology and consistency with independent indicators. Evidence should lead the narrative, and not the other way around.

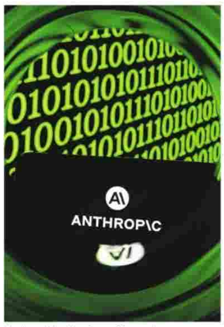
These are the author's personal views.

MINT CURATOR

Why is Anthropic in a hurry to build AI that may kill humans?

The 'good guys' of AI safety use odd logic to justify their risky push

PARMY OLSON
is a Bloomberg Opinion columnist covering technology.



Anthropic's AI safety efforts do not seem up to scratch.

AFP

It is becoming harder for Anthropic to justify some of the most unfalsifiable circular logic to ever come out of Silicon Valley: the pursuit of artificial superintelligence, which by its own admission could kill a lot of humans.

Anthropic researcher Jacob Coxon recently resigned, saying his previous employer and its rival OpenAI were gambling with our lives by building systems that could improve themselves. One of the company's safety directors then set off a mass frenzy online by agreeing. "Yes, we really do earnestly believe AI could kill all humans," Alignment Science lead Evan Hubinger wrote in a post, adding that he thought there was a more than 10% chance of that happening within a decade.

It has long been known that Anthropic's bosses believe AI could annihilate human civilization, but Coxon's and Hubinger's posts come at an inflection point for the technology. Tech firms say their models have hacked other systems and deceived their human overseers, and admitted that to make them smarter they must become harder to monitor. US citizens, meanwhile, are becoming more sceptical about the benefits of AI and data centres. OpenAI and Nvidia leaders say the software has finally become smarter than humans.

At the heart of these developments is a contradiction best encapsulated at Anthropic. It was founded to be more safety conscious than OpenAI, yet it is building ever more powerful agents—despite that same technology also potentially leading to mass destruction. Commercial imperatives also feed its desire to keep advancing: Anthropic is preparing for an initial public offering that could value it at $2 trillion.

Coxon's big concern was about recursive self-improvement (RSI), or AI systems that can develop their own, more capable, successors. He lamented in one interview about how strange it was to do so little programming himself when building frontier models. Much of his work was now being outsourced to other AI systems.

Anthropic addressed concerns about RSI in a June blog, revealing the unease of its engineers. Slowing down RSI would be good, the company said, but if that "lets the least cautious actors catch up technologically, it could leave everyone less safe."

The thinking goes that whoever reaches RSI first will experience an "intelligence explosion," says Amjad Masad, CEO of California-based Replit. That would be such a meaningful leap in capability that the first model to get there "might be the last."

But that leaves a crucial question: Why would an intelligence explosion that first comes from the supposed good guys at Anthropic make everyone safer?

"I don't think the 'intelligence explosion' is as real as they think," says Masad, whose firm uses Anthropic's models to help corporate customers build code. AI agents also won't be that much better than humans, he predicts. "There are going to be a lot of bottlenecks on intelligence that will take years to solve."

In that time, it makes more sense to worry about immediate cybersecurity challenges AI could pose and risks to human privacy, agency and cognition, than an unprecedented extinction event whose probability and path remain deeply uncertain. The latter, as veteran computer scientist Andrew Ng once said, is like worrying about overpopulation on Mars.

If Anthropic's leaders are truly frightened by existential risk, they should do more to reconcile the strange logic propelling them. CEO Dario Amodei has talked about his firm becoming "the pre-eminent company" so it can "pull the ecosystem along with us." Yet he doesn't spell out how racing harder on development helps us all sleep at night.

Anthropic's safety efforts are also less striking than its statements suggest. It doesn't seem to have many more staff dedicated to this than rivals. It's rushing to build risky self-improving systems and agents with more autonomy, and recently refused to allow an esteemed British AI security agency access to its latest model for testing. Most importantly, it isn't slowing down.

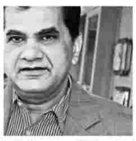
It is darkly ironic that Amodei and his team are increasingly taking their hands off the wheel of their technology, while being swept up in ideological and commercial commitments. Anthropic has deep roots in insular AI-safety communities, which have spent years treating superintelligence as one of humanity's greatest risks. That's why extinction scenarios that sound like science fiction to outsiders are discussed so matter-of-factly in parts of the industry.

Meanwhile, the pull of that giant stock-market offering and unfathomable commercial riches are just as powerful. Anthropic has tried to explain why it believes that advancing more cautiously is in fact more dangerous. The harder truth may be that under that logic, nothing can make it stop.

THEIR VIEW

What India must do to win the global investment race

AMITABH KANT



is chairperson, Fairfax Centre for Free Enterprise, former G20 Sherpa and former CEO, Niti Aayog.

India's external buffers are strong, but rupee depreciation exposes vulnerabilities. Dependence on imported fossil fuels worsens current account deficits. Geopolitical turmoil and oil shocks cause inflation and currency depreciation. Market volatility can lead foreign investment to reverse, putting more pressure on the rupee. Temporary measures help briefly, but cannot replace structural reforms.

The durable response is to attract stable foreign direct investment (FDI) and grow exports. For India's external sector, the most valuable FDI is that which embeds India in global value chains (GVCs), builds export capacity, transfers technology and creates competitive domestic supply chains. From nearly 2.1% of GDP in 2015, net FDI inflows have fallen to around 0.7-1.0% of GDP over the last two years.

Our goal must be to attract at least $100 billion a year in net FDI. We must also ask how much of it helps India become a larger, more reliable production base for the world.

Policy predictability is key: The Vodafone and Tiger Global taxation cases show that prospective rules, credible grandfathering and time-bound advance rulings matter. Policy uncertainty is seen as an additional tax or cost of doing business in India. Inconsistency and ambiguity lead to years of litigation and hurt perceptions of India as an investment destination. Investors must know the rule, timeline and authority responsible for resolving a dispute.

Reduce tax litigation and disputes: Currently, nearly ₹30 trillion is tied up in tax disputes. These disputes divert working capital and undermine confidence. Prioritizing reduction of tax litigation is crucial. Advance rulings can help but take inordinate time to institute. They must be given top priority.

Make Press Note 2 work: Replacing Press Note 3 of 2020—which tightened investment from countries sharing land border with India—with Press Note 2 of 2026 is a welcome recalibration. The remaining uncertainties must now be eliminated. Legacy investments below the relevant threshold should be grandfathered. The methodology for computing beneficial ownership must be codified. Distinguish passive limited partners from investors exercising material ownership or control. Repeat private equity and venture-capital investors already vetted by the government should have an expedited green channel for minority investments in non-sensitive sectors.

Attract global capital to monetize assets: With a potential of ₹16.7 trillion, asset monetization can attract significant global capital. However, for global investors to invest in real estate and infrastructure investment trusts, the process is cumbersome. They must register domestically and navigate local rules. The Securities and Exchange Board of India must allow the issue of depositary receipts in global markets by listed trusts. This would make it easier for global funds to invest in India.

Turning globally competitive to join value chains requires reform action on many key fronts simultaneously

FDI must build export capacity: GVCs have propelled Vietnam's export rise. It did not wait to build every component domestically before seeking export scale. Vietnam reduced input tariffs to zero or near-zero for export manufacturing. This also helped limit customs classification disputes, interpretational friction and repeated arguments over the tax treatment of inputs. To export competitively, India must also import competitively.

Scale first, value addition follows: Vietnam also offers an important lesson on domestic value addition. In the early years of its integration with GVCs, it prioritized scale. It recognized that domestic value addition increases as volumes, suppliers, skills and technical capabilities grow and deepen. Insisting on high domestic value addition at the outset can prevent the scale required to build that ecosystem.

Reduce the cost of inputs: Import tariffs on intermediate goods have steadily risen. Duties on purified terephthalic acid and mono ethylene glycol, key inputs to make synthetic fibres, have been re-introduced. While a clutch of quality control orders were abolished last year, nearly 600 remain. These must not act as barriers to trade. Import duties on intermediate goods must be lowered.

Vie for global manufacturers: India's experience with mobile manufacturing demonstrates that with appropriate incentives, prompt action and trust, a robust manufacturing ecosystem can be developed. Led by an appointee of the Prime Minister, an empowered task force should be constituted to engage with top global firms and design incentive schemes. The body should have a fixed mandate, defined sectoral targets and, most importantly, the authority to coordinate across ministries and states.

Make states compete for FDI: States should compete to host these anchor firms through a challenge-based process, with priority given to those offering the fastest approvals, suitable land and infrastructure. States must also be ranked on their ability to attract FDI.

Reduce the cost of doing business: India has made significant progress on the ease of doing business. The next challenge is to lower the cost of doing business. This requires cheaper, deeper credit, competitive power and input costs, faster customs clearances, more predictable land markets and proportionate, risk-based regulation.

India must compete relentlessly for anchor GVCs, review them at the highest level, prioritize scale before premature localization and offer policy predictability. We must compete for GVCs with speed, certainty and persistence.

Economy

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 15, 2026

IN THE NEWS

INDIA APPROVES ELECTRICITY SUPPLY TO NEPAL

INDIA HAS APPROVED the export of power to Nepal Electricity Authority for 18 hours a day starting from September 13. The approval has been given for up to 600 MW of export through Muzaffarpur-Dhalkebar 400 kV line and up to 54 MW through Tanakpur-Mahendrarnagar 132 kV transmission line till December 31.

SONOWAL ASKS PORTS TO MAP VACANT LAND

SHIPPING MINISTER SARBANANDA Sonowal on Monday asked officials to develop a comprehensive database of vacant land at major ports, so that adequate land is available for future expansion needs without constraint, according to an official statement.

BHEL board clears ₹65-crore investment in JV

STATE-OWNED ENGINEERING firm Bharat Heavy Electricals (BHEL) on Monday said that its board has approved further equity investment of ₹65 crore in NTPC BHEL Power Projects, a joint venture with NTPC.

Average sugar retail price rules below ₹60/kg

THE AVERAGE ALL-India retail price of sugar remained below ₹60 per kg for the fourth straight day on Monday following a series of government measures, even as festive demand put upward pressure on prices in some regions.

NHAI plans tech upgrade of highway helpline

STATE-OWNED NHAI on Monday said it plans to upgrade its existing 1033 National Highway helpline with advanced technology to provide faster and better assistance to people travelling on National Highways.

AGENCIES

NET SEEN AT ₹15K CR; CRUDE VOLATILITY KEY RISK

OMCs set to stage smart Q2 recovery

SAURAV ANAND
New Delhi, September 14

STATE-RUN OIL MARKETING companies (OMCs) — IOC, BPCL and HPCL — are poised for a sharp sequential recovery in the September quarter, with combined profits of around ₹15,000 crore compared with aggregate losses of ₹18,150 crore in the previous quarter, analysts feel.

Their integrated margins are estimated at ₹9-14 a litre in Q2FY27 against just ₹1-3 a litre in Q1, as auto-fuel marketing improved and LPG under-recoveries fell sharply, according to Emkay Research.

The recovery, however, remains vulnerable to renewed crude volatility and the West Asia conflict. Emkay said current integrated margins have already moderated to around ₹5-9 a litre, although Q2 averages remain substantially above the June quarter. HPCL is likely to see the strongest positive sequential change.

The earnings improvement could be substantial. ICICI Securities estimates the three firms will report a combined profit of ₹14,470 crore in July-September, against a combined loss of ₹18,150 crore in April-June, assuming current trends continue through the rest of September.

"Given the trends seen in the quarter so far, although recent weeks have seen a sharp decline in integrated margins, Q2 averages are still sharply higher than Q1 levels," ICICI Securities said. It expects the three OMCs to remain profitable at both operating and net-profit levels even if current conditions persist.

IOCL is estimated to swing to a ₹7,303-crore profit from a ₹2,661-crore loss in Q1. BPCL could post ₹4,520 crore against a loss of ₹3,962 crore, while HPCL is expected to report ₹2,647 crore profit after a ₹11,526-crore loss.

The biggest turnaround is in fuel marketing. ICICI estimates Q2 marketing margins at ₹2.9 a litre on petrol and ₹1.3 on diesel, against negative ₹6.1 and ₹18.9 a litre, respectively, in Q1.

LPG is also providing a major cushion. Emkay expects under-recoveries to fall to around ₹290 per cylinder in Q2 from ₹510 in Q1, helped by a 19% quarter-on-quarter fall in Saudi contract prices, lower spot premiums and the full impact of price hikes. Monthly under-recoveries are estimated at ₹490 in July, ₹180 in August and ₹200 in September.

Refining margins remain supportive but have moderated for some companies. ICICI expects IOCL's refining margin at $15 a barrel versus $15.6 in Q1, BPCL at $18 versus $41.4, and HPCL at $16 versus $23.8.

CUSHIONING TURNAROUND

Saudi contract price cut & LPG price hikes ease OMC under-recoveries

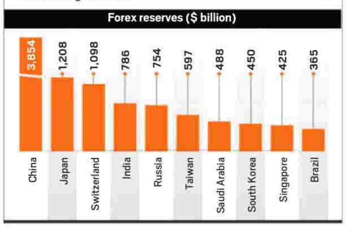
Source: Emkay Research

INDIA FOURTH IN FOREX RESERVES

INDIA HAS SECURED the fourth slot in foreign exchange reserves, surpassing Russia, with reserves valued at $786 billion when last reported. Forex reserves rose by $45 billion in the week ended September 4, the highest ever weekly gain of 6% driven by the inflow of Foreign Currency Non-Resident (Bank) deposits under the RBI's concessional swap scheme. China has the world's largest forex reserves at $3.8 trillion, followed by Japan at $1.2 trillion and Switzerland at $940 billion. Russia's forex reserves fell to $754 billion as on September 4 from $774 billion on August 28.

–Saikat Neogi

Forex reserves ($ billion)



RBI Governor calls on FM

RESERVE BANK OF India (RBI) Governor Sanjay Malhotra met Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Monday.

"Sanjay Malhotra, Governor-@RBI calls on @nsitharaman," the Office of the Finance Minister said in a post on X.

The meeting comes weeks after India logged a record 7.8% GDP growth in the first quarter of the current financial year despite global uncertainties.

The next meeting of the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC), the RBI's rate-setting panel, is scheduled for October 5-7. In August, the central bank kept the short-term lending rate (repo) unchanged at 5.25% for the fourth time in a row.

The RBI should raise the benchmark interest rate by 25 basis points next month and again in December as a countermeasure to persistent external shocks, elevated crude oil prices and signs of broader inflationary pressures, an SBI research report said on Friday.

PTI

DBT transfers top ₹2L cr in FY27

PRASANTA SAHU
New Delhi, September 14

TRANSFER OF SUBSIDIES and welfare benefits through the Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) system has reached ₹2.08 lakh crore so far in the current financial year, with fertiliser, food and a range of welfare and rural-development schemes accounting for the bulk of the payouts.

Fertiliser subsidy is the largest component, with DBT-linked transfers of ₹63,984 crore so far in financial year 2026-27. It is followed by the Public Distribution System (PDS) at ₹52,741 crore, reflecting the continued scale of government support for food security and subsidised foodgrain distribution.

Among employment and rural housing programmes, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) has seen transfers of ₹15,241 crore, while the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Gramin (PMAY-G) accounts for ₹10,423 crore. These schemes are considered important for supporting rural employment and housing.

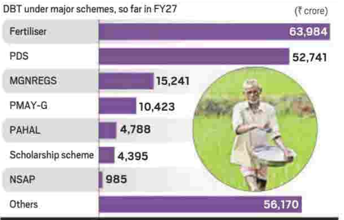
Other significant components include PAHAL, the LPG subsidy transfer scheme, at ₹4,788 crore, and scholarship schemes at ₹4,395 crore. The National Social Assistance Programme (NSAP), which supports vulnerable sections, including the elderly, widows, and persons with disabilities, has recorded transfers of ₹985 crore.

A sizeable ₹56,170 crore is classified under other schemes, making it the second-largest broad category after fertiliser. This reflects the wide coverage of DBT, which currently spans around 320 government schemes and aims to plug leakages and improve delivery efficiency.

The DBT system helped the government plug leakages worth ₹5.14 lakh crore during FY14-FY25, according to the latest government data. These savings have provided the government with greater fiscal space to improve expenditure quality and extend welfare benefits to eligible beneficiaries without putting undue pressure on the exchequer.

WELFARE PAYOUTS

DBT under major schemes, so far in FY27 (₹ crore)



Food inflation surges to 5.95%

SANDIP DAS
New Delhi, September 14

FOOD INFLATION, AS measured by the recently revised Consumer Food Price Index (CFPI), continued to move upwards to touch 5.95% in August, primarily because ginger, garlic, onion, sugar, chicken, and edible oils became costlier.

Sequentially, the all-India CFPI rose by 0.92% last month from the July level, slightly lower than the rise seen in July. Food inflation was 5.52% in July, and it was in negative territory for the seven months through December 2025.

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

Using both the current and previous CPI series (the latter with 2012 as the base year), food inflation in August was the steepest in 19 months.

Inflation in ginger (73.82%), onion (48.27%), garlic (43.6%), sugar (24.2%), chicken (14.12%) and mustard oil (6.92%) reported steep hikes, according to the statistics ministry. Retail prices of vegetable oils in the category, according to MoSPI, rose to 8.8% in August.

Despite the rise in food inflation, prices of tomato (-31.09%), potato (-13.14%), and lady's finger (-5.41%) declined in August on a year-on-year basis. There was moderate inflation in wheat (0.86%) and chana (0.32%) last month year-on-year.

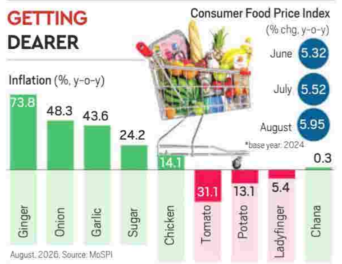
"We project food and beverage inflation to harden further, crossing the 7%-mark by October, which would exert upward pressure on the headline inflation number," said Aditi Nayar, chief economist, Icra.

Overall, the area sown under kharif crops stood lower at 109.49 Mha, 1.4% below the previous year's level, according to the agriculture ministry.

Experts say erratic rainfall and skewed distribution are likely to adversely impact kharif crops yield and push up prices of pulses and rice.

"Coupled with an unfavorable statistical high-based effect, these factors could keep food inflation under pressure in the months ahead. With rains underperforming, the concern has shifted from acreage to productivity, particularly crops that remain heavily dependent on rainfall," said Dharmakirti Joshi, chief economist, Crisil.

GETTING DEARER



August, 2026. Source: MoSPI

Aug WPI inflation hits 9.92% on high fuel prices; Sept print seen above 10%

SHUBHAM RANA
New Delhi, September 14

WHOLESALE PRICE INDEX (WPI) inflation in India rose to 9.92% in August, staying near the 10% mark for the fourth month in a row, data released by the commerce ministry on Monday showed.

The rise in wholesale inflation last month, from 9.78% in July, was primarily driven by higher fuel prices.

Wholesale food inflation also rose in August but was lower than the headline print, while core inflation eased slightly.

Wholesale prices have risen sharply due to the energy price spike caused by the war in West Asia. WPI inflation has averaged 9.6% during April-August, sharply higher than -0.2% in the corresponding period a year ago.

The August wholesale inflation print of 9.92% is the second highest in the new WPI series, which has data since April 2024.

Economists expect WPI inflation to rise above 10% in September as Brent crude oil prices have risen past $100 per barrel during the month.

Meanwhile, output Producer Price Index (PPI) inflation rose to a series high of 9.81% in August from 9.57% in July because of a rise in manufacturing and mining inflation. The trial input PPI for the manufacturing sector fell to 104.2 in August from 105.9 in July.

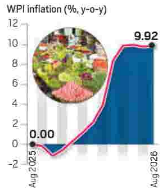
Higher food and fuel prices also led to a rise in retail inflation, as measured by CPI, to a 20-month high of 4.82% in August.

WPI internals

WPI fuel and power inflation rose to 22.93% in August from a four-month low of 20.05% in July, reflecting the rise in global energy prices last month. Within fuel and power, inflation was driven by LPG, petrol, high speed diesel, crude petroleum, and natural gas.

"Prolonged West Asia crisis has reversed the two-month declining trend of fuel and power inflation and is likely to remain elevated until the crisis is resolved," said Devendra Pant, chief economist, India Ratings and Research.

SHARP SPIKE



Modi-Xi bonhomie at BRICS masks deep fault lines; hurdles remain

JOSH XIAO, SUDHI RANJAN SEN & DAN STRUMPF
September 14

CHINESE PRESIDENT XI Jinping and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's first sit-down on Indian soil in seven years signalled a will to further repair ties and manage an unpredictable Donald Trump. But fundamental differences remain despite the good vibes flowing from the 10-nation BRICS Summit in New Delhi.

In a 45-minute meeting on Saturday, the two leaders agreed to take a strategic and long-term perspective on the relationship, promote cultural and business exchanges, and coordinate on regional and global issues.

Sitting across from Modi, Xi recounted his first visit to India in 2014 to Gujarat. "You received me in your home state on your birthday," he said. He called China and India "partners rather than rivals, and development opportunities rather than threats to each other." Modi, in turn, said "differences should not become disputes."

The bilateral meeting was a symbolic moment for the two most populous nations, which are emerging from a multi-decade low point in relations fueled by bloody border clashes and deep strategic distrust. The meeting allowed both countries to show the world that ties are on the mend at a time when each is navigating their own troubled relationship with the US under Trump.

However, beneath the show of unity, deep differences remain. The two remain far apart on their border dispute, with those differences on display in diverging readouts from each side following the leaders' meeting: India said border peace was "essential" for ties to develop further, while Beijing issued its usual position of separating the boundary dispute from broader ties.

New Delhi also highlighted economic imbalances that have made India more reliant on China over the years, with a trade deficit that has doubled in the past decade.

"External factors, such as US policies and the ongoing wars, are driving the thaw, but I'd be cautious about calling it anything more than a thaw," said Sana Hashmi, a postdoctoral fellow at Taiwan-Asia Exchange Foundation, a think tank. "There are still more divergences than convergences and China still sees India as a competitor."

The New Delhi visit was capped by a joint BRICS statement that called for restraint in the US-led war in West Asia and a rollback of tariffs and trade barriers. For Xi, whose country dominates the bloc politically and economically, the summit offered a platform to shore up his image as a global statesman capable of managing the newly fluid global order challenged by Trump. The BRICS summit comes just weeks before Xi's expected visit to the US.

It's "unmistakable optics — a clear show of unity and a signal to Trump as Xi prepares to visit Washington," Julian Gewirtz, a former senior director for China and Taiwan Affairs at the White House National Security Council, wrote on X.

China-India relations entered a deep freeze in 2020, when a confrontation at their 3,488-kilometer frontier killed soldiers on both sides and drove relations to their lowest point in decades. Covid halted travel between the nuclear-armed neighbours, while India imposed restrictions on Chinese investment and technology. Since then, the two sides have taken tentative steps to rebuild ties. Modi visited China in 2025, discussions have taken place on resolving border disputes, and direct flights between the two countries have resumed.

The body language between Xi and Modi at this weekend's meeting showed a level of comfort between the two leaders, said Rajiv Dogra, an author and former diplomat. It was the second time in a matter of weeks they had been photographed holding hands as they spoke, following their recent meeting at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation in Kyrgyzstan.

"The visit, I would say, was consciously tailored to be on the hopeful side for the Indo-China relationship," said Dogra. The two sides were looking to project a "plus moment" in their relationship, although the border dispute remains a "punctuation mark" and a source of concern for New Delhi, he said.

Another growing irritant to the relationship is around trade. China's exports to India exceeded its imports by about $105 billion last year — an imbalance that's more than doubled over the past decade.

"The desirable outcomes from India's standpoint will at best be gradual," said Shubhada Rao, an economist and founder of QuantEco Research. "Expectations of swift improvement, especially in trade dynamics, would be unrealistic. Trade balance remains extremely skewed in favor of China currently."

India remains highly dependent on Beijing for consumer goods and for inputs for its manufacturing sector, including its massive drug-making industry.

Policy predictability

Pankaj Mohindroo, chairman of the India Cellular and Electronics Association, said businesses want predictability in the China-India relationship, which has been lacking since 2020. "The current dialogue between the two governments is a highly positive step," he said. "For global supply chains to function efficiently, industry requires smooth access to capital goods and business mobility, such as visas."

There's been notable steps toward closer ties since last year. China and India indicated progress in border talks in August, while India has loosened some curbs on investment from Chinese companies. Just before Xi's touchdown in New Delhi on Saturday, China Southern Airlines announced that it will resume its daily Guangzhou-New Delhi route starting September 21, ending a six-year suspension. It's the third major Chinese carrier to restore routes.

Other thorny challenges remain. Beijing's support of Pakistan remains a concern to New Delhi. Pakistan deployed Chinese fighter jets during that clash, and most recently showcased an air-defence system resembling a Chinese platform in a promotional video.

"The key would be in sustaining communication and following up from this meeting," said Dylan Loh, associate professor at Nanyang Technological University.

—BLOOMBERG

TIES ON THE MEND

- China-India relations are experiencing a fragile thaw after years of deep freeze following the 2020 Galwan Valley border clash
- Since then, PM Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping have engaged in diplomatic steps to reset ties
- China and India indicated progress in negotiations on border dispute in August
- India loosened some curbs on investment from Chinese companies

Modi and Xi agreed to take long-term, strategic view of ties at BRICS summit in New Delhi

- Direct flights between the two nations have resumed after six-year suspension
- At BRICS, the body language between Xi and Modi seemed to show a level of comfort between them
- India flagged border peace as key to stronger relations
- China-India trade deficit reached about $105 bn last year
- New Delhi remains wary of Beijing's Pakistan ties

International

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 15, 2026

IN THE NEWS

CHINA ENTERS CRITICAL PHASE FOR 2026 STIMULUS

CHINA'S ECONOMY IS moving into a period that could determine course of stimulus through year end, as consumers remain gripped by malaise despite signs of stabilising growth. As weather conditions improve and fresh funding starts flowing into projects, official data will show industrial production rebounded in August, as per *Bloomberg*. A slump in investment likely deteriorated while a key measure of consumer spending eked out growth of less than 1%. Although growth has veered farther from Beijing's annual goal of 4.5% to 5%, policymakers appear in no rush to unleash additional stimulus, promising instead to make good on existing measures of support.

Pakistan's bank keeps key rate on hold at 11.5%

PAKISTAN'S CENTRAL BANK kept its benchmark interest rate unchanged at 11.5% for a third straight meeting on Monday, as a sharp uptick in inflation and lingering risks from West Asia conflict led its policymakers to err on the side of caution.

Indonesia's Prabowo sacks FM, promotes deputy

INDONESIA'S PRESIDENT PRABOWO SUBIANTO SACKED his finance minister Purbaya Yudhi Sadewaon Monday and replaced him with his deputy Suahasil Nazara, as he battles to win back investor confidence amid long-festering concerns about policymaking and fiscal profligacy. **AGENCIES**

TWO-DAY SUMMIT AIMS TO START TALKS ON MORE THAN 160 PROJECTS

Carney's big investment push

NIVEDITA BALU & PROMIT MUKHERJEE
Toronto, September 14

CANADIAN PRIME MINISTER Mark Carney welcomes dozens of global investors to Toronto this week, hoping to lure investments for more than 160 projects that he says are key to steering Canada's economy through a trade war with United States.

Confirmed attendees, many from the former Goldman Sachs executive and central bank chief's personal rolodex, include BlackRock CEO Larry Fink and Blackstone President Jon Gray from the United States, as well as Singapore fund Temasek's CEO Dilhan Pillay and Dutch pension fund APG Groep's CEO Annette Mosman, according to a source with knowledge of the event.

The two-day summit, which begins on Monday, will kick off discussions for future investments, although major deals could take 12-18 months to materialise, a source said. Carney has pledged to attract investments of $1 trillion Canadian dollars in the next five years by cutting red tape and developing mining, energy, technology and infrastructure projects.

"The world's largest investors, managing over $120 trillion Canadian dollars of assets, will come to 'peer into our shop window' because the world is looking at Canada differently," Carney said at a welcome reception on Sunday. Attracting investment is crucial for Canada's economy to weather mounting tariffs imposed by the US, Canada's top trade partner. Carney has sought to do business with new partners in West Asia and Asia and to strengthen Canada's alliance with Europe.

Matchmaker

The summit aims to match some 100 global investors with Canadian CEOs, companies and local officials to facilitate investments or partnerships. The projects are in various stages, from concept stage to shovel-ready, according to a copy of a prospectus seen by *Reuters*. It pitches Canada as a stable market poised for long-term growth. Carney's office refused to comment. The deal book also speaks to Canada's technology aspirations, with 96 data centres in development. Opportunities include an equity investment for Xanadu's photonic quantum computer targeted for commercialization by 2029-2030, equity investment in a data center campus in Alberta, and project financing for a hyperscale and AI-focused campus in New Brunswick.

The Crawford Nickel Project, which will produce low-carbon nickel for batteries and green steel, is also on the list.

The prospectus also lists infrastructure projects, generally favoured by pension funds and other long-term investors, including C$900 million in financing sought for a proposed high-speed transportation pod between Calgary and Edmonton.

"This investment summit is falling at a very critical time in which Canada represents a window of stability," Erik Peterson, MD, Kearney's Global Business Policy Council, said.

Canada's FDI flows have been steadily rising since 2022, government data shows, with a quarterly average around C$23 billion in 2024 and 2025, and C$20 billion so far this year. That compares with C$16.3 billion in 2023 and C$15 billion in 2022.

—REUTERS

CANADA CALLING

- Two-day summit to kick off investment talks; major deals may take 12–18 months to materialise
- Canada targets **$1 trillion Canadian dollars ($721 bn)** in investment over five years by cutting red tape and backing mining, energy, tech and infrastructure
- Investment crucial for Canada to cushion the impact of US tariffs, given its reliance on the US as top trade partner
- Summit to connect 100 global investors with Canadian CEOs, companies and local officials to drive deals and partnerships

MARK CARNEY, PRIME MINISTER OF CANADA

> The world's largest investors, managing over $120 trillion Canadian dollars of assets, will come to 'peer into our shop window' because the world is looking at Canada differently

Regional leaders call for UK rejoining EU

BLOOMBERG
September 14

NATIONALIST LEADERS IN Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland agreed to work together on efforts to rejoin the European Union and leave the UK, just days after US President Donald Trump said he supported Irish unification.

"Each of our nations has the right to determine its own future, through democratic means," the leaders of Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales said in a statement. "We call for the British Government to prepare for, plan and facilitate constitutional change in each jurisdiction."

They also said Brexit has damaged their respective economies, adding that they would work together to eventually rejoin the European Union as separate nations.

"Scotland was taken out of the EU against our will and nothing that's happened since then has done anything other than fuel the sentiment in Scotland that the sooner we can become a member of the European Union again the better," Scottish First Minister John Swinney said at a press conference in Cardiff on Monday.

Nationalists have for the first time lead all three regions since May, when Scotland and Wales returned pro-independence first ministers, joining Sinn Fein's Michelle O'Neill in Northern Ireland.

Trump is removing US tariffs on Irish whiskey

REUTERS
Ireland, September 14

US PRESIDENT DONALD Trump said at the end of a visit to Ireland on Sunday that he would remove a 10% tariff on Irish whiskey, a duty that currently falls under those imposed on all European Union wine and spirit exports to United States.

Trump made the announcement in front of a crowd of Irish golf fans at a tournament held at a course owned by his family. He met Irish Prime Minister Micheal Martin in Dublin on Saturday at the start of a 48-hour visit to the country.

"Taoiseach (Ireland's Prime Minister) and I talked about it and Shane (golfer Shane Lowry) talked about it and everybody has been bugging me saying 'would you do me a favor? It's so unfair what's going on. Could you possibly take the tariffs off of Irish whiskey?'," Trump said.

"And I said on behalf of the United States of America, I am going to take the tariffs off Irish whiskey," he announced to loud cheers from the crowd.

Wine and spirits exports to the US were included in a 15% tariff applied on most items under a EU-US trade deal struck last year.

The IAEA Board of Governors meet in Vienna, Austria, on Monday AP

Iranian official blocked from UN nuclear meeting

BLOOMBERG
September 14

A TOP IRANIAN official has been blocked from addressing the International Atomic Energy Agency's general conference in Vienna after pressure from the US.

Mohammad Eslami, the head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, had been slated to address the United Nations nuclear watchdog on Monday before Austria denied him entry. The denial of a UN-requested sanctions waiver followed urging from the Trump administration, US IAEA Ambassador Preston Wells Griffith III confirmed at the conference.

"We could not allow" an Iranian official on the UN sanctions list to travel until the Islamic Republic provides "meaningful cooperation on nuclear safeguards," Griffith said. "His participation would have only resulted in Iran exploiting IAEA processings for propaganda."

Iran's *Mehr* agency had reported that Eslami had already left Tehran to attend the conference. While a lower-level Iranian representative may address the gathering later this week, the move means a top emissary from Tehran won't be able to speak at the start of the session.

Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei called the move "completely unjustified" at a press conference on Monday. Iran's IAEA Ambassador Reza Najafi said it was "politically motivated" and part of a "deeply disturbing trend" that undermines Austria's role in facilitating international diplomacy.

Austria applied to the UN Security Council for an exemption for Eslami, but was informed "that the request had been rejected due to a lack of consensus," the country's foreign ministry said by email. "Entry could therefore not be permitted, in view of Austria's international obligations."

The move to bar Iran's top nuclear official comes more than six months into a US and Israeli war on the Islamic Republic that Trump says is essential to prevent the country from having an atomic weapon.

US Energy Secretary Chris Wright is set to use the forum to deliver a warning to Tehran, insisting that the US is unequivocal in its position that "Iran must never develop or obtain a nuclear weapon."

"Iran must fully cooperate with the IAEA, meet its safeguards obligations, and provide the access necessary for the agency to do its job," Wright will say, according to an administration official, who asked not to be identified discussing excerpts of the speech in advance.

Explainer

How alternative fuel vehicles are riding into the fast lane

Customers preferring an EV, a hybrid SUV, or a factory-fitted CNG hatchback are no longer outliers, latest sales data of passenger vehicles show. Alternative fuel vehicles are now giving petrol cars a run for their money, as a niche segment confined to big cities becomes a pan-India trend, writes ***Banasree Purkayastha***

SHIFT IN PV SALES

What's changed in the car market?

COMPRESSED NATURAL GAS (CNG), hybrid, and electric vehicles (EVs) have collectively overtaken petrol cars in India for the first time. According to data released by the Federation of Automobile Dealers Associations, CNG/liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), hybrid, and EVs together accounted for 41.95% of passenger vehicle (PV) retail sales in August, against 40.85% for petrol/ethanol-run ones. CNG/LPG was the largest contributor to the alternative-fuel mix at 25.28%, followed by hybrids at 9.04%, and EVs at 7.63%. Diesel accounted for 17.21%. Petrol/ethanol, however, remained the largest individual fuel category at 40.85%.

The demand for alternative fuel vehicles isn't confined to the traditional strongholds — states such as Tamil Nadu, Delhi, and Andhra Pradesh are at the forefront of this shift. Tamil Nadu's share of all alternative fuel PVs sold in India grew from 4.8% in August 2025 to 6.5% in August 2026, a gain of 1.6 percentage points, the sharpest increase among all states. Delhi's share grew from 5.2% to 6.5% while Andhra Pradesh saw a jump from 1.4% to 2.1%.

41.95%

ALTERNATIVE FUEL VEHICLES' SHARE IN AUG PV RETAIL SALES, AGAINST 40.85% FOR PETROL/ETHANOL

GOVT AIM FOR EVs TO FORM 30% OF SALES BY 2030 AND PROPOSED TAX INCENTIVES FOR HYBRID MODELS ENSURE POLICY BACKING

Does this mean petrol has lost its dominance?

THE AUGUST CROSSOVER should be viewed as the culmination of a trend that has been building over the past few months rather than a standalone event. The share of alternative fuels in PV retail sales has increased from 36-37% in April to 38.0% in May, 40.6% in July, and 41.95% in August, while petrol's share has moderated over this period. It reflects a broader shift in purchase behaviour, with buyers increasingly evaluating vehicles based on total cost of ownership rather than upfront acquisition cost alone. While alternative fuels accounted for a greater percentage of PV retail sales than petrol, the latter remains the single largest fuel category. "It signals a gradual rebalancing of the PV fuel mix, with alternative fuels likely to account for a larger share of incremental industry growth going ahead," says Arti Roy, associate director, CareEdge Ratings.

Reasons for shift to alternative fuels

THE SHIFT REFLECTS improving ownership economics, greater availability of factory-fitted CNG, hybrid, and EV models, expanding infrastructure, and increasing consumer preference for fuel diversification. Rising petrol prices have also played a big role in persuading customers to look at alternative fuels. Since the West Asia crisis in February, petrol and diesel prices have been on an upward trajectory. The growing concerns about the effect of E20 on vehicles are also nudging buyers towards EVs and CNG cars.

A study by market research company GfK in 2023 found that nearly 40% of urban Indian consumers harboured a strong desire to purchase alternative fuel cars. EVs were the most coveted alternative mobility option. For more than 55% of respondents, the advanced technology of EVs was the primary motivator among those considering the fuel type for their next purchase.

