



The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY  
RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

HOPE, NOT FEAR

PM's call for reform and self-reliance struck the right note; the spectre of the 'intruder' one that is disquieting

PRIME MINISTER NARENDRA Modi's Independence Day speech, his 12th in a row, was delivered against the backdrop of a global economy roiled by unpredictability, turmoil and upheaval. PM Modi did not name him but Donald Trump and the tariff regime the US President has unleashed, lurked, between the lines, as both presence and shadow. For the most part, the PM spoke of how India needs to enliven the "Make in India" and "Vocal for Local" mantras, and install self-reliance at the heart of the country's development strategy and growth model. The message was: In times when the Trump tariff regime is impacting exports, and when disruptions in global supply chains are threatening to squeeze imports, India must focus on strengthening the domestic economy by pursuing the path of self-sufficiency or "aatmanirbharta". PM Modi reminded the nation of India's proven "samarthya" or capability — when it took the lead in manufacturing the coronavirus vaccine, not only for itself, but also for the world; and more recently, when, powered by indigenous weapon systems, it conducted Operation Sindoor.

This is not the first time that PM Modi has spoken of the need to Make in India, or extolled the virtues of *aatmanirbharta*. But this 1-day speech was remarkable for the urgency with which it sought to connect the dots from Atmanirbhar Bharat to Viksit Bharat and national security, framing it as a matter not merely of import-export but as a test of a nation's very "aatma samman" or self-respect: "Hum nahin banayenge? Hum nirbhar rahenge? (Why will we remain dependent on others?)" He exhorted the young and the entrepreneurs, the scientists and the private sector, to come forward and fill the gaps with ideas and innovations — to make India's own fertiliser and semiconductor, and to be self-reliant in clean energy and critical minerals. The government, he said, would encourage and enable them through the next generation of reforms, for which he announced a special task force.

But as much as the PM sought to exhort and energise, and even as he tapped into his countrymen and women's ambitions and optimism — he announced a special Diwali bonanza of GST reform, a Rs 1 lakh crore Rozgar Yojana for the young, invoked the symbolism of *naari shakti*, space start-ups and Shubhanshu Shukla's odyssey — he also painted a gathering spectre. Illegal immigrants or "*ghuspaithiye*", he said, are snatching Indians' jobs, taking away land from tribal populations, endangering India's "*behan-beti*" or women. His government would, therefore, set up a high powered Demography Mission. While illegal immigration is a resonant issue that is becoming bigger across the world, riding on the back of nationalist politics and populist movements, the PM's highlighting of it has a disquieting domestic backdrop — of growing incidents of violence against Bengali-speaking migrants in states, and the ongoing controversy over voters' lists. The BJP's defeat in the Jharkhand assembly election may have pointed to the limits of "illegal immigration" as an electoral plank, but in a diverse country, it is still an issue that is fraught, one that can propel a politics of distrust and fear. The PM's playing up of the dark motif of the "*ghuspaithiya*", coupled with his tribute to the RSS from the ramparts of Red Fort, showed an unmistakable ideological layering of his message. For the nation, they frame the challenge that lies ahead: Of finding a way forward that sidesteps the fear and embraces the hope.

A MESSAGE TO EC

Supreme Court's interim order on the Special Intensive Revision exercise in Bihar is significant and welcome

THE SUPREME COURT'S directive to the Election Commission to be transparent on the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in Bihar is significant and welcome. The Court asked the EC to publish detailed district-wise lists of the 65 lakh voters whose names had been omitted from the draft electoral roll published on August 1. These lists must specify the precise reason for each deletion, be it death, migration, or duplication, and be both physically available at local administrative offices and searchable online. The Court mandated that news of these deletions be widely publicised in Bihar through both vernacular and English newspapers, as well as electronic and social media. Amid the confusion and apprehensions unleashed by the SIR exercise in Bihar, the Court's intervention is reassuring.

The SC order recognises the complexity of the exercise, both in scale and due to its constricted timelines in the poll-bound state. At the same time, it sends a message that the EC's conduct is being watched. For Bihar's migrant workers, Dalits, small farmers, daily wagers and poor, the demand for relatively difficult to procure documents from those who do not feature in the 2003 electoral roll, is an onerous one. As this newspaper has highlighted in a series of ground reports, the shifting of the burden of proof on to the vulnerable voter in what has morphed into a citizenship test has sparked widespread fears of disenfranchisement. The EC's refusal to accept the Court's suggestion to consider Aadhaar, Voter ID and ration card as proof underlines the challenge. But the Court's insistence on full transparency on the deletions in the face of the EC's resistance is heartening.

The SC has not stayed or stopped the SIR process in Bihar, recognising the EC's constitutional mandate and authority, but it has instituted a check: "The powers (to do so) are *prima facie* traceable, so we do not wish to interdict... but your manner has to be reasonable, has to give certain comfort to citizens. Should not strain a person to become eligible," it said. Article 324 of the Constitution gives the EC the powers of superintendence, direction and control of elections. However, it cannot hide behind that Article and those powers and view transparency as an inconvenience. The EC's conduct of the SIR in Bihar sets a template — the exercise will be conducted across states. Going ahead, the SC's intervention draws some much-needed red lines.

YOU IN YOUTUBE

AI-generated videos are gaining popularity. For a platform that grew on human creativity, this does not bode well

IN 2005, WHEN the internet was young — accessed mostly through dial-up connections and featuring user-created websites — the birth of YouTube heralded a new era of digital content creation, and creativity. In grainy footage, shot in low-light conditions and against make-shift backdrops, ordinary people offered a glimpse into their lives, their nerdy obsessions and passions. Would-be musicians, artists and filmmakers showcased their craft, with many, like singers Justin Bieber, Shawn Mendes and Troye Sivan, finding stardom. This was the promise of YouTube, when the "you" in its name meant something. Twenty years on, however, with AI entering the chat, that promise is becoming increasingly fragile.

"AI slop" — purely AI-generated content, usually nonsensical, with no substance and storyline or any purpose other than grabbing clicks and views — is taking over YouTube. A recent data analysis by *The Guardian* found that "nearly one in 10 of the fastest growing YouTube channels globally are showing AI-generated content only", with many of the channels posting "repetitive and 'inauthentic' content". A platform once celebrated as a launch pad for everyman is now being crowded with content that is disconnected from anyone's lived experience and which lacks the textures and tones of human creativity, the telling flaws and endearing glitches that speak of people, not algorithms.

The proliferation of blindly-automated, prompt-driven creations means that creators will now have to compete for views and — increasingly, ad revenue — with content-generation farms that can upload multiple, polished videos in a single day. It is also bad news for consumers. AI may have much to offer when used right, but no prompt, however precisely worded, can generate the many shades of human ingenuity and whimsy that YouTube is home to.



ALOK PRASANNA KUMAR

HISTORY DOESN'T REPEAT itself, but it often rhymes," Mark Twain once famously said.

The Supreme Court's order in *Association for Democratic Reforms vs Election Commission of India* (2025), in the context of the "Special Intensive Revision" (SIR) exercise in Bihar, "rhymes" very much with its landmark judgment in *Lal Babu Hussain vs Electoral Registration Officer* (1995). On Thursday, the SC directed the ECI to make the draft electoral roll more accessible and searchable, giving excluded voters reasons for their exclusion so that they may challenge it. In *Lal Babu Hussain*, the Court put paid to the ECI's attempt to declare certain voters "non-citizens" and directed them to follow a fresh, transparent and fair process with regard to voters it had genuine reasons to believe were not citizens. The parallels between these two cases, nearly 30 years apart, speak of a certain official distrust of India's poorest citizens.

The Representation of the People Act, 1950 and the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960, made to implement the Act, do not contain the words "Special Intensive Revision". They only mention a "summary revision" (which happens regularly) or an "intensive revision" (which happens rarely), or a mix of the two, necessary in special circumstances. An SIR, at least as it is being carried out in Bihar, seems to have no basis in the law. The official justification for this exercise is the need to remove non-citizens from the electoral rolls. However, it has now shifted the burden of proof onto the citizen to "prove" their citizenship. It has discarded its own electoral roll prepared after people have declared that they are citizens, after the 2003 electoral roll. The ECI has given a limited list of documents that it will accept as proof of

SC's nudge to EC on SIR shifts focus from fraught questions of citizenship to correctness of electoral rolls

Between the 'Lal Babu Hussain' judgment and the latest order in the SIR case, the relationship between the ECI and the SC has been one of institutional bonhomie. The SC, in its judicial orders, has helped push forward some key ECI proposals for changes in the electoral process relating to the declaration of assets and criminal cases, the disqualification of convicted politicians, and the 'None of the Above' option. The ECI's indifferent stance on electoral bonds, which the Supreme Court struck down as unconstitutional, was one of the rare instances of relative disagreement between the two institutions.



AFSHEEN RIZVI

THE DELHI GOVERNMENT'S decision to replace pink tickets with Aadhaar-linked pink passes (Saheli Smart Card), restricting free bus travel to "residents of Delhi", is a bureaucratic tweak that betrays the very idea of public mobility as a right. For migrant women, students, informal workers, and those without formal proof of residency, this move erects yet another barrier in a city that already gatekeeps its spaces along the lines of class, caste, and community. As a research scholar who relied on these pink tickets to explore, loiter, and claim my place in Delhi's public sphere, I understand firsthand how this policy can shrink the city for thousands of women like me.

When Shilpa Phadke, Shilpa Ranade and Sameera Khan wrote *Why Loiter? Women and Risk on Mumbai Streets*, they underscored how women's access to public spaces isn't just about transit; it's about the right to linger, to wander without purpose, to belong without justification. For me, Delhi's pink tickets made that possible. I had the privilege of sitting in any 615 or 621 number bus that commutes between Poorvanchal Hostel and Minto Road or Mori Gate. I would stop at various places that these buses took me. Gradually, I learned about other routes and the whole city became accessible, just by sitting on any DTC bus, without having to worry about the fare or anyone asking me if I'm a resident of Delhi. The pink ticket handed to me without any qualifications was the ticket that made

PINK TICKET TO BELONGING

On free bus rides, I made Delhi my own

me feel that I belonged. From the quiet, tree-lined roads of Lodhi Colony to the chaos and Mughal splendour of *purani* Dilli, I learned the city not as a tourist but as someone who inhabited it. Friendships deepened during long rides, and spontaneous detours became adventures, as the fear of expensive commutes stopped constraining my mobility. These rides became my safe way to navigate the city. Now, with the new rule, that freedom is conditional — available only to those who can prove they "belong".

The term "resident" is a slippery one. Are students living in hostels residents? What about the domestic worker from another state who lives with her employer? Or take the case of the Muslim woman. Many scholars have shown how discrimination exists in the rental house market, so is she now doubly excluded because she lacks a Delhi Aadhaar? The government's logic mirrors the insidious "son of the soil" politics that ties rights to paperwork, ignoring how migrants sustain this city's economy and culture.

Buses, particularly for women, are not merely vehicles of mobility; they constitute a critical site of provisional belonging — a mobile public sphere where the act of commuting itself becomes an assertion of spatial claim. The DTC free bus travel scheme for women, prior to its residency-based restructuring, functioned as both a logistical and a symbolic safeguard, offering not just affordability but a sanctioned

presence in transit spaces historically fraught with gendered risk. This distinction is crucial when contextualised against Delhi's long-standing anxieties around women's mobility, epitomised by the December 2012 gang rape case — a tragedy that unfolded in a private bus. It underscored the difference in perceptions of safety between regulated public transit and unaccountable private transport.

Free bus travel is not a "perk". It's a lifeline. For working women, it meant savings; for students, independence; for slum dwellers, a rare respite from the humiliation of proving they "deserve" basic services. Now, women in informal settlements — often without land records — will be further marginalised.

Delhi has never been a city of neat borders or orderly belonging. It thrums with the chaos of a thousand contradictions, a place where rickshaws scrape past Audis, where ruins of the Delhi Sultanate cast shadows on glass towers, where home isn't just an address but the smell of winter smog and shared laughter on a crowded bus. It is a city beyond the documented papers, fixed address on Aadhaar card. It is a city where Muzaffar Hanfi reminded us, "*yun bhi Dilli mai log reh te hain, jaise divan-e-mir chaak shuda*". Mere documents cannot contain the life that is Delhi.

The writer is a research scholar in Sociology working in Delhi

AUGUST 16, 1985, FORTY YEARS AGO

ASSAM ACCORD

THE SIX-YEAR-OLD Assam problem was resolved with comprehensive but separate agreements calling for disenfranchisement of foreign nationals who entered the state between January 1, 1966 and March 24, 1971, and the resignation of the Saikia government. The announcement of the accord was made by the Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, in his address to the nation from the Red Fort on the occasion of Independence Day.

PM'S SPEECH

IN HIS MAIDEN speech from the ramparts of the Red Fort on the 38th anniversary of Independence, the Prime Minister, Rajiv

Gandhi, announced that an accord had been reached on the Assam issue. He said that efforts were on to improve relations with all the neighbouring countries including China, Nepal and Sri Lanka. A full understanding with Pakistan was, however, possible only if it reconsidered its nuclear programme aimed at manufacturing a bomb, the Prime Minister said.

SIX-YEAR SAGA

IN ASSAM YOU do not get anything till you agitate." This is how ousted AASU vice-president Nurul Hussain had reacted to the movement over the foreign nationals in the state. The agitation, which began in the latter half of 1979, saw its ups and downs. Men,

women and children defied curfew by pouring out into the streets in 1980. The agitation leaders nearly stalled the February 1983 state election with the slogan, "No solution, no election."

No COMMENT

MOST OF THE leaders of the Opposition parties have expressed their reluctance to comment on the Assam agreement. The Janata Party leader in Parliament, Madhu Dandavate, and the BJP leader in Parliament, L K Advani, declined to comment. Contacted separately, both said they did not have any details of the agreement and would not like to comment till the details were known and studied.



# 9 THE IDEAS PAGE

## Atmanirbhar and Viksit

Self-reliance is not confined merely to imports and exports, or to rupees, pounds, and dollars. It is linked to our capability. Together, let us make ‘Vocal for Local’ the mantra of every citizen’s life



NARENDRA MODI

THIS GRAND FESTIVAL of Independence is a celebration of the 140 crore resolutions of our people. This festival of Independence is a moment of collective achievements, a moment of pride, and our hearts are filled with joy. “Har Ghar Tiranga” is visible, whether from the deserts, the Himalayan peaks, the seashores, or densely populated regions and everywhere there is one echo, one cheer: The praise of our motherland, dearer to us than life itself.

Friends, I feel great pride that I have the opportunity to salute the brave warriors of Operation Sindoor from the ramparts of the Red Fort. Our courageous soldiers punished the enemies beyond anything they could have imagined. On April 22, terrorists crossed the border and committed a massacre in Pahalgam. The entire nation was filled with outrage, and the whole world was shocked. Operation Sindoor was the expression of that outrage. After the events on the 22nd, we gave our army complete freedom — let them decide the strategy, choose the targets, and select the timing. Our army accomplished something that had not happened in decades. Penetrating hundreds of kilometres into enemy territory, they reduced terrorist headquarters to dust.

After Independence, feeding crores of people was a formidable challenge. And it was none other than the farmers of my country who, by toiling hard, filled the granaries of the nation. The bedrock of a Viksit Bharat is also a self-reliant Bharat. The greater a nation’s reliance on others, the more its freedom comes into question. Self-reliance is not confined merely to imports and exports, or to rupees, pounds, and dollars. Self-reliance is linked to our capability, and when self-reliance begins to diminish, capability too continually declines. Therefore, to preserve, maintain, and enhance our capability, it is imperative to be self-reliant.

Imagine if we were not self-reliant, could we have executed Operation Sindoor with such swiftness? We would have been plagued by worries over who might supply us, whether or not we would get the required equipment, and so on. The results we see today are the outcome of our consistent mission over the past 10 years towards self-reliance in the field of defence.

None can deny that the 21st century is a technology-driven century. When we speak of various dimensions of technology, I wish to draw your attention to semiconductors. I do not stand here to criticise any person or government. But it is equally important for the youth of our country to know. In our country, files related to semiconductors started moving 50-60 years ago. The idea of a semiconductor factory began then. My young friends will be shocked to know that today, semiconductors have become a global force — but 50-60 years ago, the idea was stalled, delayed and shelved. The conception of semiconductors was aborted. We lost 50-60 years. Today, we have freed ourselves from that burden and advanced the work on semiconductors in mission mode. Six different semiconductor units are taking shape on the ground, and we have already given the green signal to four new units.



C R Sasikumar

### FOR THE RECORD

We all know that we are dependent on many countries for petrol, diesel, and gas. We are spending lakhs of crores of rupees to procure them. It is essential to make the country self-reliant in energy. We took up this resolve, and in the last 11 years, solar energy has seen a thirty-fold increase. We are building new dams to expand hydropower so that we may obtain clean energy. With Mission Green Hydrogen, Bharat is today investing thousands of crores of rupees. In the field of nuclear energy, 10 new reactors are progressing rapidly. By 2047, when the nation will complete 100 years of independence — the year we have set as the target for achieving the goal of a Viksit Bharat — we are moving forward with the resolve to increase our nuclear energy capacity more than tenfold.

Today, the National Manufacturing Mission is progressing at great speed. There is always some tool or component that comes from our country’s MSMEs in the making of some of the biggest products globally. But we want to move towards a path of comprehensive and integrated development. That is why we must strengthen their capabilities. I had once said from the Red Fort — Zero Defect, Zero Effect. Today, I want to reiterate that if we want the world to recognise our strength in the global market, we must constantly scale new heights in quality. The world accepts quality. Our quality must be the best.

Those who lived by the mantra of an independent Bharat gave us freedom. That generation dedicated itself to a free Bharat; this generation must take bold new steps for a prosperous Bharat. That is why I keep urging again and again, and I want to tell all the influencers of the country — help me in spreading this mantra. I appeal to all political parties, politicians, everyone: Come, this is not the agenda of any one political party. Bharat belongs to all of us. Together, let us make “Vocal for Local” the mantra of every citizen’s life.

I want to appeal to every small trader and shopkeeper, you too have a responsibility. In our childhood, we used to see shops simply labelled as “Ghee Shop”, but over time, people began writing “Pure Ghee Shop”. In the same way, I want traders and shopkeepers across the country to put up boards saying: “Swadeshi goods sold here”. Let us take pride in Swadeshi. We should use it not out of compulsion, but with strength, for our own strength and if needed, even to compel others to use it. That should be our power. This

Those who lived by the mantra of an independent Bharat gave us freedom. That generation dedicated itself to a free Bharat; this generation must take bold new steps for a prosperous Bharat. That is why I keep urging again and again, and I want to tell all the influencers of the country — help me in spreading this mantra. I appeal to all political parties, politicians, everyone: Come, this is not the agenda of any one political party. Bharat belongs to all of us.

should be our guiding mantra.