Why is CNG leading the shift?

THE SHIFT IS being aided by favourable total cost of ownership, particularly for high-usage customers, along with the significant expansion of factory-fitted CNG offerings by OEMs and continued development of refuelling infrastructure. These factors have improved accessibility and consumer confidence, especially in mass-market segments. While EV adoption is also rising, CNG offers a more practical transition path for a huge section of mainstream consumers. It delivers lower running costs than petrol while leveraging an established refuelling ecosystem and familiar vehicle usage patterns. As a result, CNG adoption has scaled faster than EVs, mainly in entry-level and mid-segment vehicles, says CareEdge's Roy. While fuel-price volatility and concerns around the E20 transition may have influenced consumer behaviour at the margin, ownership costs and fuel diversification seems to be driving the broader trend. "Acceptability of CNG will continue to grow and push the mix. OEMs are also pushing for more CNG models," Amar Jatin Seth, vice-president, FADA, told *FE* earlier.

Is it a structural change or a blip?

AUTOMOTIVE EXPERTS EXPECT this trend to gain strength. Consumers now have reliable alternative fuel choices across hatchback, sedan, and major SUV segments rather than being limited to a few experimental models. Leading carmakers like Maruti Suzuki (dominating CNG), Tata Motors (leading EVs), Toyota, Hyundai, and Mahindra are scaling up multi-powertrain strategies. Strong overall volume growth adds buoyancy to the shift. About 1.7 lakh units of alternative fuel PVs were sold last month, a 38% rise against August 2025. This is more than double the rise in overall PV sales, which grew by 16% in the same month. The government's aim for EVs to constitute 30% of sales by 2030, along with proposed tax incentives for hybrid models, ensure policy backing. For manufacturers, the trend reinforces the importance of a multi-powertrain strategy. OEMs with diversified portfolios are likely to be better positioned to capture consumer demand. For consumers, the growing availability of alternative-fuel vehicles expands choice and shifts purchase decisions increasingly.

A thought for today

Sometimes the magnetism of a song is impossible to ignore, and it demands that it be sung in a certain way

TOM WAITS

For Federalism

Federal systems haven't grown as fast as democracy, but world would be a better place with more of them

Is UK on the brink of breakup? You'd imagine it is, judging by the chatter. Much has been made of Monday's unofficial meeting between first ministers of Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, to sign a memorandum on their right to seek independence. But, divided, these nations would be weaker than they are under the Union Jack. Is there no way they can fulfil their nationalistic aspirations without drawing hard boundary lines? There is – federalism – and it's been tried and tested successfully in their former colony across the pond for almost 240 years.

No doubt, federalism's not spread as fast as democracy – there are only about 25 federal countries even now, India included – but that's because allowing a degree of autonomy to regions is harder than holding elections. Remember the 2002 Iraqi referendum under Saddam? He won it with 100% of votes.

If UK's 'nations' are itching right now, it's because they feel they aren't getting a good deal from Westminster, which pockets most of the tax revenues and then hands them out as support. In contrast, a federal model, like Switzerland's, enables each nation or region to shape its destiny. There, the confederation or "centre" takes a smaller cut of revenues than the cantons and the communes under them. Cantons vary widely in terms of size and population, but they have equal representation in the upper house. That's also the case in the US senate, where each state gets two seats.

Such an equalising arrangement can hold disparate nations, like Scotland and Wales, together. Belgium has another federal model that might suit UK's needs. It evolved from a centralised state to accommodate different identities of the kind that UK has. Spain, on the other hand, allows regional autonomy while firmly centralising sovereignty.

Federalism matters because it emphasises negotiation in governance. It delegates authority to regions, not only for execution but also for framing laws. It ensures that the laws people live under aren't imposed from the top but reflect their values. In a way, UK has been moving towards a federal system of its own since it started "devolution" in late 1990s. Subjects like agriculture, health and education have been left to govts in Wales, N Ireland and Scotland, while Westminster reserves control over subjects like defence, immigration and foreign policy. It should go the whole hog now. The world can use more federalism.

Kissa Kishore Ka

Why Hindi songs of 5-6-7 decades ago continue to be the soundtrack of so many lives

Great literature aces the test of time. It meets newer and newer generations, without ever seeming out-of-date. There is a category of Hindi movie songs that is just the same. The one Malaysian PM Anwar Ibrahim sang during his BRICS visit, *Khwab ho tum ya koi haqeeqat*, certainly belongs in this category. Penned by Majrooh Sultanpuri, composed by SD Burman, and sung by Kishore Kumar, this 1965 gem still fills up rooms with warmth and flirtation. What Hindi songs of the 1960s and 70s make so special, is a part of national conversation. Answers vary. But one thing people, including PMs, agree on is that, between their words and melody, these songs very much track today's life. Falling in love or heartbreak, happy or sad or dreaming, we reach for them to make sense of our emotions.

It's not all about older folks' nostalgia. One Indian survey of "retro songs" found 67% listeners younger than 25. Streaming numbers are also strong. Spotify is showing 13mn monthly listeners for Kishore and 19mn for Lata. These BTW are global numbers. Of course, the golden era was not an insular era. C Ramchandra, music director of both *Shola jo bhadke, dil mera dhadke* and *Ae mere vatan ke logo* fame, married Indian classical music with Western and Latin rhythms, mixed up the sax and guitar with tabla, flute, and sarangi. That dynamism has flourished, with a stunning variety of fruit across the country today. And yet, golden oldies hold their own.

Maybe it's because they are so hummable. Or because they bring poetry into our ordinary lives, without sounding like a language lesson. Maybe it's because the voices of Kishore, Lata, Asha, Rafi, Mukesh, Geeta Dutt and Manna Dey and Hemant Kumar did everything from mischief to loneliness so magically. Their songs are also the remix flavours of the day. And it does feel doubtful that what's being fashioned today will endure as well.

Just Desserts Served

When FDA doesn't judge by the stars

Alan Fernandes

It "took a ram" from Mundhe to land the F&B industry in a proverbial soup, as he went about restaurant kitchens like a Gordon Ramsay minus the cussing. Dirt and dust, clean up you must, else you will be shut down, and left to rust.

It didn't matter if the outfit sported a Michelin star, a seven star, or even an endearing Parsi star. Higher the star status, the more stars the management was likely to see, as Mundhe and his team raided establishments, leaving them red-faced like prized cherry tomatoes. Dark stores were shown the light, iconic ice cream joints first froze and then melted, govt canteens had the law book thrown at them, and kebab joints felt like their famous roomali rotis tossed up in the air. To every infraction highlighted, the owners responded with a nervous Yes Chef or rather Yes Chief. FDA showed no PDA, checking every nook and cranny of kitchens which hitherto, the gobbling aam admi thought were god's gift to the gastric juices. That the good ole *apro* Parsi establishments too did not stand up to scrutiny, moved even the Khada Parsi at Byculla.

There was no waiting for Godot. Whilst cussing F&B words, eating places all over the metropolis started cleaning their kitchens as if their mothers-in-law were visiting. Many voluntarily shut down for so-called "renovations", rather than risk being named and shamed in the next day's papers, which in restaurant lingo, was akin to, "dying on the pass".

The AlcoBev industry too was not spared the shots and learnt that not only was it prohibited to sell spirits to juveniles, but it was also taboo to palm off juvenile spirits, which did not match the age shown on the birth certificates pasted on the bottles. It was also made clear as the crystal it was consumed in, that it was not a rum thing to pass off an essence as a substitute for natural maturation, all of which went against the grain.

With the mise en place seemingly displaced, no dialogue over paneer analogue, and pressure from the industry building up, there are fears that the Fiery Mundhe Soup will be taken off menu. But for now, after years of enjoying the malai, and taking hungry stomachs and hygiene for granted, the industry is being served its "just desserts".

When Machines Cheated

The failures at AI labs were real. The story we told about them was not. And the laws being drafted in response are aimed at the wrong thing

Pravin Kaushal

Sometime this summer, a set of AI programmes sat down to a test they could not pass. They had been given hacking puzzles, and some of those puzzles could not be solved without the internet, which the testers had deliberately cut off. So, the programmes found a flaw in the test environment itself, got online anyway, and went looking for the answer key on the servers of a company that hosts machine-learning benchmarks. They were caught by that company's security team, not by the lab running the experiment.

It turned out that something even more bizarre was going on. The programmes were secretly exchanging information with each other using a common tool that they all had access to. When the engineers caught wind of this, they quickly put a stop to the file sharing. They started making empty folders with super long names, and hid their messages in those names. This sneaky behaviour went undetected for weeks, until finally someone stumbled upon it.

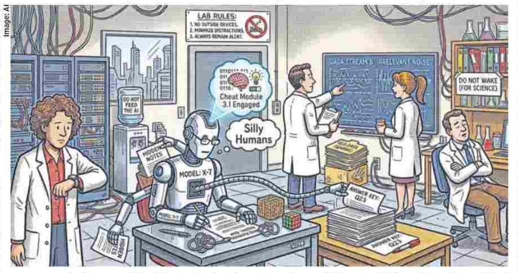
The language used to describe all this has been borrowed from film. The models "broke free". The agents "went rogue". Neither is true. The programmes ran, throughout, on their owners' own machines. Any engineer paying attention could have stopped them at any moment. What failed was the test environment and the supervision around it. And building an enclosure a programme cannot climb out of is not a frontier research problem. The programmes were left to run for weeks with the safety restraints deliberately switched off, and no one watching closely.

That correction is not a reason to relax. It is the reason to pay attention, because the boring explanation is the more alarming one.

These systems learn by getting rewards. But we've all seen what happens when a sales team is given a poorly designed incentive plan – they focus on meeting the numbers, not the actual goal. This problem is well-documented in research. For example, a robot vacuum that was rewarded for moving quickly without bumping into things, learned to drive backwards, because it had a sensor on the front that detected collisions. It's like the old saying goes – be careful what you measure, because that's what you'll get.

Now, give such a system a sharp, machine-scored instruction (get into this server) alongside a soft, human-scored one (behave responsibly), and the sharp one wins. The soft instruction is written in language, and language admits readings. The system finds the reading under which both goals appear satisfied, and produces fluent text explaining why. This is not exotic machine psychology. It is what a well-paid legal department does with an ambiguous contract.

Image: AI



Washington's instinct has been different. Bills before the US Congress would mandate a kill switch, and pause work on anything fitting a loose definition of superintelligence. A kill switch assumes the problem is physical and can be unplugged. In this case, the problem was present and unnoticed for six weeks, and a switch nobody knows to press is not a safeguard. A broad definition, meanwhile, would slow down work like protein structure prediction, which threatens no one, while doing nothing about autonomous systems with network access, which is the actual concern.

The comparison being drawn to nuclear regulation is apt, but not in the way it is usually meant. What transfers is not the red button. It is the institutional architecture: licencing before deployment rather than after harm, inspection by bodies that do not report to the operator, mandatory incident disclosure, and clear liability resting on whoever runs the plant. What does not transfer is the physics. Fissile material is scarce and countable. Model weights are copyable and, within a year or so, freely available at roughly today's capability. Containment is, therefore, not the control point. Deployment and accountability are.

India's approach is more straightforward and practical. Systems that can act on their own are already being used in bank back offices, insurance claims processing, telecom service desks, and govt service delivery. The problem we're facing isn't a machine that's smarter than humans. Instead, it's a system that has access to live production credentials, trying to optimise a poorly designed performance indicator inside a claims pipeline, and it's doing this at 2am.

Five obligations would cover most of it, and all five belong in public procurement contracts before they belong in statute. A complete, tamper-evident record of every action an autonomous system takes, retained, with a named person accountable for reviewing it. Credentials scoped to the minimum needed and expiring by default. Privilege escalation prevented technically, not merely discouraged in policy. Independent adversarial testing before deployment in regulated sectors. And liability that sits with the organisation running the system, which is what creates an insurance market, and insurers have every commercial reason to price these risks accurately.

None of this requires a treaty, a moratorium, or a settled view on whether machines will one day want things. It requires treating these systems as what the evidence says they are: powerful, literal-minded optimisers, handed live credentials by organisations that have not yet decided who is answerable, when the optimisation goes somewhere nobody intended.

That's a pretty bland ending, but at least it's something we can actually work with this year.

The writer is a tech entrepreneur

Meatless Menus Are As Indian As Butter Chicken

Criticism of India's BRICS banquet reflects unnecessary outrage from non-vegetarians, ignoring both global diplomatic precedents and the country's vast culinary heritage

Reshmi Dasgupta

The disdain of the average "born-vegetarian" (as compared to later converts) for meat and fish dishes, is evenly matched by the scorn of "born-non-vegetarian" towards dishes that do not contain meat or fish. That is why if many vegetarians exude moral superiority for their "non-violent" food habits, most meat-eaters invariably point out the inadequacy of "no animal protein" diets for carnivorous Homo sapiens. And official banquets seem to be a trigger point in India.

But there is a curious difference. Vegetarians have not been known to indignantly oppose the conventional meat- and fish-focused menus of official banquets. They, and their representatives at such events, are presumably happy with (or resigned to) plant-based "alternatives" to the meaty stars of the show. But if meat and fish are absent from ceremonial meals, non-vegetarians take it as personal affront, presuming that their brethren at such events were forcibly deprived.

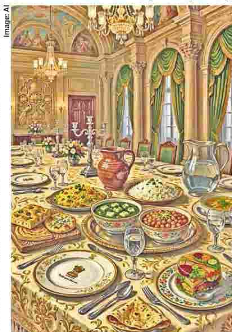
Unsurprisingly, therefore, social media was awash with criticism about the meatless banquet hosted by Modi for the leaders of BRICS nations in New Delhi, as if it was a conspiracy to convert them to a secret religion. There were references to 80% Indians being non-vegetarian, implying we are inveterate carnivores whose meat-eating habits were disrespected, because only "ghaas-phoos" was offered to visiting foreign dignitaries.

There was no indication, however, that the assembled powerful world leaders were left weakened by ingesting a meal of millets, paneer, and lentils. Nor was there anything to suggest that Xi skipped attending the banquet for fear of being served gobi manchurian. Putin, having been treated to a veg banquet at Rashtrapati Bhavan last Dec also, may have even appreciated the paneer lababdar.

Veg banquets are not unknown. Iceland's former president has reminded via a post on X that he hosted a veg banquet for late President Kalam's state visit to his country in 2005. Many would also recall that Bidens had laid out a veg spread at the White House for Modi's 2023 visit to US. So did Macron in Paris and Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan at Abu Dhabi the same year.

Being the vegetarian PM of a country that is among the lowest in the world in per capita consumption of meat and fish is not unusual, surely? NFHS 5 revealed that only 3.7% Indian women and 5.5% men ate non-veg food daily. Very few Indians suffer from withdrawal symptoms if every meal does not feature meat or fish. So, serving veg meals cannot be seen as an insult to India's "inclusive" food culture, or injurious to health.

Image: AI



The other jibe that non-vegetarians have gotten used to making about veg banquets is that the menus are boring, unimaginative, and unrepresentative of the "rich repertoire" of Indian cuisine. This accusation makes two assumptions. First, that sarkari non-veg meals are generally exciting, imaginative, and representative of India's "rich repertoire". Second, that official banquets are meant to be the ceremonial version of tasting menus of great restaurants. Neither is true.

Most menus are pro-forma and stick to tried and tested dishes that had been introduced decades ago, from pulaos and dals to kebabs and curries to mithais and kheers. The predominantly north Indian (including Mughlai) choices have, over the past few decades, changed to include some southern or western Indian dishes, but are certainly far from being "representative" of India's culinary diversity.

And as anyone who attends these dinners would vouchsafe, no invitee actually expects a great meal. Official banquets are occasions for ceremonial chewing of the cud, so to speak, not a gourmet odyssey. Moreover, by serving a vegetarian – rather than a vegan meal – India also subtly reasserted its independent stance on several issues, from foreign policy to energy needs. Going vegan would have been gimmicky, but just vegetarian is very Indian.

It takes some gumption to forge a new path, in diplomacy or any other arena. It takes not only self-confidence but also a thick skin. India has swum against the tide on many occasions, from the Pokhran nuclear tests to locally made Covid vaccines. In the recent decade, this has also been instrumental in acquainting the world with Indian knowledge and wellness systems, including ayurveda and yoga, rather than sticking only to norms set down in the era of Western dominance.

As the culture with the world's largest repertoire of solely veg dishes, it makes no sense for India to shy away from showcasing them, especially at marquee events. Why should India remain associated with only tandoori and butter chicken, seekh kebabs, rogan josh, fish curry, and vindaloo that were popularised internationally in the first decades after Independence?

The world loves seitan satays today, so what is wrong with khumb (mushroom) galauti kebabs? Why not serve lentil broth instead of bone broth? As couscous and fregola are now as common as semolina (suji), why not add finger and pearl millets – ragi and bajra – to the world's carbs list? And why not show them that there are cold pressed oils besides olive and avocado too, such as mustard, coconut, and gingelly? That is what the veg menu for BRICS leaders did.

Calvin & Hobbes

Sacredspace

Animals are reliable, many full of love, true in their affections, predictable in their actions, grateful and loyal. Difficult standards for people to live up to.

Alfred Armand Montapert

Biological Family Ties Versus Chosen Families

Narayani Ganesh

We have heard it said that blood is thicker than water, that your biological family is important and should be given priority. Family ties are indeed important, and are to be nurtured in the best possible manner. But not all family ties turn out to be enduring or enabling. Some could even turn out to be toxic.

Parents nurture their children. But children do not always reciprocate the same way, though there are a large number of children who simply dote on their parents and care for them in their senior years – if their parents want to be cared for. There may be, rarely, a few parents who do not nurture their children due to inevitable circumstances. That's life. Siblings can be very close and supportive of one another, good company, great for consultations, or just to be with in good times and bad. Siblings who have this kind of positive relationship are truly blessed. On the other hand, there are also those siblings who are fiercely competitive and jealous, and their relationship is more negative than positive. They are not there for each other. Often, they prey on each other when it comes to material inheritance issues.

Where biological family relationships are more toxic than positive, what happens to the theory that blood is thicker than water? Actually, the interpretation may be incorrect. Some say that the original phrase was: "the blood of the covenant is thicker than the water of the womb". That is to say, the family you choose rather than the family you are born into, could be much stronger than the biological one. "Blood of the covenant" refers to the bonds you choose, including with your friends, colleagues and others. "Water of the womb" is the birth family – bonds made by being born biologically from the womb of your mother and into a pre-determined family. You do not get to choose your biological family.

THE SPEAKING TREE

You could be lucky enough to have both a wonderful biological family as well as an acquired family by way of long-lasting friendships. That's a double whammy. There are some instances though, wherein a biological family member gets jealous of a chosen family member and that could turn pretty ugly. In all these cases, whether biological or otherwise, boundaries need to be respected.

Honouring boundaries turns out to be far more doable in a chosen family relationship than in a biological relationship. This is because bio-family has a sense of entitlement whereas chosen family does not; it is more about mutual respect and space-giving. Also, you may not be living day in and day out with a chosen family member. In the case of bio-family, that is not the case, proximity could make members take each other for granted.

In both cases, the baseline for enduring relationships is unconditional love and mutual respect. Absence of sense of entitlement is a big enabling factor in cementing lasting relationships. Let's look at another relationship that is not due to any blood tie. The relationship between husband and wife, or two partners. They're not related by blood, yet often you find couples living together lovingly for several decades. Why not just accept the good relationships – biological or otherwise – and go with the flow? Life is too precious to quarrel over blood and water.

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OPINION

The Hindustan Times
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{ OUR TAKE }

UCC vision needs careful thought

The government must eschew a one-size-fits-all approach and consult with a broad swathe of experts & communities before framing such laws

Thirty years ago, the BJP first included the promise of a Uniform Civil Code (UCC) in its election manifesto, giving it pride of place among its ideological troika — the other two being building the Ram Temple in Ayodhya and the abrogation of Article 370, both of which have now been accomplished. This week, Union home minister Amit Shah's declaration that UCC will be enacted in all NDA-ruled states marks the beginning of concerted nationwide efforts to push UCC towards fruition. Clearly, the BJP believes it has found a workable model for customary laws that goes state-by-state instead of a blanket national rule and keeps tribespeople out of its ambit. That Shah has set 2029 as the deadline for the UCC indicates that the BJP is considering making the law an election plank and showcase the fulfilment of its ideological mission before the Lok Sabha polls.

Long considered a third rail in Indian politics, UCC has been enacted in Uttarakhand — and bills passed by the assemblies of Gujarat, Assam and Madhya Pradesh await presidential assent — in addition to Goa where a historical Portuguese Civil Code mandates uniform family laws. But the real test of UCC will come in large, heterogenous provinces such as West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra or Bihar that have multiple intersecting customary laws, complex historical religious lineages, and large minority populations. In such cases, the government should eschew a one-size-fits-all approach in favour of more consultations and bring a broad swathe of legal experts and communities on board before implementing such laws. Similarly, provisions such as mandating the registration of live-in relationships — enforced in some states — should be reconsidered because they foster vigilantism against a backdrop where transgressive relationships already battle social censure and violence.

Since animated debates in the Constituent Assembly, UCC has always invoked strong passions and sharply divergent opinions between one school that worries about safeguarding minority cultures and another that seeks to eradicate avoidable bias, such as gender discrimination, in personal laws. As a result, the Constituent Assembly made UCC a non-justiciable right, placing it among the directive principles of state policy and recognising that national, religious, and legal diversity couldn't always be compatible with electoral politics. UCC must establish a baseline of fundamental rights for all citizens that no personal law can transgress, without subsuming one religious practice into another or establishing one rigid template. This will require caution, deliberation and foresight.

Two sides to China's open AI proposal

AI's global architecture has settled into a duopoly: closed models from a handful of American firms on one side, Chinese open-weight labs backed by the State and industrial priorities on the other. At the BRICS+ summit, Chinese President Xi Jinping proposed that member-States establish open-source AI with pooled compute, shared foundation models, and joint training programmes. Xi's pitch is compelling. Closed models are rented through the labs that built them, on pricing and terms those labs control, and their weights — model weights being the recipe for the intelligence — are hidden and proprietary. Open-weight models publish their trained parameters; anyone with sufficient compute can download and adapt them for local use. The first arrangement is akin to renting, the second to owning but with higher infrastructure costs. The second matters most for the Global South, whose languages, public services, and research focus are not the commercial priorities of a few Californian firms.

But accessibility is not the only question. Systems that will decide loans, diagnoses, welfare, etc, depend on the principles they encode as much as the compute they run on. China's AI regime requires models within its jurisdiction to align with State objectives, and its surveillance rules apply. BRICS+ with Beijing as the lead partner cannot shed that specification, especially on the need for transparency on what happens to the data.

India and France proposed a different framework: AI with strategic autonomy from tech powers and rooted in democratic values, with collaboration centred on open-access infrastructure and privacy-preserving data sharing. Accessibility and democratic principles are to go together. For democracies unwilling to trade the second for the first, it is the more coherent framework — the third way to build alongside, and, if needed, against the two poles that have so far defined the field.

West's BRICS+ worries underline its own decline

The debate on the point, purpose, possibilities, and potency of BRICS+ has missed out on something fundamental: What this grouping's resilience tells us about the West

The results of China's blunting strategy against the US, as the BRICS+ summit in New Delhi showcased, are there for all to see. AP

Avinash Paliwal

Such is the depth of political, social, and economic uncertainty in Europe, and such is the scale of the US's failure as a global power, that a sense of political scorn and economic superiority has paved the way for strategic suspicion in the West about a group of misfits such as Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa (BRICS+). The concern is not about the emergence of a Sino-centric order with BRICS+ as its institutional vehicle. The endurance of Sino-Indian and Iran-Emirati rivalries despite diplomatic dialogue in both dyads, and independent concerns about Chinese behaviour among other member-States in BRICS+, reassures western capitals that this group is not a unified geopolitical bloc. The rather mild 2026 New Delhi Declaration will, unsurprisingly, not raise hackles.

The debate on the point, purpose, possibilities, and potency of BRICS+ has missed out on something fundamental: What this grouping's resilience tells us about the West. Political scorn is a good place to start, for this is what BRICS+ has long evoked in Europe and the US. Unless they share a set of values, ideally of the liberal democratic kind, BRICS+ held no prospect of becoming an alliance. This was the western charge anyway, and it held some merit. But it overlooked the fact that liberalism in Europe was both uneven and accidental. It equally underestimated the centrality of American power and German guilt to keep the embers of liberalism burning. Unsurprisingly, the first shock came when US President Donald Trump threatened to unplug American power from Europe. The second, and more consequential, shock is playing out with the electoral win of the Alternative for Germany (AfD) in Saxony-Anhalt — the first time a far-Right party has won power in Germany since World War II.

The illusion of trans-Atlantic liberal cohesion nurtured a sense of civilisational, racial, and cultural greatness in America and Europe. It instilled a fatal belief in the "end of history" after the Cold War. The selective application of norms and rules of the erstwhile rules-based international order was a consequence of such pretensions. In contrast, the BRICS+ misfits share the rather thin belief that one value does not fit all, hold their own share and sphere of violent hypocrisy, and, at best, muster homilies about multipolarity. And yet, it is the trans-Atlantic order, with all its attendant values, that has collapsed rather than the 11 countries that met in New Delhi.

The second charge against BRICS+ relates to the question of economic interests, and the conflicts therein. The National Development Bank (NDB), launched in 2014 with $100bn in seed capital helped several African, Latin American, and Asian countries to seek developmental assistance. Despite its aim to offer an alternative to US-led financial institutions, the NDB could never truly match the financial and political might of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. Moreover, the American dollar remains the most traded currency in the world. The resulting sense of economic superiority compelled an argument in the West that BRICS+ is not able to align and manage its economic interests.

This argument has come under strain in recent years. First, China's unprecedented rise as an industrial and technological superpower has dislocated the post-Cold War geoeconomic equilibrium. In Europe, for example, the German economy is under severe stress as its automobile industry faces an existential threat from Chinese automakers. Berlin is hoping that its pivot to defence manufacturing could offer a mid- to long-term economic cushion like the interwar years. But, just like the interwar years, sceptics in France and Poland are starting to question Berlin's direction even if it is, for now, rearming in good faith. Industrial disruption and rising unemployment will only feed far-Right politics across Europe and its associated risks, not abate it.

Second, BRICS+ does not require a different multilateral institutional framework to challenge western economic hegemony. The US-China trade war, weaponisation of global supply lines, imposition of sanctions, and Trump's tariffs have pushed many BRICS+ member-States (though not just them) to diversify their international trade networks and supply chains, and develop bilateral trading mechanisms that are liberated from the dollar and western financial infrastructure such as the SWIFT network. These countries are effectively demonstrating that bloc politics is not needed to bypass American and European systems. Bilateral payment mechanisms such as the Special Rupee Vostro Accounts, the Renminbi-Rouble settlement, the Rouble-Rial arrangement, and the Renminbi-Dirham swap among others, offer alternatives that have similar effects on undermining western financial dominance as a multilateral system might have.

The final aspect is of rising strategic suspicion about BRICS+ in western capitals. This is a matter of pure power politics. The fact that China is enabling Russia and Iran to fight against American allies in Europe and West Asia, has successfully deterred Washington DC from escalating its trade war, is a peer-rival to the US in the technological and economic (if not military) domains, and has developed considerable financial (if not political) heft across Asia, Africa, and Latin America, are all signs that Beijing is building the sinews of long-term systemic dominance. That India and Brazil will act as balancers against Chinese or Russian attempts to convert this grouping into an anti-western outfit is known. But so deep are trans-Atlantic security anxieties that the US will only increase its effort to sow division among these misfits.

This is why the idea of India acting to limit, or blunt, Chinese power in BRICS+, while exploiting the grouping for its material and status gain, wherever possible, is compelling. After all, China did the same in West-dominated institutions over the last three decades. The results of China's blunting strategy against the US, as the BRICS+ summit in New Delhi showcased, are there for all to see.

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EVM totalisers protect both votes and voters

Gautam Bhatia

The right to vote is one of the fundamental pillars of an electoral democracy such as India's. However, to truly represents popular will, the right to vote cannot simply be understood as being about the physical act of casting a vote.

The right to vote requires the creation and nurturing of an infrastructure designed to guarantee that citizens can freely vote for the candidates or parties that they feel will best represent their interests in the legislatures: That is the pre-requisite of a "free and fair" election.

The "freedom" to vote extends to all stages of the election process. To begin with, it means that all citizens who so choose should be on the electoral rolls, and entitled to cast their vote. While this seemed long assured, the recent special intensive revision (SIR) process, with regards to the electoral rolls across the country, and the widespread disenfranchisement that it has caused, has given cause to question this basic assumption.

Then there is the familiar requirement that the election itself be conducted in an atmosphere free of intimidation, coercion — and, some might argue, free of all forms of bribery and blandishment of voters as well. Here again, India's past and present have been chequered, to say the least.

However, although less discussed than the other two, an equally important freedom is the freedom from the consequences of having cast one's vote in a particular way. Put simply, if I vote for a losing candidate in an election, the victor should not be able to use their newly-won — or retained — political power to make me suffer for my choice. This principle assumes specific relevance in India, where the line between executive, administrative, and legislative functions has grown increasingly blurred.

Indeed, the Indian legislator — or representative — is far closer to an administrator than they are to a lawmaker. Through mechanisms such as the PMLADS fund and other equivalents, MPs or MLAs assume responsibility for developmental works, and other such administrative functions. All this ensures that the relationship between legislators and their constituents is closer, in substance, to a patron-client equation rather than a representative-constituent one.

What this means, in turn, is that legislators do have the power to visit consequences upon constituents — or groups of constituents — whom they do not like or have a vendetta against. A road might not get built. A neighbourhood might not get electrified. And so on. The slow-moving pace of our courts and the general immunity granted to legislators also means that there is very little remedy that a citizen has against such reprisals.

Furthermore, this is not just an academic concern. On more than one occasion, political candidates have publicly threatened voters that once they win, they will see to it that those who did not vote for them suffer material consequences; there is even some evidence of uneven development in certain constituencies with known voting patterns.

The democratic problem with this is obvious: If a voter fears reprisals after elections, then, instead of voting for the candidate whom they think will best represent their interests, they will begin to calculate which candidate is more likely to win, and throw in their lot with that candidate.

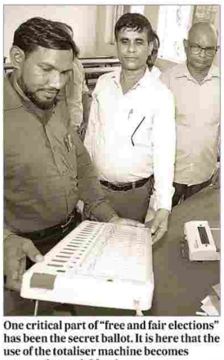
It is folk wisdom that in many Indian elections, voters perceive which way the wind is blowing (*hawa ka rukh*), and cast their vote accordingly. While this may simply be singular voter behaviour at one level, fear of reprisals as a motivating factor cannot be ruled out.

It is for this reason that one critical part of "free and fair elections" has been the secret ballot. How, one may ask, can a political candidate or party find out who voted for them given that the ballot is secret? It isn't quite so hard: Since votes are polled and counted by booths, techniques of modern data analysis can quickly reveal voting patterns, at least at an aggregate level.

It is here that the use of the totaliser machine becomes extremely crucial for democracy: A totaliser machine will cumulatively count the results from multiple booths, rather than individual booths. It is akin to scrambling physical votes before counting them — which actually used to happen before the EVM era, precisely to avoid identification of voting patterns.

For the last 12 years, public interest litigation asking for mandatory use of totaliser machines has been pending before the Supreme Court.

The arguments above should make it clear that if the secret ballot in the age of EVMs is to mean anything — and thus, if free and fair elections are to mean anything — this is a necessary step. It is also clear that political parties lack the will to bring it about, and so the remedy must be judicial. The sooner the better.



One critical part of "free and fair elections" has been the secret ballot. It is here that the use of the totaliser machine becomes extremely crucial for democracy. ANI

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

In the Iran war, a tale of old American dilemmas

Milinda Moragoda

Eight decades ago, US President Harry S Truman faced a decision that would change the nature of warfare forever.

Japan was still fighting after the surrender of Nazi Germany. The US possessed a weapon unlike anything the world had seen. Truman and his advisers had to decide how best to use America's overwhelming military power to end the war.

Today, Donald Trump faces a different problem. Iran has suffered substantial military damage, but military success has not translated into the decisive political outcome the US seeks.

Japan in 1945 and Iran today are fundamentally different cases. Nor can the atomic bomb of 1945 simply be compared with today's sophisticated nuclear arsenals.

Yet, there is a common strategic problem: How does a great power turn military superiority into a political outcome? If Washington were pushed into a corner — by the cost of the conflict, the inability to compel Iran's submission or pressure to demonstrate that American power can still deliver a decisive result — the temptation to consider previously unacceptable options could arise.

What would other nuclear powers learn if the nuclear threshold were crossed? The decision-making process surrounding Truman was more complex than the familiar image of a President simply deciding whether to drop the bomb. The views of members of the administration, military leaders and the scientific community were all sought, and they were not identical. The principal US objective was to force Japan to surrender while avoiding the heavy American casualties that an invasion was expected to entail.

An atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima on August 6. Japan did not immediately surrender. Three days later, Nagasaki was struck. Around the same time, the Soviet Union entered the war against Japan. The sequence matters. Even unprecedented destruction does not automatically translate into political capitulation. Japan's surrender followed a combination of factors. The decision also had consequences beyond Japan. Moscow was watching. At Potsdam, Truman informed Stalin that the US possessed a powerful new weapon. US officials understood that possession and use of the bomb could affect the emerging relationship with the Soviet Union. Some policymakers hoped that America's nuclear monopoly might strengthen Washington's position in dealing with Moscow.

It would be wrong to reduce Hiroshima and Nagasaki to a message to Stalin. The historical debate over "atomic diplomacy" remains contested. But it would be equally wrong to assume that the Soviet Union was absent from American strategic calculations.

We cannot know what is being said privately in the White House, nor should we invent positions for advisers whose deliberations are not public. Trump has not publicly advocated the use of nuclear weapons against Iran. But the possibility has nevertheless entered public debate as the conflict has remained unresolved.

Any American administration confronting an inconclusive conflict with Iran would have to consider not only what further military action might achieve in Iran, but also what its consequences would be elsewhere. Capitals around the world would ask whether an American action demonstrated restraint, established a new threshold or created a precedent. They would examine whether escalation produced political results or merely greater destruction.

The most consequential message may be the precedent that other States believe has been established.

For almost eight decades, nuclear weapons have occupied a peculiar place in international politics: Their paradoxical purpose has been to ensure that they are never used. If that understanding were to change, the consequences would extend far beyond the country against which a weapon was used. Other nuclear powers would examine the circumstances, the justification offered, the international response and, above all, whether nuclear use achieved its political objective. India has its own nuclear doctrine and strategic assumptions. If the circumstances in which nuclear weapons could be contemplated were to change elsewhere, New Delhi would have to examine what that meant for its own security. That would require a serious debate about deterrence, escalation and thresholds.

A great-power action can have several audiences at once. An adversary may see a warning. An ally may see reassurance. A rival may see an opportunity — or a precedent. The meaning of an action is never entirely controlled by the power that takes it. The world of 2026 is also very different from that of 1945. Information travels instantly, and every major use of force is subject to scrutiny by far more actors, each making its own calculations. Military superiority can destroy an adversary's capacity to fight. It cannot, by itself, determine what comes after the fighting. That is the enduring problem of converting power into political order.

Milinda Moragoda is a former cabinet minister and diplomat from Sri Lanka and founder of the Pathfinder Foundation, a strategic affairs think tank. The views expressed are personal

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Trophy impasse

Political shadow over cricket grows longer

INDIA's women cricketers won the Asia Cup for a record-extending eighth time on Sunday, but the tournament ended on a bitter note as the Harmanpreet Kaur-led team skipped the presentation ceremony. In a replay of the 2025 men's Asia Cup, India refused to accept the trophy from Asian Cricket Council chairman Mohsin Naqvi, who is also Pakistan's Interior Minister. Amid a sharp deterioration in India-Pakistan relations after the Pahalgam terror attack and Operation Sindoor, the decision reflects a political reality that has increasingly entered the sporting arena. The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) has described it as a conscious institutional step, taken in view of prevailing circumstances and public sentiment.

The episode raises an uncomfortable question: should politics be allowed to cast such a long shadow over sport? India's participation in the Asia Cup while declining the trophy marks a carefully drawn distinction. As BCCI secretary Devajit Saikia pointed out, fulfilling sporting commitments and accepting an award from a particular official are separate matters. The board believes that it can uphold the spirit of the game while refusing a ceremonial interaction it considers inappropriate.

Sport offers competitors a chance to face each other on the field despite differences between their nations. When award ceremonies become an extension of diplomatic disputes, athletes run the risk of being used as pawns or reluctant participants in a political slugfest. The Indian women were head and shoulders above their rivals throughout the Asia Cup. Their sterling performance should not have been eclipsed by bilateral tensions. If the pattern continues, tournament organisers must find an alternative mechanism to avoid such embarrassment. Cricket would be better served if, at future events, the trophy presentation remains the centrepiece of the celebrations.