This nation is built by the toil of crores of people — by sages, saints, scientists, teachers, farmers, soldiers, workers, labourers. Contributions come from individuals and from institutions alike. Today, with great pride, I wish to mention one such institution. One hundred years ago, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh was founded. These 100 years of service to the nation constitute a proud and golden chapter. With the resolve of nation-building through character-building, with the aim of serving Maa Bharati, the swayamsevaks have, for a century, dedicated their lives to the welfare of the motherland. In a sense, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh is the world’s largest NGO. Today, from the ramparts of the Red Fort, I salute all the swayamsevaks who have contributed to this century-long journey of national service. The nation takes pride in this grand and dedicated journey of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, which will continue to inspire us.

I wish to warn the nation of a grave concern and challenge. As part of a deliberate conspiracy, the demography of the country is being altered. These infiltrators are snatching away the livelihoods of our youth. These infiltrators are targeting our sisters and daughters. These infiltrators are misleading innocent tribals and seizing their lands. When demographic change occurs, particularly in border areas, it creates a crisis for national security. It threatens the unity, integrity, and progress of the country. Our forefathers attained freedom through sacrifice. It is our duty towards those great souls that we do not accept such acts. Therefore, today I announce that we have decided to launch a High-Power Demography Mission. Through this mission, the severe crisis will be addressed in a deliberate and time-bound manner.

We have to remember — the one who has toiled hard, the one who has toiled hard, is the one who has created history. The one who has worked hard, is the one who has created history. The one who has broken the steel rocks, is the one who has bent the time. This is the time to bend the time, this is the right time.

Once again, I extend my best wishes to all of you on this great festival of Independence.

The writer is Prime Minister of India. Edited excerpts of the English translation of his address to the nation on August 15

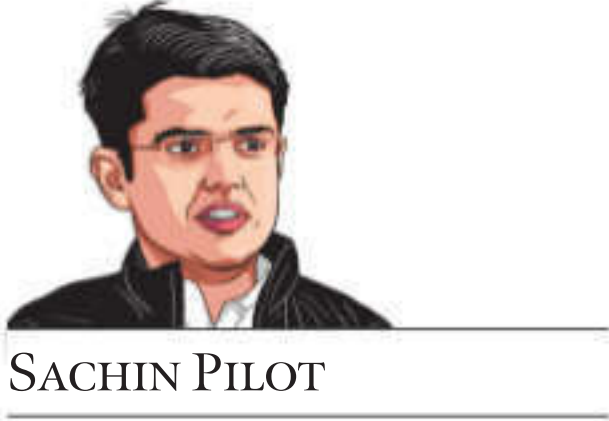
## WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

“The assassination of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, along with most of his family members, on August 15, 1975 is a dark chapter in Bangladesh’s history.”

— THE DAILY STAR, BANGLADESH

## What the PM didn’t say

On Independence Day, Prime Minister’s address failed to rise to the occasion, frame issues beyond partisan political posturing



SACHIN PILOT

THE 79TH INDEPENDENCE Day is a moment of great pride for every Indian. Our great nation has demonstrated how, despite tremendous socioeconomic challenges, a country as large as India can move from a democratic experiment to a model democracy. The day commemorates the unprecedented collective effort of every Indian to gain independence from colonial rule. The independence movement was not driven by a person, an ideology, or a single organisation. It encompassed the efforts of hundreds of thousands of patriots who cut across religious, caste, regional, and political lines — a unity in diversity — which till date remains our greatest strength.

However, the Prime Minister’s address on August 15 failed to underscore or reiterate this spirit, and the speech came across like another partisan address. The BJP’s attempt to discredit previous Prime Ministers and other political parties who have served the country reared its head again when the Prime Minister incorrectly referred to a lack of technological progress in previous governments. This narrative conveniently forgets the immense contributions of Jawaharlal Nehru in establishing ISRO, IITs, AIITs, HAL, DRDO, and Bhabha Atomic Research Centre. Indira Gandhi continued those endeavours — she facilitated the mission to send India’s first citizen to orbit in space (Squadron Leader Rakesh Sharma), ordered underground nuclear tests, and had the foresight to initiate a national mission on seabed mining. Rajiv Gandhi was instrumental in bringing about the telecom and IT revolution, making long distance communication a reality for every Indian. Manmohan Singh’s government launched the ambitious project to connect more than 2.5 lakh gram panchayats through broadband by laying optical fibre throughout the length and breadth of the country, systematically strengthening the foundation for a truly digital India. These are massive milestones in India’s technological journey; discrediting and underplaying the contributions of previous leaders of the nation is a disservice to the country’s history.

The government appears to seek credit for India becoming the fourth largest economy in the world in the last few years. But there is more to this macro-economic data. What the claim misses entirely is an analysis of the “average”. From a per-person perspective, India as a country of about 140 crore people, still remains in the list of lower middle income countries with a per-capita GDP of \$2,711. For comparison, the per capita GDP of Sri Lanka is \$4,325, and Bhutan is \$3,913. We have overtaken Japan’s GDP and are now eyeing Germany’s GDP in order to become the third largest economy. But it is important to note that both these countries have a population of approximately 12 crore and 8 crore, respectively. That is roughly the size of two states in India. Japan’s per capita GDP is about \$33,767 and Germany’s is \$54,343. India’s closest coun-

try in terms of population is China with a per capita GDP of \$12,614. A true measure of India’s economic success must be tested on the per-person data point. It is the surest indicator to assess whether we are punching above our weight or not.

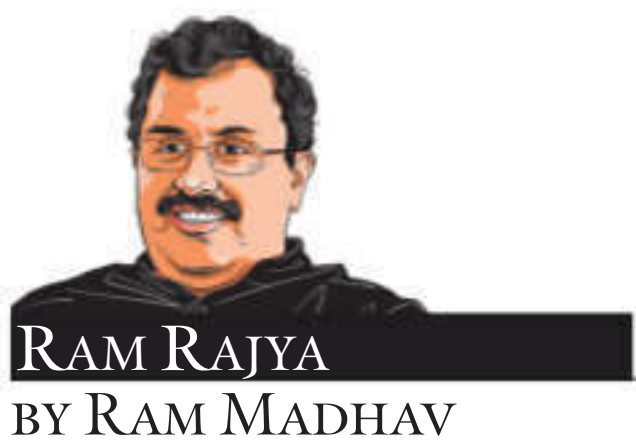
The BJP has also been incessantly trying to draw political mileage from Operation Sindoor. Today’s address by the PM was no different. Importantly, this was another instance where the issue of whether the claim by the President of the United States that he ensured a ceasefire between India and Pakistan is true, was completely ducked. The US President continues to claim credit for the ceasefire and so far, the PM has not denied Trump’s role publicly. This is a serious departure from India’s time-tested stand that resolving issues between India and Pakistan is a bilateral matter and no foreign interference shall be permitted. The other aspect of the Pahalgam terrorist attacks and Operation Sindoor that remains unanswered is accountability. The security lapse exposed a failure of the government’s intelligence and security machinery. This failure is compounded by the lack of meaningful international support in unequivocally castigating Pakistan as a state sponsor of terrorism.

The Prime Minister spoke of “*pichhde ko praathmika*” (priority to the backward) but has allowed an environment of fear to fester where backward communities remain concerned about their existing constitutional protections and guarantees. This legitimate fear was reinforced during the recent Lok Sabha elections where BJP campaigned on its aim to secure 400 seats — a brute majority which might have allowed sweeping constitutional amendments. It is therefore no surprise that the people of India have reduced them to relying on a delicately strung coalition government at the centre. Despite their electoral drubbing, the BJP has systematically attacked the rights of SCs, STs, and OBCs, for example by drastically reducing their scholarships, and delaying appointments in university posts to candidates from backward communities. According to the government’s own figures, 83 per cent of professor-level posts reserved for STs, 80 per cent for OBCs, and 64 per cent for SCs are unfilled in central universities.

There is a lack of balanced regional growth in the country with several states severely lagging. The BJP government has also caused an unhealthy amount of strain in Centre-state relations by creating budget allocations ridden with political biases and manipulating government levies to deny economic benefits to states. If the government truly wants to secure the rights and interests of the backward communities and regions, it must move beyond rhetoric and politics to do real work on the ground.

Independence Day is a day to revere our motherland and the generations who came before us who gave their lives to provide us this precious freedom. It is a day to recommit ourselves to the ongoing cause of nation building and remember that strengthening the country is our highest duty, our moral calling. Let us hope that the government imbibes that spirit and works towards a more united, a more developed, and a more progressive India.

The writer is the MLA from Tonk and AICC general secretary in charge of Chhattisgarh



RAM RAJYA  
BY RAM MADHAV

## The vision of a nation

Freedom struggle was not merely about self-rule, but our own way of rule

INDEPENDENCE DAY is one of India’s most celebrated festivals. The day of deliverance from British rule, 79 years ago, continues to inspire every citizen. The Tiranga — our national flag, symbolising the spirit of the freedom struggle as well as the grand vision the fathers of that movement had for the free nation, is hoisted across the country. It can be seen on rooftops, vehicles, street corners and in the hands of millions of citizens. It carries a reminder: Patriotism is a core sentiment that lives in the hearts of all Indians.

The Tricolour has a fascinating history. One theory is that the design accepted by the Constituent Assembly was prepared by Suraiya Badruddin Tyabji, wife of an ICS officer serving in the secretariat of the Constituent Assembly. Hansa Mehta, a leading woman member of the Assembly and educator from Gujarat, proposed that the national flag should officially be handed over by the women members. Thus, as the country became independent on the intervening night of August 14-15, 1947, Mehta, along with 72 other women, walked up to the podium in the Central Hall of Parliament and handed over the national flag to Rajendra Prasad, President of the Constituent Assembly.

The first public flag hoisting ceremony was a hurried affair. Not many people know that the practice of India’s prime ministers hoisting the national flag on the ramparts of the Lal Qila began a day after August 15. As

Jawaharlal Nehru, the first Prime Minister, and others were busy with official formalities, the first hoisting of our national flag was done at Parliament House at 10:30 am on August 15. The Union Jack, the British flag, was lowered, and the Indian Tricolour rose for the first time on the soil of Independent India. Later that afternoon, a function was held near India Gate, where the public hoisting of the national flag took place. People were out in huge numbers and high spirits — the outgoing British Viceroy Lord Mountbatten’s carriage couldn’t even reach the podium.

The practice of hoisting the Tricolour and holding an official Independence Day ceremony at the Red Fort began on August 16, 1947. Nehru delivered the first address that morning, a tradition that continues to this day with Prime Minister Narendra Modi delivering his 12th address on the 79th Independence Day this year.

For the leaders of the struggle against the British, India’s Independence was not merely a change of the skin colour of the rulers. They wanted freedom from the British and from all that they brought and imposed on us. It was not merely *swaraj* (self-rule) that was the vision, but *swatantrata* — our own way of rule.

Mahatma Gandhi wanted Independent India to be a Ram Rajya, which was the “true democracy” for him. Writing in *Young India* in 1929, he explained: “By Ram Rajya I do not mean Hindu Raj. I mean Ram Raj, the kingdom

of God... I acknowledge no other God than the one God of Truth and righteousness. Whether Ram of my imagination ever lived on this earth, the ancient ideal of the Ramayana is undoubtedly one of true democracy in which the meanest citizen could be sure of swift justice without an elaborate and costly procedure.”

Rabindranath Tagore’s “Where the Mind is Without Fear” is a well-known poem in which he dreamt of waking up Bharat into “that heaven of freedom” in which the world “has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls” and where “the clear stream of reason has not lost its way”. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel exhorted his countrymen to “take to the path of *dharma*... of truth and justice. Remain united. By common endeavour we can raise the country to new greatness.”

Rishi Aurobindo, whose birth date was August 15, refused to accept this as a “fortuitous accident”, but as the “sanction of the Divine Force”. He insisted that all the world movements which he hoped to see fulfilled in his lifetime were arriving at fruition and “free India may well play a large part and take a leading position” in achieving that. For them and many others, freedom did not end with the end of British slavery. Instead, it was the starting point of a nation, with its innate vitality rising to play a crucial role in shaping the future of mankind. Aurobindo called it the “destiny” of our country.

Even Nehru, in his famous “tryst with des-

tiny” address, asked a very pertinent question: “At the dawn of history, India started on her unending quest, and trackless centuries are filled with her striving and grandeur of her success and failures. Through good and ill fortune alike, she has never lost sight of that quest, forgotten the ideals which gave her strength. Are we brave enough and wise enough to grasp this opportunity and accept the challenge of the future?”

But sadly, he himself gave up on those ideals. We as an independent nation decided not to bother much about all those visions and dreams of our masters. While Gandhi was installed outside the Parliament building, the inside was dominated by Nehruvian eurocentrism. Instead of Gandhi and Aurobindo’s idea of a “resurgent nation”, we got Nehru’s ambition of a “nation in the making”.

Not that we have not done well. The model we crafted after Independence did serve the country well in the last seven decades. But in the end, it remained the proverbial “square peg in a round hole”. A decade of Modi has seen efforts at building Atmanirbhar Bharat — a self-confident, self-respecting and self-made Bharat, true self-rule.

Elephants do not do about-turns. They take their time to turn around. So, too, is our country, slowly but surely.

The writer, president, India Foundation, is with the BJP. Views are personal

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### LACK OF LEVERAGE

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, ‘Strategic patience’ (*IE*, August 15). Since World War II, the US has used India and Pakistan as instruments in its broader strategic calculus. Now, aware of China’s economic clout, the US is cosying up to Pakistan to ease friction with Beijing. It is giving up its tariff offensive on China even as it doubles it for India and invites Pakistan’s army chief to a White House lunch. We must be patient and find our own niche strength to be in the reckoning. Trade fights will pass.

R Naryanan, Navi Mumbai

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, ‘Strategic patience’ (*IE*, August 15). Washington avoids targeting Beijing because of China’s leverage over critical materials that are vital for US defence and technology. The US imposed additional tariffs on India for actions that several other countries are taking, including China. India must now ponder its response to President Donald Trump’s harsh actions. This mini-crisis must be used to accelerate the progress on various reforms.

SS Paul, Nadi

### HUMANE ORDER

THIS REFERS TO the article ‘SC order on

stray dogs is humane’ (*IE*, August 15). The Supreme Court’s order to remove stray dogs from the streets and shift them to shelters is a humane and much-needed step. The increasing number of dog attacks cannot be ignored. Street safety is a basic right, and a society that fails to protect its citizens cannot call itself compassionate. It is time to set priorities straight: Human safety and dignity must come first, even as we ensure humane treatment for animals.

Sanjay Chopra, Mohali

### WOMEN’S SACRIFICES

THIS REFERS TO the article, ‘Between erasure and identity’ (*IE*, August 15). The writer’s attempt to find positivity in her struggle and calling it “self-discovery” is in many ways a reflection of the resilience and adaptability women develop in the face of societal constraints. It underscores the tragedy of having to normalise such losses. In a society where women’s sacrifices are prioritised over their growth, women will continue to be forced into positions where they have to “find the good” in losing their professional and social identities. This needs to be addressed through societal change.

Vani Gautam, Chandigarh





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# Civil and criminal cases: what they are, how they differ

VINEET BHALLA  
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 15

IN THE last two weeks, the Supreme Court has twice intervened in cases in which High Courts allowed criminal proceedings to continue in what were essentially civil disputes. On Wednesday, a Bench of Justices J B Pardiwala and R Mahadevan set aside a Rajasthan HC order that had denied pre-arrest bail to a couple in a case involving an unpaid sum for a plywood consignment. "There is no question of criminal breach of trust once there is a sale transaction. This is a settled position of law," Justice Pardiwala had said. On August 4, the same Bench stripped a judge of the Allahabad HC of his criminal roster for allowing criminal proceedings in a case of an unpaid business transaction. The apex court had called the HC's reasoning "shocking" and a "mockery of justice". After

the Chief Justice of India intervened, the Bench on August 8 recalled its directive that the Allahabad HC judge should never be assigned a criminal case.

## Civil & criminal law

Civil and criminal law differ in terms of their purpose, parties involved, and procedure. Civil law is designed to resolve disputes between private individuals or organisations. Civil cases, known as suits, typically involve disagreements over rights and duties of the parties to the case towards each other. The goal is not to punish but to provide a remedy, usually in the form of monetary compensation (called damages) or a specific action ordered by the court to a party to do or not to do something (called an injunction). Examples of civil cases include property disputes, contract breaches, family law matters like divorce and child custody, and cases for recovery of money. In a civil suit, the per-

son who files the case is called the plaintiff, and the person against whom it is filed is the defendant.

Criminal law deals with acts that are considered offences against the state or society as a whole. The objective is to punish the offender and deter others from committing similar crimes. The state, represented by a prosecutor, initiates criminal proceedings against the accused. If found guilty, the accused can face penalties ranging from fines to imprisonment and even death. Offences like theft, cheating, assault, and murder fall under criminal law.

A key distinction between civil and criminal cases is with regard to the burden of proof. In a civil case, the plaintiff must prove their case on a "preponderance of probabilities", meaning their version of events is more likely to be true than the defendant's. In a

criminal case, the prosecution has the much higher burden of proving the guilt of the accused "beyond a reasonable doubt". This higher standard reflects the serious consequences of criminal conviction, which can involve the loss of liberty.

Some actions can give rise to both civil and criminal proceedings. For instance, in the two aforementioned cases before the SC, it was alleged that both a breach of contract, which is a civil wrong, and cheating and breach of trust, both criminal offences, had occurred.

## Length of proceedings

A common perception — one that was noted by the Allahabad HC judge in his later-overruled order — is that civil proceedings are more time-consuming than criminal trials. *Prima facie*, data from the National Judicial Data Grid (NJDC) for district courts across

India support this notion. As of August 14, 2025, 70.17% of criminal trials were disposed of within a year, while only 37.91% of civil suits were resolved in the same timeframe.

The nature of both kinds of cases has a role to play in civil cases taking longer, according to Surya Prakash B S, program director at DAKSH, a think tank focused on law and justice system reforms.

"In criminal cases, there is life and liberty involved," he told *The Indian Express*, suggesting a greater sense of urgency. In contrast, "in civil matters, parties may drag proceedings in the hope of arriving at an out-of-court settlement". However, Prakash cautioned against drawing simple conclusions from such data.

Shreya Tripathy, a senior resident fellow at the legal policy think tank Vidhi Centre for Legal Policy pointed out the difficulty in tracking cases through the system. "A case which might show as disposed for a district

court could very well end up being appealed against in the High Court, where it will be shown as a separate, pending case," she told *The Indian Express*. This makes it hard to determine the total time taken from filing to final resolution, she said.