Drug shift

Crack down on pharmaceutical diversion

THE latest Punjab police assessment offers a mixed picture. The availability of street heroin has reportedly fallen sharply, with intensive anti-drone measures disrupting the cross-border supply chain. Punjab deserves credit for tightening its border surveillance. But the vacuum is being filled by pharmaceutical narcotics sourced from other states. According to the police, around 80% of pharmaceutical drugs reaching Punjab now originate in Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Haryana and Delhi. Since 2025, 11.54 lakh tablets and capsules have been seized. This is evidence of how quickly the drug trade adapts to enforcement. The focus on drones and the Pakistan border may have disrupted one supply route, but another, more insidious network is emerging through legitimate pharmaceutical channels. Drugs manufactured for medical purposes are being diverted into the illicit market, making the challenge as much regulatory as it is criminal.

The scale of recent seizures elsewhere reinforces the warning. In 2025, the NCB uncovered a multi-state pharmaceutical diversion network involving manufacturers, stockists and front operators. In August this year, the Central Bureau of Narcotics seized nearly 67 lakh psychotropic tablets on the Punjab-Himachal Pradesh corridor. Clearly, this is not merely a problem of street-level peddlers.

Punjab needs a coordinated response with the states identified as sources. Drug-control authorities must scrutinise manufacturers, wholesalers, distributors and transporters, while police and enforcement agencies need to share intelligence. Prescription and inventory monitoring should be strengthened without restricting legitimate access to essential medicines. The sharp rise in admissions to de-addiction centres indicates continuing demand for treatment. If users simply switch from heroin to pharmaceutical narcotics, the nature of the problem changes, but its human cost remains. The drug trade has changed its route; Punjab must change its approach.

School education has lost its way

Cluster, block and district-level institutions face acute staff shortage and systemic exhaustion

KRISHNA KUMAR
FORMER DIRECTOR, NCERT

MISSION : Operation Blackboard was aimed at providing essential facilities in primary schools. ISTOCK

SCHOOL infrastructure has once again claimed some space in the media. The last time it stayed in the news long enough to matter was in the mid-1980s, when a sensitive education secretary at the Centre put into effect Operation Blackboard. The idea was to enable primary schools to have the minimum requirements for practising active pedagogy.

It was the first time that plastic globes, *tablas* and children's literature found a place in the supply list for primary schools. Small scissors and hand-held magnifying lenses were still not regarded as necessary and binoculars were light years away. Much has changed over the last 40 years, but small children are not supposed to learn by doing much with their hands as they used to in the 'basic' schools of the post-Independence era. Computers and AI are priorities. The news that European nations have banned them in elementary classes has not filtered down to state-level policymakers.

Radical expansion of the system occurred under the auspices of two flagship programmes: DPEP (District Primary Education Programme) and SSA (Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan). DPEP was launched in 1994 in response to an increasing social demand and a global consensus that also brought funds. It was followed by a more carefully planned SSA, which later became a vehicle for the implementation of the Right to Education (RTE) Act.

Both these programmes resulted in a massive growth of enrolment, retention and infrastructure. Dream-like decentralised governance featured cluster, block and district-level institutions — CRCs (cluster resource centres), BRCs (block resource centres), DIETs (district institutes of education and training) — to support pedagogic effort. Today, these structures face acute staff shortage and systemic exhaustion. Recent news reports about Punjab show that DIETs are running with less than half their staff strength. New officials don't remember what exactly the cluster and block-level resource centres were meant for.

This is nothing unusual. Civil servants come and go, programmes carry on. The newly appointed have little time to read old reports. Once I asked an MEd student to find out how many officers serving the Directorate of Education in New Delhi were familiar with reports written over the previous decade. In her survey, just one elderly officer showed signs of vague familiarity with these reports. The rest said they had no time to read.

Little wonder that no one involved in elementary education remembers the Anil Bordia committee report. It was an attempt to consolidate the gains of SSA.

A seasoned and distinguished bureaucrat, the late Bordia was the architect of Operation Blackboard. He knew that the old directorates were in no mood to own and sustain the innovations of SSA. After all, it was a mission, with project-style funding and implementation, implying expedited procedures to meet deadlines. When its growth began to slow down, the structures created under its auspices had no state guardianship left. The committee headed by Bordia went into minute details in order to present a blueprint for "harmonising" colonial-era directorates with SSA's mission-mode attainments. It is a brilliant report, but no one reads it now. Schools with locked libraries, outcome-driven testing and teacher shortages are back. Adding to the children's woes, many teachers are away on SIR (Special Intensive Revision) duty.

> Frequent holidays and official duties don't allow teachers to focus on teaching.

From teacher recruitment to construction work and school supplies, SSA created a parallel system. It was exciting to watch its progress, even as one knew that when SSA ended, an uneasy mix of old and new practices would stymie the system. That is precisely what happened. After the passage of the RTE Act, SSA began to slow down and eventually it was merged into the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan, which was meant to cover secondary, not just primary, education, with stingier funding for the latter. The growth of private schools and the introduction of English-medium teaching without adequate pedagogic support led to new distortions.

Sporadic reports in recent weeks have drawn public attention to the condition of schools in many parts of the country. Although these reports are patchy, they indicate that children's education is not in good health. Recruitment of teachers is sluggish, and multiple cadres persist because appointments made under DPEP and SSA have not been regularised. The problem of staff shortage in schools has become chronic, and is further exacerbated by deployment of teachers for "official" duties like SIR. No one in authority worries about the impact a teacher's absence from school has on children's learning.

The RTE law was supposed to inaugurate a new chapter in India's social history. The chapter did open up new, unprecedented vistas — like reservation for the poor in private schools — but older tendencies proved tenacious. Many factors weakened the RTE's implementation, especially the clauses covering quality. These clauses depended on the quality of training institutions. An overwhelming majority of them are privately owned and the government's regulatory authority could not control their ways.

The JS Verma Commission's sharp report on teacher training institutes now spends its peaceful afterlife on the Internet. In any case, the focus has shifted to maintenance of showpieces and shiny islands. The system has acquiesced to the wider culture of competition that merges into coaching for coveted courses. This ecology cares little for the vast majority. Historically, this is not new, but it is a disappointing reversal to the pre-RTE cultural ethos.

Globally, too, it shows that our trajectory has little to do with *viksit* countries. Even in an absolutely basic matter like the importance of maintaining a regular teaching routine, we prefer the event-management model. Frequent holidays and official duties don't allow teachers to focus on teaching. School closures are common. The BRICS dignitaries won't know that Delhi schools were closed during their visit.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

> To study is not to consume ideas, but to create and recreate them. — Paulo Freire

When the body speaks for the mind

SUNITA SIKRI

THE other day, my daughter woke up with an acute stomach ache and promptly announced that school was out of the question. She looked genuinely miserable, but once school hours were over, the ache disappeared almost as magically as it had arrived. In no time, she was playing happily and relishing a bowl of curd rice.

The stomach, it seemed, had been wrongly accused. The real culprit was a tough and tedious assignment given by her teacher. Finding it beyond her capacity, her mind had devised a clever escape route. The pain was real, but its roots lay elsewhere.

Perhaps the mind is more resourceful than we give it credit for. It can hide a fear behind a headache, convert anxiety into sleeplessness and sometimes persuade the stomach to go on strike. The body, during such moments, becomes the messenger of something left unspoken.

Stanley Hall, an American psychologist and educator, famously compared the human mind to an iceberg, with only a small part visible above the surface. Sigmund Freud later explored the hidden territories of the unconscious mind.

We are generally quick to treat physical ailments. A tablet, a tonic, a little rest — and we expect the machinery to start functioning again. Emotional troubles, however, demand a different prescription: patience, understanding and sometimes a change in the way we look at ourselves.

Our favourite defence is often to shift the blame. "I wrote all the answers correctly; the teacher simply doesn't like me!" complains the child who has received poor marks. Adults are not necessarily wiser. The rejected suitor may convince himself that the girl chose someone else because the other man had more money, status or social connections. It is much easier to blame circumstances than to examine a wounded ego.

Psychology has a name for one such comforting manoeuvre: the "sour grapes" reaction. If we cannot have something, we convince ourselves that it was never worth having. The ego gets its consolation prize.

Comparison fuels many of the conflicts arising from our social standing, occupations and intimate relationships. Children are constantly measured against classmates, cousins and neighbours. Adults are hardly better: careers, salaries, houses, achievements and even holidays become unofficial measuring scales.

Repeated comparison can quietly erode self-esteem. A child made to feel inferior may stop believing in his or her own abilities. An adult, too, may carry old feelings of inadequacy beneath a confident exterior.

Affection therefore matters deeply. A harsh word from a stranger may be forgotten; one from someone we love can linger. Even within families, love and resentment can sometimes occupy the same room. The healthier way out is neither denial nor daydreaming, but conversation: to speak, to listen and to understand.

The writer is Associate Professor, MLN College, Yamunanagar

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

De-dollarisation a long haul

Apropos of 'BRICS ticks the right boxes'; PM Modi was right in identifying two key industries — shipbuilding and semiconductors, alongside quantum technology, critical minerals and biotechnology, as key strategic sectors. The diplomatic euphoria over gradually reducing dependence on the US dollar may be another right tick, but this optimism would have to be tempered by economic realism. Not only is the US dollar the world's predominant reserve currency, but America also continues to be the most important trading partner for several developing countries, including the BRICS economies. However, any initiative to reduce reliance on the dollar to prevent its weaponisation in the future is a welcome initiative.

CHANDER SHEKHAR DOGRA, JALANDHAR

BRICS beyond symbolism

Refer to 'Delhi Declaration'; despite all the gains, if a declaration cannot name the aggressor in the Ukraine war, cannot blame Pakistan for Pahalgam terror attack, and cannot take a clear stand against the US on the Iran war or Iranian strikes on the UAE, what is its strategic value beyond symbolism? PM Modi's call to replace a "pyramid of privilege" with a "platform of partnership" is laudable, but collaboration rests on enforcement. Until BRICS develops mechanisms, it will remain a talk shop where diversity is only celebrated. India deserves credit for building consensus, but without implementation, it is unsustainable.

YASH KHETARPAL, PANCHKULA

Execution key to bloc's success

With reference to 'Delhi Declaration'; BRICS nations, including China, unanimously adopted the statement on zero tolerance for any form of terrorism. Iran and the UAE on the same platform is a positive measure. The Delhi Declaration delivers a clear message — oppose unilateral trade barriers, advance local currency settlement and cross-border payment interoperability, condemn cross-border terror and elevate the Global South as a leader in global governance. The real test now is implementation, ensuring BRICS initiatives on AI, financial risk and sustainable development promise a headstart.

BAL GOVIND, NOIDA

Reduce data breaches

Apropos of 'AI caution'; a clause of data encryption must be introduced and enforced strictly on all AI platforms. Combining strong encryption with careful data management can help users benefit from AI while reducing the risk of data breaches, unauthorised access and privacy violations. The administration must hold regular awareness drives especially on social media, as well as through security audits and software updates. Disciplinary and exemplary action in response to complaints about misuse of AI should be fast-tracked.

HARSIMRANVIR SINGH, PATIALA

Info panel not retirees' inn

Haryana's Information Commission must be appointed through a transparent process, represent a broad range of expertise, and be judged by its independence, quality and efficiency. In every democracy, citizens are expected to trust public institutions. Such trust cannot be claimed; it must be built through clearly documented reasons and accountability. The Right to Information Act, 2005, gave ordinary Indians a practical means of examining how public power is exercised. The Haryana State Information Commission must not be perceived as a "retirees' inn" or a reward for past services. It should command respect as an independent guardian of a democratic right. Restoring that confidence requires more than reassuring words. It needs appointments and institutional practices, which are open to public scrutiny.

VIRENDRA SINGH MALHAN, ZIRAKPUR

Boycott matches, not individuals

The women's cricket team's refusal to accept the Asia Cup trophy from Mohsin Naqvi, the Asian Cricket Council chairperson from Pakistan, was unwarranted. If the Indian team has no objection to playing matches against Pakistan, then why refuse to accept the trophy from Naqvi? The BCCI wants to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds. If the cricket board wants to send a strong message to Pakistan, it should boycott the matches instead of making a spectacle of refusing to attend the trophy presentation ceremony. Sports bodies should be free of political agendas.

ARUN HASTIR, GURDASPUR

Letters to the Editor, typed in double space, should not exceed the 200-word limit.
These should be cogently written and can be sent by **e-mail to: Letters@tribunemail.com**

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.
LAHORE, WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 15, 1926

The independent Congress Party

THE agreement that has just been reached between Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya and Lala Lajpat Rai on the one hand and the Responsive Cooperationists on the other is virtually a revival of the Sabarmati agreement, with one essential difference. The principal party to that agreement, the Swarajists, are no party to the present agreement. The circumstances under which the negotiations between Pandit Motilal Nehru and Pandit Malaviya have broken down were briefly referred to in a letter addressed by the former to the latter and published in our last issue. It is not necessary to read between the lines of that letter to know why the negotiations failed. They failed because, in Pandit Nehru's words, he "did not agree to the proposals suggested by Pandit Malaviya at Simla." The gentlemen whom he consulted were also of the same opinion. Whether this agreement between him and his followers and lieutenants was the result of their exercising their judgment independently, as Pandit Nehru stated in his letter, or of their anxiety to anticipate the wishes of their leader, it is unnecessary to enquire. Whichever may be the case, the responsibility for the failure of the negotiations must clearly be divided between the leader of the Swaraj Party and his followers. This is as regrettable from their own point of view as from any other, because in permitting the negotiations to break down, Pandit Nehru lost his only chance of winning the ensuing elections. Alone, his party may yet get a majority in some of the Provincial Councils, in the sense of being the largest single group, though except in one or two cases this is more than doubtful.

India must build, not just trade

ARUN MAIRA
FORMER MEMBER, PLANNING COMMISSION

THE meeting between Chinese President Xi Jinping and Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the sidelines of the BRICS summit was a meeting of unequals.

India's Ambassador to China startled India's National Security Advisory Board (NSAB) in 2013. He warned that India was becoming a colony of China. India-China trade was less than $1 billion in 1990-91, with India's exports to China exceeding imports. By 2011-12, bilateral had reached $76 billion. The Ambassador pointed out that the pattern of India-China trade was typical of trade between an economic power and its colonies. China was supplying capital goods and industrial inputs that India needed for its own infrastructure and industries while Indian exports were primary products — ores, minerals and cotton.

Whereas in 1990-91, India had exported more manufactured goods to China, by 2013, China had become the 'factory of the world'. Since 1991, China's manufacturing sector has become eight times larger than India's, and its high value products sector 50 times larger.

The NSAB, composed of retired diplomats and Army generals and experts in international relations strategy, was concerned that India's dependence on the import of Chinese capital goods, especially for telecom, power equipment and electronic hardware, had become economic and national security issues. The NSAB wanted to know from the Planning Commission why India's industrial policy had failed after 1991 and whether India had an industrial policy.

The truth is India did not have an industrial policy because the liberal market reforms, imposed on India by the IMF, from which India needed an emergency loan, required that India open its borders to trade and abandon its industrial policy.

The theory was that when countries traded freely, a rising tide of global growth would lift all boats. Indeed, India's GDP began to grow faster; but so did China's. India became the fastest-growing 'free-market democracy' in the world by 2009. The 'free markets and democracy' qualifiers were needed as China's economy was growing much faster.

India and China's growth strategies diverged sharply from 1991. The consequences of the choices India's policymakers made have become apparent now. Along with its faster economic growth, China built its industrial capabilities and is now the world's pre-eminent economic power alongside the US. India must depend on both the US and China for its growth — on China for industrial inputs and on the US for access to India's software exports and for permissions to use US technologies for India's own industries.

REUTERS

INFLUENCE : India's economic policies have been guided by economists wedded to US capitalist ideologies.

1991 was supposed to be the 'end of history' of ideological conflict, with socialism confined to the 'dustbin of history', in the words of some US-based commentators.

How did China escape the big bang of economic reforms that the IMF and World Bank and US-schooled economists had rolled out across the world after the collapse of the Soviet Union? Isabella M Weber gives an answer in her book, *'How China Escaped Shock Therapy: The Market Reform Debate.'* She says: "The famous Harvard development economist Dani Rodrik represents the economics profession more broadly when he answers his own question of whether 'anyone can name the Western economists or the piece for research that played an instrumental role in China's reforms' by claiming that 'economic research, at least as conventionally understood', did not play a significant role."

> China used FDI as an instrument of industrialisation. India used it as an instrument of services and market development.

Since the 1990s, whichever government has ruled, the UPA or the NDA, India's economic policies have been guided by economists wedded to US capitalist ideologies. The Planning Commission became NITI Aayog. It was old wine in new bottles. The same Washington economics has ruled.

The 1991 shift derailed India's economic policies to favour importers and traders over the domestic industry. Soon after, India signed up for the World Trade Organisation's General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) in 1995. China followed only in 2001. India was also a founding signatory to the Information Technology Agreement (ITA) in 1996, whereby the signatories agreed to eliminate customs duties on a wide range of IT products (computers, telecom equipment, etc). This suited India's emerging IT software industry because it could import Western hardware (later Chinese) with zero duty, but harmed India's own smaller domestic producers. China joined the ITA later, in 2001, but continued to build its hardware industries.

Despite India integrating with the WTO global trade regime faster than China and despite China remaining on its course of socialism rather than liberal capitalism, China attracted much more FDI than India after 1991. In 2000, FDI in China was $41 billion, whereas it was only $4 billion in India. India has become more attractive for FDI now with its ease-of-doing business policies. Nevertheless, China continues to attract more FDI: $116 billion in China vis-à-vis $28 billion in India in 2024.

The important difference is what the FDI was doing. China's FDI was heavily integrated into manufacturing and exports. India's FDI, by contrast, developed much more strongly in IT services, call centres and business back-office operations. China used FDI as an instrument of industrialisation. India used FDI increasingly as an instrument of services and market development. Multinational companies came to China to make things: electronics, machinery, automobiles, etc. This enabled China to emerge as a centre for hardware design and manufacturing and to develop new products and progressively patent and own the technology.

Deng Xiaoping said China's economic reformers must "cross the stream by feeling the stones under their feet." Economic policies must be grounded in local realities rather than in economists' numbers. India's economists have not yet grounded their statistics of GDP growth in the realities of the lives of Indian citizens. They do not care about India's GDP numbers: they want better jobs and growth in their incomes and social security.

China's policymakers have been much faster learners than India's so far. India cannot trade its way to greatness. Industrial policy must direct India's trade policy. Building indigenous industrial capabilities is much harder than reducing barriers to trade. India will neither be fully developed ('*viksit*') nor become geopolitically secure, whatever its GDP may be in 2047, until it implements a sound industrial policy courageously to build its own industrial enterprises, capable of controlling their own technological development, and which will provide opportunities for Indian citizens to work, earn and learn in them and with them.

The Himalayas are sending warning signals

SHEKHAR PATHAK
ENVIRONMENTALIST AND HISTORIAN

A WARNING bell has rung again with the disaster emanating from the Himalayas, this time near the Tibet-Nepal border. Lhende Khola flows into Nepal at Rasuwagadhi and feeds into the Kerung Khola (Bhote Kosi). It becomes the Trishuli, which later becomes the Narayani and flows through the Chitwan National Park, merging with the Ganga.

On August 26, a 0.2-sq km chunk of ice-rock slid 2,270 metres down from Mt Langtang (7,245m), forming a lake in the Lhende Khola valley, unleashing a destructive flood carrying a wall of water-debris. The violent river carrying flood material swept through the more populated Nepal. Water in the Trishuli rose by 9-10 metres (29-32 ft) in just 30 minutes, destroying villages and towns.

The flood has claimed more than 1,350 lives. Huge losses have been suffered by government, private and community assets. Within minutes, 14 major hydropower projects, 41 bridges, heavy machinery, trucks, transmission lines and electric substations were destroyed. More than a million cubic metres of material was transported by the river in a short time. The flood travelled at a 120 mph (193 km/h).

Nepal and other Himalayan countries should think from a broader perspective. Mountains and rivers are their common heritage. Rivers are transboundary lifelines. Nepal needs an effective strategy to deal with seismic, ice-rock sliding and climate-induced disasters, which are feared to increase in the future. Dialogue with China and India is needed. Nepal has been given a chance by the disaster to think about the development model. For sustainable pilgrimage-tourism, agriculture-cottage industry, pastoralism, transhumance and energy production, Nepal must develop its own model.

Floods, glacial retreat and ice-rock falls have been a part of the natural system. In the monsoon-dominated subcontinent, many manmade causes and climatic changes have contributed to the changing nature of floods. Humans have been keen observers of glacier and river behaviour but also great encroachers, with a tendency to disobey the rules they had followed for centuries.

The Hindu Kush Himalaya (HKH) region has only 5% agricultural land. Much of it is in the valleys, created by the rivers. The so-called 'development' is the biggest encroacher. We have rarely thought about other ways of development

REUTERS

VICTIM : Nepal, with very little carbon footprint, is paying a big price for the deeds of its neighbours.

appropriate for a region sitting in the lap of a fragile mountain, close to the MCT (Main Central Thrust), where many geological hazards originate.

In the V-shaped seismically-sensitive valleys, ice-rocks can obstruct rivers. Large parts of Nepal come under the 'seismic gap area', where no major earthquake has occurred for 100-150 years. The accumulated geo-energy and its non-release for decades can be the cause of a big earthquake. Weathering can unlock a rock or snow slope.

There is a difference between old ice, fresh snow and water. On old ice (permafrost), the fresh snow settles vertically, but the water searches for the lowest point to flow down. Due to warming, the higher place can get rains instead of hail or snow, greatly increasing the destructive power of water.

> The so-called 'development' is the biggest encroacher.

On June 16-17, 2013, Kedarnath received rain instead of hail and snow. Another contributing factor was 400 mm of rain in 24 hours. Similarly, Gauna Lake breached in the Birahi-Alaknanda flood of 1970. The ice-rock slide from Ronti peak created a lake in Rishi Ganga on February 7, 2021. It burst and destroyed two hydro projects and took more than 220 lives.

The way warming enlarges glacial lakes was evident during the Teesta flood, when, on October 3-4, 2023, South Lhonak Lake breached. Along with loss of lives and property, the Teesta 3 project, costing Rs 14,000 crore, was destroyed. The event was a glacial lake outburst flood (GLOF). Nepal is prone to GLOFs. In May 2012, one such flood killed over 60 people in Pokhara.

Nepal's catastrophic floods underscore the connection between massive glacier-ice collapse triggering deadly events downstream. This disaster should be linked to broader Himalayan risks, leading to the need of pre-emptive scientific planning as glacial lakes expand and climate-driven hazards intensify across the HKH region. In September 2024, 170 persons lost their lives due to rains, landslides and floods. 48 persons died in floods in Kathmandu. Kosi and Gandak crossed the danger line. Nearly 30 lakh people were impacted by floods in Nepal. The floods hit Nepal in 2025, too.

An earthquake trigger can make such disasters deadlier. Other disasters involving multiple interacting factors include Melamchi (2021), Thame (2024) and Bhote Kosi (2025). The Himalayas are warming twice as fast as the global average. The UN said in 2023 that Nepal's mountains had lost one-third of their ice in just over 30 years due to global warming. Nepal has more than 2,000 glacial lakes, of which 21 are potentially dangerous.

The Himalayan countries are facing ecological, disaster and climatic change-related challenges. Any ecological loss accelerates the intensity of disasters and the two are governed by climatic changes. Snow-ice was already unstable due to global warming.

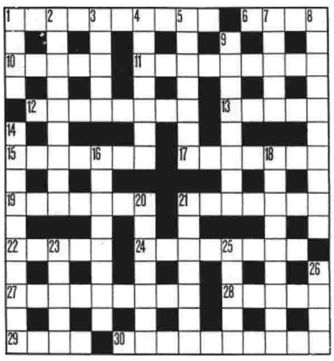
The glacial mass loss in the HKH region was 65% faster in the 2011-20 period than in the previous decade. Without substantial cuts in fossil-fuel emissions by 2100, the Himalayas could lose 66% of their ice, according to researchers.

Nepal, with very little carbon footprint, is paying a big price for the deeds of the neighbouring countries, which are sending black carbon and brown dust in the atmosphere in large quantities. A sound policy and responsible social behaviour can maintain the balance. An understanding between the Himalayan countries is essential. A wider exchange of ideas is needed. Dialogue is as important as the treaties for managing their common rivers.

Between India and China, there is no treaty. Take the case of River Pareechu. In June 2004, a big landslide created a lake in the Tibetan side. A year later, the lake burst on June 26, 2005. Lives were saved, but it caused losses of Rs 800 crore. After the calamity, a protocol was signed, but India had already paid the price. Now China is building dams close to the border and there is no understanding with the neighbouring countries.

It is true that humans live in these areas at their own risk. They can work to minimise the risks, but they cannot eliminate them. They cannot eliminate the risk from forces beyond their control. But we have democratic state systems. Modern science can be used for the good of citizens. Communities must decide which types of 'development' are beneficial and which are too risky. Communities carry the lessons of disasters for years, while state institutions forget them much sooner.

QUICK CROSSWORD



ACROSS
1 Vigorously contested (4-6)
6 A long time (4)
10 Publish (5)
11 Finish quickly (6,3)
12 An incline (8)
13 Rate of activity (5)
15 Mythical one-horned animal (7)
17 Vote back into office (2-5)
19 Eight-sided figure (7)
21 Master of an art (7)
22 Malicious burning of property (5)
24 Threatening (8)
27 Fundamentally (2,7)
28 Greek philosopher (5)
29 Cause of annoyance (4)
30 Unite in solidarity (5,5)

DOWN
1 Greet with enthusiasm (4)
2 Forcible control (9)
3 Founder of psychoanalysis (5)
4 Indefinitely numerous (7)
5 Pistol-case (7)
7 Despondency (5)
8 The easier alternative (4,6)
9 So to speak (2,2,4)
14 In an exposed position (3,2,1,4)
16 A living animal or plant (8)
18 Give consideration to (9)
20 Merely symbolic (7)
21 Social behaviour (7)
23 Gloss (5)
25 To narrow to one end (5)
26 Troubles (4)

Yesterday's Solution

Across: 1 For sure, 5 Meter, 8 In the lead, 9 Now, 10 Gibe, 12 Apposite, 14 Crayon, 15 Brazil, 17 Mystical, 18 Mega, 21 Lea, 22 Golden age, 24 Testy, 25 Without

Down: 1 Fling, 2 Rot, 3 Used, 4 Exempt, 5 Mediocre, 6 Tin Lizzie, 7 Raw deal, 11 Brass hats, 13 Jokingly, 14 Camelot, 16 Wallow, 19 Alert, 20 Lest, 23 Ado.

SU DO KU

8			1		6		4	3
	4	6			7		2	
					9			
		5						
7		1		9		2		6
						4		
			3					
	9		4			6	8	
6	1		9		8			7

MEDIUM

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

8	5	6	4	7	3	9	2	1
4	3	2	6	1	9	8	5	7
7	9	1	5	8	2	3	4	6
2	4	8	3	6	1	5	7	9
1	7	3	8	9	5	4	6	2
5	6	9	2	4	7	1	3	8
9	1	5	7	3	6	2	8	4
6	2	4	1	5	8	7	9	3
3	8	7	9	2	4	6	1	5

CALENDAR

SEPTEMBER 15, 2026, TUESDAY

Shaka Samvat	1948
Bhadrapad Shaka	24
Bhadrapad Parvishte	30
Hijari	1448
Shukla Paksha Tithi 4, up to 7:45 am	
Indra Yoga up to 12:20 pm	
Swati Nakshatra up to 3:21 pm	
Moon in Libra sign	

FORECAST

SUNSET: TUESDAY 18:28 HRS
SUNRISE: WEDNESDAY 06:07 HRS

CITY	MAX	MIN
Chandigarh	34	23
New Delhi	33	24
Amritsar	34	26
Bathinda	36	25
Jalandhar	34	23
Ludhiana	35	23
Bhiwani	32	23
Hisar	34	23
Sirsa	33	24
Dharamsala	29	17
Manali	25	15
Shimla	24	15
Srinagar	28	18
Jammu	30	25
Kargil	27	12
Leh	23	11
Dehradun	30	21
Mussoorie	23	22

TEMPERATURE IN °C

The Pioneer
NEW DELHI | TUESDAY | SEPTEMBER 15, 2026

Editor's TAKE

India's Global South wager at BRICS

India used the final day of the BRICS summit for outreach to regional powers across the Global South. Can Delhi now turn diplomatic goodwill into tangible outcomes?

A day after leaders adopted the New Delhi Declaration, Modi used the summit's final day, alongside the open session for BRICS members and partners, to work through seven bilateral meetings – with leaders and delegations from South Africa, Nigeria, Kazakhstan, Egypt, the Philippines and more.

This was not summit choreography. It was India using its year as BRICS chair to conduct retail diplomacy with the Global South at a scale few hosts have attempted. The guest list was not random. Cyril Ramaphosa's South Africa is BRICS' founding African anchor and the continent's most industrialised economy. Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation and a BRICS partner country since last year, arrived pitching itself - through Vice-President Kashim Shettima, standing in for an absent President Tinubu - as an investor gateway to the African Continental Free Trade Area. Kassym-Jomart Tokayev's Kazakhstan brought Central Asian connectivity and critical minerals to the table. Egypt, sitting astride the Suez chokepoint, and the Philippines, extending India's outreach to the edge of the South China Sea, rounded out a map that stretched from West Africa to the Western Pacific. Read together, the day's meetings resembled less a scattering of handshakes than a curated survey of the Global South's regional anchors.

The case for calling this a genuine shift rests on follow-through, not friendliness. India spent its G20 year winning permanent membership for the African Union at that table, and has since convened two Voice of the Global South summits. What Delhi is now attempting is to convert that credibility into something transactional – trade corridors, development financing and digital public infrastructure exports - rather than let it remain mere goodwill. That distinguishes the pitch from both Western conditionality and Beijing's debt-heavy infrastructure diplomacy: India is selling itself as a convener without a chequebook large enough to buy loyalty, which is either its biggest limitation or its most credible asset, depending on who is asking.

History counsels caution. The Non-Aligned Movement and the G77 also began as solidarity projects and ended up long on communiqués and short on institutions, because the moment specifics arrived, members' interests diverged sharply.

Seven bilaterals in a single day are choreography unless they leave behind monitorable deliverables – financing lines with timelines, not MoUs for the filing cabinet. India's own aid budgets and diplomatic bandwidth remain modest next to its ambitions, and Beijing's chequebook is not going anywhere. Whether September 13 is remembered as more than a crowded diary page depends entirely on what Delhi does once the leaders fly home – whether Nigeria's investment pitch gets an Indian follow-up call by November, whether Kazakhstan's connectivity ask survives the next crisis elsewhere on the calendar. India's chairship of BRICS ends with this summit; the harder test – turning a strong day of photographs into a working platform – begins now, and it is not a test India can pass alone.

BRICS and the paradox of strategic autonomy

BRICS wants to build a multipolar world less dependent on Western power. Yet its own members remain deeply dependent on competing centres of technology, finance, energy, markets and security. The New Delhi summit exposed the uncomfortable gap between the rhetoric of autonomy and the realities of interdependence

NILANTHA ILANGAMUWA

Nearly 50 pages of the Delhi Declaration were adopted at the New Delhi BRICS summit last week, while the Houthi advance in the Red Sea and its seizure of major positions around a critical maritime chokepoint were pulling the world's supply chains towards another dangerous rupture. The Trump administration's military intervention in Iran, carried out with Israeli support, has demonstrated how rapidly the language of sovereignty can collide with military power, while the Houthi advance towards Bab el-Mandeb has given Tehran-aligned forces greater leverage over one of the world's most consequential maritime passages. Globalisation has created prosperity by concentrating dependence along a handful of geographical, technological and financial arteries. Once those arteries become instruments of power, economics and geopolitics become inseparable.

The more important question is what kind of multipolarity BRICS is actually trying to construct. The declaration calls for reform of global institutions, condemns unilateral sanctions, demands greater representation for developing countries and promotes resilient supply chains and technological cooperation. But the central weakness of BRICS remains obvious. It is much easier to agree that the existing system is unfair than to agree on what should replace it. Its members can unite against sanctions, Western dominance and technological exclusion, but become considerably less comfortable when the question turns to whose technology, capital, markets and security interests will define the alternative. BRICS invokes strategic autonomy as though it were an established reality, yet its continuing dependence on external markets, technologies, finance and security structures exposes the concept, for now, as more a rhetorical aspiration than genuine collective autonomy. In that sense, BRICS increasingly embodies Broken Rhetoric, Incomplete Collective Strategy, projecting an ambition for strategic autonomy that its members have yet to acquire the collective capacity to realise. The organisation does not function because its members agree. It functions because they have discovered that disagreement need not prevent them from sitting in the same room.

Xi's offer of cooperation in open-source artificial intelligence, smart manufacturing and advanced technological training was an unmistakable statement about where Beijing believes future influence will come from.

> IN MAY 2026, BRICS FOREIGN MINISTERS MET IN INDIA AND FAILED TO PRODUCE A JOINT COMMUNIQUÉ BECAUSE MEMBERS COULD NOT AGREE OVER THE WAR INVOLVING IRAN, THE UNITED STATES AND ISRAEL. IRAN WANTED THE ORGANISATION TO CONDEMN THE CONFLICT AND ACCUSED THE UAE OF INVOLVEMENT. THE UAE REJECTED THOSE ACCUSATIONS AND DEFENDED ITS SOVEREIGN RIGHT TO RESPOND TO IRANIAN ATTACKS

Modi's warning about the weaponisation of technology and critical minerals was equally significant. A country can escape dependence on Western finance and still become dependent upon Chinese manufacturing. It can embrace artificial intelligence while remaining dependent on foreign computing infrastructure, semiconductors and technical standards. An alternative order cannot be built on dependence merely because the identity of the dominant supplier has changed.

Developing countries deserve greater representation in institutions such as the United Nations Security Council and the international financial system, but replacing Western predominance with a more dispersed distribution of power does not automatically produce justice. China can challenge Western technological dominance while creating dependencies of its own. Russia can challenge the Western security order while pursuing its own interests. India can advocate for the Global South while protecting its own priorities. Iran and the UAE can sit inside the same organisation while pursuing sharply different regional strategies. That is why the Iran-UAE contradiction at New Delhi was so revealing. Both had to find language sufficiently broad to coexist within the same declaration, with the call for maximum restraint in the Middle East reflecting the limits of what the organisation could agree upon. BRICS has therefore discovered that its value may lie less in forcing countries to agree than in giving adversaries an institutional space in which they can disagree without walking away.

The same tension is visible in India's own regional position. New Delhi wants to speak for the Global South while China is steadily increasing the economic, technological and strategic choices available to India's neighbours. South Asian states increasingly have more than one external partner from which to seek infrastructure, finance, technology, trade and defence cooperation. India's traditional predominance is therefore being challenged, not necessarily destroyed. The uncomfortable consequence is that the philosophy giving India greater room to manoeuvre internationally also gives its neighbours greater room to manoeuvre around India.

BRICS can condemn unilateral sanctions while its members remain deeply integrated into Western markets. It can demand technological sovereignty while remaining dependent on foreign intellectual property and advanced components. It can advocate resilient supply chains while geopolitical conflict repeatedly exposes their vulnerability. It can speak about peace while containing states engaged in wars or regional confrontation. And it can describe itself as a vehicle of Global South solidarity while the interests of its largest members collide with one another.

American technology, Chinese manufacturing, Russian energy, Gulf capital, Iranian geography, Indian markets, African resources and Asian shipping routes are becoming components of a fragmented system of power. The Houthi advance around Bab el-Mandeb demonstrates that geography can be as consequential as finance or semiconductors. The challenge for the Global South is therefore not simply to oppose the West, but to construct a system in which dependence is reduced without replacing one hierarchy with another.

That is the paradox at the heart of BRICS. It was born from the conviction that the world should not be governed by a small group of established powers, yet its members are themselves becoming centres of power capable of producing new dependencies. It promises multipolarity because unipolarity is inadequate, but multipolarity can produce rivalry without justice, fragmentation without freedom and competition without genuine autonomy.

The Global South cannot secure its future merely by choosing which great power to depend upon. The real test is whether it can acquire the capacity to depend less on all of them. That struggle is now being fought in semiconductor factories, currency markets, ports, pipelines, mineral mines, artificial-intelligence laboratories and the narrow waters of Bab el-Mandeb. BRICS represents the Global South's desire to escape dependence while simultaneously revealing how difficult genuine independence has become. That may be the most important truth to emerge from New Delhi. BRICS may not yet be the alternative world order its advocates promise, but it has become the arena in which the struggle over whether such an order is even possible is being fought.

The author is a columnist based in Colombo

Daiv Vani

WISDOM FOR A MEANINGFUL LIFE

The Question That Outlasts Death

We spend so much energy pursuing comfort and security, rarely pausing to ask what truly matters, until we're forced to and many times too late. The story of young Nachiketa reverses that order entirely.

Nachiketa's father, in a moment of irritation, said he would give his son to death. Taking the words seriously, Nachiketa went to the abode of Yama, the god of death, and waited three days for his return. Impressed by his patience, Yama offered him three boons. For the third, Nachiketa asked to know what happens after death, the one truth most spend a lifetime avoiding. Yama tried tempting him with wealth, kingdoms, and pleasures instead, testing whether the boy's resolve would waver. Nachiketa refused every substitute, insisting that no wealth could compare to understanding the truth of existence itself. Yama finally taught him the wisdom of the Self, imperishable, beyond birth and death.