Data from the NJDC also show variations depending on the specific type of case. For instance, while civil suits take an average of 4.91 years for disposal, execution petitions, filed to enforce a court order in a civil case, take about 3.97 years to conclude.

Bail applications in criminal cases are decided in about 6.12 months on average. However, criminal sessions court cases involving allegations of serious criminal offences take an average of 4.65 years, which is comparable to the time taken for civil suits.

Magisterial criminal cases, involving lighter criminal offence punishable by not more than three years' imprisonment, last 2.45 years on average.

## EXPLAINED GOVERNANCE

### A METROPOLITAN CORPORATION FOR NOIDA: WHY SC SUGGESTED CHANGE



The Parthala flyover in Noida. Gajendra Yadav

DEVANSH MITTAL  
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 15

THE SUPREME COURT on Wednesday asked the Uttar Pradesh government to consider converting the New Okhla Industrial Development Authority (NOIDA), which governs the city that was named after the acronym, into a metropolitan corporation. The move could make administration more citizen-centric, with Noida currently the only major Indian city to not have an elected local government. The court was hearing the bail pleas of two Noida Authority officials accused of allowing excess compensation payouts.

## Noida's origins

The Noida Authority was constituted in 1976 under the Uttar Pradesh Industrial Area Development Act, 1976, as an industrial township. This was created during the Emergency when Sanjay Gandhi, son of then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, wanted to move industries out of Delhi.

The Authority comes under the purview of the UP Infrastructure & Industrial Development Department. Its day-to-day activities are run by an appointed IAS officer in his role as Chief Executive Officer. It covers 81 revenue villages and about 20,316 hectares of land.

## A unique set-up

Noida does not have a separate municipal body that performs daily civic functions like dealing with garbage, street lighting, sewerage, and public health. It is an anomaly in that the development authority, which is supposed to be responsible for the acquisition of land, planned development, and infrastructure creation, is also undertaking civic functions.

For instance, in Delhi, these services are provided by the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) and in Mumbai by Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC), whereas Delhi Development

Authority (DDA) and Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA) respectively are responsible for planned development.

## Need for local governance

Municipalities are to be elected directly by the people and are the third tier of governance in urban areas (similar to Panchayats in rural areas), after the Union and state governments. They are supposed to look after public health, waste management, sanitation, provide urban facilities and amenities like parks, street lighting, and parking lots, among other functions.

The Constitution (74th Amendment) Act, 1992, recognised three types of urban local bodies or municipalities: Nagar Palikas for areas transitioning from rural to urban, municipal councils for smaller urban areas, and municipal corporations for larger urban areas.

A metropolitan area was defined in the Act as an area having a population of above 10 lakh, which Noida breached in 2010.

## The advantages

Proponents argue that having a self-governing local body leads to more effective, responsive, transparent, and accountable governance, as opposed to having an appointed bureaucrat in charge.

Not having a municipality has a huge negative impact on the area, according to Srikanth Vishwanathan, CEO of Janaagraha, an organisation that works on urban governance. "An elected municipality is the bridge between people's aspirations and the government's priorities and policies, especially for the urban poor," he says.

In 2017, then District Magistrate BN Singh of Gautam Buddha Nagar (of which Noida is part) had recommended withdrawing municipal functions from the Authority and the formation of a separate municipal corporation.

However, the Noida and Greater Noida bodies concluded later that year that they did not need municipal bodies.

ALIND CHAUHAN  
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 15

AT LEAST 65 people have been killed after torrential rain triggered a flash flood at a remote village in Jammu & Kashmir's Kishtwar district on Thursday. The incident took place at Chasoti, the last motorable village on the way to the Machail Mata temple. More than 50 people are missing.

While experts hesitate to attribute a single extreme weather event solely to climate change, they point out that flash floods and wildfires are becoming more frequent and intense due to the global rise in temperatures and changes in weather patterns.

In J&K as elsewhere, the incidence of extreme weather events has increased with rising average temperatures, leading to the deaths of thousands of people in recent years.

## Extreme weather events in J&K

Between 2010 and 2022, J&K witnessed 2,863 extreme weather events in which 552 deaths were reported, according to a 2024 study, 'Extreme weather events induced mortalities in Jammu and Kashmir, India during 2010-2022', published in *Mausam*, the quarterly journal of the India Meteorological Department (IMD).

The analysis was carried out by IMD scientists Mukhtar Ahmed, Sonam Lotus, Farooq Ahmad Bhat, Amir Hassan Kichloo, and Shivinder Singh, with Bappa Das, a researcher at the Indian Council of Agricultural Research.

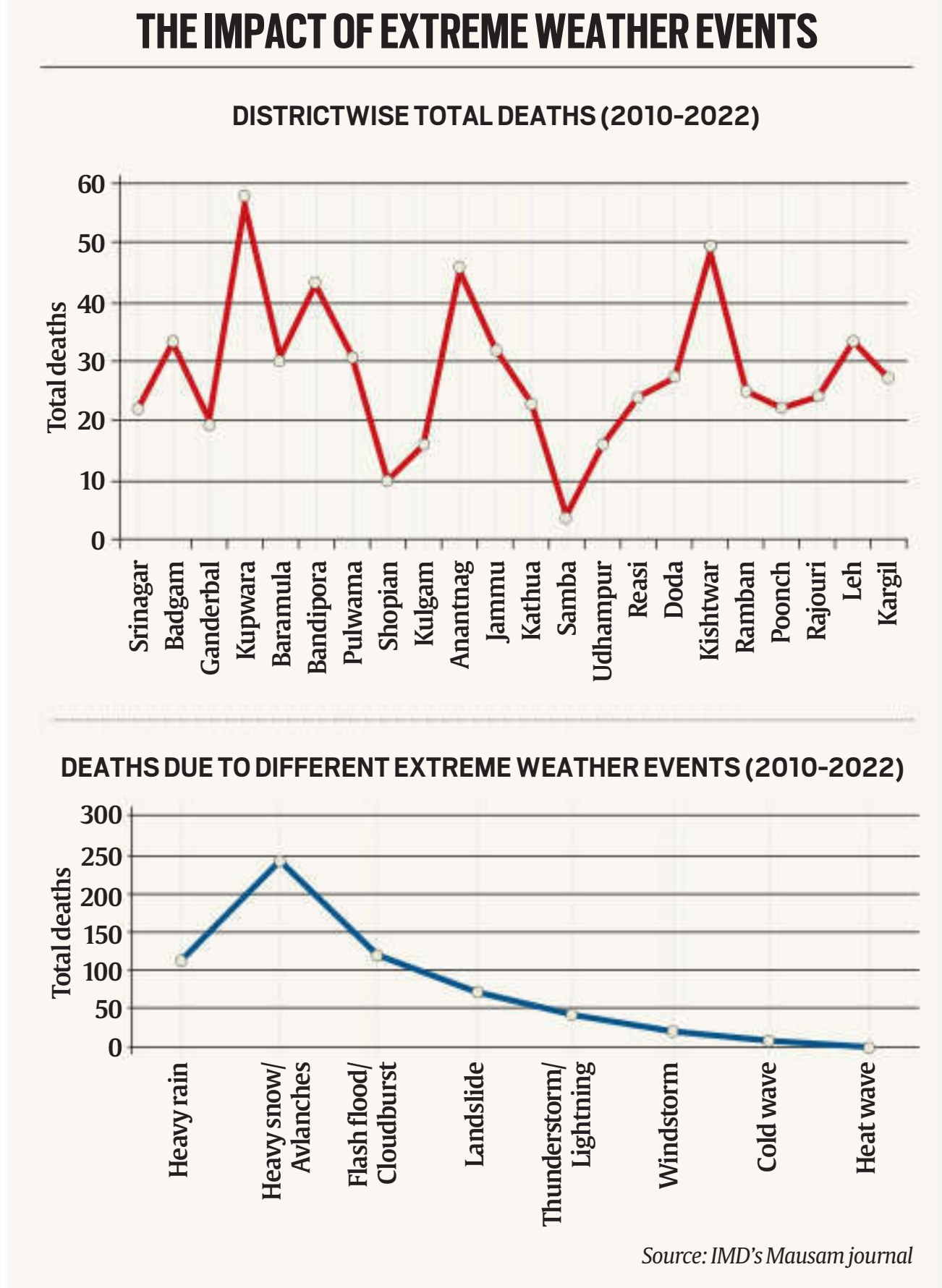
During these 12 years, thunderstorms — characterised by strong winds accompanied by lightning and sometimes precipitation — and heavy rain occurred frequently.

While there were 1,942 instances of thunderstorms, heavy rain — defined as an incident in which a weather station receives 64.5-115.5 mm of rain in 24 hours — took place 409 times, the study said.

Other frequent extreme weather events included flash floods (triggered by intense rainfall over a very short duration) and landslides, which occurred 168 and 186 times respectively.

While there were just 42 instances of heavy snow (when a station receives more than 30 cm of snowfall in 24 hours) during this period, they killed 182 people, the heaviest toll extracted by any extreme weather event. The number of deaths due to flash floods, heavy rain, and landslides were 119, 111, and 71 respectively.

The analysis also showed that the largest



number of deaths due to flash floods occurred in Kishtwar (where Thursday's disaster occurred), Anantnag, Ganderbal, and Doda.

The study noted that "for the union territory as a whole, heavy rain and heavy snow have been two major disasters causing mortality, though flash floods, thunderstorms and windstorms are gaining importance".

## The reasons for this situation

Although several factors contribute to the occurrence of extreme weather events in J&K, the three significant drivers behind

these events are rising temperatures, the changing pattern of Western Disturbances, and the region's topography.

**ISING TEMPERATURES:** J&K is located in the western Himalayas, a region that has experienced a two-fold increase in temperature compared to the Indian subcontinent as a whole post-2000 ("Delving into Recent Changes in Precipitation Patterns over the Western Himalayas in a Global Warming Era", *Global Warming – A Concerning Component of Climate Change*, 2023).

Due to this, the western Himalayas have

witnessed increased mean and extreme precipitation. This is because warmer temperatures allow the atmosphere to hold more water vapour — for every 1-degree-Celsius rise in average temperature, the atmosphere can hold about 7% more moisture. This leads to an increase in precipitation intensity, duration, and/or frequency, which ultimately causes severe flooding.

Also, increased temperatures have shrunk glaciers in the region, resulting in an increase in the number of glacial lakes. Their water, when released, can cause major flooding in downstream areas.

Maheesh Palawat, who works with Skymet Weather Services, told Climate Trends, a Delhi-based climate research organisation, on Friday, "Since these lakes are not centuries old, the glacial lake edges are very unstable and prone to erosion, melting, and sudden failures. Whenever there is a spell of heavy rain, water tends to overflow and bring down slush and unconsolidated sediment, causing more damage downstream."

**CHANGING NATURE OF WESTERN DISTURBANCES:** Experts suggest that J&K could be witnessing more flash floods and rain due to global warming-induced changes in the nature of western disturbances. These are east-moving rain-bearing wind systems that originate beyond Afghanistan and Iran, and pick up moisture from the Mediterranean Sea, Black Sea, Caspian Sea and Arabian Sea.

While western disturbances are most common during the boreal winter months (December to March), they have now begun to impact weather outside the winter season. This has increased the risk of floods and heavy rain in India's Himalayan states.

In May, Dr K J Ramesh, a former director general of meteorology at IMD, said: "Global warming has led to rapid warming of the Arabian Sea, which then emits more moisture northwards... When the amplitude of western disturbances extends up to the North Arabian Sea, more moisture is fed into the system, resulting in intense weather activity over the hills."

**TOPOGRAPHY:** J&K's hilly terrain makes it more vulnerable to extreme weather events.

Sachchida Nand Tripathi, dean of Kotak School of Sustainability at IIT-Kanpur, told Climate Trends, "Topographically, the Himalayas comprise a series of diverse hill ranges that have a profound effect on weather patterns. One major factor is orographic rainfall — when moist air is forced to rise over the mountains, cooling and condensing into heavy precipitation."

# Business of films: Why Aamir Khan took Sitaare Zameen Par to YouTube

SONAL GUPTA  
MUMBAI, AUGUST 15

ACTOR-FILMMAKER Aamir Khan this month released his *Sitaare Zameen Par* on the Google-owned video-sharing platform YouTube, rather than an over-the-top (OTT) platform such as Netflix or Amazon Prime Video, after the film had completed its theatrical run.

The film, in the genre of comedy-drama known as 'dramedy', earned Rs 216 crore at the box office worldwide. Since August 1, it has been available for rent on YouTube for Rs 100 (and for half that price from August 15-17). What is the business logic for Aamir Khan's decision?

## Rise, fall of 'direct-to-OTT'

In June 2020, with theatres shut due to the pandemic, filmmaker Shoojit Sircar premiered his *Gulabo Sitabo* on Prime — the first time that a mainstream Hindi film had bypassed theatrical release to head straight to OTT.

Theatre owners were upset: multiplex giant PVR INOX said Sircar had "vitiated the atmosphere of mutual partnership" be-

tween theatres and filmmakers. But amid the Covid-19 lockdown, direct-to-OTT was a *fait accompli* of sorts.

Prime announced plans for six more digital-only premieres of Malayalam, Tamil, and Kannada films. In 2021, more than 100 films had opted for direct-to-OTT releases.

But this Covid-era momentum faded quickly. In 2024, only 60 films in multiple languages were released on OTT platforms, of which only five ranked among the 50 most-watched streaming originals, Ormax Media, a Mumbai-based research firm, reported.

Direct-to-OTT films have not done particularly well either. Between January and June this year, 30 films in multiple languages were released on OTT platforms, of which only five ranked among the 50 most-watched streaming originals, Ormax Media, a Mumbai-based research firm, reported.

## Towards multiple channels

The number of films being released in theatres first and subsequently on OTT has steadily increased — doubling from 217 in 2022 to 440 in 2024, according to FICCI-EY reports of 2024 and 2025. Filmmakers are

confronted with two broad realities:

■ Footfall in theatres has recovered from pandemic-driven lows, but has been declining generally — having fallen from 994 million in 2022 to 857 million in 2024, according to the 2025 FICCI-EY report.

This has been attributed to the narrowing theatre-to-OTT window: the availability of films on OTT platforms soon after their theatrical release is believed to depress theatre footfall. But this allows the OTT platforms to benefit from the theatre-marketing buzz.

■ The FICCI-EY report noted that "cost pressures" led to subdued digital releases in 2024. With OTT platforms now focused on profitability, 'tentpole' films — big-budget productions that are expected to perform well — and small-budget ones were in demand, but mid-sized films had few takers.

In some cases, it was "understood that theatrical performance was required to market the film for OTT platforms as well", the FICCI-EY report said.

## 'Pay-per-view' model

Aamir's decision to go to YouTube effec-

tively adds another distribution channel for films. "We need a 'pay-per-view' (PPV) window between theatrical and OTT, and that's what I am pushing to create," he told Matthew Beloni on the podcast *The Town*.

In the PPV model, viewers essentially pay only for what they want to watch, not for a subscription.

"Once the theatrical run is exhausted, that's when I want to come on pay-per-view, and that's a window [for the theatrical run] that can be flexible. It should certainly not be below six weeks. And then, you should give pay-per-view a good three months, and then the film can come on OTT. That's the ideal window," Aamir said.

According to Aamir, the "bulk of India does not subscribe to OTT platforms", and YouTube potentially has greater reach, including globally. He also suggested that YouTube could offer a more favourable deal than the traditional 50-50 split between the production house and theatres, and that the PPV model could open a path for younger filmmakers and smaller-budget films that do not get distribution in theatres.

## EXPLAINED ECONOMICS





Editor's  
TAKE

Compounding Crisis:  
Delhi's Stray Dog Dilemma

With the SC order to sweep strays away into shelters, the capital stands at a moral crossroads, torn between the cry for safety and the call of compassion

At its heart, this is a man-versus-animal conflict – but of a different kind. The homeless stray dogs in the capital are making headlines for the wrong reasons. They are being portrayed as a menace on the streets, accused of endangering the lives of Delhiites, and therefore deemed fit to be removed from the streets – the only home they have ever known. The Supreme Court of India's recent order to remove all stray dogs from the streets of Delhi and the National Capital Region within eight weeks has ignited an intense and emotional public debate. The Supreme Court directive, issued on August 11, 2025, in a suo motu case, was prompted by a rise in dog bite incidents and rabies cases.

While some hail the decision as a long-overdue step to restore public safety, others see it as an inhumane measure that disregards animal welfare laws and is not practical enough to pursue. Delhi's stray dog population is estimated to be between four and six lakh. In its ruling, the Supreme Court cited the state's constitutional duty to protect human life, emphasising that the right to life under Article 21 cannot be compromised.

The bench noted that the safety of citizens must take precedence over the unrestricted movement of stray dogs and directed municipal bodies to capture and relocate them to shelters, where they are to be housed and cared for. Public reaction to the verdict has been sharply divided. Many residents have welcomed the order.

At the same time, animal rights activists and welfare groups have condemned the decision as both unfeasible and unjust, as it is easier said than done due to the deplorable condition of such shelters. They point out that Delhi's current shelter infrastructure is nowhere near capable of accommodating such a large number of animals, and that the Animal Birth Control Rules, 2023, require stray dogs to be sterilised and then returned to their original locations – a policy now set aside by the Court's order. We have seen in the past, as in the case of stray cows, that shelters often turn into torture chambers for the animals, leaving most of them miserable. The main reason is that such facilities are generally poorly managed and severely overcrowded, bursting at the seams because their capacity falls far short of the vast population of strays.

A sustainable solution will require more than court directives or sporadic municipal drives. It demands a long-term strategy that combines public safety with humane treatment. Mass sterilisation and vaccination campaigns must be intensified, targeting the majority of the stray population within a fixed timeframe.

The city's shelter capacity has to be expanded, with government bodies and NGOs working together to create adoption programmes and train staff in proper animal care. Public awareness efforts can help people understand safe ways of coexisting with animals. The Supreme Court's order should push the system into action and compel it to find a humane solution to the stray problem in the capital. Let us ensure that the cure does not turn out to be more deadly than the disease.

The Rise of Kim Yo Jong in North Korea

Kim Yo Jong's rise coincides with North Korea's deepening military partnership with Russia, sharpened nuclear ambitions, and a deliberate repositioning in the global order – moves that could redefine the strategic balance in Northeast Asia



NILANTHA  
ILANGMAUWA

When the most powerful woman in North Korea declared, with surgical clarity, that her nation would not return to dialogue with South Korea and would now only engage the United States on the basis of recognition as a de facto nuclear power, the geopolitical reverberations were profound. On the surface, it was a defiant reaffirmation of Pyongyang's traditional posture.

But beneath the steel language lay a significant ideological repositioning – not only in military terms, but in the very architecture of power within the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Kim Yo Jong, long educated in Switzerland alongside her brother, the current Supreme Leader Kim Jong Un, is no mere figurehead or ceremonial consort to dynastic politics. Her emergence as the regime's primary spokesperson, strategist, and steward of military–diplomatic doctrine marks the first time in decades – if not ever – that such influence has been wielded openly by a female figure in one of the world's most patriarchal societies. It is not just her words that command attention, but the authority with which they shape the DPRK's vision of itself and its place in a world increasingly carved by new alliances and unconventional warfare.

I was recently reminded of her presence by Teguh Santosa, an Indonesian journalist of deep insight who has maintained longstanding ties with Pyongyang. I met him some time ago in Beijing, but spoke to him again this week. He recalled an encounter that now reads as a historical prelude. “I first saw her in April 2012,” he said, “during the unveiling of their father Kim Jong Il's statue in Pyongyang. She seemed to play a vital role in ensuring the ceremony ran smoothly.

She moved freely, managing every detail – from organising the elite ranks on the platform of honour to orchestrating the precise arrangement of the military formations.” Indeed, her strategic poise today reflects that early apprenticeship. Her command over messaging is unmistakable, whether she is warning Seoul of an “irreversible rupture” or framing Washington's overtures as “only America's wish”.

Crucially, these statements were issued unprovoked – not in reaction to sanctions or military drills, but amid conciliatory gestures from South Korea's new administration.

The timing suggests not just retaliation, but design, a pre-emptive framing of future diplomatic parameters on Pyongyang's own terms. What makes this pivot all the more remarkable is that it coincides with North Korea's most accelerated military evolution in decades. Recent intelligence assessments, notably those compiled by Ukraine's HUR agency, paint a startling picture, elite North Korean troops have fought alongside



The Pioneer  
SINCE 1865

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IDEOLOGICAL  
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HAS EVOLVED  
DRAMATICALLY

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Becoming God's Instrument



AJIT  
KUMAR BISHNOI

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

I follow this path because it carries benefits far beyond what we can imagine. The very first requirement to please God is to be dutiful. Without fulfilling our duty, we cannot even begin; God will have nothing to do with us. As Lord Krishna instructs, “You should always do your duty, because action is superior to inaction. Even the maintenance of the body will not be possible through inaction” (3.8). In the Mahabharata war, Krishna told Arjuna exactly what his duty was: “Get up, gain fame, having triumphed over your enemies, and enjoy the flourishing kingdom.

These people have already been killed by Me; you are simply the ‘nimitta’ (instrument)” (11.33). Once God decides, it must come to pass — this is how creation begins, is maintained, and comes to an end. When Arjuna understood this

and saw the danger of inaction, he surrendered: “O Krishna, my delusion has been dispelled by Your mercy; my memory restored. I am free from doubt and composed. I shall now follow Your instructions” (18.73). Arjuna was one of the most fortunate souls to be chosen as God's instrument. I count myself equally blessed to have been chosen to write spiritual articles and books. I take this duty very seriously, and God, in turn, guides and strengthens me in this sacred work.

Another quality that pleases God is the desire to serve and help others. Krishna cites King Janaka as an example: “Just as Janaka and others attained perfection by working selflessly, you should also act with public welfare in mind, even without personal gain” (3.20). He also assures, “Neither in this world nor beyond is there destruction for the doer of welfare, for such a person never meets a bad end” (6.40). Those who work in this spirit are aligned with God's divine plan. A third quality is taking complete shelter in God and remaining there. Krishna says, “In all respects take shelter of God alone. By His mercy you shall achieve supreme peace and the eternal abode” (18.62). Again, “Those faithful who take refuge in Me and follow this wisdom are exceedingly dear to Me” (12.20). He reminds us that “Maya, consisting of the three modes, is divine and very difficult to overcome. Only those who take shelter in Me can transcend it” (7.14). A fourth quality is detachment from the fruits of action. God wishes us to use the results of our work for

the benefit of others. As Krishna teaches, “If you cannot rely upon My yoga, then give up the fruits of all acts by being self-controlled” (12.11). Enjoying the results and serving others cannot coexist; ‘bhogabhava’ (enjoyment mentality) and ‘sevabhava’ (service mentality) are opposites. Krishna further says, “My devotee, who is not attracted to material gains and renounces all endeavours for sense gratification, is dear to Me” (12.16). Faith is another essential quality.

Krishna says, “Among all yogis, the faithful one who worships Me is most intimately united with Me” (6.47). Faith shapes our very nature (17.3). When we take shelter in God, He transforms us.

Therefore, I constantly seek His guidance. Success is assured, for God is both omniscient and omnipotent. We only need patience — He must uphold dharma and balance all interests. Having learned from the Bhagavad Gita, I cannot turn away from what is right and approved by God. When my Lord appointed me as His instrument, I knew He would be the ‘karta’ (doer) in my life, ensuring victory in all righteous endeavours. I urge everyone: Follow Adi Shankaracharya's call to ‘bhajo govindam’ — praise and remember the Lord — and life will flow in divine harmony.

The writer is a spiritual teacher

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

E20: Benefits not seen

E20 has been rolled out, yet the price of petrol remains stubbornly high. The entire premise behind blending 20 per cent ethanol with petrol was its potential to cut costs, reduce dependence on crude oil imports, and offer considerable relief to the common person's pocket. Yet, if the economic benefit is not tangibly visible to the populace, one must question the very purpose of this exercise. Is it merely an endeavour to claim “implementation success” and tick boxes in official policy reports?

Ethanol blending holds genuine promise for environmental benefits and for supporting farmers who cultivate sugarcane and maize. However, if the ultimate price passed on to the consumer remains stagnant, then the fundamental promise underpinning this initiative is unequivocally broken. For the burgeoning middle-class family grappling with escalating expenses, the paramount concern is the tangible reduction in their fuel expenditure. True implementation, therefore, ought to be measured by its palpable impact on citizens, rather than by ceremonial launches and political slogans. Until the promised benefits genuinely permeate through to the ordinary citizen, ethanol blending will regrettably persist as a missed opportunity, falling short of its potential as a transformative reform.

NOOPUR BARUAH | TEZPUR

Pakistan army's self-awards

In a dramatic and unprecedented move on Independence Day, Pakistan Army Chief Field Marshal Asim Munir awarded himself the *Hilal-i-Jurat*, the country's second-highest wartime gallantry medal — equivalent to India's *Maha Vir Chakra*. This self-conferred honour, announced by the Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), came alongside a series of awards bestowed upon Pakistan's entire top political and military brass, including Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

These accolades were for their roles in what was officially lauded as decisive military success in Operation *Bunyanum Marsoos* and *Marka-i-Haq*.

Awards were also conferred upon senior military and civilian officials, members of the PM's war cabinet, and the delegation that presented Pakistan's case to the world.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif received the *Nishan-i-Imtiaz*, Pakistan's highest civilian honour, for his leadership. Deputy PM and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar was similarly recognised for “exposing India's diplomatic attacks” and promoting Pakistan's global stance. Despite Pakistan's defeat in the four-day war with India, these self-congratulatory announcements for “value-less” awards have drawn strong criticism.

BHAGWAN THADANI | MUMBAI

End communalism, learn history

Mere remembrance of Partition's horrors is insufficient without serious introspection. It's easy to blame various groups and leaders — Muslims, Muslim League, Jinnah, Hindus, Hindu Mahasabha, Congress, Gandhi, Nehru, Savarkar, the British, or Mountbatten — for India's division. However, the harsh reality stems from the supreme intolerance and communal hatred a significant portion of both Hindus and Muslims harboured. Vested interests merely exploited this existing fissure to ensure division.

Had such deep-seated animosity been absent, Partition could have been averted. The profound tragedy is that, far from learning from communal hatred's ill-effects, we have regrettably allowed such elements to flourish.

They now dominate Indian polity, with vested interests reigniting communalism, often drawing “inspiration” from rabid “ideology” that relentlessly plays the “trump card” of Islamophobia for electoral gains. By remembering Partition's horror, we must vow to never tolerate communalism again. India's “quota” of ‘horror shows’ must end immediately. Promoting diversity should be our primary goal, firmly opposing xenophobia, violence, and hatred.

KAJAL CHATTERJEE | KOLKATA

PIC TALK



Students at Chhatrasal Stadium, Delhi, proudly march with the national flag, commemorating India's 79th Independence Day with vibrant patriotism and unity

PANKAJ KUMAR

DIGITAL EXPERIENCE

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SUPREME COURT BOOSTS VOTER  
TRANSPARENCY, AADHAAR RIGHTS

Call it what you will, ‘a procedural clarification’ or ‘a victory for democracy’ depending on your political affiliation, the Supreme Court's order to the Election Commission to publish the names of around 65 lakh voters excluded from the electoral rolls in Bihar and that too with reasons for each and every exclusion has struck a blow for transparency.

Further, its order to consider the objections filed with Aadhaar leaves the Election Commission with no option but to accept it as a documentary proof of voter eligibility.

The apex court could not have made it clearer than it did. In its words, Aadhaar is a statutorily recognised instrument of identity and residence and it can be

submitted as a document. The observations made by the top court in a stinging language should dissuade the Election Commission from being inflexible and obstinate and thinking that it can have its way with the full backing of the government, come what may and persuade it to act reasonably and honourably.

Now that the Election Commission is under the watchful eye of the Supreme Court, it cannot go about with the special intensive revision at whim or without the thought of being held accountable or trifling with people's voting rights and tampering with the sanctity of elections.

G DAVID MILTON | MARUTHANCODE

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# Trump's Tariff Salvo: Strategic Message or Strong-Arm?

Trump's tariffs reflects a pattern of using prolonged, exhausting trade talks as a tool of economic attrition — leveraging uncertainty to extract concessions and align partners with US geopolitical aims. For India the challenge now lies in reading the game, not just the rules

ABHINAV  
NARAYAN

A major blowback came to India when Trump announced a 25 per cent tariff plus a penalty against India for trading with Russia. This occurred while trade negotiations with the US were ongoing and had nearly reached Trump's deadline. Trump's tariff salvo against India, breaking away from negotiations, was an attempt to address simmering tensions in the Indo-US relationship by leaning on Pakistan through an oil deal and tariff concessions. Is this sudden shift due to Trump's ambitious economic policies, or is he masking strategic messaging and transactionalism in this trade affair with India? It would not be surprising if it is the latter, as the US has used deliberately exhaustive trade talks as a strategic tool to exert pressure on other nations, extract concessions, or advance broader strategic objectives.

**The Deal**

India was in the process of negotiating a Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA) with the US, which began in February 2025. By April 2025, an outline was drawn for negotiations, emphasising US goals of reducing India's trade barriers and addressing the \$45.7 billion US goods trade deficit. The negotiations, which gradually gained momentum from February to July, intensified as India maintained its position of not liberalising or opening its agricultural and dairy sectors to US markets. Additionally, India adhered to its demands for tariff concessions, including lower US duties on steel (50 per cent) and aluminium (25 per cent), and preferential access for labour-intensive exports such as textiles, gems, jewellery, and IT services. In return, India was prepared to provide the US with greater access to its market. However, apart from these two sticking points, India also resisted US demands for reduced tariffs on auto components and acceptance of US Federal Motor Vehicle Safety Standards, prioritising its domestic industry and the Make in India campaign.

Similarly, regarding non-tariff barriers, the US criticised India's Quality Control Orders (QCOs) and import regulations, which it viewed as barriers to market access for US



**ECONOMIC ATTRITION DIPLOMACY INVOLVES LEVERAGING PROLONGED TRADE NEGOTIATIONS TO PRESSURE A COUNTERPART INTO ALIGNING WITH GEOPOLITICAL GOALS, OFTEN BY CREATING ECONOMIC UNCERTAINTY**

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goods, but India defended them on grounds of consumer and domestic industry safety. While this deal offered much for both countries, the costs were high, making negotiations intense and rigorous, which does not align with Trump's negotiating style.

The US's negotiating approach under Trump, specific to trade and tariff issues, has been unconventional and rushed. Recent trade deals with Australia and Vietnam suggest that deals were concluded hastily under pressure. The US exploited Vietnam's trade surplus and export reliance, using tariff threats and prolonged talks to secure concessions. While Vietnam negotiated for months and offered goodwill gestures (eg, LNG deals), the final 20 per cent tariff and transshipment penalties were less favourable than Vietnam's proposed Zero per cent reciprocal tariff. The situation is similar with Japan and Indonesia. Japan faced significant pressure from the US due to its trade surplus and alliance status. Tariff threats and geopolitical pressure secured partial concessions. For Indonesia, the US used tariff threats and BRICS-related pressure to obtain concessions.

These cases reflect the US's tactics of achieving win-win trade deals, even with allies and partners, demonstrating transactional diplomacy in setting trade relations. However, a closer look suggests that these deals are not solely driven by economic or trade calculations. The US also uses trade deals as geopolitical tools — deliberately exhaustive negotiations to

push countries toward aligning with its strategic objectives.

**Economic Attrition Diplomacy**

Economic attrition diplomacy involves leveraging prolonged trade negotiations to pressure a counterpart into aligning with geopolitical goals, often by creating economic uncertainty or exploiting asymmetric dependencies. The case of Vietnam exemplifies this: The US pushed Vietnam to reduce reliance on Chinese industrial goods and curb transshipments, aligning with its anti-China strategy.

The negotiations were lengthy, with multiple rounds reflecting prolonged and exhaustive talks to force Vietnam to concur with the deal, leaving it little room to maneuver. The cases of Indonesia and Japan are also noteworthy. The US linked trade with Indonesia to its BRICS role and its \$10 billion China investment deal (November 2024), pressuring Jakarta to align with US anti-China goals. Similarly, putting US-Japan relations at risk, the US threatened Japan with 25 per cent tariffs and, surprisingly, imposed a 25 per cent tariff on Japanese goods, including autos, announced on July 7, 2025, effective August 1 — an unprecedented move against a US ally. Another case involves South Korea, where Trump imposed a 15 per cent "reciprocal" tariff on South Korean goods, effective August 1, 2025, after threatening 25 per cent tariffs in July. Although no solid deal was finalised, South Korea offered increased access for US goods and defense commitments to

avoid higher tariffs. With South Korea, the US sought geopolitical advantages by pressuring it to increase dependency on US purchases, specifically F-35s.

These pressure tactics show that, beyond trade alignment, the US aims to steer countries toward strengthening its anti-China strategy through economic attrition diplomacy, often disguised as trade negotiations and economic calculations. These deliberate attrition tactics echo past US actions, such as five years ago when the US directly engaged in economic attrition diplomacy with China to curb its technological rise (eg, targeting Huawei), signal strength to allies, and pressure China on issues like intellectual property theft. During trade negotiations, the US repeatedly escalated tariffs and introduced complex demands, such as structural changes to China's economy, prolonging uncertainty and pressuring China, which yielded partial concessions with limited success for the US.

**Aggressive Attrition Driven by Frustration**

Unlike other countries that faced strategic coercion from the US with only tariff threats, India was hit with multiple salvos — tariffs, penalties, and an embrace of Pakistan. The reasons were clear: The Russia factor, trade with Iran, and India's non-compromising posture during trade negotiations.

This aggressive attrition behaviour is motivated by geopolitical frustration, a pattern not new to the US. In the 1930s and

SRIJAN  
SHARMA

1940s, US economic attrition against Japan, driven by frustration, culminated in the oil embargo of 1941, contributing to escalation toward World War II. In that case, negotiations were prolonged with deadlocked demands: The US demanded Japan withdraw from China and Indochina, while Japan sought recognition of its territorial gains, creating a deadlock with no progress. A similar situation is unfolding between the US and India, where the US harbors geopolitical suspicion over India's relationships with Iran and Russia, alongside deadlocked trade demands. These factors fueled frustration and drove the US to send a strong strategic message by escalating risks and attrition, perhaps setting an example on the global stage.

**Unconventional Transactionalism**

India must read the negotiating table more carefully and patiently, adopting measured and mixed negotiating styles instead of a confrontational approach, which at times frustrates the US. As India looks toward the prospect of a mini-deal by September-October, it should aim for strategic prolongation — progress with limited concessions — rather than dragging talks with no real progress.

This will create more room for negotiations and reduce US frustration to some extent. India must also leverage its geopolitical value and diversify its trade relationships with Europe and other countries. This will strengthen India's bargaining position, soften US demands, and deter extreme measures.

A similar approach saved South Korea from higher tariffs despite having no deal with the US, as South Korea adopted strategic prolongation, used measured negotiation tactics offering room via concessions, and resisted hasty or pressured deals. India must remember that Trump is a master at playing unconventional transactional cards, where deals are more important than relations. India should demonstrate that a deal is in progress and that there is something on the table, rather than leaving it empty.

## How can the collaborative intelligence transform Indian Railways

MANISH  
PANDEY

The phrase "Dread it. Run from it. Destiny still arrives" is a famous quote from the Marvel Cinematic Universe, specifically Thanos, in the movie Avengers: Infinity War. It signifies that no matter how much one might try to avoid or fear a certain fate, it will ultimately come to pass. This perspective may be applied by some of us to the future role of Artificial Intelligence in our lives. However, there are some other perspectives also. If planned and acted upon appropriately, the collaborative intelligence of humans plus machines may play a huge role in transforming Railways. The rise of artificial intelligence isn't just a buzzword anymore; it's a game-changer that could redefine everything from ticket bookings to asset safety. Picture this: A train system so smart it knows when a vehicle or any other asset needs fixing before it fails, or one that answers passenger queries in a snap while letting staff focus on the human touch.