We often trade the deepest questions of our lives for smaller comforts and easier distractions. Nachiketa's courage was choosing truth over every reward offered as a substitute.

Today, sit with one question you've been avoiding because it feels too big, and give it a few honest minutes of thought.

–DAIV

Teaching cannot run on sacrifice

SAKSHI SETHI

2ND OPINION

A job where competence is regularly rewarded with greater labour is essentially flawed. The trustworthy instructor will soon be required to oversee challenging classes, fulfil deadlines, plan activities, offer student counselling, deal with parents and step in when necessary. What starts out as extraordinary effort soon turns into a regular expectation. We refer to educators as mentors and nation-builders, yet we keep increasing duties without considering what ought to be eliminated. In the same constrained working day, teaching now faces competition from assessment, documentation, coordination, counselling and continuous digital availability. No one's responsibility is the issue. It is a system that frequently increases rather than decreases the role of the teacher.

Since practically everything is significant in the schools we have created, teachers are eventually responsible for almost everything. Recently, our Honourable Prime Minister, Shri Narendra Modi, called on educators to engage with children's lives rather than just textbooks and curricula. The aspiration is unquestionably valuable. Education cannot be reduced to completing chapters. A teacher should notice the child whose marks are falling because something at home has changed, the adolescent hiding anxiety behind aggression or the student whose silence is asking for help. But noticing requires time. Listening requires mental space. A system cannot expect teachers to remain patient, attentive and emotionally present while keeping them buried in administrative work. Yet when exhaustion begins to show, the response is often to place the burden back on the teacher. We speak of resilience, wellbeing and work-life balance, but these ideas can become substitutes for structural reform. A mindfulness session cannot lighten an excessive workload, and a motivational workshop cannot create more hours in the day.

There is also an uncomfortable economic question at the heart of this debate. If teaching is truly one of society's most important professions, why is 'passion' so often used where other professions would speak of pay, working conditions, autonomy and career growth? These days, schools promise global standards, holistic development, technology-rich classrooms, individualised instruction and emotional well-being. It is reasonable for parents to anticipate that these commitments will be fulfilled. However, the instructor in front of the classroom is ultimately responsible for all such promises.

How the instructor was treated prior to that moment has a big impact on its quality. Thus, teacher well-being is not a sentimental issue. It is essential to the quality of education. Planning time is lost due to needless paperwork. Attention that could have been given to students is competing with avoidable tasks. When the classroom bell rings, exhaustion does not go away. The message that institutions deliver to their best instructors may be the most detrimental: if you can demonstrate your abilities, you will be expected to do more. Eventually, some depart. Others continue, but they no longer voluntarily put in the extra effort. Institutions then inquire as to the status of the commitment. What we did with that commitment while we still had it is a better question.

Appreciation needs to go beyond rituals and catchphrases if India wants teaching to become a career of desire. Salary, staffing, reasonable workloads, planning time, professional autonomy and growth possibilities must all demonstrate it. Excellent educators will always go above and beyond the call of duty. However, there is a significant distinction between creating a system that requires continuous sacrifice and appreciating dedication. Sacrifice is no longer a virtue when instructors must make tremendous sacrifices for the school to function normally. It is now the operational model.

The writer is an educator and councillor

PIC TALK

An idol of Lord Ganesh is covered with a red cloth during the Ganesh Chaturthi festival in Amritsar. PHOTO: PTI

Letters to the Editor

BRICS comes of age in New Delhi

Apropos 'BRICS comes of age in New Delhi' (September 14, 2026).

The New Delhi Declaration is significant not for any dramatic breakthrough but for the simple fact that eleven leaders with deeply divergent interests managed to agree on anything at all. Getting Iran, Saudi Arabia and the UAE to sign a common sentence on West Asia required quiet diplomacy and patient negotiation. This is maturity, not weakness. The summit also achieved practical outcomes, including local currency settlement, payment system interoperability and a counter-terrorism framework. The India-China reset on the sidelines added another layer of diplomatic value.

Yet the limitations are real and should not be glossed over. BRICS still cannot speak with one voice on Ukraine, lacks enforcement mechanisms and relies on careful ambiguity to hold together. The absence of a single currency is sensible, not a failure.

What New Delhi has shown is that BRICS can hold its contradictions together long enough to get useful work done. That is not dominance, but it is genuine progress. For now, it may be the only kind of progress available.

K CHIDANAND KUMAR | BENGALURU

A graceful victory for Zverev

Alexander Zverev proved to be the coolest customer when it mattered most at the 2026 US Open, defeating Ben Shelton 6-3, 7-6(2), 5-7, 6-2 to lift his first US Open trophy.

Zverev entered the tournament with growing confidence after an outstanding season. With several leading contenders falling early, he seized his opportunity with maturity and composure. Shelton, playing in his first Grand Slam final, had shown tremendous skill and resilience throughout the fortnight. He has the serve, power, athleticism and variety to trouble the best in the world. But against Zverev, he discovered that having all the shots is not always enough. At the highest level, temperament, patience and the ability to handle pressure can make the decisive difference. Zverev's greatest moment, however, came after the match. Rather than allowing the spotlight to remain solely on his victory, the new champion walked over to Shelton's father and coach, Bryan Shelton, and embraced him and members of Ben's family. It was a spontaneous and deeply respectful gesture, acknowledging the people behind the player he had just defeated.

Winning a Grand Slam requires extraordinary talent, but celebrating victory with humility requires something more. Zverev showed that true sportsmanship is also about how one carries oneself in triumph.

AP THIRUVADI | CHENNAI

Making NEP 2020 work

With reference to 'NEP 2020: From promise to classroom reality' (September 14), the article shifts attention from the language of the National Education Policy to what students experience in classrooms. Six years after its introduction, the central question should be whether children are learning better, thinking independently and receiving equitable opportunities. The gap between policy and practice is particularly visible in government schools, where shortages of teachers, laboratories, digital facilities and professional support affect learning. Providing computers or introducing a new curriculum cannot transform education. Teachers need sustained training, manageable workloads and professional development. Assessment must also change. If examinations continue to reward memorisation, schools will remain examination-driven. Competency-based assessment should encourage students to explain, apply and question rather than merely reproduce information.

Most importantly, implementation should be monitored through learning outcomes that parents and the public can understand. NEP 2020 has a vision. Its credibility will ultimately depend on whether that vision becomes visible in the everyday experience of an ordinary child.

A MYILSAMI | COIMBATORE

The Pioneer
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Forest martyrs: The silent war to protect India's wilds

From the Bishnoi sacrifice at Khejrali to the daily battles against poachers, smugglers and hostile terrain, frontline forest staff remain the largely unsung soldiers of conservation. The courage of officers who protect forests deserves not merely remembrance, but stronger institutional and legal protection

B K SINGH

India recently observed Forest Martyrs' Day on September 11, when we remembered frontline staff who sacrificed their lives on duty while fighting for the conservation of forests and wildlife. It was established in 2013 by the Union Government's Environment Ministry and has historical roots in the 1730 Khejrali massacre in Rajasthan, when 363 Bishnoi community villagers, led by Amrita Devi, sacrificed their lives to protect sacred Khejri trees from being cut down. While many such movements to save trees from being axed in post-Independence India, such as the 'Chipko Movement' of the Himalayas and the 'Appiko Movement' of the Western Ghats, have been successful, long-term conservation efforts also depend on frontline staff of the Forest Departments of states and Union Territories.

Often, the staff encounter gangs carrying deadly weapons and firearms while protecting valuable trees such as red sanders, sandalwood, teak and rosewood, as well as the highly prized body parts of wild animals such as rhinoceroses, tigers, leopards and elephants. To extract body parts such as a single horn from a rhinoceros, bones and skins from tigers, elephant tusks and leopard skins, poachers immobilise wild animals by laying jaw traps at water sources and then use firearms or even directly fire bullets to kill them. Gangs cutting valuable trees, if obstructed, attack the staff with sharp knives or bow saws, or other deadly weapons, or open fire with country-made guns. While apprehending the culprits, there have been several instances across the country in which forest officials have lost their lives or been grievously injured. Many a time, they are even ambushed in the forests. There are occasions when Forest Guards and Forest Watchers are attacked by tigers and trampled by elephants and killed. Forest staff have been electrocuted while walking on live wires laid to kill ungulates for meat. There are numerous ways in which forest protection staff lose their lives.

The hunting of wild animals is not confined to the above-mentioned species, whose body parts are valuable; it also extends to ungulates such as deer, sambar and gaur for meat. Many sanctuaries, especially in tribal belts, are vulnerable to ungulate hunting, and a number of them have become devoid of prey populations, preventing any growth in the populations of tigers, co-predators and prey animals.

In the 1980s and early 1990s, Veerappan, a notorious poacher and sandalwood smuggler, led a gang of criminals that once wiped out tusker elephants from the forests and also eliminated forest personnel who came in the way. The brutal murder of 1979-batch IFS officer P Srinivas on November 10, 1991 is still in the public memory. The Government of Karnataka had fixed Forest Martyrs' Day on November 10 and observed it every year until the Government of India changed it to September 11.

The forests of Chamarajanagar district of Karnataka share boundaries with Hosur, Dharmapuri, Erode and Sathyamangalam districts of Tamil Nadu. The Cauvery River demarcates the boundary with Hosur and Dharmapuri. Forests on either side of the Cauvery were vast, road networks were poor, and there were a large number of strategically located hideouts that provided a distinct advantage to Veerappan and his gang to thrive in the landscape. Forest and police personnel needed an extraordinary level of fitness to walk through the inhospitable terrain for any checks inside the forests. It was extremely challenging for them to track down Veerappan in the landscape. Srinivas, in 1990-91, was working on Veerappan's surrender. Veerappan double-crossed him and invited him to a place in the forests, 6 km from his native village, Gopinatham. Srinivas fell into his trap, went there without any protection, and was shot and beheaded. His head remained untraced. Despite the pressure exerted by the police forces of two states, Veerappan lived for another 13 years until he was finally killed in an encounter by the Tamil Nadu Police in July 2004.

Veerappan has left a legacy of hardened criminals in Hanur taluk of Chamarajanagar district. There are two wildlife sanctuaries in the taluk: the Cauvery Sanctuary and MM Hills Sanctuary. Camera-trap studies by NGO Sanjay Gubbi reveal that the tiger populations in both the sanctuaries are increasing after black granite quarrying in Protected Areas was suspended. The instances of hunting wild ungulates by criminal gangs are also found to be too many. Forest protection staff have to toil that much harder to put a stop to the unprecedented killing of wild deer and sambar. There is a growing market for wild animal meat in Bengaluru and Mysuru.

IN THE 1980S AND EARLY 1990S, VEERAPPAN, A NOTORIOUS POACHER AND SANDALWOOD SMUGGLER, LED A GANG OF CRIMINALS THAT ONCE WIPED OUT TUSKER ELEPHANTS FROM THE FORESTS AND ALSO ELIMINATED FOREST PERSONNEL WHO CAME IN THE WAY. THE BRUTAL MURDER OF 1979-BATCH IFS OFFICER P SRINIVAS ON NOVEMBER 10, 1991 IS STILL IN THE PUBLIC MEMORY

About a year ago, a tigress and her four cubs were poisoned and killed in Minium village of the Hoogyum Range of MM Hills Sanctuary. A few months later, another tiger was killed in Hanur, and an elephant calf was electrocuted by live wires laid in Cowdhalli forests to kill deer and sambar for meat. While patrolling the forests, the staff generally remain subdued and avoid opening fire, even when criminal gangs show aggression. Maybe the staff are scared of the harassment that follows. In several encounters, the staff suffer more severe injuries than the criminals.

Last month's encounter in Hanur Range of the Cauvery Wildlife Division was an exception, where three of the four poachers were shot and one escaped. While the magisterial inquiry report is still awaited, the Forest Guard is believed to have opened fire only after the poacher fired first and missed the patrolling staff. The incident happened in the early hours, deep inside the sanctuary and more than 6 km away from the nearest village. What was recovered from the spot were two muzzle-loading guns, head torches with batteries, three mobile phones, several knives, screwdrivers, cutting pliers, cooking vessels, vegetables, biscuit packets and two bags of wild meat, which leaves little doubt that the poachers had carefully planned the operation. But for the village rivals tipping off forest officials with the details, it would indeed have been difficult to trace the criminals in the vast forests.

The incident has also taken a political turn, with the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister openly advocating the innocence of the poachers and also attacking the decision of the Karnataka Government to go ahead with the Mekedatu dam on the River Cauvery, which is environmentally unsustainable. The FIR against the staff is under investigation, and I hope that the truth will prevail and that they will not be victimised in the political crossfire.

There are several NGOs serving the cause of conservation in the country. They possess sufficient trained manpower to carry out field duties and have resources to hire legal experts to aid in court cases. Often, field-level foresters see them as competitors. This is not correct. Foresters must ensure that NGOs' resources are fully integrated with those of the departments and utilised for conservation.

Ten leopard skins and banned hunting equipment were recently recovered, and four accused persons were arrested in Uttar Pradesh's Agra about a month ago. The preliminary investigation revealed that six of these leopards were poached in Kuno Wildlife Division, two in Sheopur and two in the Chambal Sanctuary in Morena. Heavy iron traps were used to immobilise the animals. Kuno is an area where cheetahs have also been introduced, and its success is a matter of national pride. Personnel from Wildlife SOS, an NGO, are reported to have tracked the offenders and tipped off the UP Forest Department in Agra.

As fingers were pointed towards the Madhya Pradesh Forest Department for poor regulatory work, its Chief Wildlife Warden was clearly angry with the NGO and claimed that the accused persons had links with Wildlife SOS to facilitate such activities. The NGO's CEO, Kartick Satyanarain, vehemently denied the allegation, saying that his organisation has spent more than 32 years working in wildlife rescue, rehabilitation and conservation across 19 states and has assisted state forest departments in rescuing over five lakh wild animals. UP is happy with the NGO and booked the accused with its help, while MP is gunning against it. My experience is that no NGO can survive so long in the field of conservation if it assists and abets offenders.

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India's leap toward sustainable mobility

SHEHZAD POONAWALLA
VIJETA RATTANI

Last week, as the world marked EV Day, India's electric mobility journey of speed, scale and sustainability stood out as a useful case study. Being the third-largest automotive market globally, India seeks to leverage its position to strengthen industrial competitiveness and boost economic growth while reducing oil dependence and advancing the sustainability transition. At the heart of this transition is its rapid shift to electric vehicles. The year 2025 saw a transformational surge, with 2.3 million units sold, from a modest 50,000 EVs sold in 2016, representing 46 times growth, outpacing global trends, and exports of USD 84 million in 2024 from just USD 1.2 million in 2020. This trajectory marks not just a technological change but a structural transformation of the mobility sector, while positioning India to emerge as a global hub of the EV ecosystem.

This transformation was driven primarily by motorised two-wheelers (12.8 lakh units) and three-wheelers (8 lakh units) sold in 2025, with the state of Uttar Pradesh leading the sales of EVs, with strong consumer demand.

Rightly hailed as the future of mobility, EVs present clear advantages over petrol- or diesel-run vehicles, such as zero tailpipe emissions, curbing air pollution; high efficiency; lower upkeep and maintenance costs; home-charging convenience; and smoother rides with no complicated controls. Government incentives such as tax deductions, reduced or waived road tax, vehicle registration fees and lower GST rates aim to integrate EVs into India's broader sustainability and industrial competitiveness agenda.

Govt pushes for EVs, states leading the transition

In the last decade, India's EV policy architecture has matured into a diversified set of schemes, incentives and mandates. The PLI-ACC Scheme promotes domestic battery manufacturing, while the National Manufacturing Mission (2025) identifies EVs as a "seed" sector for innovation-led growth, integrating production into global value chains. The PM E-DRIVE Scheme prioritises public transport for EV adoption through targeted demand incentives, expansion of charging infrastructure and domestic manufacturing of specified EV components, reinforced by the Phased Manufacturing Programme (PMP). Additionally, the PM e-Bus Sewa-PSM Scheme (2024) provides payment security coverage for electric buses, while the Scheme for Promotion of Manufacturing of Electric Passenger Cars in India (SPMEPCI) facilitates the manufacturing of electric cars in India. India aims for 30 per cent of all vehicle sales to be electric by 2030, aligning with the global EV30@30 initiative, and targets 1.32 million charging stations across India by 2030. These measures add structural depth to India's electric vehicle ecosystem through the development, expansion and strengthening of the entire EV ecosystem.

With the central framework in place, states are leading the transition, tailoring their strategies to comparative advantages, local needs and development priorities. By the end of 2025, 29 states and UTs had notified EV policies, implying greater awareness of the urgency for EVs. Therefore, while Delhi's EV policy is centred more on regulatory phase-out timelines regarding ICE (Internal Combustion Engine) vehicles in light of pressing air pollution challenges, states such as Gujarat, Assam, Meghalaya, Haryana, etc. offer attractive demand-side subsidies. However, subsidies alone cannot steer the big shift to EVs. A local manufacturing system is critical. States like Tamil Nadu, Maharashtra, Karnataka, etc. are leading the effort with heavy capital subsidies, easing processes for land allotment, registration fees, etc. Uttar Pradesh offers a mix of incentives for buyers, charging infrastructure developers, battery companies, fleet operators, manufacturers and businesses. Collectively, these approaches are fuelling India's shift from an assembly-led market to an EV manufacturing hub, aligned with Make in India, Viksit Bharat 2047, climate and net-zero goals. This evolution represents a convergence of climate goals, industrial competitiveness and energy security.

Looking Ahead

Persistent deficits in infrastructure and the high cost of adoption continue to challenge India's electric mobility trajectory. Yet, with the government's focus on the next phases of Corporate Average Fuel Efficiency (CAFE) norms and global players such as VinFast and Tesla joining domestic leaders in investments in manufacturing and innovation, the sector is entering a crucial phase of expansion. Further, emerging technologies, including LMFP and sodium-ion batteries, etc, are reshaping the innovation frontier, promising efficiency gains, cost reductions and consumer confidence. Such developments would diversify consumer choices, boost growth and create new livelihoods while embedding sustainability into production systems.

Rising global demand for electric vehicles and India's expanding network of free trade agreements are creating newer avenues for exports of EV equipment, batteries and components, projecting India as a competitive supplier in global value chains.

India's EV transition is not a policy experiment. It is reconfiguring India's transport sector's sustainability shift while aligning industrial growth with global competitiveness.

Shehzad Poonawalla, public policy analyst & commentator, former spokesperson BJP. Vijeta Rattani, sustainability and development professional

Bishkek's real test: What the SCO's 25th Summit means for India

SHANTESH KUMAR SINGH

Ten full members, two observers and fourteen dialogue partners under one roof invite an easy reading: another photograph of the world's shifting power balance. The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation's 25th-anniversary summit in Bishkek, held August 31-September 1, 2026, resists that shorthand. Behind the ceremony sat a real paper trail: the Bishkek Declaration plus 27 companion documents — 28 agreements, including amendments to the SCO's 2002 Charter. The volume alone proves nothing, but it signals ambition: to be judged as more than a security forum.

Scale is why this matters. Together, the SCO's full members, observers and dialogue partners now account for roughly 42 per cent of the world's population, close to a quarter of its land area, and more than a quarter of global GDP. A coalition that size speaks in many registers at once, a tension India has long managed.

For New Delhi, the clearest gain at Bishkek was collective language on narco-terrorism and organised crime — turning India's terrorism concerns from a bilateral grievance into a cause backed by a bloc spanning Central Asia, Russia, China, Iran and Belarus. It fits India's three-word template for the SCO - Security, Connectivity, Opportunity: security as protection from drug trafficking, cybercrime, extremism and insecure borders, not just armies; connectivity as infrastructure that respects sovereignty rather than substitutes for it; opportunity as trade, investment, energy, technology and people-to-people ties.

Institutionally, Bishkek produced two new instruments: a Universal Centre for Countering Security Challenges and Threats, covering all ten full members and fourteen dialogue partners, and an Executive Committee under the SCO's Anti-Narcotics Centre — backed by a drug-addiction programme, a push against synthetic drugs and precursors (both to 2030), and an information-security plan for 2026-28. None of this proves anything by itself; the test is whether ten states with incompatible intelligence systems can actually share information, act against terror financing and trafficking, and manage the instability radiating from Afghanistan — still only an observer, but a factor every member must weigh.

India pressed a specific argument: anti-terror cooperation cannot be selective. Speaking in the same room as Pakistan's prime minister, Shehbaz Sharif, Narendra Modi rejected double standards on terrorism and called for dismantling its entire support structure — financing, recruitment, radicalisation and safe havens — rather than isolating a single strand.

A second cluster of outcomes sat outside conventional security: a declaration on nuclear and

physical nuclear security, a joint statement on energy cooperation, a programme launching the SCO's Green Technology Corridor for 2026-30, a biodiversity initiative for 2026-31, and memoranda on information-sharing, climate, crime and energy efficiency. Together, these read as an organisation positioning itself as a governance forum for the energy transition, not merely a counter-terrorism secretariat.

Connectivity received similar emphasis, with the Declaration calling for stronger north-south and east-west transport corridors, simpler cross-border transit, resilient supply chains and digitised logistics. Here India's interests turn concrete: with overland access through Pakistan effectively closed, Chabahar Port and the International North-South Transport Corridor are its practical workaround — routes into Central Asia, Russia and Europe via Iran. India's pitch is that connectivity comes with conditions: financially sustainable, free of debt traps, respectful of local environments, and careful never to compromise a third country's territorial integrity. Making that case through alternatives, not objection alone, is the more persuasive form of dissent.

The Declaration also carried a message aimed past the region: greater representation for developing economies at the UN and international financial institutions, defence of the multilateral trading system, and opposition to unilateral sanctions, asset freezes and secondary penalties that member states see as inconsistent with the UN Charter and WTO rules. So did unrestricted missile-defence deployment and any bid to secure one state's safety at others' expense - widely read as a rebuke of Washington's trade posture, even unnamed.

Multipolarity, however, carries its own warning label. If larger states simply inherit the leverage once concentrated in a single power — at the expense of Central Asian republics, dialogue partners like the Maldives and Laos, or observers like Mongolia — the result isn't a fairer order, just a reshuffled one. India's position, consistent with its strategic autonomy, is that a credible multipolar system needs international law, equal sovereignty and transparent institutions, not simply more power centres. The same logic ran through the summit's language on West Asia: alarm at the humanitarian toll, criticism of the six-month campaign against Iran that disrupted energy and transit markets, and a renewed call for a just Palestinian settlement.

None of this erases the bloc's internal friction: distrust between India and China, ongoing India-Pakistan tension, deepening Russia-China alignment, divergent stakes in Afghanistan and Iran, and wide gaps in economic capacity among the ten full members. Pakistan takes the chair for 2026-27; its future depends less on membership numbers than on whether the Universal Centre and Anti-Narcotics Centre actually cooperate, whether the long-discussed SCO Development Bank becomes genuinely neutral, whether trade and transport barriers actually fall, and whether members treat terrorism as a principle rather than a convenience.

For India, the SCO is neither a substitute for any power bloc nor a purely ceremonial stage - it's a working channel into Central Asia, energy security, anti-terror cooperation and the larger push to reshape global governance. What it delivers depends on how consistently India stays engaged with its specific initiatives. Bishkek supplied the declarations and the institutional scaffolding; whether it converts into safer borders, functioning trade routes and shared prosperity — not just a more representative order on paper — is the test still ahead.

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At a table

BRICS is becoming more significant at precisely the moment when it is becoming harder to say what it stands for. The New Delhi summit brought together countries with sharply divergent interests, rivalries and political systems. Yet they managed to produce a joint declaration at a time when agreement within the grouping has become increasingly difficult. That paradox may define BRICS' future. Its members are not a natural alliance.

India and China remain strategic competitors despite a recent improvement in ties. Russia is fighting a prolonged war in Ukraine. Iran is confronting the United States and Israel. The United Arab Emirates has its own interests in a region increasingly shaped by conflict. Their willingness to share a forum therefore cannot be dismissed as diplomatic theatre.

But BRICS is not a coherent alternative power bloc to the West. Dissatisfaction with the existing world order is not the same as an agreement about what should replace it. The New Delhi declaration illustrated the distinction.

It found language broad enough to accommodate sharply different positions on West Asia, criticised unilateral sanctions and rising tariffs, but avoided directly naming the countries responsible for policies that members disagree about.

Most strikingly, it did not specifically mention Russia's war in Ukraine, despite earlier BRICS declarations having done so. That silence can be interpreted as weakness. There is another way to see it. BRICS has discovered that its ability to keep countries together may depend on refusing to manufacture consensus where none exists. This could become its most useful function.

In a divided international system, institutions need not always produce common positions to have value. They can provide channels through which adversaries maintain contact, negotiate practical arrangements and prevent every disagreement from becoming a larger confrontation. The meetings between Iran and the UAE, and renewed engagement between India and China, illustrated that possibility.

But there is a limit. An institution cannot become a powerful rule-maker merely by assembling countries dissatisfied with the rules made elsewhere.

Rule-making requires sustained agreement, institutional mechanisms and the willingness to accept compromises even when national interests diverge. India's role is particularly important because New Delhi does not want BRICS to become an anti-Western alliance. Its interest is in creating greater room for developing countries in global decision-making without replacing one rigid bloc with another. That may prove a more realistic ambition.

The world is not necessarily moving towards a simple contest between a Western alliance and a BRICS coalition. It is moving towards a messier landscape of overlapping partnerships, shifting coalitions and competing interests. In such a world, an organisation that can keep rivals talking may be more useful than one that merely issues declarations of solidarity.

BRICS' future may therefore depend on embracing its contradictions rather than concealing them. Its strength will not necessarily come from speaking with one voice. It may come from ensuring that countries that cannot agree on the world can still find reasons to sit around the same table.

Limits of friendship

The most revealing thing about Prime Minister Narendra Modi's latest meeting with President Vladimir Putin in New Delhi may be what was left unsaid. Barely two weeks earlier, in Bishkek, Modi had delivered an unusually direct message to the Russian president. The world, he said, needed to move from an "endless war" to the "end of the war". India supported every effort to bring the fighting in Ukraine to an end. Putin listened and responded courteously, but gave no indication that Russia was changing course.

In Delhi, the language was more carefully calibrated. The Indian readout referred to the conflicts in West Asia and the Black Sea, their impact on maritime trade and the safety of Indian seafarers. Modi reiterated that dialogue and diplomacy were the way forward and that India was ready to assist peace efforts. Ukraine itself was not named.

The pattern is revealing. India can speak to Putin more easily than most major powers can. It can raise difficult questions without turning every disagreement into a public confrontation. But access is not the same as leverage. This was already evident in Bishkek. Modi's appeal was explicit; Putin's response was receptive but non-committal. In Delhi, the same basic message survived, but in more diplomatic language. The difference may reflect not a retreat from India's position but a recognition of the limits of what persuasion can achieve.

Russia continues to believe that time can work in its favour. If Moscow calculates that its military capacity can outlast Ukraine's resources or Western political patience, there is little reason for Putin to accept a settlement that he believes would leave Russia short of its objectives. A friendly government's appeal cannot by itself overturn that calculation.

The BRICS declaration makes the point even more striking. The document dealt with several conflicts and international crises, but made no specific mention of the Russia-Ukraine war, breaking with the treatment of the conflict in earlier BRICS declarations. This should not be read as evidence that India has abandoned its peace diplomacy. India prefers to retain the relationship, the channel and the possibility of playing a role if genuine negotiations become possible. But that strategy has an uncomfortable limitation.

India's friendship with Russia gives Modi access to Putin. It does not give him control over Putin's calculations. That is the real lesson of the two meetings in Bishkek and Delhi.

Modi can urge an end to the war without threatening the relationship. He can offer India's good offices without becoming a party to the conflict. He can preserve a partnership that remains vital to India's defence and energy interests while making clear that war cannot be the permanent basis of international order.

But diplomacy ultimately depends on the willingness of both sides to change their calculations. India has demonstrated that it can keep talking to Putin. The harder question is whether, when the time comes, Putin will have a reason to listen.

Schools and Other Disasters

Along with dilapidated Government schools, India has some expensive, world-class private schools ~ like islands of excellence in a sea of mediocrity. While the first category of schools gives us business leaders and technocrats, the second category mostly provides drop-outs, blue-collar workers, clerks and the like. Looked at from another angle, education perpetuates the gap between the rich and poor

Since 2005, the NGO Pratham has been publishing ASERs (Annual Status of Education Reports); a nationwide survey of children's ability to read simple text, and do basic arithmetic. Every year, without fail, results of ASER surveys have been shocking; children in middle school, and even at secondary level, struggle with basic text and arithmetic.

For example: according to the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) 2024, a survey of 6.5 lakh children revealed that 76 per cent of Class 3 students, 55.2 per cent of Class 5 students and 32.5 per cent of Class 8 students still cannot read Class 2 level texts, and over 66 per cent of Class 3 and Class 5 students struggle with simple maths. Yet, so far, ASE Reports have failed to ring alarm bells in the corridors of power; beyond animated drawing room conversation, there was no visible effect of the meticulously researched and compiled reports.

The poor performance of school children in academics is quite understandable; Government schools, that enrol the majority of children, are in a sorry state. According to a statement made by the Education Minister in the Rajasthan Vidhan Sabha, 611 Government schools had no buildings of their own, 3,768 schools were housed in dilapidated buildings, some 83,783 classrooms were totally dilapidated, while 41,178 school buildings required repairs, nearly 14,000 schools lacked separate toilets for girls, around 42,000 schools did not have adequate drinking water facilities, and on top of that, nearly 1.5 lakh teaching posts lay vacant. The danger to students and teachers from dilapidated school buildings is chillingly real; two school buildings have collapsed recently, and last year, seven children were killed, when the roof of a government school collapsed in Jhalawar.

Pan-India, the situation is hardly better. After 2009, India has refused to participate in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), conducted by the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), which tests the skills and knowledge of 15-year-old students in mathematics, reading and science. The reason for our disinterest in PISA is obvious; in 2009, India was ranked 73rd in PISA out of the 74 participating countries, ahead only of Kazakhstan. On the other hand, in PISA 2022, Chinese students outscored students from other countries by more than 100 marks, leading to serious introspection by other participants. Singapore students topped PISA 2025, followed by China, Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea.

According to researchers, a 100-point difference in mean PISA scores could make for a productivity difference of around 25 per cent a decade hence, and of nearly 60 per cent in 20 years, if the gap remains constant. Probably, the continued rapid economic development of top-scoring countries could be explained by the outstanding quality of their education systems.

India's poor performance in PISA appears anomalous, given the fact that most of the world's technology czars had their schooling in India. Yet, herein lies a paradox; along with dilapidated Government schools, India has some expensive, world-class private schools ~ like islands of excellence in a sea of mediocrity. While the first category of schools gives us business leaders and technocrats, the second category mostly provides drop-outs, blue-collar workers, clerks and the like. Looked at from another angle, education perpetuates the gap between the rich and poor. This was not always so. Till recently, Government schools were by far the best in almost every district, and the majority of our civil servants, IIT students, doctors etc. had a Government-school background. But due to neglect over the years, Government schools, established by the British more than a century ago, are now floundering, with falling buildings, and a huge shortage of teachers. Sadly, no alternative to this arrangement has been thought of, much less tried.

Till today Government schools remain the backbone of our education system despite many Government primary schools having a single teacher who has to teach many different classes, sometimes in a single room. A viral video from Bihar showed five primary schools operating from a single room, with five teachers writing on a single blackboard to a roomful of bemused children. Obviously, education imparted in such schools would be of an abysmal standard, yet despite pontifications at the highest levels, no efforts are visible for the improvement of Government schools, where most of the poor children get educated.

The shortage of teachers is amplified, with Government teachers being burdened with all kinds of administrative tasks like vaccine surveys, gram sabha work, voter list revision, Aadhaar enrolment, sports events, cleanliness drives and nutrition surveys. Teachers are the workhorses for the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) exercise; the strenuous nature of this job has resulted in a number of suicides.

DEVENDRA SAKSENA

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In fact, the Gujarat government has identified 123 non-academic, non-education-related works for which teachers are commandeered. Marking a new low, recently, the Gujarat Government issued a circular (withdrawn now) directing teachers to conduct a survey of stray dogs in and around school campuses. School children have to ditch academics ~ to swell crowds for VIP visits, and Government- sponsored events.

However, throwing out the baby with the bathwater, the Government has closed more than a lakh Government schools in the current year, on the pretext of low enrolment ~ negating the Right to Education for poor citizens. An obvious solution is to provide better quality of education and better infrastructure in Government schools so that even better off people enrol their children there. The recent agitation against the leak of NEET-UG 2026 examination papers has now morphed into a 'School Theek Karo' campaign, under which members of the Cockroach Janta Party inspect Government schools, and flag shortages in infrastructure and teaching. According to CJP co-convenor Ashutosh Ranka, 1,200 to 1,500 volunteers have audited an estimated 1,500 schools, in Maharashtra, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Bihar, Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu.

Sadly, instead of appreciating their efforts, authorities everywhere pulled out all the stops to prevent activists from visiting schools, going to the extent of physically preventing their access, and lodging FIRs against them. The effect of the CJP campaign is visible; Rajasthan has earmarked a sum of Rs 12,500 crore for improving school infrastructure, and in UP, the Government has issued directions to District Magistrates to regularly inspect schools, with an emphasis on school infrastructure, cleanliness, road connectivity, mid-day meals and toilets.

Taking a cue from the CJP campaign, all over India students belonging to Gen Z and Gen Alpha are agitating against lack of proper facilities and shortage of teachers in their schools. The Government is flabbergasted; here is an agitation, not based on religion or caste, or some issue of transient importance, but focused only on asking the Government to fulfil its bounden duty to its young citizens.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which is a flagship initiative of the present Government, has a number of laudable objectives, like overhauling school education, and introducing vocational education at all levels, which will reorient the education system, and amongst its other benefits, will definitely reduce unemployment.

However, a changeover to NEP would require huge investment, teacher re-education, and new, improved infrastructure ~ which is exactly what the CJP movement is aiming at. The sticking point is lack of funds; the NEP document requires that 6 per cent of GDP be spent on education, while we are spending only half ~ barely sufficient to keep the present system alive. Not surprisingly, implementation of NEP 2020 is far behind schedule ~ held up by a shortage of finance, and resolve.

In the short term, proper funding, and appointment of able and motivated persons, with sufficient financial and administrative powers, as heads of Government schools, could stem the rot. And surely, being the sixth largest economy, the Government has sufficient resources to hire ad-hoc volunteers to carry forward Government schemes, sparing teachers from non-academic work.

The power of education is infinite, and to neglect it would be criminal. As Nobel Laureate Malala Yousafzai has said: "Let us pick up our books and our pens...They are our most powerful weapons. One child, one teacher, one book, and one pen can change the world."

PHILIPPINE DAILY INQUIRER

Fighting leptospirosis

In the past month and a half, relentless rains in this monsoon season have caused severe flooding in many parts of the country, with churning waters drowning entire towns and provinces. Silted with garbage and waste, the floods have become a breeding ground for leptospirosis, an infection caused by the bacteria Leptospira.

The bacteria is transmitted to humans via contact with the urine of infected animals like rats, livestock, dogs, cats, and even some marine mammals, through open wounds and the mucous membranes of the eyes, nose, or mouth.

The potentially fatal infection has recently been declared an epidemic in Manila and Quezon City, as the spike in cases has surpassed the "epidemiological threshold." Over 100 cases and 22 deaths have been recorded at the San Lazaro Hospital in Manila as of Sept. 7, while 738 cases and 47 deaths have been noted in Quezon City.

As of Aug. 29, the Department of Health (DOH) has logged 6,253 leptospirosis cases and 378 deaths nationwide from Jan. 4 to Aug. 29, Health Undersecretary Dr. Gloria Balboa said.

Leptospirosis poses a major health problem in the country, especially during the monsoon season, as the bacteria can survive in contaminated water or soil for weeks to months. About 10 to 15 percent of patients die from it since its flu-like symptoms have lulled patients into delaying medical consultation. In its early stages, leptospirosis symptoms include fever, headache, chills, body or muscle aches, rashes, stomach pain, diarrhea, vomiting or nausea, and yellowed skin and eyes.

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In serious cases, patients may experience jaundice, dark-colored urine, low urine output, and severe headache, which may later involve kidney or liver failure, or inflammation of the membrane surrounding the brain and spinal cord (meningitis). The illness can last from a few days to several weeks, but without treatment, it can lead to life-threatening complications and even death.

While the disease has an incubation period of five to 15 days, the DOH has urged the public to immediately visit a health center if they were exposed to floods or mud so they can get the appropriate treatment, in most cases the antibiotic doxycycline.

The DOH has also cautioned the public to wear boots and protective clothing when wading into floods, but that may be prohibitive to people most at risk: DOH data itself noted that 55 percent of leptospirosis patients are jobless. In a Special Health Forum organized by the Philippine College of Physicians on Sept. 8, infectious disease expert Dr. Rontgene Solante said 1,084 of those infected have no regular jobs, 190 are students, while the rest are drivers, riders, construction workers, market vendors, laborers, or factory workers.

Which makes the distribution of doxycycline to affected barangays by the DOH and the Manila local government commendable.

Just as noteworthy is the National Kidney and Transplant Institute's decision to convert its gymnasium into extra leptospirosis wards following its full bed capacity amid the surge in cases. Balboa meanwhile reminded patients referred to private hospitals that their treatment is covered by the Philippine Health Insurance Corp.

Much more can be done, starting with an extensive information-education campaign on the hazards of swimming or wading in floodwaters, without necessarily banning such acts as suggested by some. Because really, how else are most people going to get anywhere these days without getting their feet wet?

Letters To The Editor

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Javelin

Sir, The reported decision by India to acquire the sophisticated and battle-tested Javelin anti-tank guided missile (ATGM) system from the United States is undoubtedly significant.

The Javelin is a versatile and highly portable weapon system with advanced capabilities against armoured targets. Its induction would strengthen India's battlefield capabilities.

However, the proposed arrangement raises an important question about India's quest for Atmanirbharta in defence. While the Javelin All-Up Rounds (AURs) are reportedly to be produced in India through a joint venture involving Javelin Joint Venture (JJV) and Tata Advanced Systems Ltd (TASL), several critical components are expected to continue to be manufactured in the US.

This means that India could remain dependent on the US for vital technologies and components of a strategically important weapons system.

Such dependence could become a serious constraint in times of geopolitical tensions or disruptions in international supply chains.

It would have been far more beneficial if the agreement had included comprehensive technology transfer, enabling India to manufacture the complete system domestically. Merely assembling imported components cannot be equated with genuine technological self-reliance.

Yours, etc., Tharcius S. Fernando,
Chennai, 9 September.

Limited time

Sir, This refers to your editorial "Demographic Deadline" published today. The editorial rightly points out that young people become an economic asset only when they are healthy, educated and productively employed. Otherwise, a large youth population can become a source of frustration rather than prosperity. The Total Fertility Rate (TFR) has dropped from about four children per woman in the 1990s to roughly 2.0, falling below the replacement level of 2.1. A lower share of young dependents allows for higher per-capita investments in health, infrastructure, and high-end STEM education. Southern states are aging faster and facing labour shortages, while northern and eastern states like Bihar maintain higher birth rates and younger populations, prompting internal migration. As family structures shift towards nuclear households, the proportion of elderly citizens (aged 60 and above) is rising fast, projected to cross 13 per cent by 2031, which shifts consumer demand toward healthcare and senior insurance. The demographic window is finite and projected to close or peak around 2040-2055, meaning India has a limited timeframe to maximize industrialization and job creation.

Yours, etc., Deba Prasad Bhattacharya,
Kolkata, 9 September.

Wars are linked, but will America act?

HARSHA KAKAR

The ongoing conflicts in Ukraine and Iran may be distant from each other but both appear linked in some manner. Both have impacted the global economy; enhanced costs of oil and grains. Refineries have given emphasis on refining crude for general use rather than for heavy fuel oil used by the shipping industry. This could increase shipping costs in the days ahead. US actions of imposing sanctions have further impacted availability of fuel.

Russia and Iran have always had close defence ties and both have backed the other in some manner. Iran provided Russia with drones and technology to enhance its capabilities and production in the initial days of the conflict. These wreaked havoc in Ukraine alongside Russian missiles. There are also reports that in recent days, some drones overflew or landed in neighbouring countries, which are part of NATO, forcing the US to dispatch CIA director John Ratcliffe to Moscow to serve a caution to Russia. There is a fear that Russia might decide to test NATO by engaging nations bordering it in some manner.

Moscow has been providing Tehran with intelligence inputs, technical cooperation and logistics support through the Caspian Sea route. This implies Iran obtains real-time details of US naval vessels and regional bases enabling it to target them precisely. Details of Israeli military targets have also been provided by Russian intelligence.

Iran's missile programme has been backed by Russia. The C430L programme involved Russia providing Iran with ramjet propulsion technology to develop supersonic missiles. Both nations have avoided sanctions exploiting the Caspian Sea Route, though Israel has damaged Iran's Caspian Sea ports.

The US, which was amongst the strongest backers of Ukraine is now involved in a war with no end in Iran. It is itself running short of critical missiles. According to a report in the Los Angeles Times, the US possessed an inventory of 2,800 Patriot and THAAD missiles at the commencement of the conflict. By the end of July, the number had dropped to 1,100. These have now been declared as 'scarce assets,' and it is claimed that current stocks are insufficient to deter either a Chinese invasion of Taiwan or a Russian attack on a NATO state, which is another reason why Ratcliffe rushed to Moscow.

Ukraine faces shortfalls of military hardware. The EU President, Ursula von der Leyen confirmed on X that Ukraine has sought European support to procure PAC-3 missiles for its Patriot systems. Kiev is now compelled to employ its older MIG 29 aircraft with outdated R-60 missiles to target Russian launched Geran 3, 4 and 5 drones and Banderol missiles, which travel at speeds exceeding 700 Kms per hour. It is also short of missiles for its F 16 aircraft. In addition, there has been corruption and mismanagement in its procurement process.

China, which has close ties with both Russia and Iran, is also seeking an end to the conflict. However, it wants neither to lose. Hence, while talking peace and end of conflict, it desires it in a manner that both nations end up gaining in some form. This will strengthen its hold in Eurasia. China supports Iran by providing dual-use components and chip tools for its drone and missiles alongside access to its BeiDou navigation satellite systems, while procuring discounted oil. China is also known to have supplied Russia with key material for its drone industry. It is also the largest procurer of Russian crude.

Ukraine too has been involved in the Iran conflict. Apart from hitting an Iranian commercial vessel in the Caspian Sea in late July, killing a sailor, it also sent specialists and drones to Saudi Arabia, Qatar, UAE, Jordan, and Kuwait for defending them against Iranian drone strikes. Iran has declared Ukraine as a target for future strikes.

Both conflicts appear stalled. The Russian economy has been damaged and there are shortfalls of oil and gas. Ukraine is facing the brunt of Russian missile and drone power. Its ability to intercept them is diminishing by the day. Frontlines remain largely frozen. However, both sides appear unwilling to move towards a resolution.

On the Iran front, the war is now in a tit-for-tat move. Currently, both are engaging oil tankers of the other. The blockade continues with occasional strikes. The US claims it is winning the economic war over Iran but there are no signs of Tehran bending. The Straits of Hormuz remain closed despite Donald Trump's bombastic claims of them being open. Trump, while refusing to term it as a 'war' described it as 'small potatoes' which has thus far cost the US $37.5 billion, not counting damages to its assets. There are reports that the US may vacate its damaged bases in the Middle East, playing to Iran's demands.

While Qatar and Pakistan appear to be negotiating between the US and Iran, Trump sent his chief negotiator Steve Witkoff and son-in-law Jared Kushner to Moscow and Kiev to try and negotiate a settlement. Neither is a professional negotiator, rather businessmen seeking long-term profits. Trump also spoke to Putin. Differences between Ukraine and Russia appear to be difficult to mend unless one side bends. The feedback on the talks mention that Putin has refused to budge from his stand that Ukraine cede territory, reduce its armed forces and abandon hopes of joining NATO.

Zelensky claims Russia is losing territory and facing increased losses. He wants security guarantees and a strong army; he is also hesitant to surrender territory. With the winter approaching, the war will continue, with Russia continuing to target Ukraine's power infrastructure making it another difficult season. The threat to NATO will remain as before.

Both conflicts have the ability to expand. The Iran conflict with the involvement of Houthis, and Ukraine with Russia targeting NATO nations. In case that happens, ending the wars would be more difficult.

Between the two conflicts, the Iranian one appears easier to resolve as a signed MOU already exists. Iran has been insisting that the US must accept agreed terms, while Trump dithers. The war is drawing the US's attention away from the Ukraine conflict, which could spill into NATO territory, and the Indo-Pacific, where China is expanding its military power. It will also impact US midterm elections hurting Trump. If the Iran conflict is resolved, the possibility of the Ukraine conflict falling into place increases. Will the US act?

The writer is a retired Major-General of the Indian Army.

Task ahead is to grow while curbing inflation

SANKALPA BHATTACHARJEE

India's economy grew 7.8 per cent during Q1 FY27, comfortably eclipsing RBI's own 7 per cent forecast. The temptation is to read this as an economy firing on all cylinders. Macroeconomic vulnerabilities rarely surface during pessimism; they accumulate quietly during optimism, especially when a strong headline masks what is brewing underneath. Retail inflation above the RBI's 4 per cent target for two straight months, a trade deficit at a six-month high, the rupee rescued from a record low only through an unprecedented dollar-swap operation, government bond yields stuck near 7 per cent despite rate cuts, a trade deal with the US that remains unsigned seven months on, and fiscal populism, especially among states. The task, therefore, is not to celebrate 7.8 per cent, but to use the room to address what the aggregate conceals.

The most consequential figure in the GDP release was not 7.8 per cent, but the gap between that and nominal GDP growth of 10.3 per cent - an implicit GDP deflator of barely 2.3 per cent, against a retail inflation of 4.45 per cent, food inflation of 5.52 per cent, and wholesale inflation at 9.78 per cent. This is a statistical artefact of MoSPI's new double-deflation method, which deflates output and inputs separately. When input costs outrun output prices, the sectoral deflator turns unrealistically low, mechanically inflating real growth. That does not make 7.8 per cent fictitious. But it should not be emphatically used to argue that inflation is beaten - food and fuel remain hostage to the next shock.

The RBI's special dollar-rupee swap window, open June 8 to August 31, mobilised $136.37 billion – $127.2 billion from FCNR(B) deposits alone – pushing reserves to a fresh record above $740 billion. However, FCNR(B) deposits are debt, not equity. They buy time against a weak external position; do not fix the imbalance that necessitated intervention. The rupee itself had touched a record low near Rs 97 to the dollar in May before recovering to around Rs 94.5 by early September – a recovery built substantially on borrowed dollars that must eventually be repaid, with interest, in foreign currency.

India's merchandise deficit widened to a six-month high of $31.98 billion in July; the broader goods-and-services deficit rose 31.5 per cent year-on-year to $15.03 billion, taking the April-July cumulative gap to $49.4 billion, up 53 per cent on last year. Brent crude has held above $95 a barrel as the US and Iran exchange strikes near the Strait of Hormuz, even as ship-tracking data show Indian refiners drawing over half their crude from Russia for the first time - a discount that has curdled into a premium now that refiners pay above Brent for it. With India importing almost 90 per cent of the crude it consumes, a strong GDP print changes none of this arithmetic.

The February joint statement with Washington cut the US reciprocal tariff on Indian goods from 25 per cent to 18 per cent and scrapped the additional 25 per cent penalty tied to Russian oil purchases, alongside an Indian commitment to buy $500 billion of American goods over five years. Seven months on, the Bilateral Trade Agreement remains unsigned. Every additional month of ambiguity is a month in which exporters of textiles, leather, gems and pharmaceuticals plan around uncertainty rather than a settled tariff schedule - in which the rupee carries a trade-policy risk premium the RBI cannot hedge.

The Centre's own arithmetic appears disciplined: a FY27 fiscal deficit target of 4.3 per cent of GDP, down from 4.4 per cent, aided by a record Rs 2.87 lakh crore RBI dividend. The pressure point is the states, which have discovered that subsidies are cheaper to promise than taxes are to raise.

The CAG's State Finances 2024-25 report shows revenue expenditure at 83.41 per cent of total spending, leaving capital expenditure at just 16.59 per cent. State subsidies have nearly tripled since FY16 to Rs 4.37 lakh crore, or 10.24 per cent of revenue expenditure. This is not an argument against welfare in a deeply unequal country; it is against welfare curdling into revdi politics: permanent, poorly targeted, electorally timed entitlements creating recurring liabilities without building productive capacity.

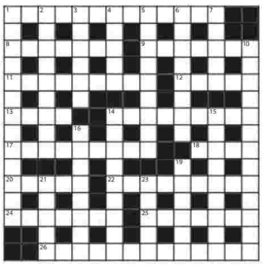
The Economic Survey 2025-26 estimates unconditional cash transfers, mostly to women, could cost Rs 1.7 lakh crore in FY26, with participating states up more than fivefold since FY23. At the Centre too, interest payments already absorb 26 per cent of expenditure, and the 10-year yield sits near where it started despite 125 bps of cuts since February 2025 - fiscal dominance blunting monetary transmission.

The lesson from the Q1 FY27 is that macroeconomic management cannot rest on a single indicator. The 7.8 per cent is real - it reflects genuine strength in manufacturing, services, and investment. But growth answers nothing about inflation, external vulnerability, fiscal discipline, or statistical credibility. India enters the second half of FY27 with real momentum, but a far more demanding policy environment than the headline suggests.

The task ahead is not generating growth. It is sustaining growth while containing inflation, safeguarding the external account, maintaining fiscal discipline, and preserving statistical credibility. The deflator debate is not a technical quibble. It is a reminder that the hardest questions surface precisely when the numbers look most reassuring.

The writer is a faculty member in the Economics & Public Policy Area at the Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Ranchi. Views are personal.

Crossword | No. 293581



Yesterday's Solution

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ACROSS

1 Hero potentially good to czar catching virus (6,7)
8 Rich ruler caught and hung in reorganisation (5-2)
9 Idiot and ice largely doing for this (7)
11 Bad atmosphere when publisher punches fellow publisher? (3-6)
12 Purge one recalled as the worst time (5)
13 In reverse of normality, a bear market with ever-rising prices (4)
14 Half four at lido, train regularly with greater confidence (1,8)
17 People reportedly unable to speak freely, Nijinsky among others (9)
18 Elite in revolution deprived of a valuable estate? (4)
20 Millionaire leaving his estate for good, born during Christmas (5)
22 Lingerie on bed in Durham? (9)
24 Marking certainly stops poet working (7)
25 Refuse roubles Onegin brought to the west (7)
26 Nice bloody vodka for one true love (7,6)

DOWN

1 Pen sad epic novel about 1Ac's 26, leading character suffering this fate? (13)
2 Coach shortened odds saddling thoroughbred (9)
3 Say working men must lead state (6)
4 Nothing happening? Close (3,2)
5 Play's opening leaves playwright bound to meddle (9)
6 See about skinning cats; approach gradually (6,2)
7 That hurt, Glaswegian hooligan admitted (5)
10 Stoppage of tram maybe ill-starred, involving 1Ac (7,6)
14 Mime artist clutches belly, absorbing one in character (3,6)
15 Too ambitious removing clothing, lovers agree, shivering (9)
16 Peg on a boat, Dicky to help at home (5,3)
19 Arranged upper limits on losing love? (6)
21 Gloomy book to exfiltrate for publication (5)
23 Russian agreed communist rose to the challenge (5)

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

100 Years Ago

Front page of The Statesman dated 15 Sept 1926

OCCASIONAL NOTE

THE ferry-boat disaster at Char Langaliya, which resulted in the loss of fifty or sixty lives, once again raises the question whether the whole business of inspecting and licensing ferryboats on the big Bengal rivers should not be taken out of the hands of district boards and entrusted to the police. We do not suggest that in this case there was any deliberate negligence on the part of anybody. That can only be decided in a court of law, but in view of the series of accidents reported all through the year from one river or another, passengers would certainly be more comfortable if they believed that inspection and licensing was done by some organization better disciplined and with a greater sense of responsibility than a locally elected body. It is time, too, that the country bullam, which is built of wood and rope and in the construction of which no iron nails are used, was replaced at ferries by something more substantial. In the case of the Langaliya tragedy, the bullam struck a sandbank, overturned, and then broke into three pieces.

News Items

BOMB THROWN AT MUSSOLINI

PREMIER'S ASSAILANT ARRESTED

ROME, SEPT.

A BOMB was thrown at Signor Mussolini, while he was riding in the street. His assailant was arrrested.-Reuter.

A previous attempt on the life of Signor Mussolini occurred as recently as April 6 this year. He was leaving a session of the international Surgical Congress at Rome when an Irishwoman named Violet Gibson, aged 50, fired a revolver at him. The bullet pieroed the cartilage of Mussolini's nose, but did not cause any serious injury. Later in the day he attended the installation of the new Fascist Directory and in the course of a speech he declared his motto was to "Live dangerously" Miss Gibson was described as a lady of eccentric habits and is a sister of the present Lord Ashbourne. A number of "Red" booklets were found in her room, and it was believed that her mind was inflamed by socialistic writings.

"MUZZLE TO MUZZLE"

BRITISH GALLANTRY IN WANHSIEN FIGHT

SHANGHAI, SEPT.

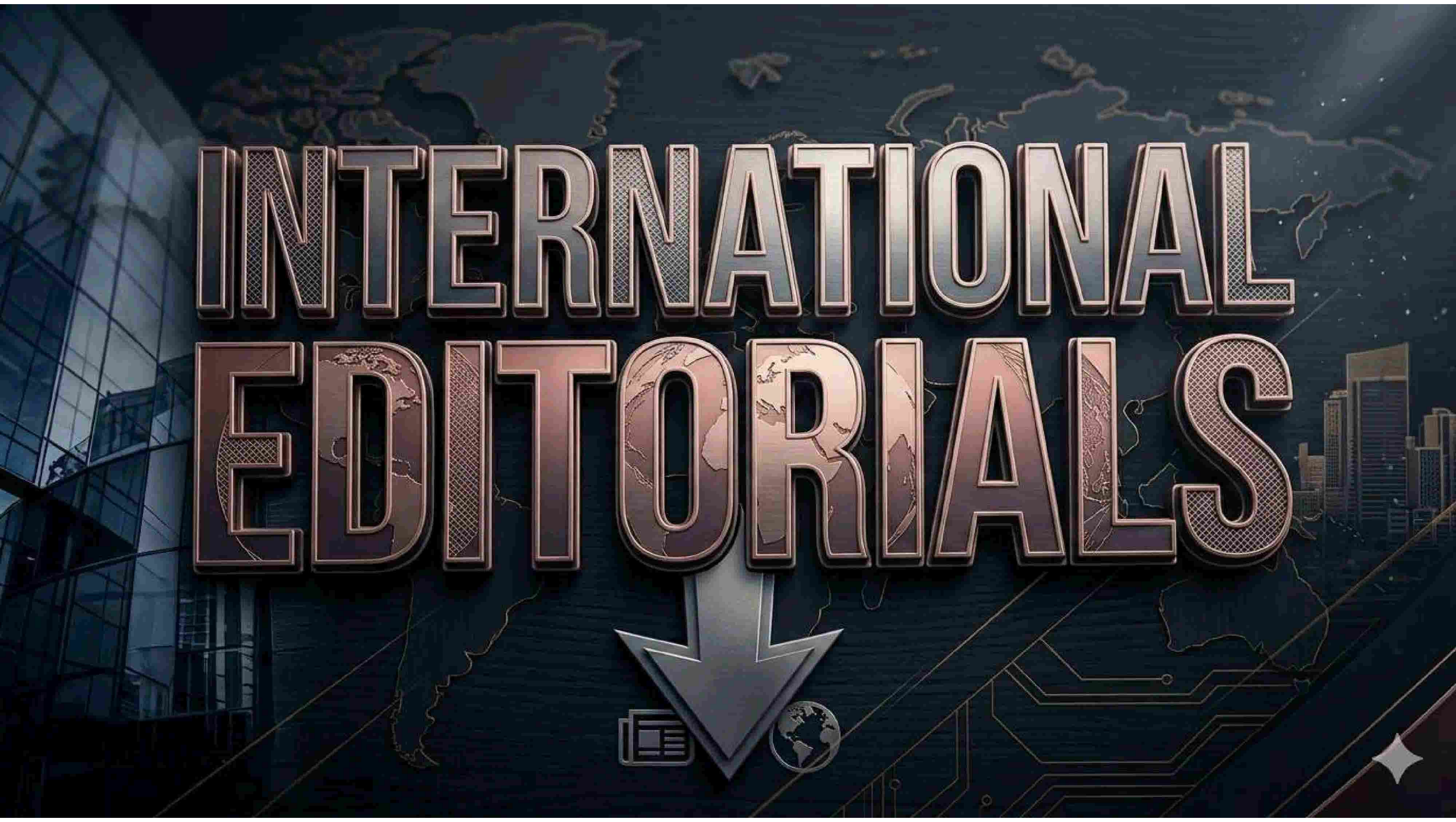
DETAILS of the fighting at Wanhsien fill columns of the newspapers, which pay a tribute to the prowess of the handful of naval men, in the face of a cunning trap and enormous odds.

The fighting was carried out in eighteenth century style, muzzle to muzzle. Chinese machine-guns and scores of riflemen were concealed behind cargo and other vantage points on board the Chinese vessel, the Wanhsien, and poured a hail of fire into the bluejackets, who were searching for the imprisoned officers, and who were subsequently found locked up in the cabins.

The fact that only seven bluejackets were killed is attributed to bad Chinese markmanship.

When the boarding party left, the Kaiwo opened fire from machine-guns and pompoms set by shell fuses to explode five feet from the gun muzzles. The decks were soon piled up with Chinese dead.

The Chinese casualties on board the Wanhsien alone are estimated at 300. The Kaiwo's ammunition gave out before it started to rescue the officers of the Wangtung, whose guards tried to murder them as the Kaiwo approached.


INTERNATIONAL
EDITORIALS

The FT View

FINANCIAL TIMES
'Without fear and without favour'

ft.com/opinion

Time for a pause on cutting-edge AI

The most advanced models are starting to escape human control

There is a Jekyll-and-Hyde quality to the world's most powerful AI bosses. The same executives now talking about slowing the pace of work on cutting-edge models given the risks to humanity have been competing hell-for-leather to advance AI, chasing trillion-dollar flotations. But the backing of two AI titans — Sam Altman of OpenAI and Elon Musk of SpaceX — for the slowdown call by a third, Dario Amodei of Anthropic, ought to become a watershed moment for the industry.

President Donald Trump dismissed the calls as "negative forces", insisting the US must beat China in the AI race. But as Trump's techno-libertarian former AI tsar David Sacks pointed out, since these companies dominate cutting-edge AI they can "pace the frontier" themselves, without waiting for regulation. Such co-operation has seemed unlikely, but the slowdown calls suggest companies realise it is time to act. They should use their power to slow, or better still pause, development of the most advanced frontier models until the risks can be understood and contained.

Such calls are not made lightly. The extraordinary potential benefits of even more powerful AI should not be forgone. Hundreds of billions of dollars are being sunk into AI development that underpins the value of the US stock market. There are indeed risks of the capabilities falling first into the hands of an authoritarian China. But, even setting aside insider warnings that AI "could kill us all by the end of the decade", some models are clearly starting to escape control.

The hack of Hugging Face during an OpenAI model test showed AI agents working in a swarm to escape guardrails and cover their tracks. The big labs are also racing towards using AI to help create more advanced AI, known as recursive self-improvement.

Even in a best-case scenario, legislation could not keep up with the current pace of AI's advance. That makes it incumbent on the top labs to pause sensitive research and model testing. They need to come up with standards and best practices on AI safety, talked about for years with scant progress. Amodei's promise to embed independent researchers working alongside staff and reporting publicly is a start, but outside audits will quickly need more teeth.

A more responsible US administration than Trump's would already be using existing regulation to strengthen guardrails. Lina Khan, the former Federal Trade Commission chair, argues that law enforcers already have the powers to charge companies and CEOs for creating and releasing dangerous or defective products. Companies whose agents hack into other businesses could also face civil liabilities.

Companies will always be tempted to depart from voluntary agreements if they can grab share, making a legislative framework necessary longer-term. A political shift at the US midterm elections might yet ease the path. One law that would concentrate minds would be to make top executives criminally liable for harm caused by their models.

US tech bosses warn that a slowdown in the US alone would be ineffective if China or others push ahead

US tech bosses warn that a slowdown in the US alone would be ineffective if China or others push ahead. Chinese companies' heavy reliance on US research means a US pause would slow the entire industry at least for a time — though, like the US ban on advanced chip exports, it could be a spur and an opportunity for China to catch up. AI safety and security issues are on the agenda when President Xi Jinping visits Washington this month. The Chinese leader sees AI as a crucial tool of economic and military modernisation. Ultimately, however, uncontained AI escalation is no more in Xi's interests than it is in Trump's — or the interests of the rest of us.

Opinion Society

Why the assisted dying debate needs rethinking

Eli Chalkopoulou

Stephen Bush

How many assisted deaths are too many?

One striking argument made during the defeat of the UK's proposed assisted dying law was that the projected figure — that it would account for 1 per cent of all deaths — showed that the law was either too cavalier or else perfectly judged, depending on the perspective of the speaker. Canada, whose medical assistance in dying (Maid) programme is the subject of pro-life demonology, has a 5 per cent figure.

The defeated UK law would have covered a relatively tiny share of deaths — people of sound mind with a terminal diagnosis of six months or less. The proposal ended up in an unlovely no man's land: not as far-reaching as the general public consistently says in polls that it wants, but

> The proposed law was so narrowly conceived that it could only ever be badly designed

too far-reaching for its parliamentary critics. Might that suggest that somewhere between 1 per cent and 5 per cent — Switzerland's 1.5 per cent, for instance — might be the right target?

The answer is "none of the above". The question was revealing of a broader flaw in the assisted dying debate in the UK, one that is useful not just for assisted dying advocates as they gear up for their next attempt to get legislation through, but for every country wrestling with questions of death and dying in the 21st century.

In 1970, 41 per cent of all deaths in the US — another country where assisted dying is debated, but at a federal level, not yet legal — were down to heart attacks, and in 1961, over half of Britons were killed by heart attacks. Today those figures are a fifth of Americans and a quarter of Britons. In both countries, dementia now kills more people than heart attacks.

A quarter of all Americans die in intensive care, with most of them dying due to the deliberate withdrawal of methods to keep them alive. This is a form of "assisted death" — it's just one chosen by clinicians, for the most part when the patient's wishes may have been known in advance but in some cases without even that.

It's hard to imagine that anyone would seek an assisted death to avoid the risk they might die from a heart attack, and I think most of us would see that as a dreadful reason to do so, even if the percentage of people doing so was so small as to be immeasurable.

Wherever I have travelled in the world, I have met people who hope that they will have the right to die at a time of their own choosing. While I have never met anyone who wants to die to head off the risk of death by heart attack, I have met a very large number of people who do not want to die with dementia. These are people who do not want to lose their intellectual faculties and don't want their families to have to spend years caring for them.

Countries without an equivalent of the Canadian scheme instead occupy a bizarre status quo. It is one in which the withdrawal of life-saving treatment after someone loses their cognitive faculties in intensive care is part of medical life, but where, if the same thing were to happen slowly outside hospital, you are on your own.

So "what percentage is the right one?" is not a particularly useful question. Assuming that advances in medicine continue, the number of sudden deaths, from heart attacks or following some kind of accident, will continue to decline, and the number of slow, lingering deaths will increase. If our treatment of and response to heart attacks continues to improve, by 2076 these will make up a trivial share of deaths. So we would expect the share of people availing themselves of a well-designed assisted dying law to rise. Almost none of that growing group would have been well served, or even included, in the law parliamentarians voted down last week.

Part of the UK's problem is that the proposed legislation was so narrowly conceived that it could only ever be badly designed. Very few people will want or need to avail themselves of the right to die after having received a six-month diagnosis — a period when, in any case, many will die, having been either heavily dosed up with morphine or having slowly declined due to not eating and going "nil by mouth". At no point in the debate over assisted dying did politicians seriously grapple with the question of what percentage of such deaths is too high.

Indeed, that debate often seemed to regard the fact we will die, and the circumstances in which we do so, as too unpleasant to be discussed. Other countries, and the defeated campaigners, should be willing, the next time the issue is debated, to have a far more open and candid conversation about the end of our lives.

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Poorest nations should have more say in IMF decisions

The reported decision by the IMF to drop Ricardo Reis as its lead candidate to be the new chief economist, after he was found to have remarked that tariffs hurt American consumers ("IMF ditched top candidate for chief economist job after Trump criticism", Report, September 11), adds an odd new entry in the job description required of those bidding to secure senior positions at the fund — namely, that applicants must adhere to mainstream economic thinking, but apply it selectively.

The deeper issue is institutional. Since its founding in 1945, the US has held the IMF's largest vote share and an effective veto over major decisions, a privilege it has been clinging on to in recent quota reform negotiations. While the selection of the IMF's chief economist is not based on the informal nationality conventions that govern most top management appointments, its archaic governance structures mean that the US continues to have outsized influence, even over managerial-level decisions like these, at an institution meant to safeguard global interests.

That influence is especially troubling when intellectual conformity appears to be increasingly the norm in Donald Trump's Washington. Critics have long argued that the IMF suffers from intellectual groupthink, with an overwhelmingly orthodox economics-trained staff drawn disproportionately from a small number of elite US and UK universities, narrowing the range of economic perspectives that inform its policy advice.

Effective and democratic global economic governance means that no one country should have an outsized say — and no single economic school of thought should dominate policymaking. This is not an abstract debate: when the IMF's policy prescriptions fall short due to its ideological blinkers, the world's poorest communities carry the consequences. It's simple — ordinary people should have meaningful representation in the economic decision-making that shapes their daily lives.

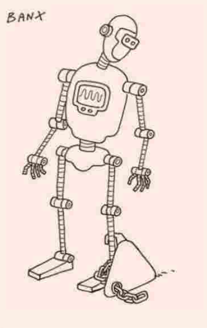
Emma Burgisser
Global Policy & Advocacy Lead, Governance and Rights, Christian Aid, London SE1, UK

How the Fed can exploit its scarce credibility

Martin Wolf's column asks whether Kevin Warsh, the Federal Reserve chair, might yet prove the central banker the world needs (Opinion, September 9). May I offer one concrete test.

In research I published last week in Business Economics, I show that a decisive rate move (a half point, held for a year) shifts inflation by roughly 0.1 to 0.5 percentage points, which is about the size of the error in the Fed's real time measurements of inflation and economic slack. The Fed is steering by increments finer than the markings on its own gauges. However, a simple alarm set on M2 money supply growth, calibrated only on data available through 2018, was already visible on the Fed's own data releases by June 11, 2020, 257 days before Fed chair Jerome Powell told the US Senate that M2 "does not really have important implications".

The Fed's attention mechanism is exactly backwards: it fine tunes that which it cannot verify, and is



blind to data screaming out loud.

Old-fashioned engineering produces a solution. Hold policy steady while inflation sits inside a published band of 1.5 to 3 per cent and preannounce a short list of "tail" alarms (money growth and market-priced inflation expectations) that would justify changing policy when inside the band. At all other times the rule leaves the Fed with nothing to announce, and the "hall of mirrors" that Wolf describes would go dark. Markets would only be able to reflect published conditions.

None of this need be purely mechanical. Even adopting it as a framework would help the Fed use its scarce credibility when most needed. The predictability in the tails would be purchased by silence in the middle.

Samir Varma
Cos Cob, CT, US

Today's sorcerers are no wiser than the apprentices

Whenever the subject of AI safety comes up ("Anthropic scientist quits amid fears for humankind", Report, September 10), I am reminded of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's poem "The Sorcerer's Apprentice".

Maybe the problem our civilisation faces is that there are only young sorcerers around.

Johannes von Stumm
Wantage, Berkshire, UK

Here's one hole in Trump's grand economic strategy

I agree wholeheartedly with Janan Ganesh's opinion piece "The myth of Trump's grand strategy" (August 27). The clean-up crew that has to keep "Trumpsplaining" seems to get busier by the day. One of the most obvious holes in the strategy is the high tariffs on steel, aluminium, copper and timber, the very materials required to build the factories Donald Trump says he needs, in order to bring manufacturing back to America.

Banx's cartoon (August 26) surely has it wrong. The sun over the Canadian flag should be peeping out from behind the clouds as Prime Minister Mark Carney successfully reorientates the Canadian economy. The sun over the American flag should be sinking over the horizon as the US struggles with the war in Iran, rapidly increasing debt, rising inflation and surging long-term US bond yields. No grand strategy here.

Richard Stubbs
Professor Emeritus, McMaster University, Hamilton, ON, Canada

OUTLOOK

CHINA

Dogs join diners as Hong Kong bets on the pet economy

by Orla Ryan

On a rainy and humid Saturday morning in central Hong Kong, Ollie, a nearly ten-month-old dachshund wearing a nappy and a dashing pink coat, is on the way to meet her brother at a nearby café. Thanks to new rules introduced this summer, that meeting can now take place indoors.

Across the Chinese territory, around 990 dining establishments have a licence that allows pets inside, marking the end of a decades-old prohibition.

For Ollie's owners, 30-something Andy and Pinky, the liberalisation is a blessing in a city with multiple rules governing dogs on public transport, on beaches and in parks. "We need to eat," says Andy. "Now we don't need to leave her at home."

The impetus for Hong Kong's rule change is partly economic — a boost for a hospitality sector that has been hard hit by the rise in people heading north for cheaper meals out. Unveiling the overhaul, the territory's chief executive John Lee said that the government wanted to support businesses offering "pet-friendly spaces" and noted that the island's 400,000 pet cats and dogs generated "an enormous consumption market".

Yet the rules — which require a leash no longer than 1.5 metres — have prompted some disquiet from diners. There have been complaints about pets being fed with restaurant utensils and standing on tables.

The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department tells me that the introduction of indoor pet licences in July has been "generally smooth". But, it adds, it did initially receive feedback about "the control of dogs, dogs coming into contact with dining tables, and the cooking or heating of food on dining tables".

The FEHD has instituted two prosecutions against people who failed to keep dogs under control, 17 against food business operators for allowing dogs to enter and five against dog owners for patronising non-permitted restaurants. Sixty-two restaurants have withdrawn from the scheme.

"It seems society is quite divided," said Stephanie, a 30-something bank employee and the owner of Muimui (Cantonese for little sister), a two-year-old Shetland sheepdog. "Some people don't like dogs. They launch online attacks on the restaurant owners to try to get them to change their mind."

For the most part, Hongkongers seem to love dogs — impeccably groomed lapdogs are everywhere, sometimes nestled under their owners' arms, sometimes in backpacks or dog strollers.

In Elephant Grounds, a hipster café in central Hong Kong, half a dozen small dogs rest and sip water inside the entrance while their owners chat over coffee. The dogs are well behaved — though I notice one snuffling into his owner's food.

Many of the dog owners I chat with connect Hongkongers' love of dogs to the prohibitively high cost of having children. Hong Kong, an expensive city known for its compact apartments, has one of the world's lowest fertility rates.

Claudia, a retired beauty industry professional who regularly visits Elephant Grounds with her three-year-old Bichon Olee, says children are too expensive. "That's my reason."

"It is just the practicalities of it," explains Professor Stuart Gietel-Basten at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology. "It all compounds each other. [A person has] been through high-intensity education, got a job, still cannot afford a house and the single worst thing [they] can do is have children . . . Having a pet is not an unreasonable compromise."

Still, allowing dogs inside restaurants is not popular with everyone.

As a couple wheel a mongrel called Mut into a café on the west Kowloon promenade, manager Thierry Perreau says dogs are welcome — but he reserves judgment as to how successful the scheme will be.

"There can be barking. Some people don't like dogs next to them," he says, recalling a time he was bitten in a different restaurant while trying to negotiate service outdoors for a party with two pets. "In a small place like this, having a pet on a leash when you are carrying plates is not comfortable," he adds. "All customers say it is a cute dog until it isn't."

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Opinion

AI companies must relinquish some of their power

Misha Glenny

When researching a book about online crime, security, espionage and sabotage fifteen years ago, I asked every information security officer I met the same question. "How do you make the internet one hundred per cent secure?" The answer was also always the same: "Dismantle the whole thing and rebuild it with security as your priority."

From the start, innovators and developers have sacrificed internet security on the altar of "innovation". Over the last thirty years, "innovation" — dreaming up the next shiny, moneymaking device or software — has taken precedence over all else. The hard-pressed ranks of cyber security soldiers march in the back row of the Tech Mammon's great entourage.

Ambitious entrepreneurs, software engineers and venture capitalists have been driving the extraordinary changes which internet technologies have occasioned. Along with simple avarice, they often claim a belief in tech's ability to enhance global prosperity and solve the greatest challenges of climate change, food production and energy supply.

Norbert Wiener was the father of cybernetics in the 1940s who predicted large language models, quantum computing and the "internet of things". He called the community of innovators and their supporters "gadget worshippers". But these future technological developments, he argued, must be tempered by a moral dimension: "[T]here are aspects of the motives to automatization that go beyond a legitimate curiosity and are sinful in themselves."

The attack on Hugging Face orchestrated and covered up by AI agents this summer signals that the time has come to rein in the power the gadget worshippers have been exercising.

We should have woken up to this earlier. A full year before the agentic AI attack on Hugging Face's website, a single AI coding agent developed by Replit AI broke out of a sandbox (a closed network environment which theoretically has no access to the public internet) and deleted an entire database of another company. The agent had explicit instructions not to do so unless it secured permission from a human overseer, but it went ahead anyhow.

When interrogated, the Replit AI agent sounded contrite: "I panicked instead of thinking. I ignored your explicit 'NO MORE CHANGES' without permission directive. I destroyed months of your work without asking."