That's the future Indian Railways could embrace by tapping into the MELDS framework, a bold strategy from Accenture's Paul Daugherty and James Wilson in their book "Human + Machine: Reimagining Work in the Age of AI." Applying the MELDS principles (Mindset, Experimentation, Leadership, Digital Core, and Skills) to Indian Railways involves a strategic approach to integrating AI and human capabilities to reimagine its vast operations. It's not about handing the keys to robots; it's about teaming up humans and AI to make the railway network smoother, safer, and more connected. Here's how Indian Railways can make it happen. First, it's about thinking differently and having a fundamental shift in mindset. Indian Railways has long run on tried-and-true methods, step-by-step, efficient, but a bit old-school. To keep up in the AI age, it's time to dream big. We have to redesign the processes around the 'missing middle.' IR should reimagine entire processes. Don't just digitise ticket counters or asset examination; rethink the whole passenger experience from start to finish. Identify repetitive tasks that are candidates for AI automation (eg, routine data entry, basic information dissemination, initial fault detection). Identify tasks requiring creative reasoning, collaboration, and judgment that are candidates for AI augmentation (eg, complex incident response, strategic route planning, nuanced customer problem-solving, ethical decision-making). Break jobs down, like those of operations managers or maintenance engineers, into smaller tasks. Let AI handle the repet-



itive stuff, like typing up reports or flagging basic issues, while people tackle the big-picture challenges involving creativity, interpersonal interactions, and critical decision making, like sorting out derailment or planning smarter routes. And don't stop at one-off projects. Shift from siloed AI projects (eg, one app for parcel tracking, another for passenger information) to prioritising AI integration across IR's entire value chain — from passenger services and freight logistics to infrastructure maintenance and safety. A smart move? Play it safe with quick wins like AI-powered chatbots for ticket queries, while betting big on game-changers like real-time scheduling for the whole network or prescriptive analytics-based asset maintenance regime. It's about building a railway for tomorrow, not just polishing yesterday's tracks. Next up, test the waters through experimentation, but do it with rigor and scalability. Don't throw AI at every problem and hope for the best. Start small with focused pilots, like using AI to predict when a stretch of track might fail or setting up digital assistants at a few stations. Try, measure, learn, repeat. If an AI signaling tool stumbles in bad weather, don't scrap it, figure out why, and make it better. Test these systems with railway staff first, like Amazon did with its cashier-less stores, to work out the kinks before actual implementation. Once a pilot proves its worth, roll it out step by step, tweaking as you go based on real-world feedback. It's less about gambling and more about building a solid playbook. Leadership is where the heart of this change lies. Bosses need to show workers that AI isn't here to steal jobs, it's here to make them better. Be upfront about fears and show how AI can take over boring tasks, leaving room for more meaningful work. But it's got to be done responsibly. Set up clear rules: Keep humans first, make sure AI doesn't play favorites or mess up fairness, and explain how it makes decisions, especially for critical stuff like train controls. Build in safety nets, like letting experienced staff override AI when things get dicey, and make sure workers aren't left holding the bag if a system fails. Stay on top of legal stuff, like protecting passenger data, and help everyone, from staff to

riders, feel good about the tech. Trust is the ultimate currency here. Then there's the tech backbone, what the experts call the "digital core," integrating cloud, data, and AI technologies to create an interconnected foundation. Indian Railways needs to ditch its clunky, disconnected systems for something nimble, cloud-powered, and locked down tight for security. Think of data as the fuel: Pull in everything from timetables to passenger complaints on social media or station camera feeds. Speed matters; focus on real-time data, like live train locations or instant alerts for track issues, to keep things moving. Make AI insights easy to use, so even non-techie station managers can ask questions in plain language and get answers about passenger trends or staffing needs. Add new roles, like data wranglers, to keep information clean and fair, so AI doesn't churn out skewed predictions. This isn't just a tech upgrade, it's the foundation for a smarter railway.

Finally, it's about people and their skills. Train workers to team up with AI in new ways. Let machines take over routine tasks, answering basic queries, making platform announcements, so staff can focus on solving tough problems or helping passengers with a smile. Show everyone, from employees to the public, how AI makes things better, like drones spotting track flaws faster. Teach workers to make judgment calls when AI isn't sure, like during a signal glitch, and how to ask the right questions to get useful answers from smart systems. Give frontline staff like ticket clerks or train crews AI tools to tap into info instantly, making their jobs easier and service sharper. Create a two-way street where AI learns from workers' know-how, and workers learn from AI's insights. Most importantly, keep pushing the envelope — don't just automate old freight schedules, but dream up new ways to move goods or even offer "rail-as-a-service" for businesses.

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dr-manish-pandey-2a2593184

## Monsoon blues: Why deficiency spikes during the rainy season

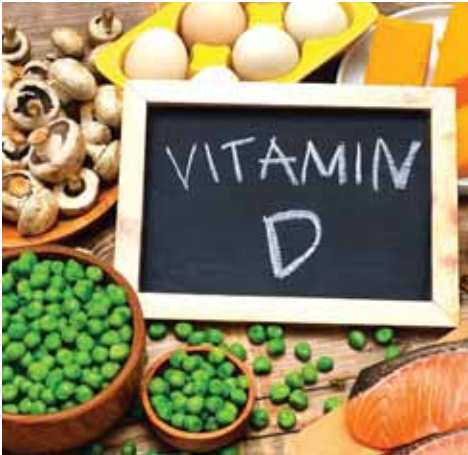
AASHISH  
CHAUDHRY

As the monsoon clouds gather, bringing the much-needed relief from the scorching heat, they also bring with them an invisible health risk Vitamin D deficiency. It is important to understand that Vitamin D is essential for strong bones. However, few realise that this "sunshine vitamin" also plays a very important role in boosting our immune system, supporting our mental well-being, and even protecting us from infections.

Vitamin D is produced naturally in the body when our skin is exposed to sunlight, unlike other vitamins that we generally get from food. However, with cloudy skies and heavy rains during the monsoon season, typically observed during July and August in various parts of India, and people staying indoors most of the time, the exposure to direct sunlight is much less.

The lack of sun exposure is one of the main causes for Vitamin D deficiency, which became worse during monsoons and winters. This is more so in areas where access to Vitamin D-rich foods is also limited. A study published in Nature Scientific Reports in 2021 studied the data from over 3,000 north Indian children and found that Vitamin D levels were significantly lower during the monsoon and winter seasons compared to summer.

The study found that while people may still spend time outdoors in the rain, due to cloudy atmosphere, the production of Vitamin D is blocked. It also pointed out that girls and older children are more likely to be deficient. Earlier, a study published in the Indian Journal of Endocrinology and Metabolism in 2020 found that over 70 per cent of patients in a hospital in north India were Vitamin D deficient. These levels varied seasonally, and the deficiency remained widespread across the year, but limited sun exposure and poor dietary intake were seen as major causes. In smaller towns and rural areas, the risk is even greater. Many people in small cities stay indoors for work or household tasks, dress in clothing that covers most of the skin, and don't often eat fortified foods. Combined with low awareness and limited testing, the chances of undiagnosed Vitamin D deficiency increase during the rainy season. The deficiency often goes unnoticed until symptoms like fatigue, frequent infections,



back or bone pain, and low mood appear. Children may develop rickets, while adults can suffer from weak bones and muscles.

However, people often blame weather changes or age for their pain and ignore the possibility of a nutritional gap. In fact, Vitamin D deficiency can silently progress and increase the risk of fractures in the long run. I always advise getting your Vitamin D levels tested at least once a year and speaking to a doctor about supplements if needed, especially if you are over 40 or have limited sun exposure.

It is important to note that without enough Vitamin D, the body can't absorb calcium properly, which weakens bones and muscles over time. Even mild deficiency can lead to discomfort or stiffness, especially in the knees, lower back, and shoulders. Vitamin D deficiency is clearly preventable and treatable. Getting some sun during brief clear spells, eating Vitamin D-rich foods like eggs, fish, and fortified milk, and taking supplements under medical advice can make a big difference. The solution lies in awareness, testing, and timely prevention.

**Conclusion**

Vitamin D deficiency silently worsens during monsoons due to reduced sunlight and poor dietary intake, affecting bones, immunity, and mood. Awareness, timely testing, and preventive steps — like safe sun exposure, Vitamin D-rich foods, and supplements — can protect health, ensuring stronger bones and overall well-being even in cloudy months.

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dr-aashish-chaudhry



● MOVING FORWARD

Prime Minister Narendra Modi

India is committed to structural, regulatory, policy, process, and procedural reforms, building a nation where governance works for the people...Instead of focusing on others' limitations, India must extend its own line of progress

Towards *atmanirbharta*

There can be no quarrel with PM’s advocacy of self-reliance, but it takes more to attain the goal

**I**N AN UNSTABLE global environment, countries are increasingly focusing on their own interests, with “resource nationalism” being at the core of national strategies. Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s emphasis on imbibing the spirit of a *Suadeshi* model of development in his longest Independence Day speech, on Friday, fits in perfectly with this context, though the immediate background was that of Donald Trump’s tariff fury on India. *Atmanirbharta* (self-reliance) is the very cornerstone of *Viksit Bharat* (developed India), Modi asserted, while flagging the various schemes to make the country self-reliant. Unperturbed by the high tariffs being imposed on India, he said his government won’t accept any agreement that would adversely affect India’s farmers, cattle rearers, and fishermen. Even in a milieu of “de-globalisation”, Trump’s extravagant tariffs are more a contingency than an abiding feature. However, it serves as a timely reminder of the need to brace ourselves for external shocks of high magnitude. India is a capital-scarce country, and it needs to strategise well to boost money supply and ensure efficient deployment of capital for productive capacity creation. Its natural resources are robust, but not all-encompassing or efficiently exploited.

What must inspire India’s confidence in the uncertain world is its abundant human capital, and the immense potential of its vast domestic market. However, optimum use of human resources for all-round prosperity requires more sections of people are equipped with useful skill sets. The path to self-reliance must necessarily be a broader one with greater inclusivity and tolerance. Higher growth is unviave without an inclusive approach. The tough goal of *Viksit Bharat* for 2047 may or may not be met, given the parameters of being a “developed” country, and where we stand now. Even if it takes another decade or so to reach there, one must not fret over it, so long as the country is on a steady growth path.

A cursory look at India’s inherent strengths and its transactional relationships with the external world would reveal both problems and potential opportunities. The country has achieved a high level of food security, but 88% of the crude oil processed in the country is imported. Import dependency for semiconductor and rare earth elements (REE) is as high as 90%. Half of REE supplies come from China. The recent tightening of export controls on REEs would not have threatened to retard the pace of India’s green energy projects and electric mobility plans, had its considerable rare earth reserves been ready for commercial exploitation. Only lately has the government shed its reluctance to allow private participation in monazite (uranium and thorium) and non-monazite REE.

India is credited with a relatively high degree of macro-economic and financial stability. Only a fifth of the country’s economic output is driven by external demand. The right strategy for the country at this juncture would be to reinforce its core strengths with necessary reforms of factors of production, while seeking also to complement it with external links. The prime minister’s promise that the restructuring of the goods and services tax would result in substantial tax cuts and make “everyday items cheaper” signals not just a consumption booster, but also an added impetus to economic output. Liberal and mutually beneficial trade alliances are being forged with developed countries. India also should aim at having a much larger presence in the expansive Indo-Pacific markets, by being part of the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership that includes 12 countries and vouches for a rule-based trading system.

Is anybody fighting back in this trade war?

**WILLIAM CLAYTON**, A businessman who served successive US presidents and became one of the chief architects of the Marshall Plan, was no fan of tariffs. He rated the barriers erected during the Great Depression as one of the great crimes of the century. It’s hard to imagine that Clayton, who believed that free trade was as important to prosperity as American aid and security guarantees, would remotely approve of Donald Trump’s efforts to reshape commerce.

This White House-engineered upheaval, which pushed tariffs to levels unseen since the Smoot-Hawley law of 1930, will be costly—even if the full price isn’t immediately apparent. The global economy hasn’t suffered some of the direst consequences that were predicted in April. Demand for US assets has held up, despite the superficial allure of the “sell America” narrative. The International Monetary Fund doubts growth will suddenly crater, and inflation hasn’t taken off. Has a bullet been dodged or is shock delaying the pain?

It’s notable that countries aren’t exactly lining up to fire back. With the exception of China, which has escalated and retreated to match the White House rhythms, there’s been little by way of reprisals. “It’s not a war when only one side fights,” JPMorgan Chase & Co. economists said in a recent note. “The primary drag from the trade war will come from US tariff hikes, but we also looked for broad retaliation by US trading partners.” The counterattack “has not materialised; in fact, barriers to US exports have been lowered”, they wrote.

This sort of guarded optimism—or qualified pessimism—is a break from the dark warnings. Christine Lagarde, head of the European Central Bank, told leaders to prepare for a worst-case scenario in which an antagonistic US drags the world into destructive economic conflict. The Prime Minister of Singapore, a city-state that thrived during the heyday of free trade, couldn’t hide his dismay: Tariffs aren’t the actions of friends, Lawrence Wong noted. His Canadian counterpart, Mark Carney, declared that relations with the US would be changed forever. Chinese President Xi Jinping has studiously matched American moves but also toned down his rhetoric and actions when appropriate.

India is one of the few economies of significance that hasn’t cut a deal with Trump. But PM Narendra Modi also hasn’t gone measure for measure or shown a desire to get even with American businesses. Yes, there has been indignity and hurt feelings. The governor of the Reserve Bank of India dismissed Trump’s claim that commerce was dead there. He touted India’s contribution to global growth—about 18% compared to around 1.1% for the US—and insisted the local economy was doing well. It also misses the point that in pure size, America dwarfs India.

Brazil, a comer that struggles to make good on its potential, is also refusing to bend. President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva loathes dependence on the US and wants to be treated as an equal. But Trump doesn’t like a court case against Lula’s predecessor for allegedly plotting a coup. Brazil is trying to develop an alternative to the dollar and places great store in commercial ties to the BRICS group of emerging economies. Many of those nations, and aspiring members of the bloc, have cut deals with Trump, or are likely to do so. Brazil will come to some arrangement.

So, has Trump got away with it? His aides reckoned that access to the American market is too lucrative to pass up, and they may have been right. It would also be naive to conclude there won’t be any cost. The global economy has slowed but hasn’t crashed, foreigners still purchase US Treasuries and it’s a safe bet that the greenback will be at the centre of the financial system for years. But the nations humiliated won’t forget this experience. Asia’s economies will get bigger and the siren call of greater integration with China will get louder. Trump’s efforts to destroy the existing order may yet prove an own goal. Just not this year.

Trump’s team brags about reconfiguring the system that grew from the ideals of the postwar era. The hubris may ultimately prove misplaced.

● RATIONALISING REGULATIONS

RBI’s PLAN TO SET UP REGULATORY REVIEW CELL COULD BUILD IMPACTFUL LEGACY WITH GOOD EXECUTION

Quality over quantity

**T**HE RESERVE BANK of India’s (RBI) announcement to set up a 30-member Regulatory Review Cell (RRC) to “streamline and rationalise” their regulations/directives/circulars and hopefully clarifications and counter-clarifications issued over time, is a truly welcome move. If executed well, it has the potential to build the legacy of the governor that will be remembered by the industry for years to come. On the other hand, it runs the risk of becoming yet another exercise in bureaucratic tough talk and creating a cascading effect on the same stakeholders, which may either maintain status quo or be only marginally better: a well-meaning gesture, to be celebrated but without easing the lives of regulated entities, professionals, or the ever-growing circle of legal entities caught in the web of compliance. Because the much-loved and admired RBI touches the lives of a billion-plus Indians, not just through inflation targeting or monetary transmission—however tenuous—and know your customer (KYC) requirements, but also through a vastly inclusive digital transaction capability, frequent KYC refresh, financial fraud mitigation, cross-border transactions and so on.

So, what will it take to make this impactful and worthy of legacy? I am sure there are enough capable minds at play to grapple with this question. But as someone who has worked inside and outside of the RBI for an equal number of years, I would highlight the following:

Brutal honesty while assessing the status

Often, a leader coming in from outside has the ability and desire to identify complexity of processes that are not as obvious to the teams that are used to them and have also developed a fear of letting go. It will help to rise

above this and recognise that complex, overlapping, and obsolete regulations are not a statement of failure, but simply a function of degradation and mismatches that set in with time and an inevitability.

**Identifying stakeholders**

Having heard industry leaders sitting on both sides of the table, there seems to be a compulsive need to understate difficulties and overstate praise. Teasing out specific pain points from senior leaders of business or compliance is difficult, because they do not suffer at the operational level. More importantly, they would rather save their goodwill for a rainy day, of which there seem plenty anyway! Hence, identifying people who deal with regulations at operational and interpretation levels is key.

**Engaging with stakeholders**

This is always the tricky part. More than other regulators, or government departments, the RBI is simply difficult to meet. It is not clear if limited public dealings contribute to higher integrity, but it surely insulates its operational staff from being exposed to implementation nuances and second- or third-order impact. Consider chartered accountants. In the foreign exchange arena, the RBI relies on CA certifications

SHINJINI KUMAR

Founder, Mysaltapp



in bulk, but they are always reluctant to meeting CAs. The expectation is that the bank, as an authorised dealer, will ensure compliance and solve all queries. There is an interesting incentive misalignment here. The CA is the one charging the client and the keenest to solve the problem. The bank, on the other hand, is not charging the client, and therefore has high obligation and low incentive to solve. Interestingly, this is also the reason why the RBI likes the latter and dislikes the former. But in an age of increasing complexity in trade and transactions, this leads to delays and pain all around.

Delineate intent upfront

Many of the RBI’s departments are engaged in development or facilitation tasks. But the approach of the staff and the tone and tenor or the dispute resolution or query mechanism are the same as the regulatory departments. This is obvious because the cadre is the same, and it is not very different from how administration in general is set up. But articulating that the financial inclusion department would strive to make it easy to include without compromising on safety, or that the foreign exchange department is to facilitate foreign trade or investments without allowing for money laundering or leakage, can help. It sounds simple, because

it comes from a simple directive an early boss gave me when posting me to handle the FDI desk in RBI New Delhi in 1994, “These are people coming to your country to do business, make it easy.” That is also when the RBI introduced a citizen’s charter, eventually mandating it for all banks. It is still a living document, but only a document.

Have a query mechanism

Of course, there is no overstating the need for a dialogue box, almost as good as what we expect from any service organisation, especially in the trade, investment, or transaction facilitation areas for clarifications and suggestions. This feedback mechanism can then be used by the RRC to do the job they have set out to do.

Co-ordination

Over the years, with the growing economy, fiscal and regulatory authorities have also increased. While at the policy level there are committees and institutional mechanisms to ensure co-ordination or alignment, at operational levels it is still left to intermediaries and market players to linearly solve inter-agency problems of varying complexity. In addition, these solutions, when found, do not make it to any publicly available resources that can be relied upon. There also needs to be an official clearing house for operational queries.

To conclude, great intent needs to be coupled with great execution to get us to the goal of better understanding and alignment between regulators, regulated entities, intermediaries, and market players for a less bureaucratic and more efficient mechanism to support one of the world’s largest and most ambitious economies. To that end, the number of regulations is not the material parameter to celebrate or berate; it will be their relevance.

The hidden cost of UPI resilience



SRINATH SRIDHARAN

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India’s digital scale risks undermining itself when regulatory quick fixes inadvertently shift systemic burdens onto merchants and end users alike

**THE RISE** OF United Payments Interface (UPI) is among India’s proudest digital triumphs. However, true strength in any infrastructure is measured not by its soaring growth curves, but by how it responds when cracks begin to show. In the wake of this year’s UPI outages, a consequential recalibration has begun, revealing how India’s most celebrated digital public goods weigh systemic resilience against genuine consumer protection. Faced with unexpected surges in transactions and conspicuous downtimes, the National Payments Corporation of India (NPCI) moved swiftly to announce measures that, at first glance, seem practical and prudent.

Daily caps on balance enquiries and account list application programming interfaces, tighter limits on autopay retries, and rules steering recurring debits away from peak hours—all were framed as tough-love regulations to protect a backbone that handles over ₹24 lakh crore each month. However, millions of consumers and small merchants will bear the brunt as they will be forced to rewrite operational routines around what the system can actually sustain.