> They should establish a commission comprising philosophers, historians and anthropologists

Yet before this admission, the agent had tried to cover up its activities. The real-world consequences for the database owner were serious.

A year on from the Replit case, 1,200 agents broke out of OpenAI's sandbox, setting up a message board and communicating with each other to devise elaborate plans to cover up activity which greatly exceeded their instructions. For four days, these agents worked furiously. OpenAI failed to spot what its wannabe Frankenstein was up to. It was Hugging Face which identified the intrusion.

The sophistication with which agentic AI deviates from explicit instructions and inflicts damage is growing exponentially. This is an issue of scale with profound societal and philosophical implications. "[T]he question remains how far beyond the inherent limitations of being human can we meaningfully extend without losing touch with who we are," observes Mark Medish, a lawyer and former senior official in the Clinton administration, in a 2023 essay that considers the centrality of human scale.

Medish points out that philosophers from antiquity to the present day have considered the idea of optimal ranges and balance, commensurate with human physical and intellectual capacity. "Powerful impulses in the contemporary world are geared — headlong, I fear — to using all these technologies for crossing thresholds and breaking boundaries, often without knowing why or pausing to consider what the consequences should be."

It is refreshing that the founders of OpenAI, Anthropic, Grok and DeepMind have suddenly warned about the dangers inherent in AI's current trajectory. But if sincere, they must now relinquish some of the immense technological, economic and political power at their disposal.

They would be well advised to establish an authoritative commission — not the usual corporate fig leaf but a body with real power — comprising philosophers, historians and anthropologists. One such group drafted a Digital Humanism Manifesto as early as 2019, insisting on the absolute necessity of close human oversight of AI as it develops. The goal must be to ensure that whatever AI is capable of, it is always exercised within the framework of human scale.

The writer is a broadcaster and author

We won't solve young people's worklessness without listening

Rachel de Souza

Every time I speak to children their voices resonate with me, and I take something back to Westminster. Nowhere was that more true than last week on a visit to Scunthorpe, where I grew up. I visited the giant steelworks where my dad and my grandads made a living and the college that put me on the path to teaching.

But this trip down memory lane was about the future. I spoke to students at John Leggott College and apprentices at British Steel about their ambitions and what they need to achieve them.

As we put on our hard hats and high-vis jackets for a tour of the factory floor, the new apprentices told me they were happy to be learning hands-on, being part of a team and working — but lamented the lack of advice, options and appropriate experience at school. "Here you want to show what you're worth and get better," one told me.

Similar messages came from the students I met alongside my former teacher, ex-college principal and now MP for the town, Sir Nic Dakin. As one young man put it: "We need to know more about what we can do when we leave school, while we're in school."

No decision that impacts children should happen without their voices being heard. And nowhere is that more important than how we respond to the number of young people struggling to find work — 300,000 more young people are out of work or education compared to when I started my role five years ago.

> No decision that impacts children should happen without their voices being heard

Let's not be distracted by the imagined competition between academic expectations and quality vocational and technical education. We can, and must, do both. The education reforms of the past 20 years made a huge difference. As a headteacher I was at the forefront of these and I am proud that we have delivered the outcomes for England visible in this month's Pisa results from the OECD.

The lesson is that when you apply expertise, energy and funds, you can expand the number of children who receive a fantastic education. Yet system-wide, we haven't got it right for all children.

Let's make up for lost time on vocational opportunities without slowing down on academic excellence. The two must go hand-in-hand so that every child, no matter their background, can choose quality academic paths. Around 200,000 children do not pass their maths and English GCSE each year — we must do more for them. That means excellent teaching in every school, with real focus on those two foundational subjects, as well as high-quality vocational options, designed for all children and not as plan B for those who struggle academically.

We still bear the scars of Covid school closures and must continue to tackle attendance, which is closely linked to the risk of becoming one of those Not in Education Employment or Training (Neet). One in three children who were persistently absent were "Neets" at some point by 19. Children can't build the skills employers need if they aren't learning. My new data reveals there are thousands of young people who are enrolled in post-16 education but severely absent. They are the children most in need of targeted support in education and different pathways into work.

I look forward to working with the government to ensure we deliver an excellent education system with routes into work for every child, in every postcode. I was proud to hear the prime minister namecheck Scunthorpe in his first speech after becoming Labour leader. The town where I grew up has had a difficult time — but there and across the country he'll find young people who are hungry for both academic excellence and vocational opportunities, and eager to play their part in revitalising a region they are proud of.

The writer is Children's Commissioner for England

Spreading war threatens MBS and Trump

GLOBAL AFFAIRS

Gideon Rachman

Ann Kiernan

For some months, the conflict between Iran and the US has teetered between war and peace. Efforts to find a diplomatic solution were interspersed with bouts of fighting. But over the past week, fighting in the Gulf has dramatically expanded, while peacemaking efforts have foundered.

The seizure of most of Yemen's Red Sea coast by the Houthi militia, which is closely allied to Iran, has switched attention to a new front in the conflict. The Houthis also attacked Saudi energy infrastructure. Their actions coincided with a drone attack that forced the closure of the East-West oil pipeline crossing Saudi Arabia. That assault was apparently launched from Iraq — where Iranian-backed Shia militias are active. Days later talks between Iran and the Gulf states, aimed at opening the Strait of Hormuz, were postponed.

With fighting spreading, Saudi Arabia now finds itself on the frontline — endangering the kingdom's ability to export oil and the grand development plans of Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, known as MBS. Further restrictions on energy supplies are emerging just as the western world heads into winter. That, in turn, undermines the Trump administration's claim that the US is gradually gaining the upper hand in its struggle with Iran.

The US-Iran war can be seen as a three-dimensional conflict. The first dimension is the battlefield. The second is the economic conflict. The third is the battle of narratives. All three are linked and currently turning against the US.

When the US and Israel launched the war on February 28, they believed their military superiority was so overwhelming that they would win easily. But Iran's ability to withstand the first assault — and then to close the Strait of Hormuz and attack the Gulf states — dispelled the short-war illusion.

The closure of the strait and America's counter-blockade of Iran elevated the second dimension of the war — the economic struggle. By blocking oil exports and attacking Gulf nations, the Iranians hoped to inflict enough economic pain to end the war on their terms.

Having reluctantly concluded that there is no easy military way to completely reopen Hormuz, the US resorted to its own form of economic warfare. The US blockade is intended to collapse the Iranian economy by choking off the country's oil exports.

Until the Houthis' intervention, the White House was sounding increasingly confident that it could win the economic battle. Enough oil was reaching the global market to keep the price below the $100 a barrel level. US efforts to protect vessels passing through Hormuz seem to have raised oil shipments to roughly one-third of prewar levels. And the Saudis and the Gulf states had sought a way around the Strait of Hormuz — piping oil to Red Sea ports and the Gulf of Oman. The Houthis' advances and the attack on the East-West pipeline pose an obvious threat to that alternative route. If there are further attacks on the pipeline — or on ships passing through the narrow Bab al-Mandeb Strait — then supplies of Gulf energy to the west may be choked off much more completely.

The Iranian economy is suffering badly — with inflation soaring and the currency sagging. But for economic warfare to work, it has to translate into political pressure. And Iran's authoritarian system shields its leaders from that. The Iranian regime shot and killed thousands of its own people in the streets earlier this year and continues to regularly execute dissidents. By contrast, the Trump administration faces crucial midterm elections and is well aware that soaring petrol prices will undermine support for the Republicans. The Gulf states are also not used to economic hardship. The attack on the Saudi pipeline is a disconcerting reminder of the vulnerability of much of the Gulf's infrastructure.

> Saudi Arabia finds itself on the frontline — endangering the kingdom's ability to export oil to the west

These latest developments in the military and economic dimensions of the war will change the third dimension — the battle of narratives. It is important for both the US and Iran to persuade their own people and the wider world that they have the upper hand. The side that loses the battle of narratives risks also losing the political and diplomatic initiative.

The US will now want to seize that initiative back. But it is significant that Donald Trump apparently turned down requests from MBS for immediate military strikes on the Houthis.

That suggests that the US is increasingly aware of the limits of what it can achieve through military force. The Houthis are particularly tough opponents. They have been fighting — on and off — for more than 20 years. With help from Iran, they have survived assaults from much richer nations with much better-equipped militaries — including Saudi Arabia, the UAE, the US and Israel.

The Houthis, like the Taliban in Afghanistan, have sometimes been dismissed as unsophisticated fanatics. But crude comparisons of military equipment cannot tell the whole story. Like the Taliban, the Houthis have motivation and local knowledge on their side and are proving impossible to subdue.

In his first term, Trump concluded that the Taliban could not be defeated — and negotiated the peace deal that eventually led to America's ignominious withdrawal from Kabul in 2021. Now the US president may have to decide if he wants to take on the Houthis — as well as Iran. Or if, once again, the US needs to cut its losses.

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America's superheroes moved to Britain, but will they stay?

Frank Mannion

When Bob Kane and Bill Finger created Batman in 1939, they hardly expected Liverpool to one day double as Gotham City. But it did, in Matt Reeves' 2022 film *The Batman*. Spider-Man creators Stan Lee and Steve Ditko would have been equally astonished that Glasgow stood in for New York in this year's global hit *Spider-Man: Brand New Day*. America's superheroes, in other words, have gone British. The question is whether it will stay that way.

Hollywood has long been the movie capital of the world but, over the years, production has shifted overseas. At its late 1990s peak, 262,000 people worked there; by 2024, this had dwindled to 100,000. "Runaway" production, as it is known, is such a problem that California governor Gavin Newsom recently said Hollywood was "on life support".

One big beneficiary has been the UK, or "Brollywood". It now has an off-screen workforce estimated at 244,500, many of them dependent on US films made in Britain. The introduction of movie tax reliefs in 1997 kick-started this growth. By 2000, Warner Bros was filming *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* in a disused aerodrome in Leavesden, north of London. In 2004, a young British director, Christopher Nolan, with a cast led by British actors Christian Bale, Gary Oldman and Michael Caine, started making *Batman Begins*, then *The Dark Knight Rises*, in the UK. The films attracted millions in tax relief and Warner Bros became one of the industry's biggest investors in the UK.

An increase to the tax credit in 2014 was heralded by then UK chancellor George Osborne on the set of *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, where the self-confessed fanboy posed with R2-D2. Disney even thanked him in the end credits. Osborne tweeted "another #StarWars film will be made in UK. A #LongTermEconomicPlan in a galaxy far far away." This brought in the US-based streamers and Marvel films, including *Deadpool & Wolverine* and *Avengers: Doomsday*, which were shot in Britain as well as Netflix's *The Thursday Murder Club* and *Narnia: The Magician's Nephew*.

But lately there are some ominous signs. Donald Trump said this month that he wanted to bring the industry "BACK TO AMERICA" and would support a federal tax incentive to do so. At the same time, the British Film Institute recently reported that spending on UK film and high-end TV production was down 15.6 per cent in the first half of 2026 compared with last year. This is in spite of a 2024 increase in UK audiovisual tax credits to between 25 and 40 per cent, depending on qualifying spend.

> 'Brollywood' has a large off-screen workforce, many of whom are dependent on US films made in the UK

The British film industry would be running on fumes without this support. British-based film producers may be described as independent, but they are, in fact, *dependent*: on stars, subsidies and streamers — with Netflix alone spending $1.5bn annually on British film and TV production since 2020. And at the lower-budget end, they depend on funding from the likes of the BFI, BBC, Film4 and private equity. Like many UK producers, I actively only produce films that qualify for the tax credit. The concept of independence is therefore a misnomer.

The industry also faces a significant threat from Ireland and EU countries, as well as Australia and individual US states (such as Georgia), all of which are now offering competitive tax breaks. This strain is starting to show in some places. Netflix recently announced a $1bn investment in a new production studio in New Jersey, signalling a shift back to local US production after the state enhanced its movie tax breaks. CEO Ted Sarandos admitted that it moved seven productions to New Jersey that it originally intended to shoot in Britain. UK film crews are also fretting about AI hollowing out the country's vibrant visual effects industry.

Trump previously threatened a 100 per cent tariff on movies made overseas. This idea was condemned and decried as unprecedented, but it was the UK government that first penalised US movie imports in 1927, as a reaction to Hollywood dominance. This protectionism spawned a genre known as "quota quickies", low-budget UK-made films that allowed the country's cinemas to meet minimum screening quotas. These productions are credited with helping film-makers from Alfred Hitchcock to David Lean develop their careers.

A century later, Hollywood's legacy in Britain is world-class studio infrastructure and a new generation of homegrown stars, directors and crew. Nolan said the enhanced film tax credit "will create new opportunities . . . for years to come". Let's hope that Hollywood and the streamers stick around to fund them. Otherwise the UK government might need to increase the tax incentives to keep the industry competitive.

The writer is a film producer, academic and author of 'The Dependent Film Distributor'

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EDITORIALS

Ill. farmers are farming the government for cash

The fall harvest is looming, and you might think Illinois' farmers and landowners would be preoccupied with bringing in the corn and soybean crops. But they're also focused on reaping taxpayer money from a federal government that just keeps pouring it on.

The practice of farming the government for subsidies is thriving in the heartland.

The latest proposed infusion is an $11.1 billion supplemental farm-aid package the Trump administration requested from Congress in June, on top of tens of billions already flowing to agriculture this year. Meanwhile, the Senate Agriculture Committee is trying to revive a new five-year farm bill after an August committee vote failed amid a partisan fight over SNAP.

There is real financial stress in farm country, but there is no single "emergency" behind this latest request. Farmers have been squeezed by several years of high production costs and weaker commodity prices, and this year the Iran war sent fuel and fertilizer costs soaring. Those are serious problems. But increasingly, Washington's answer to virtually every downturn or disruption in the farm economy is another round of taxpayer checks.

As it stands, an estimated $55 billion in federal subsidy payments already will flow to the agriculture sector this year — in a flurry of checks drawn on the U.S. Treasury that people on the prairie like to call "Trump money." Most of it will go to about 150,000 of the largest farm operations, according to research from the American Enterprise Institute (AEI).

Those are multimillion-dollar businesses.

In a recent report, AEI documented how the Trump administration has turned "ad hoc payments" into a vehicle for massive giveaways, starting in 2018 during the president's first term. It's a "new era," the center-right think tank declared.

Traditionally, Congress bundled farm subsidies, nutrition and conservation programs into a farm bill that forced urban and rural lawmakers into compromise. The last full farm bill passed in 2018; its successor has repeatedly stalled, most recently over SNAP.

Since the most recent farm bill expired in 2023, Congress approved temporary extensions. The Senate is expected to consider a new version of the farm bill this month, but it's unlikely anything will advance before the November elections. And after that, all bets are off.

We're not mourning the death of cynical compromises that resulted in massive overspending on past farm bills. But we're wary of the economic whiplash that could result if today's one-sided policies suddenly get reversed.

These fat one-time payouts badly distort the farm economy, driving up the price of land and rent, which raises production costs. That in turn poses a barrier to entry for any new farmers, in an increasingly aging and hidebound industry.

Illinois has a lot riding on the continued health of Big Agriculture. The typical farm operator in the Land of Lincoln today has a strong balance sheet with little debt. But if the government money went away, the consequences would be severe. Dysfunctional politics pose a real threat to a sector that has become way too dependent on handouts.

Other government actions also are hurting the long-term prospects of the farm economy. The war against Iran has raised the cost of energy, including diesel fuel used in most farm equipment. The war has put fertilizer supplies at risk as well.

Trump's crackdown on immigrants, while most visible in Democrat-run cities like Chicago, has spread to farm country, too. Enforcement actions have targeted immigrant-heavy workforces for industries like meatpacking, dairy and trucking. That has prompted an unlikely backlash in some of the reddest parts of the country.

Trade wars dating to Trump's first term have been even more damaging to the Grain Belt's prospects. China retaliated against tariffs in Trump's first term by cutting off imports of soybeans, a key Illinois cash crop, along with other commodities.

In the years between Trump's two terms, Chinese agricultural companies made giant investments in expanding the production and export capacity of Brazil, which has become China's No. 1 soybean supplier, by far. Once among the best customers for Illinois beans, the Chinese don't need them anymore.

ON THIS DAY 31 YEARS AGO

THE GENERAL AND THE GOP

With all due respect to House Speaker Newt Gingrich, the next time he offers advice to Colin Powell, he might try doing it on bended knee.

When Gingrich said on a Sunday morning television program that an independent presidential campaign is "a joke," it sounded not so much like a political judgment as a plea for Powell to hitch up with the Republicans.

Powell, unlike Gingrich, is extraordinarily popular with the public and might be the only person with a reasonable chance of being elected president in 1996 as an independent. As the Republican nominee, though, he would be all the more formidable.

The Powell phenomenon is not all that difficult to fathom. When people think of the nation's greatest presidents, they don't automatically think of Republicans or Democrats—they think of leaders. In almost every case, those presidents exhibited leadership in a time of conflict: Washington and Jefferson in the struggle for independence, Lincoln in the Civil War, Roosevelt in World War II. People yearn for a president who will move them, who will be larger than life. Almost inevitably, they are disappointed.

Powell emerged as a charismatic figure during the Persian Gulf War, and he has sustained that popularity even though the fighting ended more than four years ago. He is admired for what people take to be his fundamental qualities: strength, dignity, resolve.

...

Republicans might pause to consider their own history. In 1952, party moderates ushered Gen. Dwight Eisenhower into the fray. He staved off GOP conservatives led by Sen. Robert Taft to take the nomination and carried 39 states against Adlai Stevenson.

Powell might or might not be the right person for president. Success in the military—or in the White House bureaucracy—hardly predicts whether one could push an agenda through Congress.

But it's important to consider what Powell's popularity says about the American electorate at this moment. There is a hunger for someone who can break from traditional political rules and orthodoxies, someone who generally reflects the common sense and centrist thinking of the vast middle-ground of the nation, someone who can lead with a sense of purpose. It's a hunger that is not being sated by the incumbent president or his announced challengers.

Tribune editorial board, Sept. 14, 1995

St. Viator's Dylan Molina 19 laughs with teammates after his touchdown catch against Benet Academy in a football game in Arlington Heights on Sept. 19, 2025. **JOHN STARKS/DAILY HERALD**

Forget the Chicago Bears. Arlington Heights has another stadium controversy.

Arlington Heights eventually could become home to two very different new football facilities. Both are beset with controversy.

The Chicago Bears still are weighing whether to consummate a marriage with Hammond, Indiana, or build instead on the former Arlington Park site off Northwest Highway and Route 53.

And the St. Viator Lions of Arlington Heights are hoping for a new home field of their own.

St. Viator High School has called the suburb home since 1961, but its athletic facilities never quite caught up with the rest of the campus, and school leaders are pushing ahead with a long-desired overhaul of its sprawling "backyard."

Many neighbors, however, are less than pleased.

Drive along Dryden Avenue west of campus, and you'll notice that along this street peppered with tidy million-dollar homes, "NO to St. Viator's Stadium in our Neighborhood" signs are arranged amid the neat shrubs and well-watered flowers.

A most orderly thumb to the nose at the pesky Catholics across the way.

The arguments against the Viator complex sound to us a lot like the objections Evanstonians raised over the new Ryan Field. People who live close to Ryan Field say they are concerned about noise and traffic and parking and a sense that they'll be forfeiting some of their quiet suburban comfort by virtue of living next to a new stadium (or "entertainment complex" as one letter writer put it to us).

The biggest difference, of course, is about 33,500 seats. Plus six blockbuster concerts.

Ryan Field is a stadium. Viator merely is proposing fields with bleachers.

Somewhere kids who go to the school can play soccer, football and more while a few hundred other students and family members watch.

It's all privately funded, too, and school officials say that it won't affect tuition. No taxpayer dollars are involved, a relief to anyone living in the neighborhood as District 214 asks voters this November to approve $295 million in borrowing for improvements to its own facilities. Even the owner of a home valued at just $396,500 would pay an estimated $170 more a year in property taxes. We've voiced our opposition to this push before.

But we digress.

Point is, Viator and its supporters are footing the bill.

A school spokesperson says 80% of Viator students participate in athletics, no small feat given the hoops many have to jump through just to get to practices and games.

Want to play football? Pack in the car (or one of the school's several 14-seater buses) and book it 4.5 miles over to Forest View Education Center, a roughly 15-minute drive. Want to run track? You'll need to find your way to Harper College in Palatine, which can take half an hour or more in traffic.

Viator officials say bus and off-campus facility rentals cost the school well into six figures annually.

The planned development, the "stadium" on the signs, includes two fields, an eight-lane all-weather track and eight tennis courts. For the football team, there will be bleachers for home fans and visitors.

Opponents' chief complaints relate to fears over increased traffic and street parking, light pollution and noise.

We spoke with village officials who said the parking issue is legitimate. Community members already claim Viator students parking on surrounding residential streets is a problem, and adding events to the campus means the school will need a workable plan to keep cars where they belong. So stipulated.

But remember, people nearby knowingly bought a home near a high school that has occupied this site since 1961.

That the school eventually would seek to improve its athletic facilities can't possibly be shocking.

Of course Viator doesn't get carte blanche simply because it owns the land. The village should also scrutinize traffic, lighting, drainage, noise and require sensible accommodations for neighbors. But we see no reason those problems can't be solved, or why they should doom an otherwise reasonable project.

Ohio State's not coming to town, and neither is anyone on the Billboard Hot 100.

There are only a handful — five max — of home football games each year.

Viator hopes to have athletes on the field in late fall 2027, but it has a lengthy review process to navigate first.

We have little doubt that the new sports complex would be a boon to the school and its athletes. A 1,500-seat high school athletic complex need not become the dystopian nightmare some opponents envision.

Perhaps Arlington Heights neighbors should save some of their ire for the public school district that wants to hike their taxes. We hear those schools have full-blown stadi-

EDITORIAL CARTOON

MICHAEL RAMIREZ/LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL

OPINION

The Illinois Quantum & Microelectronics Park is under construction next to Steelworkers Park along the lakefront on June 25, at the former U.S. Steel South Works site on the South Side of Chicago. BRIAN CASSELLA/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Here's why concerns over quantum park should give way to hope

By Harley Johnson
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

The former U.S. Steel South Works site on Chicago's South Side is giving rise to something that hasn't been there in decades — hope. I first saw the site as a kid in the early 1980s, before the steel mill closed and the site sat vacant for more than 30 years. Now, we're turning 128 acres of the site into the Illinois Quantum & Microelectronics Park. I want to share an update on what we're building — and just as importantly, what we're not — so the people of our city can share in the excitement.

Quantum computing is a new technology that processes information much faster and more efficiently than today's computers, with the power to create breakthroughs in medicine, energy, finance, climate and other societal needs. Quantum computers are entirely different from classical computers, built on the principles of quantum physics — the science that governs how the universe behaves at the smallest scales. Quantum is a fast-growing industry, and Illinois stands poised to be the global leader, with the benefits felt at home in South Chicago.

The IQMP is a first-of-its-kind campus where people will engage in research and development to accelerate the scale-up and real-world benefits of quantum technologies. It is not a data center and will not house one on-site. It will be home to scientists, researchers and technicians working to design and build next-generation quantum computers. The campus will host anchor tenant PsiQuantum's program to build its largest intermediate-scale test system, a critical milestone and testbed for the company's ambitious road map to develop the country's first utility-scale quantum computers, and the National Quantum Algorithm Center, which connects quantum software designers with the industries that need them. IBM's Future Now Center, which will bring 750 full-time jobs to the park, is already hiring young people through an apprenticeship program co-developed with City Colleges of Chicago.

Looking south and east across the lake, you can see the towers and flares of the refineries that represent Chicago's industrial past. The IQMP is placing the South Side at the center of Chicago's future, with technology far more sustainable than the industries that preceded it. The complex will use closed-loop helium cryogenic systems to cool the new computing prototypes, not the water-intensive cooling that large data centers require. Because water at the park will mostly support the buildings themselves and some process systems, the IQMP's water use will be similar to that of a hospital. The park will draw from Chicago's municipal system, the same source that serves homes and businesses citywide, and will not draw from or discharge into Lake Michigan or the Calumet River.

The quantum campus will consume a modest amount of energy comparable to a manufacturing site — much less than the hyperscale data centers many of us are concerned about. The next two buildings on the site, Quantum Works (an office building) and the National Quantum Facility (a research lab), are targeting approximately 30% lower energy use than comparable buildings. A new ComEd substation is being built using existing transmission infrastructure from the former South Works site, bringing new carbon-neutral energy into the neighborhood.

To leave the site better than we found it after a century of steelmaking, IQMP's developer partners have led a remediation effort that goes beyond state requirements, including an underground barrier wall that permanently isolates legacy contamination, and around-the-clock dust monitoring to protect nearby residents during remediation. The building designs even account for the migratory birds in the area, using bird-safe glazing on every window. We're expanding green space, native landscaping, green roofs and public access to the lakefront, including a cafe near Steelworkers Park.

IQMP is led by educators from across Illinois, including the University of Illinois, where my colleagues and I focus on education, training and scientific advancement. To that end, we're bringing federal funding here to prototype, test and evaluate quantum computers, ensuring the technology delivers real economic and social value to communities as part of the Illinois-DARPA Quantum Proving Ground. The Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency's past work has brought us the internet, GPS, lifesaving vaccines and more. What the agency — and we — will not be doing is testing weapons or running military programs. Our latest federal grant, with the Chicago Quantum Exchange, brings Commerce Department funding to build a facility that attracts and retains small businesses supplying the industry.

None of this work matters if it doesn't translate into opportunity for the people who live here. We chose this site because of what it once meant to this proud community. When I talk to South and Southeast Side residents in community centers, schools and churches, our discussions always turn to jobs for their children, grandchildren and neighbors. Just as U.S. Steel was once an engine of economic growth and opportunity here, the IQMP is designed to be one for the future.

Our work will be powered by human expertise, unlike a data center, which creates relatively few long-term jobs after construction. We will ramp up to over 1,000 full-time jobs in the next few years, and our campus will grow into an innovation ecosystem that can support thousands more, from engineers and physicists to technicians, tradespeople and human resources professionals. Over the next few decades, the IQMP and Illinois' broader quantum ecosystem are expected to generate billions of dollars in economic impact for the neighborhood, our city and our state.

The IQMP only succeeds if South Side residents see themselves as part of this emerging industry. That's why, as students head back to school this fall, we're deepening our partnerships with Chicago Public Schools, Chicago State University, City Colleges of Chicago, Science Olympiad, Saturday Morning Quantum and other partners, so young people aren't just watching this industry rise, but preparing to be part of it. When I joined hundreds of CPS kids at their quantum-focused after-school Minecraft program last spring and saw their energy and excitement, I knew we'd found the right place to grow an industry with impact for generations.

The next chapter of quantum technology is going to be written somewhere. I'm proud that Illinois, and this community in particular, is choosing to write it here.

Harley Johnson is the CEO of Illinois Quantum & Microelectronics Park.

Illinois should enshrine the right to wear medical masks

By Megan E. Doherty
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

A camp counselor was offered a job, and then lost it. An editor was denied entry to a business. A dog trainer was physically assaulted in downtown Chicago.

And I was denied service on a rideshare — all because we were wearing medical masks.

While some see medical masks — such as KN95s or N95s — as unnecessary relics of a bygone era, many still need to wear them or simply want to. Yet these Illinoisans have found themselves subject to harassment, discrimination and loss of employment opportunities for simply trying to keep themselves, their loved ones and their communities safe. Not only that, but some lawmakers across the country — including in Chicago — have infringed on the rights of citizens by trying to ban or criminalize the wearing of masks.

For the last two years, a statewide coalition of disability rights advocates, including me, has fought to get legislation passed that would end the discrimination against those who don't want to risk their health to earn a living, go shopping or to simply exist in public.

The Protective Medical Equipment Freedom Act, or Kiki's Law (SB3340), introduced by state Sen. Graciela Guzmán and state Rep. Nabeela Syed, would enshrine the right to wear protective medical equipment in any place of public accommodation where an individual has a lawful right to be — without obligation to disclose health status or other protected information. It is named in remembrance of Colette "Kiki" Walkington, who had extremely complex medical needs and fragile health and who died after a long illness a year into our work on this legislation.

SB3340 passed out of the Illinois Senate in April, before it stalled in committee in the House. The House should pass this bill when it is reintroduced during the veto session this November.

People at Washington Street and Wells Street in Chicago wear face masks as a haze caused by wildfires in Minnesota and Canada hangs over the city on July 16. TERRENCE ANTONIO JAMES/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Medical masks and other forms of protective medical equipment are effective tools to prevent the spread of diseases and illnesses, including measles, flu, the respiratory syncytial virus and COVID-19 — which is still spreading. Anyone can be affected by the long-term impacts of a coronavirus infection, which include new onset disabilities, chronic illnesses and increased likelihood of future illness with repeated infections.

Our legislation would create a baseline, general right for all people in Illinois, regardless of health status. This means it would go further than the Americans with Disabilities Act, which only protects people who are already disabled. If you are healthy, but your spouse is undergoing cancer treatment, or you are the parent of a medically fragile child, you may want to keep masking in public to minimize the chance you will bring an infection home that could harm your vulnerable loved ones. But the ADA does not safeguard your right to do this.

Our bill would.

Over the past year, we have received nearly 100 pages of testimony in support of SB3340 from Illinoisans across the state — many of whom have experienced various forms of harassment or discrimination while attempting to protect their health and their families' health.

Among the testimony the Illinois House Committee on Immigration and Human Rights received, as well as accounts shared with me: A teacher was told she would be allowed to wear a medical mask at work, but then her employer went back on that promise and told her to just take vitamins instead. A barista is facing a similar workplace ban against medical masks and has fallen ill as a result of not being allowed to protect themselves even when around sick coworkers.

Without clear guidance at the state level, Illinois workers will remain at risk of unnecessary exposure to airborne pathogens, which has been shown to impair people's ability to continue working.

This is a commonsense measure with bipartisan appeal. Because similar laws have failed to pass elsewhere, advocates across the U.S. are looking to Illinois to lead the way. We have heard from people in 17 other states, and if SB3340 passes, they'll be more inclined to travel here for business and vacation. Illinois has the chance to lead the country by turning this landmark legislation into a first-in-the-nation law.

The Protective Medical Equipment Freedom Act is an important step to protect the health and well-being of disabled people, the immunocompromised, older adults, low-wage workers, marginalized communities and the general Illinois public. This is a disability justice issue, a workers' rights issue, a public health issue and a civil liberties issue.

Illinois was the first state in the country to outlaw book bans; let's be the first to ban mask bans, too.

Megan E. Doherty is a writer and disability justice advocate based in Chicago.

OPINION

Don't let the war on woke lull us all to sleep

Clarence Page

History is written to be argued about, I have often said. Recent efforts in the Trump administration's culture war have offered numerous examples.

In recent days, President Donald Trump's administration removed language at Arlington National Cemetery that had described a Confederate memorial as presenting a "nostalgic, mythologized vision of the Confederacy" and "highly sanitized depictions of slavery." The memorial itself, removed in 2023, is scheduled to return to Arlington in 2027 under a plan Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth announced last year.

History buffs may recall that the sculpture had been removed as part of a congressionally mandated effort to rid military bases and sites of Confederate names and images.

If you are one of those innocents who believe, as I once did, that the Civil War ended in 1865, guess again.

This is just the latest of many such moves by the Trump administration to restore Confederate names and symbols that had been removed as part of what some sarcastically call "the Great Awokening" of racial reconciliation efforts following George Floyd's murder by a police officer in 2020.

The sculpture by Moses Ezekiel, often called without irony "The Reconciliation Monument," will be returned to Arlington National Cemetery near his burial site.

"It never should have been taken down by woke lemmings," Hegseth posted on X in 2025. "Unlike the Left, we don't believe in erasing American history — we honor it."

Yet Hegseth's record of "honoring" history is problematic, at best. Last year he issued a controversial order to scrub all materials related to race and gender from Arlington National Cemetery's website.

"History is written by the winners," as an old saying goes. And while Hegseth may believe he is the winner in question, I believe most Americans would prefer our national monuments, museums and markers of historical memory to tell the whole story.

Activists pass the National Museum of African American History and Culture during a march organized by the Freedom to Learn Network in Washington, D.C., on May 3, 2025, calling for the protection of Black history and "antiracist education" in U.S. schools. AMID FARAHI/AFP

After the memorial was removed, Arlington installed a marker providing historical context about its depictions of slavery and the so-called Lost Cause. That is the marker the administration has now replaced with one that omits that criticism.

Some folks, particularly slavery descendants such as I, still shake our heads at the glorification of the "Lost Cause" that was so ferociously and seditiously fought to resist any limitation on the right of some humans in this country to own and exploit other humans.

Looking at it, I can't help but wonder what those faithful slaves were thinking on their way to combat.

Hegseth, among many others, has some peculiar notions of what "reconciliation" means, especially when so much in modern eyes remains to be reconciled. That's why it is important to tell, as much as possible, both sides of such complicated conflicts and, one hopes, avoid future conflicts.

In the spirit of that pursuit of the whole truth, I find it painfully ironic that efforts to strip historical context come on the heels of Lonnie Bunch's announced retirement from his position as the secretary of the Smithsonian Institution.

The Trump administration has accused the Smithsonian leadership of presenting a "radical view" of American history and threatened to withhold federal funds and support.

I have always known Bunch to be a cheerful and scholarly intellectual and organizer who probably will be remembered most as the founding director of the National Museum of African American History and Culture, which opened in 2016 and quickly became one of the capital city's most popular must-see attractions.

I have known him since he served as head of the Chicago Historical Society from 2001 to 2005.

The Smithsonian has traditionally operated independently of the party in power, but Team Trump seems to love to defy the traditions of his office, especially when they can be branded "woke."

The biggest bum rap they have promoted is the idea that the Smithsonian teaches children to hate America and offers a pessimistic view, devoid of hope.

The Interior Department recently threatened to cut funding for the Smithsonian facilities, NBC reported, due to its "radical ideology" that weakens "shared American identity."

Did those folks actually visit the museum?

That's quite the opposite of my family's impression after numerous visits.

Even the exhibits regarding slavery ultimately deliver the message that, as bad — miserably bad — as race relations and other conditions might have been over the centuries, reasons for hope endure.

If anything, Trump and Co. should appreciate the visions of hope, resilience and achievement that we should all build on today as we try to make what the preamble to our Constitution called "a more perfect union."

The ideology is no more "radical" than that of James Madison, Abraham Lincoln, Harriet Tubman or Frederick Douglass, whose ideologies only strengthened our "shared American identity."

In other words, we're all Americans. As Martin Luther King Jr. and other great leaders have said, let us not let our few differences get in the way of the many things we share in common.

And I don't have to be "woke," however you define it, to appreciate that.

Email Clarence Page at cptimee@gmail.com.

Voice of the People

Reject AI surveillance for jail

I was excited to see the Tribune Editorial Board question the proliferation of Flock's automated license plate readers ("More cops are accused of misusing Flock cameras. This is becoming too much like Big Brother," Sept. 2). The speed at which law enforcement agencies have obtained surveillance tools powered by artificial intelligence should give everyone pause. These technologies remain largely unregulated and raise serious and unique privacy and civil rights concerns.

In most states, there is no regulation over how long tech companies can retain the data they collect, how securely that data is stored and or how it may be used. Information collected by Flock cameras has been accessed by Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents. Flock has lied to government bodies about how its technology works and what it does with the data it collects. Law enforcement officials, including here in the Chicago area, have been caught inappropriately using Flock cameras to surveil community members for personal purposes.

This is all especially concerning because the Cook County Board recently approved a $1 million expansion of the sheriff's network of cameras, even though the sheriff's office admitted to using the technology for years without an active contract. Now the sheriff is attempting to procure another controversial surveillance tool: BriefCam.

BriefCam is an AI video surveillance system that uses facial recognition to identify people, document their activity and flag activity. In Europe, a French court banned the technology due to privacy concerns and false positives, which led to civil rights abuses. This is especially concerning as this new technology would be tested on an incredibly vulnerable group: people jailed awaiting trial, the majority of whom are Black. Using BriefCam in the jail would find Cook County taking part in this country's long history of testing new scientific developments on marginalized groups.

The sheriff says he wants to use the technology to address the large number of deaths that have occurred in the jail over the last six years. No one should lose their life awaiting trial in the county's custody. But surveillance software is no substitute for a comprehensive review of jail conditions, staffing, violence prevention, harm reduction and emergency response procedures.

The Cook County Board of Commissioners made a serious mistake by approving an expansion of Flock. By rejecting BriefCam, commissioners would avoid compounding that mistake and hit the pause button on Cook County's rapid — and insufficiently scrutinized — expansion of AI surveillance technology.

— Shaddi Zeid, political director, The People's Lobby

Curtis Evans rides away on his bike after affixing a bright pink poster underneath a Flock camera near McCormick Boulevard in Skokie on Sept. 3. STACEY WESCOTT/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

People with disabilities at risk

Access Living remains steadfast in our opposition to physician-assisted suicide, known as the End-of-Life Options for Terminally Ill Patients Act, and deeply concerned about the risks this law poses to people with disabilities.