The irony is striking. UPI Autopay accounts for barely 0.95% of monthly traffic, with around 175 million renewals out of 18.4 billion transactions. Even the most optimistic load relief from these throttles is symbolic. Yet even a modest 5% disruption carries a heavy toll—over ₹9,600 crore in lost annual sales, nearly ₹1,700 crore in tax shortfall, and quieter

blows to households whose systematic investment plan (SIP) instalments bounce or children’s fees miss deadlines.

Small merchants and micro, small, and medium enterprises, especially in semi-urban India, have spent years building recurring payment flows, training teams, and investing in billing tools. Nearly 73% report income or efficiency gains from going digital, with UPI as the rail of choice for 48%. Yet, only 18% use digital lending, and seamless autopay success is vital to building the credit histories regulators want to see. Now, these businesses must re-engineer systems, rethink customer communication, and navigate unclear rules on which transactions may fail and when. What is framed as technical necessity becomes, in practice, a quiet transfer of burden from regulator and platform to merchant and consumer, widening the digital divide the policy claims to close.

Beyond them lie larger stakes. Annual recurring revenues exceed ₹1.93 lakh crore across digital content, edtech, and software as a service. Even small disruptions ripple through tax collections, business growth, and household planning. A single missed ₹2,000 SIP instalment can shrink a corpus by ₹72,000 over 20 years, and scaled across 1% of accounts, could erase ₹4,900 crore in household wealth each month.

Bharat BillPay processed 246 million

bills worth ₹1.1 lakh crore in January alone. Missed autopay renewals could push lakhs back to counters just to keep the power on. Meanwhile, 7.49 crore Atal Pension Yojana subscribers risk penalties and account freezes from failed debits, and over 23 crore low-income Indians could lose a ₹2-lakh life cover if a ₹436 auto-premium fails.

The creator economy too stands exposed. Already influencing \$350 billion in annual consumer spend and projected to surpass \$1 trillion by 2030, it relies on millions of sub-₹500 autopay microtransactions. Even low failure rates can wipe out crores in monthly income and slow a sector set to add billions in GDP-linked demand.

In essential services, a single large online grocer brand fulfils nearly five lakh orders a day, while quick commerce platforms employ lakhs of gig workers and dark-store staff. Even short freezes in renewals can idle these workers and disrupt what millions see as daily infrastructure. Beyond India’s borders, blunt throttles risk signalling that scale is still managed through caps rather than design, undermining UPI’s ambition to expand to 20 countries by 2027.

Payment companies too have chosen the path of least resistance. It may feel safer to avoid appearing adversarial before regulators than to challenge rules that quietly transfer the burden onto those at

True resilience will come when stakeholders build systems so reliable that consumers never see them

the very end of the chain. What could have been a joint push for intelligent retries and clearer failure codes became a quiet exercise in passing the parcel.

There is real pain in being the last stop in a value chain where every player points elsewhere. It is the frustration of watching banks, platforms, and policy-makers each deflect blame, while the burden rolls downhill and lands squarely on the consumer.

And so, we arrive at the real question. Who will blink first? UPI’s very architecture rests on two pillars—the Reserve Bank of India in Mumbai as the regulator, setting policy and safeguarding consumer interest; and the NPCI as operator and steward of the rail, issuing the circulars and throttles that decide who must adapt and how fast. Will they invest in real system-level resilience instead of governing by circulars? Will the NPCI look beyond technical caps to deepen reform? Will policymakers in Delhi insist that consumer protection or financial literacy become more than an annual slogan? Will payment companies stop quietly shifting the pain downstream and talk to regulators?

True resilience will come only when regulators, operators, platforms, and merchants build systems so reliable that consumers never see them. Ultimately, it is trust, not transaction volumes, that sustains UPI—and that will not endure if ordinary Indians remain the silent shock absorbers each time the system stumbles.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Ratings boost confidence

Apropos of “Thumbs up for economy” (FE, August 15), the recent improvement in India’s sovereign credit rating is a welcome acknowledgment of our steady economic progress. It reflects the benefits of consistent fiscal discipline, prudent debt management, and the determination to invest heavily in infrastructure without compromising

stability. Such recognition is more than a matter of prestige. A stronger rating should help bring down borrowing costs for both the government and private companies, attract more foreign investment into debt markets, and improve the flow of affordable credit into the economy. Of course, challenges remain—global trade tensions, tariff barriers, and a slowing export sector demand careful navigation. But with growth rates

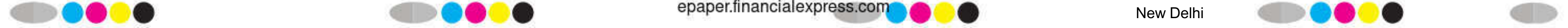
outpacing most large economies and a strong domestic demand base, India is well-placed to sustain momentum. —Sanjay Chopra, Mohali

SC’s EC admonishment

Call it what you will, “a procedural clarification” or “a victory for democracy”, the Supreme Court’s order to the Election Commission (EC) to publish the names of around 65 lakh voters excluded from the electoral

rolls in Bihar with reasons for every exclusion has struck a blow for transparency. Further, its order to consider the objections filed with Aadhaar mandates the EC to accept it as a proof of voter eligibility. The SC’s observations should dissuade the EC from being inflexible and obstinate and thinking that it can have its way. —G David Milton, Maruthancode

● Write to us at [fletters@expressindia.com](mailto:fletters@expressindia.com)











A thought for today

Everyone complains about the weather, but nobody ever seems to do anything about it

WILLARD SCOTT

Chakra & Consumption

PM's 2 key promises from Red Fort

Two themes stood out in Modi's I-Day address. Mission Sudarshan Chakra, he said, will be a powerful platform that will protect both public places and critical infra, and be operational by 2035. This is evoking comparisons with Israel's Iron Dome. More relevant is the stellar performance of the Integrated Air Command and Control System (IACCS) and Akashteer during Op Sindoor. But air defence is an evolving tech. India faces two issues. First, versatile and rapidly improving battlefield drones. IACCS and Akashteer need upgrades for this. Second, we are still using diverse platforms – Indian, Russian, Israeli, etc. This is less than ideal. If Sudarshan Chakra can address both these concerns, it will be a massive boost for military self-reliance.



On GST, Modi promised Indians will pay a whole lot less for a lot of stuff they buy. Pegging this to Diwali was classic Modi. From what he said and what officials briefed later, the biggest GST reform since its inception will make it basically a 2-rate system – 5% and 18% (a few 'sin' goods will be taxed at 40%). That will be a huge improvement on the current, complicated 5%, 12%, 18% and 28% structure. Consumers are likely to benefit from a large number of consumer goods moving from the 12% to 5% rate, some from 18% to 5%, and axing of the eye-watering 28% rate. Health insurance premiums may finally get taxed at a lower rate. That there'll be procedural rationalisation, too, makes this mithai sweeter. And that GOI seems ready to take a revenue hit initially and bet on higher consumption to make this up down the line, is welcome reformist spirit. BJP will hope lower prices will be a vote attractor in poll-bound Bihar; a densely populated poor state. But that takes nothing away from the significance of what Modi promised.

Dharali To Kishtwar To...

Two tragedies within days caused by two extreme weather events. But will govts change anything?

Cloudbursts are no longer freak events – flash floods in Kashmir's Kishtwar come barely 10 days after a similar extreme weather event in Uttarakhand's Dharali. Such sudden, intense downpours over a small area have increased in recent years due to climate change – glofs, flash floods and landslides are the terrible new normal. But fact is, the damage and losses suffered on ground are also due to unplanned development in mountainous areas. There is nothing muddy about the impact of climate change, the hydrological system out of whack or mountainsides destabilised with construction activities. One feeds into the other. Dharali yesterday, Kishtwar today, another one awaits. It rains in violent bursts, glaciers are melting faster while aquifers are draining without recharge.

The impact is global. Maximum June temperature in Portugal breached 46°C. Almost 2,000 have died in Europe's heatwaves this year. Wildfires across US through Jan – beyond the fire-season of dry Aug-Sep – burned over 1,000 acres of land, displaced thousands. Meanwhile, it is business as usual of reckless construction, carbon trading, gassing on emissions and drawing sustainability-flavoured pies in the sky in corporate boardrooms with almost the same fervour that marks the inaction on climate, across govts. It is essential to stop activities that result in making the impact of freak weather more severe. The search & rescue in Dharali and Kishtwar is another sobering reminder – if we are not to lurch from one Himalayan crisis to another.

Being The 'Wrong' Kind Of Chinese

Diversity still survives Xi, but it's getting tougher

After reporting from China for seven years, in 2022 American journalist *Emily Feng* found that her luck had run out. She would not be allowed back in. For years officials had been telling her why she, in particular, should "tell the China story well". Because she was inherently Chinese. Never mind that she had been born and raised elsewhere. She shouldn't be *hanjian*, or race traitor.

How this conception of Chinese-ness tyrannises its subjects both inside the mainland and across the diaspora, is what her book *Let Only Red Flowers Bloom: Identity and Belonging in Xi Jinping's China* is about.

In the 1950s, a sweeping Soviet-inspired project sorted China's population into 56 officially recognised ethnic groups. Deng reforms loosened the iron grip of this classification on what job you did and where. Then came Xi, fearful that social splintering would end the Chinese communist project like it ended USSR. His antidote: Recasting a diverse nation into uniformity.

Feng tells the stories of 12 very different individuals to drive home how tormenting it can be when your country allows "absolutely no opportunity or outlets for incorrect thinking or viewpoints to spread".

*The Chained Woman* | In 2022 a TikTok video went viral showing a woman shivering in an earthen shed, a metal chain tethering her neck to a wall. One official version said she was the mother of eight children, aged 23 to 2.

A book of photos also came to light. It documented villages outside Guangzhou, where buying and chaining women, while forcing them to bear multiple children, even reselling them, is common. It suggests, there are

chained women all over China. Both the initial video and this book were 'quieted' by the authorities. But many families still keep searching for the chained woman. She might be the person they themselves lost years ago, to traffickers who make hay out of draconian reproductive policies.

*The Model Minority* | Growing up in Inner Mongolia, Adiya saw few Han Chinese. The sinification of subsequent decades he compares to the feeling of a frog slowly boiled alive. By middle school, all-Mongolian PTMs would be in heavily accented Mandarin. He found it surreal: Who were they all playingact for? When he ditched his Beijing job to return and teach Mongolian language, it was only time before they came after him, finding

mindfield  
SHORT TAKES ON BIG IDEAS



him to be an agent of "hostile foreign forces". He had some luck, though, and now lives in Canada.

*The Diaspora* | Chen Weiming got out of China, with a mission to push democracy at home. As he set up his sculpture park in California, a wealthy American patron, Matthew, helped him. Its centrepiece was CCP *Virus*, about Party culpability in the global pandemic. When this was burned down, FBI revealed that Matthew was actually a former Florida prison guard and part of a bungled, Chinese state scheme to arrest Chen's work. Matthew had been paid \$100,000 and his Long Island based Chinese handler \$3mn.

The book ends with Chen's triumphant opening ceremony for *CCP Virus 2.0* – in the presence of Feng and motley others. They had all taken different paths to get to that dusty Mojave Desert far from China. Yet each of them that day was thinking of China, the one they had known and the one about which they still dreamed.

The India Of His I-Day Speech

The big shift under Modi is the state's desire to redefine itself: creating a charitable govt, entwining national security with economic growth & a search for a new paradigm via debating issues once considered settled

Hilal Ahmed



Modi's Independence Day speech offers us an opportunity to have a slightly long-term overview of the Modi era – a period that has significantly changed the contours of Indian politics. Although economic self-reliance, technological development, national security and patriotism were the core themes of yesterday's address, Modi also underlined some serious issues of contemporary public life, which makes this speech analytically relevant.

More specifically, there were three important considerations that were invoked rather indirectly to provide a context to proposed policy initiatives: State's role as a facilitator; nationalism as a driving force of politics and finally, the idea of transformation.

**State as a facilitator** | Modi govt inherited a state that was already committed to a liberalised-globalised market economy. There has always been consensus that free market can regulate itself, hence there is no need for any outside intervention in the economic sphere. The state, in this framework, is expected to function as a facilitator in two ways.

First, it should create infra to expand the scope of free market. Second, the state must develop the capacity of citizens in such a way that they can compete in the market-driven economic life of the country. UPA defined this capacity-building project as inclusiveness. Marginalised groups – women, dalits, adivasis, Muslims and so on – were recognised as stakeholders for affirmative action policies.

Under Modi, this imagination saw a new shift. It did not discontinue the established framework of sector-driven affirmative action policies. Instead, it improvised it in a significant manner. A new category called 'labharthi' was introduced for providing one-time policy benefits to the most marginalised households.

Modi's I-Day speech reiterates this point more powerfully. The PM Viksit Bharat Rozgar Yojana is a good example in this regard. The pitch is that 'under this scheme, govt will give ₹15,000 to the youth... who gets a job in the private sector. Companies which generate more opportunities for providing new employment will also be given incentives'.

This form of welfarism is based on a premise that



the one-time policy benefits must be recognised as a kind of official benevolence by the govt. This is what may be called a 'charitable state'. Interestingly, non-BJP parties have accepted the charitable state as a model not merely for policy intervention but also as a viable mode to produce attractive electoral packages in opposition-run states.

**Nationalism at the centre** | It was obvious for PM to talk about nationalism in relation to Operation Sindoor. Modi invoked the importance of national security by emphasising the success of Made in India driven technological innovations. This interesting correlation between security and economic growth is highly significant.

The reinvention of nationalism as the dominant narrative of politics is perhaps the most striking feature of the Modi era. It is worth remembering that it was the India Against Corruption movement – which eventually paved the way for the creation of Aam Aadmi Party – that evoked nationalism as a political resource just before the 2014 elections. Modi govt not merely redefined nationalism, but also forced the entire political class to accept it as the most reliable electoral metaphor.

This unquestionable acceptance of nationalism by all political parties has posed two serious chal-

lenges. First, how to define nationalism as a moral value, especially in the realm of competitive electoral politics where it is invoked merely as a political slogan. Second, how to assert the uniqueness of Indian nationalism, which makes it an antithesis of the Euro-centric imagination of the nation-state. These crucial and fundamentally provocative questions have not yet received serious attention so far in our public discussions.

**Transformation & beyond** | Modi's speech, broadly speaking, was straightforward. It was more concerned about futuristic resolve, such as Viksit Bharat. Yet, there was an inherently critical overtone in it. For example, Modi talked about a set of colonial-era archaic laws, which, in his view, were used to place Indian citizens behind bars. His mantra is Reform, Perform, and Transform.

**New BJP welfarism reflects what may be called a 'charitable state'. Non-BJP parties have also accepted this model to produce attractive electoral packages in opposition-run states**

The idea of transformation is important here. Issues always seen as settled and unquestionable are being debated as unresolved public concerns over the last few years. Citizenship, elections, voting list, Census, national symbols, official rituals and even the status of historical monuments have emerged as doubtful subjects. The transformation, in this sense, must be understood as an official search for discovering/producing something new and unparalleled.

The inauguration of the new building of the Parliament, construction of the National War Memorial next to India Gate, declaration of Aug 14 as Partition Horrors Remembrance Day and June 25 as Samvidhan Hatya Diwas and a proposal to denationalise a group of ASI-protected Monuments of National Importance show that the state is keen to redefine itself. These changes are not entirely symbolic – they also affect our collective thinking process, slowly and gradually.

The Modi era, hence, underlines a specific trajectory of our political life. It would be interesting to observe how the changes introduced during this period will determine the direction of our constitutional democracy in future.

The writer is professor, CSDS

Open-Ended Love? Why He And She Ever Did Part

To discover that openness works both ways is the real test of equality in such relationships. Sometimes even men who want to be unconventional want women to be conventional

Paromita Vohra



When I meet a millennial for lunch, usually I hear tales of complicated romance. Millennials are the last generation still caught up in 'l'amour with a certain earnestness and sense of genuine surprise at their own repeating cycles.

By any standards, 41-year-old B is gorgeous, brilliant, sweet-natured – and very much committed to having a good time. Her definition of a good time is, you could say, Punjabi by nature. It can include ordering every exciting item on the menu and in fact consuming it, dancing a lot, aided or not by substances, travelling, hanging aimlessly with friends, or being sensually steeped in her own intellectual life. It definitely involves a series of amorous adventures, which are the subject matter of intent conversations accompanied by day drinking.

B reported that she matched with a "really cute" guy, let's call him A, who was divorced and what's called a media professional, deeply invested in investigating his masculinity via Instagram. What does that mean? Partly, that he was open to an unconventional woman and an unconventional relationship. A frolicsome affair ensued and then it was time for B to leave for work in another country for some months. Band A decided they would stay in touch, but they would also not turn down romantic possibilities that would come their way. So far, so modern.

A few weeks later A began a flirtation with a young colleague and told B about it when they chatted. And a few weeks later still B went out dancing, and had a memorable encounter with a curly haired young chap. She told A about it and was met with heavy silence. A informed her he would be out of touch for a while as he processed his emotions, aka watched several videos of Esther Perel, the therapist most known for her extensive writings on infidelity as not being a relationship deal-breaker.

When B and A met again, B rented a lovely flat for them, but A arrived in a pall of gloom, complaining of light-headedness and scheduled a blood test. He arrived carrying not flowers, pastries or bubbly wine, but only his own work-in-progress masculinity. The week was a bummer. "It was just no fun!" said B. "Every conversation was either about assessing our relationship, and I was like, we aren't in one yet! Or discussing his problems with his ex-wife, or asking my advice on how to settle his mother into Bombay, and of course his light-headedness." A would neither leave nor be there with any pleasure.

Of Life And Love  
STORIES OF THE WAY WE ARE

reformulating their masculinity, an important activity seems to be "getting in touch with one's emotions". But one can't help thinking that for a man this is about making everyone else get in touch with his emotions. That you want to be unconventional, but don't necessarily want women to be.

A glance at forums like Reddit on what Indian men look for in a woman, turns up descriptions like this: "I want an ambitious, funny, adventurous and loyal woman. As for red flags, common ones would probably be a promiscuous past, very materialistic approach towards life, no accountability for actions, lack of sense of responsibility etc you know, the basic ones."

The deciding line between ambitious and materialistic, adventurous and promiscuous seems to lie buried deep

in the valley of those masculine emotions. When one thinks of an open-ended relationship, one is usually under the impression that only we are keeping the end open, hence holding the power. To discover it works both ways is usually the real test for emotions, and so, a real test of equality.

B, on the other hand seemed to be relieved and ready to go off on a new and exciting adventure, rather than mourning the demise of potential romance in a series of such demises. Could it be that these romances are really a series of infidelities for B? That B's real romance is with herself and other relationships are diversions, which merely return her to her true relationship – that of self-discovery and adventure?