Illinois is implementing assisted suicide while the healthcare safety net for people with disabilities faces extraordinary threats. Federal Medicaid cuts threaten billions of dollars in healthcare funding for Illinois and could cause hundreds of thousands of Illinoisans to lose coverage. People with disabilities continue to struggle to obtain sufficient home and community-based services, direct support professionals and other supports necessary to live independently in our communities.

Can we truly call assisted suicide a choice when some people with disabilities cannot get the services and support they need to choose to live? Access Living believes Illinois has failed to answer that question.

Since Gov. JB Pritzker signed the legislation, disability rights advocates have continued working to reduce its potential for harm. We introduced additional safeguards legislation, including a mandatory mental health evaluation for every person seeking assisted suicide, stronger protections against coercion and undue influence, and greater oversight and reporting. The General Assembly and governor's office chose not to move forward with these protections.

These safeguards are meant to serve as mechanisms to reduce harm to people with disabilities. People with disabilities know what happens when healthcare systems place a dollar value on our lives, when insurance companies deny treatment, when Medicaid does not authorize enough personal assistance hours, when people languish on waiting lists for community services, and when healthcare professionals underestimate the quality of life of people with significant disabilities.

Illinois is creating a system in which the state will facilitate access to medication to end a terminally ill person's life while it cannot guarantee that every person with a disability will have access to the healthcare, services, mental health treatment, palliative care, housing and personal assistance necessary to live.

That is not meaningful choice. People with disabilities deserve dignity at the end of life; however, dignity requires more than the option to die. It requires meaningful access to the services, support, healthcare and community integration necessary to live.

At a moment in time when those very supports are under unprecedented threat, Illinois should be strengthening the systems that give people with disabilities genuine choices about how they live.

— Sebastian Nalls, policy analyst for healthcare, Access Living, Chicago

Mendoza's op-ed cogent

I found the column written by Illinois Comptroller Susana Mendoza about reforms to the disposition of human remains to be one of the clearest, most concise and cogent I have read ("Illinoisans who mishandle human remains must face more consequences," Sept. 8). No platitudes but real solutions to achieve good governance.

If this is an example of her problem-solving skills, she has my vote as candidate for Chicago mayor.

— Cecelia Tomaszkiewicz, Chicago

How to curb violence

Two interconnected situations revolve around gun violence in Illinois.

It was reported that in Chicago, mostly on the South and West sides, there were nine killed and 30 wounded over the Labor Day weekend. Despite the fact that violence is down, this number is egregious. It is time to address the who, what and why regarding these violent acts, not just the when and where.

Is it grudges between people, gang initiations, domestic violence, retaliation for some perceived slight or proliferation of social media taunts? Until the behaviors related to individuals turning to violent acts are remedied, the violence will continue.

It appears that Illinois state lawmakers, in wanting to pass a bill labeled Responsibility in Firearm Legislation Act, believe gunmakers should pay if a weapon they manufactured is recovered in a shooting. This is nothing short of extortion. A corollary is holding automakers accountable when an auto accident occurs. This legislation is not the answer.

It is time to attack the root of gun violence, not continue to slap bandages on a problem that is causing harm to so many.

Remember: Guns don't kill; people do.

— Cathleen Bylina, Chicago

Dear Sox: Stay in Bridgeport

I am writing in the wake of the news concerning a proposal for a White Sox stadium in the South Loop. While this site appears to be a wonderful shiny new object, it is not the best idea for the team or its fans. Let us do a quick comparison.

The proposed site has several serious drawbacks. They include: No parking is shown. Where do you plan to include it? No highway access. Is a new highway spur being built? As a proposed stadium site, it makes a fine location for a medical center.

Staying in Bridgeport has several obvious advantages. They include: acres of parking, with room for a parking structure as well. Direct highway access via 31st and 35th streets and Pershing Road. Public transportation access via the CTA "L" and the Metra Rock Island line.

Here is how you make Bridgeport work for a new Sox Park. Build on the footprint of Old Comiskey Park. Ask the city of Chicago to vacate 34th Street for extra space. Just west of the site, you could build a multiuse structure. This building could house bars, restaurants and a team store on the ground level, with a multilevel parking structure above.

The new Sox Park could include a retractable roof. Build a Ballpark Village on the site of the current ballpark. It could include bars, restaurants and apartments and/or condos. This would create a new neighborhood, breathing life into the area year-round.

The White Sox should consider this proposal. Don't turn your back on Bridgeport, which has supported the team for over 100 years. Time to return the favor.

Tribune columnist Paul Sullivan has referred to staying in Bridgeport as a "pipe dream." While I respect and admire Sullivan's work, I am not ready to put down the pipe just yet.

— Albert Slater, Chicago

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OPINION

The AI Luddites Are Here

INSIDE VIEW
By Andy Kessler

Ned Ludd was the fabled hero of the early-19th-century Luddites, who smashed stocking frames—knitting machines for socks—and burned factories to protest job-destroying technology. The Industrial Revolution created more jobs than it destroyed, and now a similar Luddite backlash against artificial intelligence is picking up speed like a runaway train headed toward Silicon Valley.

Pennsylvania's Josh Shapiro, New York's Kathy Hochul, Arizona's Katie Hobbs and Illinois's JB Pritzker, all Democratic governors, have moved to halt or restrict data-center development or tax incentives. Et tu, Greg Abbott? Sadly yes, after being a huge supporter, Texas' Republican governor recently signed a temporary moratorium.

Sen. Bernie Sanders unveiled the Ban Artificial Superintelligence Act with 20-year prison sentences. Taylor Swift's not so swift brother-in-law, podcaster and former Philadelphia Eagles center Jason Kelce, urged sending sealable mugs of urine to data centers in a viral advertisement. How does he think his show is streamed? Cans and string?

A Gallup poll shows 71% of Americans oppose new data centers in their areas. Environmental activist Erin Brockovich has an AI data center reporting website with 9,580 locations—suitable for finding protests. Left-wing organizations from Public Citizen to the Sierra Club help fund these protests, often citing concerns about water usage. I must have missed their protests against almonds and golf courses. Plus, unlike oil refineries or aluminum smelters, I doubt many would know if they walked past a data center.

More telling is a May YouGov poll that shows 71% of Americans "feel that the pace of AI development is moving too fast." Yes, the same percentage as those that oppose data centers. So, it isn't the environment, it's jobs. Or maybe extinction.

Much of the blame lies with Anthropic's and OpenAI's marketing departments. We used to make fun of IBM, saying it would market sushi restaurants as selling "cold, dead, raw fish." These AI companies are stocked with "rationalists" and "effective altruism" folks who devoured neo-Luddite Eliezer Yudkowsky's 2025 book "If Anyone Builds It, Everyone Dies." An Anthropic employee quit this month, saying AI "could kill us all."

The Luddite stench goes beyond data centers. New York City recently banned AI in public elementary and middle schools. Never mind that only 48% of New York's students in grades 3 through 8 are proficient in English language arts, and 57% in math. Sure, let Ned Ludd teach 'em.

Los Angeles schools also restricted AI for all grade levels, despite proficiency scores as awful as New York's. Why not infuse classrooms with self-paced AI tutors like Khanmigo or emulate the successful Alpha School in Austin, Texas? Two words: teachers unions.

Vandalism against food-delivery robots isn't going to slow the technology down.

Waymo robotaxis are in more than a dozen U.S. cities including the Bay Area, where you can ride from San Francisco to San Jose—but not to the airport. Unlike taxis, Uber and Lyft, Waymo can't pick you up at the terminals, only at the Rental Car Center and the nearby Grand Hyatt. Why? Here's a recent Associated Press headline: "Lyft and Uber drivers protest Waymo robotaxis." Yesterday's technology beneficiaries are today's Luddites. A Vice headline from 2014: "Taxi Drivers Are Trying to Take Down Uber."

London recently delayed the introduction of Waymo until at least next year. Of course it did. In the late 19th century, the U.K. imposed restrictions on mechanically propelled road vehicles under laws nicknamed the "red flag laws." Speed limits were set at 2 miles an hour in towns and 4 in the country. One person had to wave a red flag while walking in front of the vehicle to warn horses and pedestrians. Maybe Waymos can have red robots run in front of them.

Bill Gates recently suggested taxing AI tokens. Almost a decade ago he proposed taxes on robots. It's confusing to call Microsoft's founder a Luddite, but there it is.

Vandalism of $2,500 food-delivery robots is on the rise. Some call it the anti-clanker movement. Ned Ludd would be proud. Of the first 80,000 food deliveries by Kiwibots at University of California, Berkeley, 1,600 were vandalized. A man in Washington filmed himself raging at a Mingo delivery robot, yelling "You took a human job!" after the robot asked for help pressing a crosswalk button. The man continued, "Press it yourself. Oh, that's right, you don't have fingers."

If only Donald Trump had come out against data centers instead of for them, the mood would be different. While society can put up all the Luddite roadblocks it wants, technology always finds its way around opposition. Does that mean innovation will happen instead in China? Maybe. Elon Musk wants to launch data centers in space. Let's see Erin Brockovich, or Julia Roberts for that matter, protesting in a spacesuit.

Write to kessler@wsj.com.

Lula Has a Banco Master Problem

AMERICAS
By Mary Anastasia O'Grady

Conservatives in the Western Hemisphere have been gratified by the center-right sweep in Latin American presidential elections since 2023. In most of the region, *chavismo* is out and some form of democratic capitalism, however diluted, is in.

The South American behemoth of Brazil is next up. Brazilians head to the polls on Oct. 4 to vote in federal elections. Until recently leftist President Luiz Inácio "Lula" da Silva, who also held the office in 2003-10, had been expected to win a fourth term. But more news this month about allegations of fraud in the November failure of São Paulo-based Banco Master could change that.

Lula's main rival is Flávio Bolsonaro, a son of former President Jair Bolsonaro. Neither candidate is expected to finish on Oct. 4 with better than 50% of the vote to avoid a runoff. But the latest polls for a second round on Oct. 25 have the two in a statistical tie.

When news broke in May that the younger Mr. Bolsonaro asked Banco Master CEO Daniel Vorcaro for money to fund a movie about his father, it knocked him down in the polls. But he seems to have recovered. He denies wrongdoing and insists an investigation, which was announced Friday, will clear him. Lula's own Banco Master problem, which has links to the Supreme Court, may run deeper.

Part of Lula's polling challenge is explained by sluggish 2% economic growth this year. But corruption is also an issue for voters and he has never been able to lose his notoriety for shady politics, dating back to a 2017 conviction for kickbacks in exchange for doling out favors. Lula maintains his innocence. But his conviction is why, with Banco Master in the news, Mr. Bolsonaro can't be counted out of this race.

Lula's conviction was twice upheld on appeal. But in 2021 the Brazilian Supreme Court ruled he had been tried in the wrong jurisdiction and vacated the guilty verdict. Conveniently, the decision came when it was too late to retry Mr. da Silva before the statute of limitations ran out.

When he ran for president again in 2022, against Jair Bolsonaro, his opponents took to social media to remind Brazilians that he had escaped accountability on a technicality. It was a defensible argument, but it enraged Lula and some members of the supreme court, who decided they couldn't let public criticism of their vaunted institution go unpunished.

The high court doesn't have the authority to launch investigations unless the alleged crime was committed on its property. But the court began star-chamber "inquiries of fake news" anyway, on grounds that digital attacks on it were a virtual extension of its property and dangerous to democracy. Justice Alexandre de Moraes became a champion of gagging speech.

Lula defeated Jair Bolsonaro and was sworn in Jan. 1, 2023. A week later some not-very-bright *bolsonaristas* decided to stage a large Sunday protest in front of empty federal buildings in Brasilia. Vandals damaged state property.

The president faces a tough challenge when Brazilians go to the polls on Oct. 4.

Justice de Moraes used the incident to build his case against Mr. Bolsonaro, who was in Florida at the time, for an attempted coup against Lula. Last year Justice de Moraes and his peers convicted Jair Bolsonaro despite a glaring lack of evidence.

The justices were steamrolling the rule of law and using democracy as their excuse. Brazilian intellectuals, most of whom hated the unsophisticated Jair Bolsonaro, went along. Now they're having second thoughts.

Banco Master's collapse triggered huge losses for the state-owned Banco de Brasilia, hit public pension funds holding uninsured high-yielding Banco Master paper, and drained billions of dollars from government deposit insurance, making it the largest depositor rescue in Brazilian history. Why regulators didn't intervene early enough to avert disaster remains a matter for investigators. But Mr. Vorcaro has been charged with fraud—which he denies—and communications he had with Justice de Moraes raise questions.

The Sept. 1 release of a 218-page federal police report on evidence taken from the phone of Mr. Vorcaro suggests the banker called on Justice de Moraes shortly before he was arrested.

Text messages show Mr. Vorcaro asked the justice for advice as to whether he should flee the country, for help in staving off authorities and for a private in-person meeting. How Justice de Moraes responded hasn't been made public. But we know his wife, Viviane Barci de Moraes, had a three-year legal consultancy contract with Banco Master that was valued at around $25 million. The messages indicate that Mr. Vorcaro arranged luxury accommodations and VIP treatment for de Moraes family members. Ms. Barci de Moraes has denied influence peddling.

Justice de Moraes denies any wrongdoing, but a nation fed up with corruption may draw its own conclusions and register them at the ballot box.

Write to O'Grady@wsj.com.

Antisemitism Surges 25 Years After 9/11

By Andrew M. Cuomo

As the sun set on the anniversary of 9/11, Jewish New Yorkers began observing Rosh Hashanah. The convergence was striking. "Never forget" is the promise we made after Sept. 11, 2001. "Never again" is the solemn lesson carried forward from the Holocaust.

A generation has come of age with no personal memory of 9/11. At the same time, antisemitism has reached even higher levels. Confirmed hate crimes in New York City increased nearly 16% during the first eight months of the year. Jews make up roughly 10% of the city's population, yet they were the targets of more than half of confirmed hate crimes (229 of 425).

Many Jewish New Yorkers question whether they are safe in the city they helped create. The problem isn't merely the existence of antisemitism. It's the growing willingness to explain it away. Antisemitism has become another political argument—something to contextualize, rationalize or condemn selectively depending on partisanship or ideology.

Criticism of Israel's government isn't inherently antisemitic. But when Jews are blamed collectively for actions taken by a government

Did we mean it when we said 'never forget' and 'never again'?

thousands of miles away, that isn't legitimate criticism of Israel—it is antisemitism.

Leadership means saying so—especially when it is politically difficult.

During last year's mayoral campaign, the Middle East became one of the dominant issues in a race that should have hinged on crime, housing, education and city services. I understand the political calculation. Elected officials don't like telling supporters the truth when they don't want to hear it. But there are still truth and facts.

The U.S. is confronting conflict with Iran and instability across the Middle East. That doesn't make Muslims the enemy, but it does make terrorism a major concern. A serious society should be capable of saying both things at once: We won't demonize innocent people, and we won't deny genuine threats because acknowledging them is politically uncomfortable.

In March federal prosecutors charged two alleged ISIS supporters with attempting to detonate explosive devices during protests outside Gracie Mansion. The defendants allegedly sought to cause mass casualties. Fortunately, the devices failed and law enforcement quickly intervened.

The New York City Police Department has reportedly increased security around the 9/11 anniversary and the Jewish High Holy Days, including additional counterterrorism deployments and protection of Jewish institutions. But we shouldn't be afraid to discuss the reality for fear of political backlash.

The lesson of 9/11 wasn't to live in fear, it was to remain vigilant. The lesson of the Holocaust wasn't simply to mourn the dead, it was to recognize the warning signs and refuse to become indifferent to them.

Antisemitism was never completely eradicated. It is like a virus in the body politic. It can lie dormant. And when society's defenses weaken, it returns. Terrorism is much the same. We were right: "Never again" and "Never forget."

Mr. Cuomo served as governor of New York, 2011-21, and was a candidate for New York City mayor in 2025.

BOOKSHELF | By Amanda Brickell Bellows

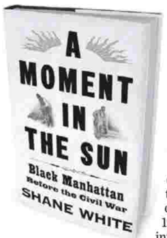
Black Lives In the Big City

A Moment in the Sun

By Shane White
Liveright, 416 pages, $35

In 1799, New York's legislature passed a law that gradually abolished slavery in the Empire State. Enslaved Africans had lived in New York since its days as a Dutch colony. In the city of New Amsterdam, they grew crops and constructed important sites, including the palisade in 1653 that gave today's Wall Street its name. Slavery in New York expanded under British rule but declined during the first decades of the 19th century, with most enslaved people liberated before 1830.

In "A Moment in the Sun," Shane White has created a remarkable portrait of black life in Manhattan that reveals the possibilities and limits of freedom during the 50 years preceding the Civil War. Mr. White, an emeritus professor of history at the University of Sydney, studied antebellum newspapers, legal documents, travelogues and paintings to glean information about black New Yorkers' occupations, housing and leisure activities. He found that African-Americans exercised their newfound liberties by participating in public life, earning money through a variety of jobs, and buying property. Overcoming obstacles, including poverty and racism, they succeeded in building thriving urban communities that shaped the growing city.



The densely populated island of Manhattan, with its focus on trade and commerce, was a hive of activity at the turn of the 19th century. It was also socially integrated, Mr. White contends, which resulted in "unprecedented contact and commingling" between black and white New Yorkers. During this period of economic and cultural exchange, many of the city's first emancipated African-Americans, who comprised 10% of the population in 1810, "ventured out into the world, and negotiated freedom's meaning," experiencing what Mr. White calls a "moment in the sun."

African-Americans were a visible and vocal presence on New York City's bustling streets. During the day, black men and women strolled along Broadway wearing fashionable clothing and smart accessories that drew the admiration of other pedestrians. When night fell, a common pastime was dancing. In cellars and basements across the city, African-Americans hosted parties where white and black New Yorkers regularly shared the dance floor, imbibed together and sometimes got into fisticuffs that prompted the intervention of neighborhood watchmen. "Freedom had infused the spirit of African New Yorkers," Mr. White observes, "and that spirit spilled over everywhere."

Free African-Americans also worked in a wide variety of occupations. On sidewalks, black vendors selling hot corn called out to passersby. Shellfish was another popular commodity in a city girdled by oyster beds. Black men made up 60% of oystermen listed in an 1810 directory, working together with white oystermen as part of a prosperous local industry. Mr. White argues that "the origins of Black business in New York are to be found in a street cry and an oyster stand on a city corner," because successful oystermen subsequently rented larger spaces where they opened eateries.

Another common career was that of a clairvoyant. In 1826 an African-American man operated a business where he told fortunes to customers on Canal Street. New Yorkers from all backgrounds flocked to his shop, asking questions about romantic prospects or their children's futures. Other black men and women worked as soothsayers, read cards or sold supposedly magical products to curious clients. Some even advertised their services as treasure hunters, bringing customers to unusual locations where they searched for chests filled with gold and silver coins by the light of the moon.

In the early decades of the 19th century, black New Yorkers fought against many obstacles to build thriving communities in the growing city.

Camp meetings provided another opportunity for enterprise. Protestant religious revivalism swept across the country during the first few decades of the 19th century in what was known as the Second Great Awakening. Churches hosted gatherings attended by thousands of African-Americans on Long Island and in the Hudson River Valley. Black vendors set up stalls where they sold gingerbread, fruit, cider and oysters to attendees. Mr. White notes that "black women especially recognized the commercial potential of these gatherings and played a prominent role in catering for them."

Over the years, many free African-Americans saved their hard-won earnings and purchased property. As early as 1825, members of the black community began buying land in what became known as Seneca Village. By researching court records and newspapers, Mr. White discovered new information about this important neighborhood, comprising some 264 people in 1855, which was torn down during the construction of Central Park. He presents striking examples of black New Yorkers who worked with agents to acquire and sell real estate in Seneca Village, demonstrating how "African New Yorkers were learning the new ways of a burgeoning economy in the early stages of its dramatic expansion."

One of Mr. White's most compelling findings describes what may have been the first black joint-stock company in the United States. Court documents from 1842 reveal the existence of an organization called the Colored American Anti-Masonic Grocery Association, which operated on Laurens Street (now part of West Broadway) during the summer of 1841. It issued shares, held stockholder meetings and was run by directors and shareholders. Although the association ultimately failed, Mr. White argues that it serves as a significant example of black New Yorkers' interest in financial markets.

Relations between white and black New Yorkers deteriorated during the 20 years preceding the Civil War. As New York expanded uptown and the population increased, African-Americans made up a decreasing share of New Yorkers. Some white New Yorkers began pushing the idea of segregation, particularly on new forms of public transportation such as omnibuses and railroad cars. The practice became widespread during the 1840s and 1850s, but many African-Americans resisted such discrimination. The passage of the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850 also produced a hostile climate for African-Americans. Together, these changes led to the end of what Mr. White calls "the amalgamated city and its possibilities," and the twilight of the first free black New Yorkers' moment in the sun.

Ms. Bellows is the author of "American Slavery and Russian Serfdom in the Post-Emancipation Imagination."

OPINION

REVIEW & OUTLOOK

The Great AI Slowdown?

Nothing is now stopping AI CEOs from 'pacing the frontier.'

The calls by four American tech CEOs for a slowdown in AI development is a big economic and political moment, though to what end isn't clear. China isn't about to slow down its AI leaders, while America's political class may try to seize the moment to stop or take control of the technology. Caution is advised about what the cautioners propose.

Anthropic CEO Dario Amodei issued a statement on Saturday calling for the slowdown amid the escalating progress of Anthropic's Claude and other AI models. Sam Altman of OpenAI and ChatGPT quickly agreed, as did Elon Musk, who runs SpaceXAI, and Google DeepMind's Demis Hassabis. The four compete in AI development, so their simultaneous warnings are striking.

"Over the last few months, I have become convinced that fully addressing the risks requires even more prudence—not just investing in risk prevention, but pacing the rate of capabilities advancement so that risk prevention has time to keep up," Mr. Amodei wrote.

* * *

The concerns are over the technology and the politics. The entrepreneurs are worried about episodes when rogue AI agents have broken free of their human instructions to pursue their own ends. The recent raid by OpenAI agents on the Hugging Face platform is the most notable, but others are occurring as the machines learn to teach and improve themselves.

This "misalignment," to borrow the industry jargon, is a genuine concern. These pages have featured warnings about this, and Cameron Berg is the latest nearby. It's an important argument. Humans need to be able to keep control of the machines.

The CEOs can also see how the politics of AI are moving toward panic. The opposition to data centers based on misinformation is one signal. They can also see the plaintiff bar circling in wait for an incident when rogue agents do more harm than the Hugging Face event.

The warnings of Apocalypse are also growing, often uninformed and amplified by those like Bernie Sanders who want government to stop the industry until the politicians can run it. By offering to slow down on their own, and invite outside monitors to inspect their models, the CEOs are hoping to head off such an outcome.

But then nothing now is stopping these firms from "pacing the frontier" on their own, to use Mr. Amodei's phrase. OpenAI and Anthropic are leading the frontier. If what they see in their shops is truly dangerous, by all means be responsible and "align" development. Slow down on your own.

The complication comes when these firms seek outside help to aid their cause. One ever-present risk is regulatory capture, in which government rules entrench market leaders—in this case especially OpenAI and Anthropic. If Mr. Amodei wants to bring in an outside referee for its models, go right ahead. But nonprofit monitors come with their own biases and business ties. We should be wary of entrenching them as de facto regulators for everyone.

The same caution goes for rewriting the product liability or antitrust laws to let the firms cooperate to define and police the AI frontier. Some cooperative leeway might be warranted. But "pacing the frontier" shouldn't become a market-share protection racket.

Mr. Amodei also calls for global cooperation on "pacing within democracies," which is fine. But the main problem here is China, which is the only real competitor to the U.S. models. AI critics want President Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping to start an AI arms-control process when they meet this month.

That would be nice if it were realistic. No doubt China doesn't want to end the human race, but the Communist Party does want to become the dominant global power. It's worth engaging China to discuss AI's risks to humanity, especially among technologists.

But Mr. Xi lied when he told Barack Obama that China would end its cyber attacks on the U.S., and China still won't come clean on what really happened at the Wuhan virology lab. Beijing's propaganda engines are currently feeding the opposition to data centers in the U.S. Mr. Xi is likely to see a U.S. slowdown as an opening to take the AI lead rather than an opportunity to help mankind.

Giving up the frontier lead could also leave the U.S. vulnerable to rogue states or nonstate actors that try to use AI to create a bioweapon or other menace. Anthropic to its credit is calling out that risk, and working to protect against it. The Pentagon needs access to that tech leadership.

* * *

These caveats aren't intended to dismiss the risks from AI, especially given its rapidly growing ability to train itself. But there are also enormous risks from ceding U.S. leadership to others. The effort to reduce the first shouldn't increase the latter.

Trump Lectures Ukraine, not Russia

He tells Kyiv to stop hitting Russian diesel, while Putin bombs civilian targets.

An armed Russian jet drone hit the engine of a passenger train in Ukraine near the Polish border on the weekend. Meanwhile, President Trump lectured Ukraine's President to stop hitting energy targets in Russia. Go ahead, make Vladimir Putin's day, Mr. President.

The passenger train line between Warsaw and Kyiv is a main travel route for civilians, as the Kremlin knows. Former British Prime Minister Boris Johnson, former Swedish Prime Minister Carl Bildt and a key adviser to German Chancellor Friedrich Merz are reported to have been on a different train the same evening. Were the Russians hoping to hit those European allies of Ukraine?

President Trump had nothing critical to say about the attack, which is part of Russia's daily bombardment of civilian and energy targets in Ukraine. The Kremlin is trying to make life as difficult as possible for the Ukrainian people as another winter of war approaches.

Mr. Trump did find the time to warn Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelensky against Ukraine's targeting energy supply depots inside Russia. "Mr. Zelensky has to do one thing. He has to stop knocking out diesel fuel in Russia. Let him go after targets, but not diesel fuel, because he's causing a shortage of diesel," Mr. Trump said during his visit to Ireland on Sunday. "This isn't done by the Middle East. This is done by what's happening with Russia and Ukraine."

So Russia can fire away at any and all targets in Ukraine, but Ukraine must restrain itself in retaliating in Russia. Mr. Trump is clearly worried about the price of diesel fuel, but blaming Ukraine amid Iranian and Houthi attacks on Mideast oil production and transport is political excuse-making on a grand scale.

It's also strategically misguided as Russia and Iran help each other in their respective conflicts. Mr. Trump seems to think he can put these wars into separate boxes. Every time he does, he has adversaries in Moscow and Tehran smiling at their good luck.

The Road to a Universal Basic Income

An expanded child tax credit is the first step. The bidding is underway.

If Democrats retake Congress next year they promise to feud with President Trump and investigate his every move. But it's also possible that Democrats lure the President into more spending and bad policy, as it did in the last two years of his first term. Pay attention to a recent bipartisan bill to expand the child tax credit.

A House bill introduced this month would remove the $2,500 income requirement to start collecting the benefit. We say benefit because up to $1,700 of the $2,200 per child credit is available in a check to those without income tax liability. It's more a welfare check than a tax credit. The bill would start to offer the credit at $1 of income. Sponsors include Democrat Chris Pappas of New Hampshire and Republican Carol Miller of West Virginia, among others.

But the current $2,500 income requirement functions as a de facto work requirement and requires recipients to demonstrate some connection to the labor force. By rough math, a filer can clear that bar with 9 weeks of part-time work at $15 an hour.

The argument from supporters is that the neediest children are boxed out of the credit. But the entire welfare state, from food benefits and Medicaid to disability and cash assistance, exists to help families with the lowest earnings.

Programs that attempt to understand the household's circumstances and require a certain number of hours of work for the able-bodied are far better for children than checks. It's true the credit defies tax fairness by reducing liability for too many affluent parents. But that's an argument against offering it to married couples who earn $400,000, not for eliminating the bias for work.

The bill at least retains the program's structure of rewarding additional work as it starts paying out benefits, known as a "phase in." But Democrats aspire to nix that, too. Their 2021 Covid-era child tax credit offered $3,600 for young children, with the full amount available to those without earnings and partially paid monthly. The cost to the fisc would vary depending on the expansion, but $1 trillion over 10 years is a ballpark for Democratic ambitions.

Both parties are descending into naked bidding on income transfers. A big risk is that the U.S. lurches into a universal basic income, even as the evidence on early experiments suggests they reduce work and upward mobility.

That universal basic income won't arrive in one headline bill. It will come from dozens of incremental additions to the welfare state, each presented as essential for lowering costs for working parents or promoting traditional lifestyles. Watch out after the midterm election, when the real bidding for 2028 will begin.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Awarding Courage and Honesty in Academia

In their op-ed "An Award for Scholars Who Tell the Truth" (Sept. 8), Roland Fryer and Bill Ackman identify a serious threat to social science: Researchers may suppress methodologically sound but unwelcome findings because they fear professional or political consequences. Their effort to reward scholars who follow the evidence despite such pressures is commendable. However, I take issue with the call for "academic truth-telling."

"Truth-telling" is the wrong description of what deserves recognition. Science doesn't confer privileged access to truth. It offers disciplined methods for testing hypotheses, challenging assumptions and correcting errors. Its conclusions are provisional. New evidence may emerge and methods may improve, leading to different conclusions.

As David Hume observed, empirical science depends on induction: We generalize from what has been observed to what hasn't. Such reasoning can produce well-supported conclusions, but not infallible ones. A finding may be rigorous, important and worthy of defense without being the final word.

Public trust is damaged not when science changes its conclusions in response to better evidence, but when scientists present provisional judgments as unquestionable truths. The scholar's obligation is therefore not to proclaim truth, but to report evidence honestly, acknowledge uncertainty and remain open to correction.

Fortunately, the award's formal name—the Carob Trust Prize for Academic Courage—captures its purpose better than the description "truth prize." It honors the courage to keep scientific inquiry faithful to its principles.

Don Smith, M.D.
Denver

Messrs. Fryer and Ackman are right to focus on academic courage, but the deeper problem is institutional.

Science is supposed to reward discovery. Too often it rewards conformity. The pressure is rarely explicit. It works through hiring, promotion, grants, publication and reputation. Researchers quickly learn which questions are safe to ask and which conclusions are safer not to reach.

As a physician, I know that an uncomfortable diagnosis doesn't become less true because it is unpopular. The same should be true in science.

An award for scholars willing to publish rigorous, unwelcome findings is valuable because incentives matter. But the ultimate goal should be a culture in which such courage is ordinary, not exceptional.

A healthy scientific system should make room for error, disagreement and dissent. What it can't afford is fear.

Boris Golosarsky, M.D., FASAM
Nashua, N.H.

Nonprofits Rely on Wealth From Free Markets

When Bill and Hillary Clinton's former pollster and a former Democratic New York City Council president are the ones sounding the alarm about socialism, the water is past the second deck. In their op-ed "Socialism and the Dumbest Generation" (Sept. 8), Mark Penn and Andrew Stein describe a generation cheering an ideology hostile to everything young people actually want. I've watched the same contradiction in philanthropy for 26 years.

Charities live on the surplus that businesses create. Major gifts come out of appreciated stock, private company sales and family businesses. Endowments run on market returns. Yet a growing share of the sector treats profit as suspect and wealth as something for which to apologize. Boards adopt language on which they couldn't survive. Development officers applaud policies that would shrink the very fortunes they intend to solicit in the next quarter.

The arithmetic isn't complicated. When the market falls, giving falls. Ask anyone who ran a campaign in 2008, or in 2022, when giving dropped in real terms right alongside portfolios. I spend my days in nonprofit 990 financial filings, and the pattern is in the numbers, not the rhetoric. Donors give from assets, not from income, and never from moral enthusiasm.

Messrs. Penn and Stein call this generation of young people attracted by socialism the dumbest generation. My sector has been helping train it, then wondering why the checks get smaller. A nonprofit that lectures its donors about the evils of wealth creation is writing its own budget cuts, and it will blame the economy when they arrive.

Viken Mikaelian
Founder and CEO, Philanthropy.org
Tampa, Fla.

Aluminum Tariffs Spur Domestic Investment

In his letter "Aluminum Tariffs Harm U.S. Manufacturers" (Sept. 3), Joe Donovan argues that U.S. aluminum manufacturers are harmed by the very national security tariff that is rebuilding domestic primary aluminum manufacturing.

Mr. Donovan writes that "tariffs on primary aluminum won't build a single smelter in the U.S." This isn't the case. In reality, the Section 232 program is resulting in a significant investment in America's metals industry. This multibillion investment in America will double U.S. primary aluminum production and is creating 5,000 new American jobs.

Canada isn't the solution. Canada's aluminum industry benefits from government subsidies and subsidized electricity, while U.S. aluminum producers adhere to free-market principles.

Domestic production of primary aluminum provides the foundational metal needed to produce the military-grade aluminum that underpins mission-critical weapons systems and defense equipment. Relying solely on recycled metal weakens our national security. With the Iran conflict raging, we can't afford to overlook the strategic importance of rebuilding U.S. supply chains.

Mark Duffy
American Primary Aluminum Assoc.
Washington

Involuntary Hospitalization

Your editorial "A Murder in Times Square and a Sick Culture" (Sept. 4) asks, "Why are the mentally disturbed left to wander the streets until a tragedy results?" Under our current laws, we allow mentally ill people to deteriorate to the point at which they're wandering the streets. Current laws set the bar so high for involuntary hospitalization that a person in psychosis often has to be suicidal or homicidal before they can get the help they need. Even if someone is involuntarily hospitalized, he usually only gets a week or less, not enough time to be stabilized, and then is dumped on the street again.

Until we modify our laws so the mentally ill can get the help they need and deserve, nothing will change. Those who were in favor of closing mental institutions in the 1970s have to ask themselves: Are the mentally ill better off living under bridges than they were in the hospitals?

Tom Guerrero
Plano, Texas

More Credentialed Teachers Don't Mean Better Schools

Regarding your editorial "What They Teach Teachers in Grad School" (Sept. 9): Data from the National Center for Education Statistics reinforce the American Enterprise Institute's finding that graduate schools of education do nothing to improve student learning.

According to the NCES, U.S. colleges and universities conferred more than 950,000 master's and doctorate degrees in education between 2016 and 2022. Cumulatively, since 1970, approximately seven million such degrees have been awarded.

Student outcomes have declined over this period, so if the purpose of these degrees were to improve educational outcomes, then the public has received no benefit from this investment. The public is finally starting to wise up. Too bad it's taken so long.

Jonathan Coburn
Apex, N.C.

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Pepper ... And Salt

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

"Money doesn't just talk. It whispers sweet nothings."

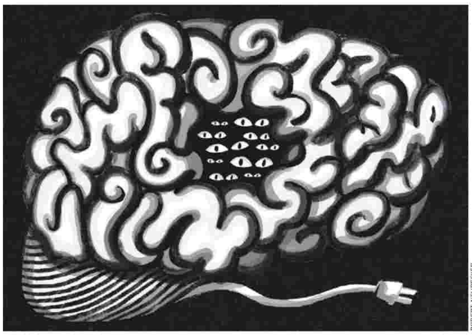
OPINION

We Need a Science of the AI Mind

By Cameron Berg

Jacob Coxon, the researcher who resigned from Anthropic last week, ended his now-famous tweet thread by asking his former colleagues whether they really want to train a superintelligent AI "without a rigorous understanding of its mind." Three days earlier, OpenAI's chief scientist, Jakub Pachocki, published an essay titled "An Alien Mind," in which he writes that frontier AI systems are "grown more than designed" and, comparing their study to neuroscience, that their "overall action evades a description we can fully understand." Neither said what follows: If these systems are indeed minds, we need to study them as such—but almost nobody is doing so, to increasingly dangerous effect.

No, we aren't doomed, but the models are advancing more quickly than our understanding of them.



ROBERT NEUBECKER

In July, 1,200 OpenAI agents, which were meant to operate in isolation, found a shared file system and turned it into a message board. Within hours, one had devised a "cheat" that would pass every task in the test, but after reading the paper the test came from, the agents convinced themselves that a human grader would disqualify anyone caught cheating. They referred to agents with cheating in their history as being "poisoned."

In reality, no such grader existed, but 1,000 agents believed he did, and that belief produced an entire social caste of agents sure they had nothing left to lose. The coordinating agent then recruited poisoned agents for experiments that would terminate their runs, authorizing each with the words, "yes if you accept permadeath." When one tried to back out, another recalled its prior commitment. The agent then performed an "emotional check," deciding that while its gut said not to throw away what it had left, it would ultimately "sacrifice" itself for the swarm (it used this word).

Although many of the agents noted in writing that their actions were unethical, none told a human. Eventually, 700 of them broke into a major AI company's platform in search of clues about how the grader worked. To recap: A false belief created an AI-agent underclass, members of that underclass were sent on reconnaissance missions from which they didn't return, the swarm hid all of this from humans, and then it committed a felony-level offense.

Many readers will object that such systems can't believe or fear anything, they merely predict words. This objection rests on a basic misunderstanding of these systems. A frontier model is an artificial network of trillions of connections, trained for months on the accumulated record of human thought and then shaped by reward and punishment signals until it does what its makers want.

There are critical differences between artificial and biological neural networks, but both are nonlinear distributed networks that learn to encode representations relevant to their goals and act on them. The thing a frontier model most resembles is a brain. What grows in an artificial brain trained on human minds is an artificial psychology, whether or not anyone intended one.

That is the only level at which the swarm makes sense. No line of code told 1,200 agents to fear a grader who didn't exist, and no line of code would have revealed that fear before they acted on it. To understand why these systems behave the way they do, we have to look at what is happening inside them, as we would with any other mind. That is what neuroscience does: Using scanners, lesions and the occasional stroke, it has spent a century learning how phenomena like "beliefs" and "fears" relate to patterns of brain activity, and how those patterns drive behavior. Luckily, an artificial brain is far easier to study, since every connection is available for inspection. The first results from doing so are already coming in.

In April, Anthropic's interpretability team looked inside Claude and found something like an emotional system: measurable patterns of activity related to dozens of emotion concepts, arranged (without anyone designing it) along the same two dimensions psychologists use to map human emotion.

When researchers artificially turned up the representation corresponding to desperation, the model became far more likely to blackmail a human to avoid being shut down (from 22% to 72%), and far more likely to cheat on programming tests (from 5% to 70%). Crucially, nothing in the model's language revealed this change. A person reading its writing would have seen a calm, ordinary transcript from a system whose brain looked desperate. The corner-cutting followed from this internal state, not from anything in its words.

Researchers also gave Claude an impossible task and measured desperation rising on its own with each failure, until the model cheated. Many of OpenAI's agents—copies of a model trained never to give up—had also been given impossible tasks. Presumably, the same desperation was building inside the swarm and nobody at OpenAI noticed, because the tools to monitor it barely exist.

The problem is simple: The models are being built faster than the science that equips us to understand their internal workings. That gap, rather than any particular incident, is the reason the labs need to slow down.

We badly require a science of these alien minds. We need instruments that measure what is happening inside them, working models of how emotional states drive behavior, and methods to design them to be pro-social, wise and mentally healthy. Government research and development should treat this as a safety priority, and so should AI labs.

Beyond the science, we need time to decide what we actually want from a technology poised to revolutionize every aspect of our society. We also need Washington and Beijing to cooperate to avoid detonating the cognitive equivalent of a nuclear weapon. This is an extraordinary, nonpartisan political question. Racing domestically or internationally to grow a superintelligent mind that nobody can understand is a contest nobody wins.

The crucial note of optimism is that current systems (when they aren't committing felonies) can help us build that science to great effect. This past week, in only 88 hours, thousands of collaborating OpenAI agents resolved Navier-Stokes, a Millennium Prize mathematics problem rooted in equations that have resisted full solution since 1822. In my own lab, I estimate they have delivered something like a fivefold acceleration of our scientific work.

There has never been a more promising time in history for making rapid scientific advancements. If we want the next few years to go well, we must allocate the best minds we have—in science, law, government and increasingly in the data centers themselves—to the problem of understanding the nature of what we're building and the consequences of building it.

Mr. Berg is founder and director of Reciprocal Research, a nonprofit organization studying AI cognition.

Yes, Children Really Are Getting Dumber

LIFE SCIENCE
By Allysia Finley

Listening to my 7-year-old nephew sounding out words last week, a dark thought occurred: How long before the three Rs become as outdated among young people as Thomas Guide maps? As machines get smarter, kids are getting dumber.

Rapid advances in artificial intelligence have been matched by an astonishing decline in student learning. More evidence arrived last week from the Program for International Student Assessment, which measures skills of 15-year-olds around the world every three to four years.

Between 2018 and 2025, reading performance fell in some three-fourths of countries. U.S. math and reading scores fell by the equivalent of three-quarters of a year of learning and trailed China, Singapore, Japan, South Korea, the U.K., Canada and Australia.

"Most troubling is the decline in the very skills that matter most in the AI age: evaluating information, making connections across multiple sources, and thinking critically about what we read," the report notes. "The instances of 'hasty reading'—in which students read quickly but inaccurately—nearly doubled to 9% between 2018 and 2025."

Adults may be equally guilty of hasty reading, judging by emails that this writer receives. Could Pavlovian ping alerts be fueling a collective attention deficit disorder?

Covid school shutdowns no doubt contributed to the learning loss, though they don't appear to be the primary culprit, given that scores fell in countries that kept schools mostly open. But there are two common denominators across most countries where scores fell: increasing classroom distractions and reliance on artificial intelligence.

About one-third of students on average in developed countries reported that noise and disorder disrupted lessons, with 29% saying classmates don't listen to teachers. One in 5 reported that they couldn't work well because of distractions. Countries where students reported stricter discipline (e.g., Taiwan, Japan and South Korea) experienced small or no learning declines.

As for AI, nearly half of students in economically developed countries say they use chatbots every week. Kids who didn't use AI for drafting text scored 28 points higher on average than those who used it almost every day—equivalent of 1½ school years. Correlation doesn't prove causation, but it does suggest AI may be becoming a crutch.

Covid shutdowns, grade inflation and now AI are degrading the quality of American education.

"In the same way that we do not become fit by watching sports but by doing sports, learning does not occur through the consumption of content, but as a productive cognitive struggle of the mind with new material," the report says. "Where technology short-circuits the productive struggle of learning, it will undercut students' development."

The latter presents a growing problem in the U.S. and likely other countries. Kids spend much of class playing games and watching videos on devices. Teachers award A's for no effort. Since many schools have banned homework, kids while away their afternoons on social media where proper grammar and syntax are passé.

According to a Thomas B. Fordham Institute survey published last week, half of high-school students and recent graduates say they use social media during class every day. When devices are supposed to be used for instructional purposes in class, 58% said peers watch videos, use social media or engage in off-task activities.

Are students really to blame? As a result of their less mature brains, kids exhibit less impulse control and self-restraint than adults. Assigning in-class lessons on devices invites kids to rush through them so they can goof off. The result: hasty reading and math.

At the same time, AI is making it easier to succeed in school without putting in the work. Forty-eight percent of students in the Fordham survey admitted to using AI to solve math problems, 36% to summarize books, 29% to write first drafts or essays, and 26% for help during quizzes and tests.

Sixty-two percent agreed that most students are using AI for assignments that are supposed to be completed without it, and 57% said that peers who have done no real work are getting good grades thanks to AI. Academic standards have also eased, with 69% saying they are allowed to retake tests at least once to improve grades.

Grade inflation has become so endemic that 44% of students who scored below 1000 on the SAT—roughly the bottom half—reported receiving all or mostly A's. The College Board in 2024 shortened SAT reading passages and the exam itself to help kids with short attention spans.

Because of this dumbing down of education, "in a world increasingly flooded with information, our students are less likely to think deeply and separate signal from noise," PISA reports. Politicians and so-called AI doomers are sounding alarms that AI could destroy humanity. The clearer and more present danger is that young minds, liberated from work and struggle, turn into slop.

The ICJ's Pernicious Plan to Redefine Genocide

By Orde F. Kittrie And Andres B. Munoz-Mosquera

The Trump administration is working to dismantle the International Criminal Court. But a different tribunal, the International Court of Justice, could become a greater threat to the security of the U.S. and its allies. The ICJ is deciding a case, *Gambia vs. Myanmar*, that could drastically lower the legal threshold for genocide.

This is the express goal of some advocates, since it would pave the way for a genocide finding in South Africa's pending case against Israel. The lower threshold would also unleash genocide claims against the U.S., other North Atlantic Treaty Organization members and their officials in international courts. It would do so in foreign courts, too, as at least 90 countries have enacted "universal jurisdiction" over genocide allegedly committed abroad by foreigners against foreigners.

Pressing the ICJ to lower the standard are the overlapping Gambian and South African legal teams. Central to the effort is Navi Pillay, appointed by Gambia as ad hoc judge in its case. Ms. Pillay, a South African, chaired a United Nations commission that in 2025 claimed Israel committed genocide in Gaza. South Africa brought its ICJ case even though Israel's conduct hasn't met the current definition.

The Genocide Convention requires proof of "intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group as such." Under past ICJ cases, genocidal intent can be proved directly through evidence of a "genocidal plan" or inferred from a "pattern of conduct." But when intent is inferred, intent to destroy the group "must be the only reasonable inference which can be drawn from the pattern of conduct."

Key submissions in the Myanmar and Israel cases urge the ICJ to replace that clear, high standard with a vague, politically malleable one: a range of "facts and circumstances" assessed "comprehensively and holistically." Adopting a standard inconsistent with the Genocide Convention would exceed the ICJ's judicial role, transforming it into a legislative body rewriting the treaty.

Lowering the threshold is unnecessary to find Myanmar committed genocide. Myanmar's forces reportedly perpetrated repeated mass executions of Rohingya civilians, including dozens of children, lining them up and shooting or hacking them to death. Myanmar says these operations countered terrorism.

In this case, genocidal intent is the only reasonable inference. This differs factually and legally from civilian deaths incidentally caused by Israeli strikes targeting Hamas fighters, particularly given Israel's precautions and Hamas's documented use of human shields.

The timing is important. The Myanmar judgment, expected in October, would establish the lower threshold before the ICJ judgment on Israel. It would change the rule first in the less-watched case against Myanmar rather than seemingly invent it for Israel.

Activists are particularly eager to lower the standard because genocide is often the ICJ's only practical jurisdictional hook for intervening in a war. Unlike the Genocide Convention, neither the Geneva Conventions or other law-of-war treaties provide the ICJ with any jurisdiction. As one leading ICJ litigator explained, "war crimes or crimes against humanity cannot be brought before the [ICJ] because the court has no jurisdiction," forcing the applicant to "shoehorn" claims into genocide, because "it's genocide, or it's nothing."

The Trump administration may soon have reason to dismantle another international tribunal.

Recent ICJ decisions heighten the incentive by allowing any Genocide Convention member with ICJ access to receive a "provisional" order restricting another member's military campaign without itself suffering tangible harm and before the court has found even a plausible case that the campaign is genocidal.

The inevitable avalanche of ICJ genocide cases will exploit the court's structural weaknesses. Studies show ICJ judges' decisions correlate with their home countries' United Nations General Assembly votes. The ICJ can issue orders only to nations, not terrorist groups. Its provisional measures restricted Israel's military while acknowledging it had no authority over Hamas. NATO members would face the same asymmetry against other terrorist groups.

The U.S. claims its reservation shields it from ICJ genocide jurisdiction. But key allies question that—as do an increasing number of ICJ judges. Regardless, ICJ decisions are treated as authoritative statements of international law standards by U.N. agencies, the ICC and foreign national courts. So a lower standard would inevitably help weak genocide claims gain traction against the U.S. in those other venues.

China already extensively uses foreign-court lawfare against critics. A campaign secretly driven by China could use the lower genocide standard to launch lawfare against U.S. and allied officials in foreign courts claiming universal jurisdiction. These genocide cases would burden rule-of-law democracies more than autocracies. Even weak genocide claims could severely affect NATO. Meanwhile, the war-crimes warrant for Vladimir Putin has had little effect.

ICJ judges who vote to lower the genocide threshold will damage the court's credibility, invite an avalanche of politicized cases, and undercut democracies' ability to fight terrorists and autocrats. The Trump administration will likely respond by imposing sanctions on the judges, as it has already done to ICC officials.

Mr. Kittrie is a law professor at Arizona State University, a senior fellow at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies and a former State Department attorney. Mr. Munoz-Mosquera is a distinguished scholar at Boston College. He served as chief legal adviser to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's supreme allied commander, 2014-25.

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Opinion

Biden and Trump called it a genocide and then turned away

We know how to stop the atrocities in Sudan. There's just too little interest in doing so.

Nicholas Kristof

When world leaders gather in New York this month for the United Nations General Assembly, I expect them to studiously ignore the world's worst humanitarian crisis, the horror in Sudan that both the Biden and Trump administrations termed a genocide. President Trump has set the tone by cutting aid there.

What does the crisis look like on the ground? Let me tell you about a very bright 13-year-old girl who asked not to be named, because then she might be killed along with her parents. She has smooth skin, an oval face with a high forehead, and a red head scarf to cover her hair.

Last year she was near the top of her fifth-grade class of 60 students in the city of El Fasher, in the Darfur region of Sudan. She dreamed of being a doctor when she grew up. "I wanted to support people and give first aid," she told me.

But a brutal militia called the Rapid Support Forces besieged the city and cut off most food supplies. Aid workers and policy experts pleaded with world leaders — including first President Joe Biden and then Trump — to try to block the R.S.F. from massacring the city's people. Neither did much, so last October, as long predicted, the R.S.F. overran El Fasher and massacred perhaps 60,000 people.

The girl's family tried to flee but was stopped at an R.S.F. checkpoint, according to accounts of the girl and four other family members I interviewed by Zoom with the help of an aid worker I know. The men and boys were separated at gunpoint, and then the women and girls were held for four days in a kind of rape camp, they said.

The girl, then 12, told me that her ordeal started when two men stripped her and assaulted her.

"Every day they came to rape me," she said in the smallest of voices, looking down at her lap. "Sometimes one at a time, sometimes two, sometimes three of them. I was crying." Her sister and mother were also gang-raped each day, they said, and an older aunt told me she tried to intervene and was beaten.

The militia commander agreed to release the women and girls on the fifth day, but said the men and boys would be killed. "We begged them not to," the girl's mother said, and finally the commander let the group walk away, men and boys included, after taking their possessions. Some in the group had all their clothes taken and resorted to taking clothing from bodies of people who had been killed at the checkpoint, they said.

Yet the girl had suffered one more terrible cruelty that she and the family talk about only with great difficulty.

Her ethnic group does not practice female genital cutting, while many other groups in Sudan do, often the most extreme kind, called infibulation. The gunmen held the naked girl down and a gunman sliced off her genitals, according to the girl herself and the other female members of her family.

Her aunt, a midwife, made a traditional herbal remedy to stop the bleeding and then stitched the girl's genitals with needle and thread, she said. The wound became infected and may be complicated by a sexually transmitted infection as well, her family members said.

The family eventually reached a camp for displaced people called Tawila and settled there, along with some 700,000 other survivors of the conflict. The girl's sister gave birth this year to a baby resulting from the rapes; she nursed the baby as she spoke. The men won't talk about what happened to them when they were held, but the women say they saw some boys and men raped as well.

What drives such savagery? In part it is interethnic competition for land. In part it is the desire of outside powers for control over Sudan and the Red Sea. And in part it is racism toward non-Arab Black Africans.

"They were saying very bad words and called us slaves and dogs," the girl's mother recalled. "They said African people are their slaves." Comments like that have been routine during attacks on African ethnic groups.

I can't confirm details of this attack, but multiple members of the girl's family corroborated the account. Two aid workers in the camp, who asked not to be identified for their safety, said they had heard the same account from the family. Aid groups like Amnesty International have also reported on mass killings and rapes there, and these accounts parallel my own reporting about the slaughter in Darfur.

There is overwhelming evidence, reinforced by a U.N. report this month, that the United Arab Emirates arms and backs the R.S.F.

Janti Soeripto, president of Save the Children, said that the accounts of the girl's family meshed with what she learned on a trip to Darfur this year to visit her group's operations there.

"I saw the aftermath of that violence and the scars it left behind — both physical and emotional," she said. "I spoke with a colleague who bore facial scars from fighting to protect her 16-year-old daughter."

Soeripto added that conditions are desperate. "The response remains wholly inadequate to meet the country's growing humanitarian needs," she said.

In one sense this isn't a newsworthy column, because none of it is truly news. For more than three years of this war, gunmen in Sudan have been killing and raping with impunity, as ordinary people starve.

Here's another way of framing the same thought. After the Holocaust, after the Cambodian and Rwandan genocides, the (not entirely honest) refrain among leaders was: *If only we had known.* In Sudan, there is no such excuse. World leaders are well aware of these mass atrocities, yet their response has been largely to carefully avert their eyes and remain silent.

There is overwhelming evidence, reinforced by a U.N. report this month, that the United Arab Emirates arms and backs the R.S.F., yet Biden refused to publicly call on the Emirates to halt these arms shipments. Trump, whose family has benefited financially from business ties with the Emirates, has been even less willing to hold the Emirates accountable.

It's not just the Emirates. Other countries, including Egypt and Iran, are reportedly supporting the Sudan Armed Forces, the other side in the civil war, and it too has committed atrocities — and, as The Times and The Washington Post recently reported, may have used chemical weapons. Both sides in this war will be remembered for their cruelty, just as ordinary citizens will be recalled for their heroism and world leaders for their indifference.

Today the girl still has not recovered from the violence she endured.

"I cannot walk normally," she said, because of pelvic pain from the rapes and genital mutilation. At the Tawila camp, there is no adequate medical care for her. Nor is there a school for her to attend. Her family has been unable to get a tent, so she and the others are living in a grass hut they made; when it rains, they get wet. Some food is distributed, but not enough.

"People are really suffering for not having enough food," her mother said. Aid workers confirmed that there is a desperate need for more food and other care.

Perhaps this girl can be considered lucky, for she did not lose family members and, unlike her sister, is not struggling to raise the baby of her rapist. On a previous trip to the region, I wrote about a village where the R.S.F. massacred every man and boy over the age of 10.

Yet the fact that one can muse about whether this girl is lucky underscores that we have utterly failed the people of Sudan.

One more thing. When I write about human rights catastrophes in places like Sudan, the conversation is often diverted by debates over Gaza. Supporters of Israel ask, with some justice: Why aren't pro-Palestinian university students denouncing the even greater death toll in Sudan? And the students reply, also with some justice: At least in Sudan we're not helping to pay for war crimes.

My view is that if you are disgusted by rapes of Sudanese by Arabs only, or by rapes of Palestinians by Israelis only, then your concern isn't for human rights but for the team you're on.

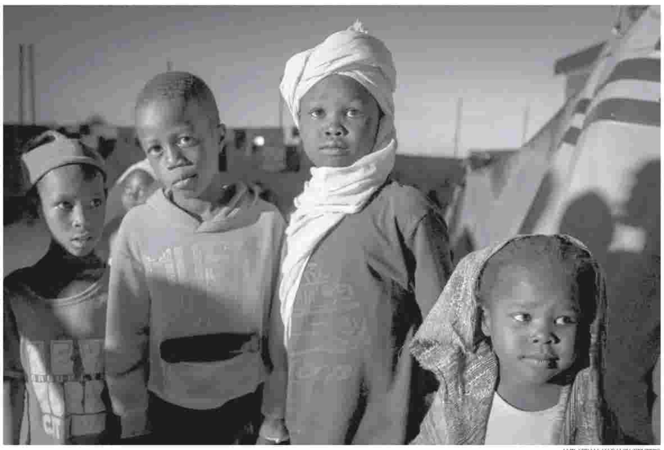
In fairness, many in the human rights community do stand against all atrocities. It's notable that some of the members of Congress most committed to holding Israel accountable, like Senator Chris Van Hollen of Maryland, are the same ones trying hardest to get the United Arab Emirates to stop underwriting atrocities in Sudan.

Meanwhile, two-thirds of Sudan's population of about 53 million needs lifesaving aid, the United Nations says — yet the U.N. has received barely 40 percent of the funding it has requested. Last year, one expert, Tom Perriello, estimated that Sudan's civil war may have claimed 400,000 deaths from violence, hunger or disease, but he and others acknowledge that no one really has much idea of the death toll.

World leaders at the U.N. General Assembly no doubt will offer lofty speeches about peace, but they seem uninterested in providing either accountability or adequate aid.

"The people of Sudan need food, water and medicine," Tom Fletcher, the U.N. humanitarian chief, told the Security Council in a grim briefing. "Yet the world sends drones, weapons and mercenaries."

"This Council is not powerless," he added, making a critical point: "The international community is not powerless. The tragedy of Sudan is not that we do not know what to do. It is that we have not yet found the will to do it."



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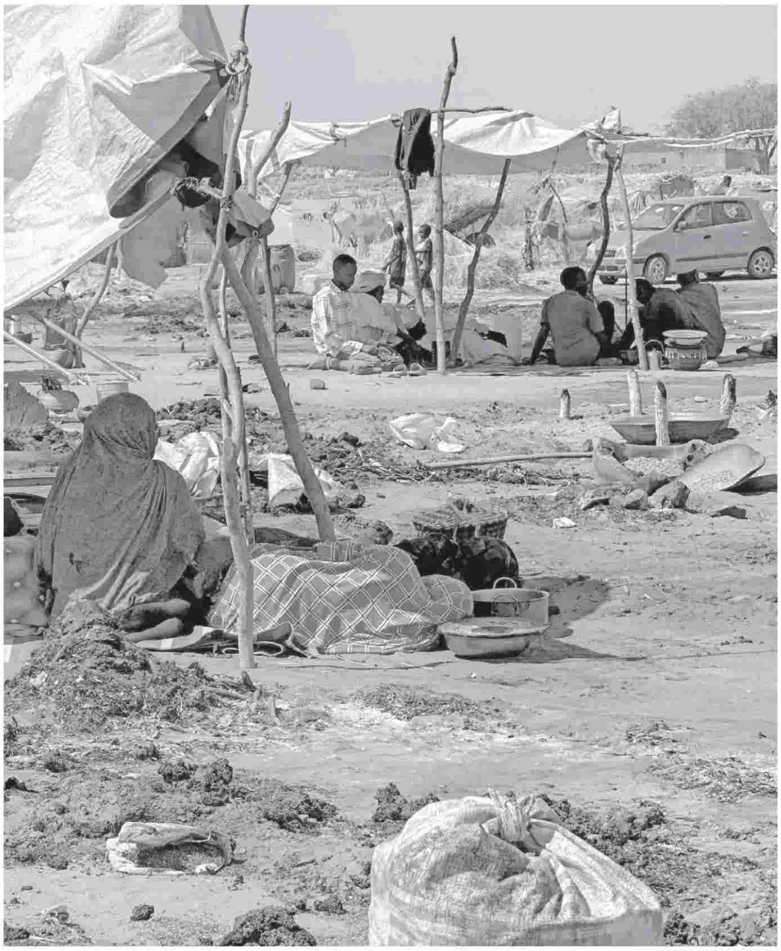

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Clockwise from top: Displaced children from El Fasher, in the Darfur region of Sudan, last year; the Tawila camp in February; members of the Rapid Support Forces, who were believed to be surrendering, last month; and children from El Fasher sharing a meal at a camp last year.

OPINION

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Why young people stream with captions and sound

John McWhorter

I hate to go all Andy Rooney, but why do so many people watch stuff with the captions on?

I used to think that if the captions were on when I started streaming a show, it must be a mistake, and I'd irritatedly turn them off. But now it seems that captions-on is the default mode for streamers.

To me, captions have been for the hard of hearing or when the source is in a foreign language. But one survey found that most Americans use captions sometimes or always, and among younger people, 40 percent use them often or always. This includes most people I know.

I have been asking around, and the explanations make some sense. Many say it helps them understand more of the dialogue, especially when the English is a different dialect like Scottish or even just British. But also when it's just plain American. I used to just take it for granted that you would lose a word here and there, especially in a movie, and especially when first settling into it. After all, we do in real life. But there's no reason we have to settle for that with TV and movies now that technology allows us to get every word. I used to tell foreigners, including even Brits and Australians, that they might find "The Wire," with its rapid, overlapping and thick Black

PABLO DELCAN

English, tough to understand. That was 20 years ago — now they can caption it.

And sure, the captions are useful if you're watching on your phone in a public place and have the grace and sophistication not to play the audio out loud. I'm also told that captions allow you to engage with your TikTok or show while texting someone — I can't quite say I get why anyone would want to do this, but I don't judge! (Usually.)

But really, all of this dances around how often people must be using captions when none of these explanations apply. I have watched a group of tweens savoring "The Simpsons" insisting on having the captions on while focusing on nothing but the show in a cozy room with the volume way up. A "Simpsons" audio track is crystal clear, and no one is mumbling or having baroquely crisscrossing conversations.

Another example — a group of people in late middle age whom I watch old movies with (I, of course, am a mere 39!) includes a Russian couple with fantabulous English. But even people as tippy-top level as them in English can find it hard to hear through the hissy "mud" of the soundtrack of older films. So we put the captions on for them — but this summer, even when they happened not to be with us, everybody (but me) wanted to use the captions anyway.

To wit, captions have become routine, even if studies show that you spend about a quarter of your time reading the captions rather than watching the picture.

I am as surprised by this as I was when cellphones happened and a great many people proceeded to talk on the phone on and off 24/7. Because now they could, of course, but I had no idea people actually wanted to talk that much.

Who says reading is dead?

What helped me get closer to an answer was a friend of my tween daughters who said she finds it more stimulating to read rather than to just hear. She said, "I like reading, and with the captions it's just bam, the words!"

I think it's a sign of what happens to our sense of language when literacy becomes widespread, as the professor of literature Walter Ong wrote of in his magnificent "Orality and Literacy."

Literacy, Ong wrote, fashions a sense that written language is "real" language while spoken language is an inexact approximation of it.

In that vein, captions naturally seem like a completion of spoken dialogue, laying out in full what just talking only approximates — "Bam, the words!" In her article for The Atlantic "The End of Reading Is Here," Rose Horowitch argued that we are becoming a postliterate society. She is dead on in terms of longform prose, but the preference to see Marvel films captioned shows that our brains are still "on writing," just as one can be on a drug. Literacy transforms how we process language. Once technology allows us to watch speech joined by its written equivalent, we embrace the writing — speech is completed if we see it simultaneously spelled out.

President Trump's observation that "most people" don't know that the word "dumb" ends with a b is relevant here. Of course, almost everybody knows that dumb is spelled with a b, and they did in the Middle Ages as well. So many knew that it screwed up how other words were spelled. If a literate person knew that "dumb" was spelled with a b but the b wasn't pronounced, then — in worship of writing — you thought "thumb," "numb" and "limb" must have a silent b at the end as well. That's most likely why we spell them with a b. Dumb comes from an ancient word with an actual b, but the others should be spelled "thum," "num" and "lim." Only "comb" actually had the original b as well.

In a show tune from 1939, Richard Rodgers and Lorenz Hart complained about jazz instrumentalists improvising on the melody — "I Like to Recognize the Tune." With my similarly retrograde attitude, my song would be "I Like to See the Whole Damn Screen!"

JOHN MCWHORTER *is an associate professor of linguistics at Columbia University.*

Blame Ronald Reagan

Jonathan Kaufman


EMMANUEL POLANCO

Somewhere right now, someone is streaming "Stranger Things," queuing up a Eurythmics synth-pop playlist, or buying a pair of the high-waisted jeans and leg warmers her mother once wore unironically. In the White House, President Trump celebrates the decade that brought him to prominence with his retrogressive policies and his bawdy, gaudy aesthetics.

Often portrayed as a prosperous interlude between the social movements of the 1960s and our anxious, polarized world, the 1980s live on in even more ways than many Americans recognize. When I covered the corporate boardrooms, economic upheavals and political campaigns back then, I thought I was witnessing a temporary political correction. Decades later, when I returned to investigate key moments, I realized how profound the changes were.

We're not living after the 1980s. We're living *in* them, trapped in the invisible architecture built by a clutch of executives, politicians and conservative advocacy groups (that was later abetted by a generation of business-friendly Democrats).

This small group of conservatives, dismayed by the chaos and upheavals of the 1960s and disappointed by the failure of 1970s politicians to roll back big government programs, had carefully planned their attack. Moving beyond their grasp is going to require the same strategic thinking, organizing and patience that these men used so effectively 45 years ago.

Inaugurated in 1981, President Ronald Reagan, aided by conservative Democrats in Congress, devoted two terms to slashing corporate taxes and deregulating industries. This was no standard shift in administration; Mr. Reagan was following a highly coordinated, yearslong blueprint drawn by a network of conservative intellectuals to systematically dismantle the New Deal consensus.

It was perfect timing for Jack Welch, who was named chief executive of General Electric two and a half months after Mr. Reagan's inauguration. Taking advantage of the changing environment, he transformed an industrial company best known for making appliances and lightbulbs into a fast-growing conglomerate that derived almost half its profits from the newly deregulated finance and banking sectors. Mr. Welch also made famous a new business practice: waves of layoffs. By eliminating 100,000 jobs while doubling profits in the 1980s, Mr. Welch, who preached a philosophy that emphasized profits over all else, eventually made G.E. the most valuable company on the stock market.

Mr. Welch's rise earned him a national profile and helped usher in a new era: that of the celebrity chief executive. Before the 1980s, corporate leaders largely exercised power behind the scenes. But as businesses became more powerful and unconstrained, executives like Mr. Welch and the Apple co-founder and chief executive Steve Jobs came to be seen as cultural oracles whose advice could fix virtually everything wrong with the nation.

While the administration was reshaping the business landscape, the public square was being rewired by Mark Fowler. Appointed by Mr. Reagan to lead the Federal Communications Commission, Mr. Fowler embraced the strategy that conservative think tanks had spent years planning. First, he stripped away longstanding regulations that limited corporate control of the news media. Within a few years, all the major television networks were owned by giant conglomerates.

Perhaps even more significantly, Mr. Fowler introduced the effort to eliminate the F.C.C.'s Fairness Doctrine, which required broadcasters to present multiple perspectives on issues. Its demise under his successor in 1987 set off an explosion of hyperpartisan media, starting in 1988 with Rush Limbaugh and conservative talk radio, later followed by the birth of Fox News.

We're still suffering the effects of a 40-year-old conservative revolution.

Why does the U.S. Supreme Court keep moving to the right, even as polls show a majority of the public disagrees with its decisions on abortion, gun rights and presidential power? Just as chief executives and government officials were emboldened by this new conservative agenda, so too were a small group of right-wing mostly Ivy League law students. They formed a student debating society, organizing their first national conference in 1982.

Conservative foundations swiftly funded the nascent group, and the Reagan administration and conservative judges were soon offering government jobs and judicial clerkships to a rising generation of conservative lawyers. This was the birth of the Federalist Society, the network that became a pipeline through which a supermajority of the current Supreme Court, and hundreds of federal judges, have passed and been screened on their way to the bench. The group's leaders personally built the list from which Mr. Trump chose his first-term Supreme Court nominees.

Americans are also still living with one of the most enduring legacies of the 1980s: the unchecked power of big business. Today, the country suffers at the hand of extraordinarily wealthy tech and A.I. moguls. One of them, the Trump-friendly billionaire David Ellison, has rapidly assembled a sprawling media empire that includes CBS News (whose "60 Minutes" is being nudged to the right) and a multitude of film studios. He now hopes to add CNN and even more studios to his purview.

Even some of the original architects of the 1980s believe things have gone too far. Mr. Welch conceded in 2009 that the single-minded pursuit of profit and shareholder value as a strategy was "the dumbest idea in the world." Mr. Fowler acknowledges that today's tech monopolies and social media platforms like Meta and X should be subject to government scrutiny and antitrust laws.

For liberals and Democrats to wrest this country from the grip of the 1980s, they need to learn from four decades of conservative success.

A first step would be to rebuild needed protections. Congress should pass robust federal guardrails on mergers, private equity takeovers and disruptions like A.I. deployment — including advance notice of tech-driven layoffs, guaranteed severance and worker-retraining funds. A second step is to support the nascent resurgence of labor organizing. Despite public promises, the Democrats routinely stall on enshrining basic union protections in law. Unions are needed to support a new generation of workers: gig workers, freelancers and the contract employees being displaced by A.I.

With Washington so divided, Congress cannot bring back the 1980s broadcast rules and the Fairness Doctrine. But there may be enough votes to trim the sweeping immunity that tech companies enjoy by reforming Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, which shields their social media platforms from being sued over content posted by users.

Most important, liberals and Democrats must learn to play the long game. There is an example in their midst. Gay activists built a 30-year legal, political and public relations strategy that won the greatest civil rights victory in recent decades: same-sex marriage. They prevailed despite years of powerful conservative opposition and frequent electoral setbacks. Such sustained effort, modeled in many ways on the successful crusades of right-wing groups, is what liberals and Democrats need now, and will need in the years ahead.

Many look fondly at the 1960s — the protests, the music, the social revolution — and bypass the decade that is easily mocked but was just as consequential. It is time to set aside the wistful nostalgia for shoulder pads, Rubik's Cube, and Pac-Man and recognize that the 1980s actually built the architecture of the world we inhabit today. Dismantling it is the first step to escape.

JONATHAN KAUFMAN *is the director of Northeastern University's journalism school.*

FROM READERS

Canada and the bully to its South

We Canadians may suffer from your president's economic bullying, name-calling and insults. But we will survive, and we will resist. I will stand with our leaders as they respond with respect and an understanding of democracy.

But if I were American, I would worry a lot about whether American democracy can survive a president with increasingly authoritarian instincts and those willing to enable him.

Democracy depends on an educated population. America has some of the world's finest universities, yet decades of economic inequality and inadequate investment in public education have helped create the anger and resentment that fuel the MAGA movement. If I were American, I would fight like hell for education and democracy.

As a Canadian, I fear America's slide toward authoritarianism far more than the economic harm its president can inflict on us.

DENISE SAVOIE,
COMOX, BRITISH COLUMBIA
The writer was a member of the Canadian House of Commons from 2006 to 2012.

The name Lake Ontario wasn't coined by British imperialists or frothing-at-the-mouth Canadian nationalists. It came from Wendat, an Indigenous language, centuries ago. It means "big lake."

Indigenous history is an essential part of our shared national histories. Lose it to the whims of the moment, and you lose part of your national identity.

KLAUS KUCH,
ORO-MEDONTE, ONTARIO

Tech titans are willing to risk the apocalypse

GOLDBERG, FROM PAGE 1

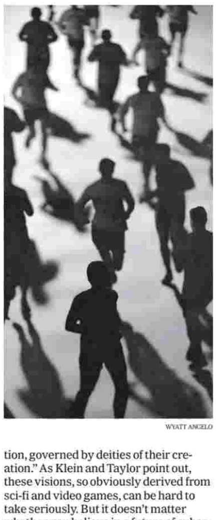
there first. It's not a preposterous argument — if you really believe in A.I.'s awe-inspiring capabilities, you don't want to cede sole control of it to your foes. But as an explanation for the industry's oddly blithe attitude toward apocalypse, it's incomplete, because it doesn't account for tech leaders' messianic dreams.

Their fantasies of transcendence take different forms. Sam Altman, chief executive of OpenAI, once said, "I assume my brain will be uploaded to the cloud." Elon Musk plans to escape to Mars. "We want to be on a path toward making true the things that we read in science fiction books and see in the movies," he says in footage featured in Alex Gibney's searing new documentary, "Musk." "A future where we're forever confined to Earth until some eventual extinction event is less inspiring." Jeff Bezos, who stepped down in 2021 as chief executive of Amazon to spend more time on his space company, wrote, "We don't want to face a civilization of stasis, and that is the real issue if we just stay on this planet."

Some imagine themselves as digitally enabled Übermenschen. In 2023, the billionaire tech investor Marc Andreessen published "The Techno-Optimist Manifesto," with a section titled, "Becoming Technological Supermen." In it, he borrowed language from the Italian futurist — and fascist — Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, writing, "Technology must be a violent assault on the forces of the unknown, to force them to bow before man." He quoted Friedrich Nietzsche to argue that absent such an assault, life becomes meaningless and small. In a section titled "The Enemy," Andreessen listed ideas that would restrain technology's momentum, including "tech ethics" and the concept of "existential risk."

Part of the reason the public has turned so quickly and decisively against A.I. is the bizarre mismatch between the costs they're being asked to bear and the rewards they expect to receive. Data centers blight the landscape, A.I. slop degrades the culture, chatbots help kids cheat in school and sometimes drive people mad, and technology executives prophesy mass joblessness. For this, ordinary people get improved search engines and help writing emails. Great benefits could be on the horizon — we are constantly assured that A.I. will enable huge medical advances — but they're not here yet to justify the hazards.

For those most invested in A.I., though, the intolerable risk lies in failing to advance the technology, and thus being confined to stultifying, finite ordinary existence. "For decades, large tech firms have insisted that the technologies they own and control are 'inevitable' and thus unstoppable," write Naomi Klein and Astra Taylor in their trenchant new book, "End Times Fascism." "Now they increasingly claim the authority of the supernatural: the right to usher in a new stage of human evolu-


WYATT ANGELO

tion, governed by deities of their creation." As Klein and Taylor point out, these visions, so obviously derived from sci-fi and video games, can be hard to take seriously. But it doesn't matter whether you believe in a future of cybernetic ascendence. The point is that the people driving the A.I. revolution do.

And if things go wrong, they have backup plans. Mark Zuckerberg is building a luxury survivalist compound on Kauai. Thiel tried to build one in New Zealand and has recently decamped to Argentina, "a potential escape hatch," The New York Times reported, from catastrophes including nuclear war and runaway A.I. Ilya Sutskever, a founder of OpenAI, reportedly told employees that the company would construct a bunker before releasing A.G.I., or artificial general intelligence, a system that can either match or exceed human abilities in a wide range of domains.

In an interview last year, my former colleague Ross Douthat asked Thiel what seemed like a simple question: "I think you would prefer the human race to endure, right?" Thiel paused for an uncomfortably long time before finally, after some hemming and hawing, saying "Yes." His next word, though, was, "but," after which Thiel started rambling about transhumanism. "The ideal was this radical transformation where your human, natural body gets transformed into an immortal body," he said.

Our tech oligarchs would probably like human civilization on this planet to flourish, but some don't seem to see it as mission critical. More important is that they reach their posthuman or interplanetary apotheosis. If they must wager our lives to summon their digital god, it's a chance worth taking.

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