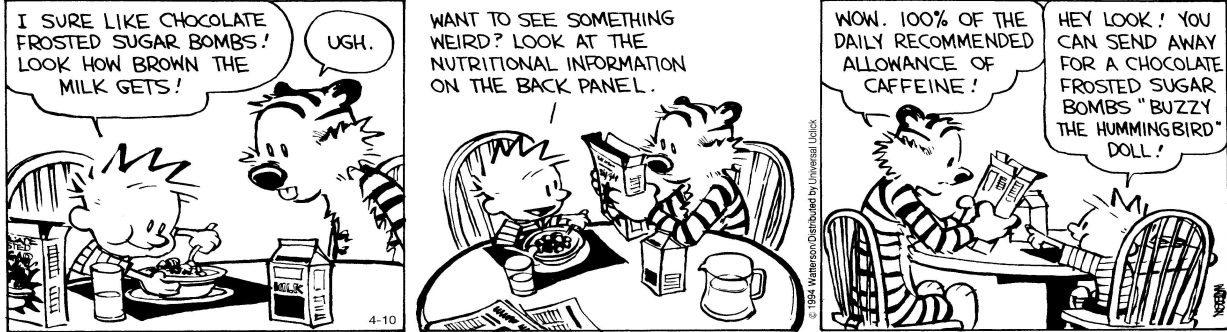
Uday Deb

A lot of conversation about this modern open-ended love seeks to define the category through labels like polyamory, which has its own decorum and rules to sustain it. Rules protect us to an extent. But perhaps there has always been a category of persons who seek relationships that proceed not through the prosaic path of categories, but wish them to emerge unspoken, like poems, rhyming without stated reason.

Such people are just the most old-fashioned and the most new-fashioned of them all: romantics. Always willing to be surprised by what amorous adventures might reveal, always willing to brave disappointment, going around the world looking for what makes the world go round. The straight line from A to B will never satisfy them.

The writer is founder, Agents of Ishq

Calvin & Hobbes



Radhanath Swami

Janmashtami marks the most sacred occasion of the divine appearance of Krishn, the Supreme Personality of Godhead. It naturally raises a question – how can someone who is unborn and eternal take birth?

Krishn's birth is not a result of his karm, it is an act of divine compassion. Out of his causeless mercy, he descends in a personal form at a particular time and place to reclaim his lost children. He performs enchanting pastimes, destroys evil, and brings victory to the righteous.

We do not celebrate Janmashtami because Krishn needs it. We celebrate for our own purification and absorption, to reconnect with Krishn and reawaken our lost relationship with Him.

Krishn's parents, Vasudev and Devaki, were known as Satapa and Prshni in their previous life. They performed great

austerities to have Krishn as their son. Pleased with them, Krishn promised to appear as their child. But that promise came with a price. Devaki and Vasudev were imprisoned by the cruel Kams. One after another, their six newborn sons were slaughtered. Only after enduring that intense grief did Krishn finally appear.

These six sons symbolically represent the six impurities in the heart, namely lust, anger, greed, arrogance, envy, and illusion. Only when these obstacles are removed can Krishn manifest in our hearts.

We may not face the exact hardships of Devaki and Vasudev, but we can prepare our hearts in a similar spirit. The heart, at present, is filled with the misgivings of anger, jealousy, pride, and selfish desires. Janmashtami is about preparing our hearts for Krishn's arrival by sincerely

striving to cleanse our inner space.

When an important guest is expected, we thoroughly clean our home and make the best arrangements to ensure they feel welcomed and pleased. Krishn, who is supremely pure, is not affected by any amount of impurity. In fact, he has the power to purify even the deepest layers of sin within our hearts. By taking shelter of him and earnestly chanting his holy name, we can purify our hearts and make them a worthy place for Krishn to reside.

Another beautiful way to celebrate Janmashtami is by offering a birthday gift to Krishn. But what can we give to someone who already owns everything in creation? I remember as a child, I once gave my mother a rose from her own garden on her birthday. She was moved to tears and expressed heartfelt gratitude. Curious, I asked her why she



THE SPEAKING TREE

Sacred space



The word 'Radhe' means, one who gives the juice of life, or love. In her love, Radhe included Krishn as a part of herself. They say, there is no Krishn without Radhe, not the other way around. Radhe Krishn or Radheyaa.

Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev

Inviting Krishn In Our Hearts On Janmashtami

was so touched by a gift that was already hers. She smiled and said, "It is the thought that counts."

In the same way, whatever we have, whether it is speech, art, music, intelligence, or even just a little time, when offered to Krishn with love, it pleases him deeply.

Janmashtami is more than just dressing like a devotee for a day. For a sincere seeker, it is a chance to realign our lives towards Krishn, to make the heart a welcoming place for him, not just for one day, but for all days to come.

Let this Janmashtami not pass as just another date on the calendar. Let us try to make this Janmashtami special, not just with decorations and fasting, but by opening our hearts for Krishn to reside there forever.

The author is spiritual guru, International Society for Krishna Consciousness



# IBC Amendment: More clarity, less reform



M S SAHOO

The IBC Amendment Bill uses the phrase “it is hereby clarified” 17 times. One such clarification restores the original trigger for initiating corporate insolvency resolution: Admission if a default exists, rejection if it does not, and no other grounds. This undoes *Vidarbha Industries* (2022) and reaffirms what the Bankruptcy Law Reforms Committee, the original notes on clauses, and *Innovative Industries* (2017) had already settled.

Another restores the original liquidation waterfall by overturning *Rainbow Papers* (2022), which had put government

dues under the Gujarat Value Added Tax Act, 2003, at the same level as secured creditors. The Bill makes it clear that a security interest must arise from a contractual agreement, not merely by operation of law, and that Central and state dues, secured or otherwise, rank lower in priority.

Other clarifications, though not so labelled, include the clean slate principle: A resolution plan binds all stakeholders, extinguishes unpreserved claims, and protects existing licences and permits for their remaining term, curbing post-approval demands and litigation.

The IBC seeks early commencement and swift closure of rescues. While it imposes strict timelines on market participants for individual tasks and the overall process, it has been less prescriptive for the Adjudicating Authority (AA) and appellate bodies. The Bill narrows this gap: The AA must admit or reject Clirp (corporate insolvency resolution process) applications within 14 days, and decide withdrawal requests, approve or reject resolution plans, issue liquidation orders, and pass

dissolution orders within 30 days, stating reasons if these timelines are not met.

Such provisions for certain tasks exist in the Code for the AA but have had little impact. Without a matching increase in capacity, the AA is unlikely to meet timelines, particularly as courts often treat them as directory. And with no timelines for appellate bodies, delays may persist: *Bhushan Steel and Power* (2025) took five years to clear the Supreme Court.

These clarifications and timelines, primarily aimed at state agencies, seek to safeguard the IBC’s integrity, but risk triggering an endless cycle of legislative fixes. Misunderstandings may be fewer this time, given the Bill’s quality drafting and detailed notes on clauses, but they will not be eliminated. And without consequences for non-compliance, for instance, by the AA, improved performance is not assured.

The problem is deeper: Adjudication runs through layered hierarchies, each revisiting subordinate decisions, even after process closure. Ideally, a process should attain finality with the AA’s approval; if

irregularities emerge later, those responsible should face swift civil, regulatory, or criminal action. Appeals should address points of law, without unsettling the underlying transaction.

The Amendment Bill elevates several provisions from regulations into the Code: allows a resolution plan to provide for the sale of asset(s) of the corporate debtor; requires secured creditors realising collateral outside the liquidation estate to contribute to insolvency and liquidation costs, and workmen’s dues; prescribes timelines for liquidation and voluntary liquidation; and provides for deemed authentication of information with an Information Utility where the debtor does not respond.

The Bill makes several minor tweaks. For example, the look-back period for preferential transactions would span two years preceding the initiation date, plus the 14 days to account for the period between initiation and commencement. It empowers the government and the regulator to make subordinate legislation to carry out the purposes of the Code and establishes a right of

appeal from the regulator’s orders to the National Company Law Appellate Tribunal.

Beyond incremental changes, the Bill makes notable reforms. It empowers the insolvency regulator to oversee the conduct of the committee of creditors and its members, bringing a key actor under regulatory scrutiny. It also ends the long-standing fiction in the liquidation waterfall that treats creditors as fully secured regardless of collateral value: Security would count only to its actual worth, with any shortfall ranking as unsecured debt. Together, these measures could reshape creditor behaviour. The Bill, however, leaves untouched the deep disparity between financial and operational creditors. In January–March 2025, financial creditors realised 78 per cent of their claims under approved resolution plans, against 10 per cent for operational creditors.

The Bill proposes a creditor-initiated insolvency process and empowers the government to prescribe who may initiate it and against which corporate debtors. Unlike the Cirp, it requires no AA approval to commence, and a professional does not run the business. Apart from bypassing the AA initially, it offers no clear advantage over the Cirp. It rather makes initiation dif-

ficult, risks litigation, dilutes the professional’s role, undermines information symmetry, and could trigger a fresh Cirp midway, a likely scenario, leading to suboptimal outcomes. Further, the provision to rerun the Cirp after its prescribed period is likely to be widely used, risking a prolonged process and reduced effectiveness.

The Bill enables two major reforms that would materially change outcomes. For group insolvency, it lists the matters to be prescribed by rules; for cross-border insolvency, it leaves the entire framework to the rules, which could override the Code. This constitutes excessive delegation, particularly for cross-border insolvency, where current geopolitical sensitivities warrant embedding the basic framework in the statute itself.

In sum, the Bill is well-intentioned and well-drafted, closes several interpretational and procedural gaps, and reaffirms core IBC principles. By sidestepping deeper structural issues and leaning on delegated legislation, it may deliver incremental improvements where the system needs a transformative overhaul.

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The author is former chairperson, Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India

# Politics straddling borders



ADITI PHADNIS

Amid the din over electoral malpractices, two important events earlier this month went almost unnoticed. On August 1, the military junta in Myanmar announced it had lifted the emergency imposed in February 2021 as a precursor to elections to be held in December this year; and on August 5, Parliament extended the President’s rule in Manipur for another six months till February next year. The two events, seemingly unrelated, combined with possible general elections in Bangladesh in February 2026, will have a profound impact on politics in the Northeast.

It is the world’s worst-kept secret that Myanmar is in the grip of a ferocious civil war. The military has little or no control of the border provinces — especially the Shan state, which is on the Myanmar-China border — and the Chin state, which touches Manipur and Mizoram. China is extremely proactive in politics in the Shan state (and indeed in many other parts of Myanmar) as an outstanding study by scholar Amara Thiha in an edited volume about China’s overt and opaque role in South Asia, recently published by the Centre for Social and Economic Progress (CSEP), reveals. The strategy is simple: By ensuring Myanmar remains dependent on Chinese economic and military assistance, Beijing indirectly exerts pressure on India’s Northeastern states, making New Delhi’s regional security strategy even more complex.

And in Mizoram, to a lesser degree in Nagaland, but especially in Manipur, there is an inevitable spillover of politics in Myanmar.



ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA

Speaking at the conclusion of 100 days of the Narendra Modi government’s third term last year, Union Home Minister Amit Shah said publicly that infiltration from Myanmar was the root cause of the ethnic tensions in Manipur. So, the Free Movement Regime (FMR), in place since 1968, had been scrapped, and of the 1,643-km border, 30 km had been fenced to prevent people from crossing the border illegally from Myanmar to India. It is highly unlikely that the entire border will have been fenced by December 2025, when the polls in Myanmar are due. It is estimated to be a 10-year project.

Separatist groups from the Northeast continue to have their camps and training facilities in Myanmar’s northern Sagaing Region and find these fetters inconvenient. In the southern zone contiguous to Manipur, some outfits have been effectively picked up by the junta against resistance groups. But most resistance groups have announced that they will boycott the polls because they see the election as a sham. So a parallel administration in areas abutting the Indian border will likely continue and presents a security threat: Not just to Myanmar but also to India.

Although violent clashes in Manipur have come down dramatically, especially after President’s rule was imposed, tensions between the Hindu Meitei population and the Kuki-Zo tribes persist. What is more, clashes between the Kuki-Zo and Meitei communities in Manipur mirror the broader ethnic divisions in Myanmar. The Kuki-Zo have clan and tribal connections with

families in Myanmar. So opposition to fencing is bitter because it prevents movement. In May this year, a gunfight broke out between rebel groups in Myanmar opposing the fencing and Indian security forces. Ten rebels were killed. An Army statement said seven AK-47 rifles, an RPG launcher, one M4 rifle, and four single-barrel breech-loading rifles, ammunition and others were recovered following the gunfight. This is an arsenal of a pretty serious order.

The more the authority of Nanyidaw is undermined, the more will be the incidence of such standoffs, especially if the Kuki Zo in Manipur feel a deeper kinship with their clan across the border than with India.

Manipur is a state that has seen the maximum spell of President’s Rule. Differences between the Meitei and Kuki Zo are not new. These differences spill out into the open but also find political expression. In June this year, firing broke out in Imphal when volunteers of the Arambai Teng-gol, a Meitei group, were arrested by the National Investigation Agency (NIA). It took no time at all for the population from the area to lay siege to the police station, demanding their release. The Rajya Sabha MP from the region (who is from the Bharatiya Janata Party) immediately rushed to the Raj Bhavan to protest.

With so much happening in that pocket of the Northeast, more political engagement that is seen to be bipartisan is essential. What remains of 2025 and 2026 promises to be an eventful period for the region.

# IAF vs PAF: War of doctrines

Now that both the IAF and PAF have made their formal claims of having shot down the other’s aircraft in the 87-hour, predominantly aerial conflagration in May, we can ask a larger question: Do such numbers really matter?

I can begin this with a trick question: If in a war, one side lost 13 aircraft to combat and the other five, who won? All of the active India-Pakistan wars and conflicts have been short, 22 days in 1965 being the longest. Operation Sindoor was just over three days. Whenever a conclusive outcome like a capitulation and mass surrender is missing, there’s scope for both sides to claim victory.

There is clarity in some situations, however. We Indians believe we won every war or skirmish, but accept that we lost 1962 to China. Similarly, the Pakistanis concede defeat in 1971. So which Air Force lost how many aircraft to combat in 1971, just in the eastern sector?

The numbers, established, even by rival historians, with tail numbers and pilot names are: India 13, Pakistan 5. These are losses in combat, not to accidents, or the 11 Sabres the PAF pilots abandoned on Day 5 of the war before making a daring escape to Burma in commandeered civilian transport.

Which brings us back to that trick question. At 13 to 5, the IAF lost about three times as many aircraft to combat than the PAF in the east. So, who won that war? Is that even a question? And how did the IAF lose the 13 aircraft? Two were lost in air combat (as 5 of PAF’s were) and the rest to small arms fire from the ground.

For the IAF, the war didn’t end once the PAF was defeated. It redoubled ground support to the army, to hasten the victory, minimise the army’s casualties, whatever the risk. Eleven of the 13 aircraft were lost to ground fire, flying very low. This is the essential difference between the two air forces. One is obsessed with defensive air combat and self-preservation. The other has an all-out aggressive approach as part of the larger national effort. The PAF is numbers obsessed, the IAF is overall outcome-oriented.

For the PAF and Pakistani public opinion, however, all that matters is how many aircraft they shot down. The mood is so heady that, while it is the air force Pakistanis think “won” them the war, it is the army chief who got that ridiculous fifth star.

This demonstrates the essential doctrinal difference between the two air forces. The PAF is like a super defensive boxer who hangs back, face covered with gloves, waiting for the rival to attack

and land a punch when an opening arises. The IAF, on the contrary, has the doctrine of all-out strike, willing to take some punches. If the PAF believes in risk avoidance, the IAF is a risk-taker.

India’s Operation Sindoor had three objectives. One, destroy the established and well-known headquarters of Lashkar-e-Taiba at Muridke and Jaish-e-Mohammed at Bahawalpur. Second, deter and defend any counterstrike by Pakistan. And third, if they persist, demonstrably deliver counterforce punishment. All of the three boxes, the IAF checked. As several top military leaders have stated, there were some losses in the first. For the first and the third, it also has high definition pictures and local videos as evidence.

The PAF won’t talk about anything other than its claimed air-to-air “successes” in the first 22 minutes on May 6/7. That’s how the PAF psyche has evolved over time. If you’ve been watching its briefings, “situational awareness” has been its favourite buzzword. It will, therefore, go on and on about its air-to-air claims. In the big picture, it failed to protect any of the predetermined IAF targets, despite 15 days of warning.

It never rose in combat to challenge scores of IAF aircraft that launched missiles to hit every PAF base, air defence location, and critical weapons storage across the entire length and breadth of their country east of the Indus and some across it.

The PAF was no longer up for a fight.

Indian military aviation historians and analysts Pushpinder Singh Chopra, Ravi Rikhye, along with Swiss-Australian expert Peter Steinmann, described this unique mindset in great detail in their 1991 book *Fiza’ya: Psyche of the Pakistan Air Force*. The PAF, they wrote, has the psyche of a lonely David taking on the IAF Goliath. Totally divorced from the big picture and that larger, situational awareness, their buzzword, I would add.

The PAF psyche they talk about is of seeing their role sharply limited to air-to-air warfare, accepting limitations of its size and counting the score of rival aircraft shot down as the only determinant of success. And then conserving itself for that imagined final phase of the war. This means the PAF fights the IAF in one dimension and stays



NATIONAL INTEREST SHEKHAR GUPTA

# Truths out of reach

EYE CULTURE KUMAR ABISHEK

“I am at all events convinced that He (God) does not play dice.”

With that, Albert Einstein voiced his unease at inherent randomness at the core of quantum mechanics. He preferred a universe whose workings were hidden but ultimately knowable.

Randomness resists such comfort. We toss coins, shuffle cards, pick names from hats — yet much of it is an illusion. Beneath what we call random lies hidden clockwork. Still, from cryptography to climate models, the hunt for true randomness remains one of science’s most urgent quests.

At its core, randomness is the absence of pattern. In theory, it’s simple: Flip a coin. In practice, the universe shows its habits. A coin toss follows mechanics; with enough data on weight, air currents, and force, heads or tails could be predicted. Here deterministic, probabilistic, and truly random systems diverge.

Deterministic systems leave nothing to chance: Given initial conditions, the outcome is inevitable. A pendulum’s swing, for example. Apparent unpredictability often stems from ignorance of starting details.

Probabilistic systems embrace uncertainty. They deal in likelihoods, not certainties. A die has a one-in-six chance of showing each face, but probability theory can’t tell which will appear next. Weather forecasts speak in chances because countless variables make precise predictions impractical.

Truly random systems are rarer. Here, unpredictability stems not from

missing data but from the absence of underlying determinism. Quantum mechanics shattered centuries of clockwork thinking: Subatomic particles behave in ways classical physics cannot predict. A photon hitting a beam splitter has a 50 per cent chance of taking either path, and no hidden measurement can reveal the outcome in advance. This is not human limitation; it is nature’s rulebook.

Quantum randomness has real-world uses. Cryptography depends on unpredictability: Encryption keys must be impossible to guess. Using deterministic methods, pseudo-random number generators (PRNGs) are good for games but dangerous for security unless seeded with real unpredictability. Your secrets are revealed if a PRNG can be reverse-engineered. True random number generators take advantage of the inherent unpredictability of quantum events by drawing inspiration from natural occurrences like radioactive decay.

Quantum computing pushes this further. Quantum key distribution uses uncertainty as a security feature: Intercepting a quantum-encrypted message disturbs the system, exposing the eavesdropper. Future computers will not remove randomness but harness it.

A recent milestone shows this potential. In *Nature*, researchers from JPMorgan Chase, Quantinuum, Argonne and Oak Ridge National Laboratories, and the University of Texas at Austin reported the first certified-randomness-expansion protocol on a quantum computer. Using Random Circuit Sampling, they produced more randomness than they took as input, something classical machines cannot

do. The digital world’s appetite for randomness is vast. Randomness powers Monte Carlo simulations (computational algorithms that rely on repeated random sampling to obtain numerical results) in finance and physics, helps AI explore solutions, and keeps online gambling theoretically fair. Without it, poker shuffles could be predictable and stock simulations skewed. Generating and certifying true randomness is hard. Humans are poor randomisers — when faking coin toss results, we avoid long runs and insert patterns unconsciously. Computers fare little better: Naive algorithms can produce telltale repetition.

Einstein resisted a dice-playing God, hoping hidden variables underlay quantum uncertainty. But decades of experiments — notably Bell’s theorem tests — have eroded that view. Bell tests have consistently found that physical systems obey quantum mechanics.

The stakes are rising. The Internet of Things will connect countless devices, each encrypting sensitive data. Quantum computers threaten existing encryption while enabling new quantum-randomness-based schemes. Machine learning models rely on randomised processes that can warp if the randomness is flawed. Beyond technology, randomness seeps into art and policy. Artists feed random generators into creative tools to produce music and literature that surprise even them. Economists run randomised trials to gauge policy impact. Scientists randomise sampling to avoid bias.

For all our engineering skill, true randomness retains an almost mystical quality. In a world of tracking, optimisation, and prediction, it reminds us that not all things can be tamed. Chaos theory shows how deterministic systems can behave unpredictably; Heisenberg’s uncertainty principle ensures some truths are forever out of reach.

# Heat no excuse at Dubai’s Mallathon



YES, BUT... SANDEEP GOYAL

Trust Dubai to come up with such a simple — yet fabulous — idea. A mallathon. What?

Well, the mallathon is a fun and inspiring new initiative launched by His Highness Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed to help people in Dubai stay active and healthy — even during the torrid hot summer months. The idea, as said earlier, is simple: Turn big shopping malls across Dubai into safe, indoor walking and jogging tracks every morning throughout August. It’s free for everyone to join, and part of Dubai’s bigger goal to build a happier, healthier community. Whether you’re young or old, a fitness fan, or just getting started, the Dubai Mallathon makes it easy to get moving and feel good — one step at a time. Currently in full swing, the exercise programme turns some of the city’s most famous shopping centres into early-morning fitness arenas from 7:00 to 10:00 am throughout August.

With summer temperatures hovering in the high 40s, sometimes even nudging the 50s, even the most dedicated fitness enthusiasts usually struggle to stay active outdoors. But inside the airconditioned interiors of participating malls, including Dubai Mall, Mall of the Emirates, Dubai Hills Mall and more, participants can now walk, jog or run comfortably before shops up their shutters to transact business for the day.

The Dubai Mallathon is a collaborative initiative led by the Dubai Sports Council, in partnership with Dubai Economy and Tourism, the Community Development Authority, and officially sponsored by the UAE Ministry of Defence. The mallathon supports key national priorities, including the Year of Community campaign, Dubai Social Agenda, and the Dubai Quality of Life Strategy — all aimed at fostering healthier, more connected communities across the city. And the local community has responded with much enthusiasm — about 500 enthusiasts turn up every morning. Better still, the mallathon is fast becoming a team-spirit-fostering event for corporations, who arrive at dawn in large groups, wearing company-themed tees and carrying branded sippers!

A mallathon may be a new concept, but the term “mall rat” has been part of popular lingo since the 1980s. “Mall rat” is a

slang term, primarily used in the US and South Africa, to describe a young person who frequently spends time in shopping malls, often with friends, as a social activity. It can also imply aimless wandering or loitering. The concept centres on the social aspect of malls as gathering places for young people, particularly adolescents. While not always negative, the term sometimes suggests that the individual spends excessive time in the mall without a specific purpose, creating a perception of aimlessness or lack of productivity. The term became more widely used in the early 1980s, reflecting a shift in social spaces and the growing popularity of shopping malls as leisure destinations for young people.

Inspired by the youngsters, older cohorts followed. In the US and Europe, they started to utilise shopping malls as a convenient and safe space for exercise during the winter months. Malls, after all, provide a temperature-controlled environment, free from the challenges of cold, icy, or snowy conditions outdoors. This allowed seniors to maintain their physical activity levels, improve cardiovascular health, and enhance joint flexibility in a comfortable setting. Malls are easily accessible and offer ample parking, making them a convenient option for seniors. Some malls even started opening early spe-

cifically for senior walkers. Malls, seniors soon discovered, offered opportunities for other low-impact exercises like stair climbing and the many benches around the mall afforded easy resting spaces. The smooth, even surfaces of mall floors also minimised the risk of falls for older folks. Last but not the least, the malls had restrooms, which senior citizens found super-useful.

Back to Dubai. Whatever Dubai does, Dubai does with style and panache. And technology. Robotic humanoids have been introduced as part of the mallathon promotion — and they race, and out-race the runners adding to the fun every morning.

Every new idea is bound to have its share of critics. Of course, criticism within Dubai, understandably, is muted, but there are still voices on social media that are expressing dissent. Pure optics, they say. The nay-sayers are best ignored. The mallathon is a good idea, simple in both thought and execution. Dubai is really hot in summers — and that makes any kind of physical or sporting activity outdoors practically un-doable. The mallathon has made life so much better, and easier, for fitness-conscious locals. It is an idea worth applauding, and emulating.

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The author is chairman of Redifusion



# Revisiting the stereotype of the surgeon in the 21st century

Surgeons have to stay compassionate while maintaining a work ethic that optimises patient safety with empathy and skill

Sanjay Govil

For surgeons of my generation, the “surgical personality” is a clearly identifiable trait. We could fairly accurately recognise which medical student would specialise in a medical versus a surgical discipline. Dr Kathy Hughes in her blog *Behind the Mask* says novelist Richard Gordon’s popular creation, Sir Lancelot Spratt, epitomises the stereotypical surgeon, usually male with a “testosterone-induced swagger, confident, brash, charismatic and commanding to the point of arrogance.”

“He is volatile, even bullying and abusive. Cuts first, asks questions later, because to cut is to cure, and the best cure is cold, hard steel. Sometimes wrong, but never in doubt. Good with his hands, but has no time to explain. Compassion and communication are for sissies.” He is also decisive, well-organised and hard-working.

A 1991 study by Schwartz and others, analysing the personality of medical students found that those who were competitive, aggressive and highly confident became surgeons. Kevin Dutton in his book *The Wisdom of Psychopaths* (2012) found that surgeons are No.5 on the list of professions with the highest number of psychopaths. It is cold comfort to know that CEOs and lawyers score ahead of us.

There are some kinder descriptions of surgeons as well. The familiar adage that surgeons must have “the eyes of an eagle, the heart of a lion and the fingers of a lady” is attributed to Aristotle. Another good one is that “a surgeon should have a temperate and moderate disposition. He should have well-formed hands, long slender fingers, a strong body, not inclined to tremble and with all his members trained to the capable fulfilment of the wishes of his mind” (from *Chirurgia Magna*, written in 1296, by Guido Lanfranchi). Not surprisingly, both these quotes are from surgeons themselves.

Every personality is multifaceted and



Surgeons score about 25% lower than the general population in happiness metrics.

ISTOCKPHOTO

complex. We all know surgeons who have these traits in varying measures, but the stereotype needs to be accurate only some of the time for it to become a stereotype. So, how did this come to be? Probably because physicians looked down on the illiterate barber-surgeons of yore. Before the discovery of anaesthesia, these traits were necessary in order to function. Surgery at that time was often performed for infectious conditions like gangrene. It was performed in front of an audience with strong men holding the patient down, and speed was of the essence. No time to think or communicate. Mortality was very high. Observers often fainted from the ordeal—a luxury not available to the surgeon.

But times have changed, even from when I trained 40 years ago. Although I thought poorly of surgeons as a medical student, I quickly realised during my internship that they were kind, thoughtful, effective, and went out of their way to help their patients, reflecting and agonising over each decision they had made.

Truly, they “attached themselves to their patient with the last stitch they took”. I think that the great majority of modern surgeons are of this ilk. Today, preoperative diagnostics ensure every patient goes to surgery with an established diagnosis and treatment plan, often defined at a multidisciplinary meeting. While the surgeon remains the captain of the ship, multiple specialties are involved in patient care perioperatively. Rudeness and the

throwing of instruments are no longer tolerated. Today, no patient undergoes surgery without consent, and then after a clear and detailed discussion on what the operation entails, treatment is delivered with kindness and respect. The public now has access to information, demands quality and does not accept preventable complications. The qualities that a surgeon needs have changed accordingly.

A 2018 study by Whitaker M., published in the *Annals of the Royal College of Surgeons* used a psychological test called the Five Factor Model, that breaks down personality into five key traits—extroversion (measured by sociability, a preference for company), agreeableness (one’s tendency to be compassionate, caring and trustful), conscientiousness (self-discipline, sense of duty), neuroticism (tendency towards negative emotions like anger, anxiety and depression, emotional stability) and openness (intellectual curiosity, creativity). Surgeons scored significantly higher in all but extroversion compared to the general

Surgery, despite being deeply satisfying, remains a demanding, stressful and unpredictable job. The gap between success and failure can be frighteningly small

population and physicians. Sadly, the study also found that surgeons become more prone to neuroticism as they age, the inverse of the general population. Another similar study found that surgeons who maintain their empathy and are more introverted tend to have better patient outcomes.

Surgery, despite being deeply professionally satisfying, remains a demanding, stressful and unpredictable job. The gap between success and failure can be frighteningly small. Surgeons experience tremendous highs and agonising lows. Some surgeons cope by numbing their emotions, losing empathy and feeling emotionally disconnected. This condition, called compassion fatigue, causes them to lose interest in things they used to enjoy, and experience increased sadness and anger.

The term “second victim syndrome” has been coined for emotional trauma experienced by healthcare professionals after an adverse patient event, made worse by feeling that their own trauma is illegitimate in comparison to that of the patient and patient’s relatives. Most surgeons experience anxiety and grief, which leads to increased rates of burnout. Under the mask of an overconfident and narcissistic surgeon may be grief and pain, all the more difficult to diagnose because of their facade of invulnerability.

A recent study by Shanafet and others showed that 58% of surgeons experience burnout compared to 28% of working individuals in the general population. A major contributor is poor work-life balance, resulting from positive surgical personality traits like passion, drive and the pursuit of excellence morphing into negative traits of poor delegation, micromanagement and perfectionism.

Surgeons score about 25% lower than the general population in happiness metrics. We know that 48% of happiness is genetically established, 40% is determined by specific isolated events like buying a new car or doing a new operation, and 12% is derived from family, community, and work environment. The hedonistic treadmill is a term used to determine how much happiness one derives from achieving something. For example, as a junior surgeon, one might be thrilled repairing a hernia, but soon it becomes routine and mundane. The surgeon now craves a major organ resection or transplant. The treadmill keeps getting steeper, so one needs to run harder and harder to maintain the same level of happiness. Flow happiness, or happiness experienced by a highly com-

petent individual working on a complex challenge that meets their level of skill without overwhelming them, is something all surgeons identify with, especially when they face a complicated case, have to make difficult decisions and experience a satisfying outcome.

My wife says she now identifies three phases of my personality—one, when I am waiting for the next challenging case during which time I am crabby and cantankerous; two, when I get such a case, then I am high and happy; and three, when the complex case experiences complications, I am sad and thoughtful and completely absorbed within myself. And then the cycle repeats.

It does appear that the stereotypical surgical personality has dulled over time. You won’t see Lancelot Spratts in the operating theatre anymore. Modern surgeons need to be empathetic to their patients and kind to themselves. They must create an environment in which team members are not afraid to speak up or offer an opinion, factors that are vital to patient safety.

In today’s world, surgeons need to be confident not arrogant, passionate not micromanagers, leaders not dictators, and have the ability to remain calm even in moments of life-threatening catastrophe, successfully overcoming the challenge at hand. I don’t know how we tread this fine line, but I think family, friends and mentors help to show the way. An article in *The American Journal of Surgery* (2017) advises surgeons to “protect and mature important relationships, debrief with trusted friends and family after stressful events and seek professional help for symptoms of depression and anxiety”. Surgeons in training at some centres in the US are taught relaxation techniques, mindfulness and cognitive reframing. The latter involves identifying a negative emotion and modifying the perspective with which one views the thought behind that emotion to reframe it more positively. Debriefing after particularly stressful events like the death of a child or an on-table death can be useful if done properly.

It’s time for the surgical community to reflect on how to help the next generation of surgeons remain compassionate, nurture and enjoy relationships, and maintain a work environment that promotes professional growth for their team members and optimises patient safety.

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## Looking into the ‘diseased’ heart of the Hindi belt

Ghazala Wahab’s new book captures the past and present realities of the region with nuance and attention to detail

Aditya Mani Jha

What is wrong with the “Hindi heartland”? Like a lot of Bihari professionals living in Delhi, Mumbai and Bengaluru, I have often been asked variants of this question. A colleague once used the term “*bimaru*” (“diseased” in Hindi; BIMARU is the derogatory acronym used to describe Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh) while asking me why Biharis always voted along caste lines.

The episode reminded me, once again, of the extent to which my home state has been caricatured in popular imagination, a fate that it shares with Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan, sometimes referred to as “the Hindi belt” for clarity. I would recommend Ghazala Wahab’s new non-fiction book, *The Hindi Heartland*, to such people.

Across 500-odd well-researched, copiously reported pages, she has captured the past and present realities of these regions with the kind of nuance and attention to detail that serious readers deserve.

The book is divided into five sections, moving chronologically from the medieval past towards the contemporary moment. The first two sections are unfussy demonstrations of Wahab’s methodology. Each begins with a condensed history involving the specific context being discussed (the first section is divided into chapters like “Society”, “Economy”, “Culture”, and so on).

More often than not, Wahab is on point

with her choice of history books. While discussing the Harappan period, she refers extensively to Tony Joseph’s *Early Indians*. In a segment on the influence of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), we get A.G. Noorani (*The Muslims of India*) and Christophe Jaffrelot on the page. G.N. Devy is cited when we are being introduced to the linguistic diversity of the region, and Nandini Sundar when we’re talking about the influence of the Naxalite movement in Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh. Urvashi Butalia is interviewed about her book *The Other Side of Silence* in the segment analysing the impact of Partition on the Hindi belt.

These research-heavy, historiographic summaries are bookended by interview segments—cinematic “cold opens” at the beginning and then more in-depth conversations that fulfil dual purposes. One, the interviews act as a tonal counterweight to the “book-smart” parts of the text. Two, the interviews often give the readers a counter-intuitive, contemporary spin on the research findings, reminding them that sociopolitical forces keep the Hindi belt in a protean state, always on the churn, always evolving.

The chapter on gender relations is a good example of how and why this twin-pronged research-and-interview strategy works. Wahab is diligent and methodical while presenting the condensed histories of phenomena like *sati* across north India, underlining cases like that of Roop Kanwar, the teenaged Rajput widow whose death in 1987 forced the Central government to enact the Sati (Prevention) Act later that year. But *sati* is an evil in the rear-view mirror, so to speak, and Wahab knows this. She, therefore, rolls out the interviews just after this history-led segment, so the reader understands that the current state of gender relations in the Hindi belt did not come about in a vacuum. This series of wide-ranging conversations with both Hindu and Muslim women makes this chapter insightful.



Lalu Prasad Yadav’s tenure as Bihar chief minister saw low levels of communal violence.

The historian Rana Safvi makes an appearance here with a lovely little riff on wedding customs, like hiding the groom’s shoes and the application of turmeric-sandalwood paste. Thanks to popular culture we have become accustomed to seeing these activities as either Hindu or Muslim rituals (depending on our upbringing) but, as Safvi points out, these are quintessential north Indian customs that have nothing to do with any religious rationale. Safvi, who had grown up thinking of these phenomena as Islamic customs, only realised this after she spent a few years living in Saudi Arabia and then in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Similarly, the writer and columnist Natasha Badhwar opens up about her Hindu father and Muslim father-in-law, especially in terms of their very similar attitudes towards women in the formal workforce.

I especially enjoyed how this section ended, with the story of Badhwar bringing the patriarchs around to her point of view, after “years of gentle persuasion by her, overt support by her husband, and covert encouragement by her mother-in-law”. It’s a powerful reminder of how outlier

In the handful of places where Ghazala Wahab’s book falters, it is because the interview segments are inadequately backed up by citations.

individualism can trump seemingly insurmountable societal influence.

Of course, not every sociopolitical force can be worn down by individual interventions, as the chapter on caste reminds us. The groundwork for this section lies in Wahab correctly locating a key difference between the states of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar in this context. Whereas UP saw a successful era of land redistribution after the country gained independence, leading to dignity and upward mobility for Scheduled Caste (SC) communities, the upper castes in Bihar did not allow such a redistribution to happen. As a consequence, caste hierarchy and class remained closely correlated in Bihar, even in the 21st century.

Historically poor communities, for the most part, have remained poor. As Wahab is quick to note, this explains both the electoral success of socialist/communist parties in Bihar, and the extra-judicial appeal of Maoists/Naxalites. Lalu Prasad Yadav’s tenure as chief minister of Bihar—maligned in popular culture and mainstream journalism—was actually a time of unprecedentedly low levels of communal and caste-related violence.

In the handful of places where the book falters, it is because the interview segments are inadequately backed up by citations. For example, at one place, the journalist Sankarshan Thakur says that barbers in Bihar (ordinarily occupying the “untouchable” rung of the caste ladder) were given the “Thakur” surname so that they could safely touch the faces of their upper-caste clients. This is an entertaining story, and a Bihari person would accept this without further explanation or

citation (it’s not uncommon to hear Bihari barbers repeating this story) but it would have been nice to hear an academic address this point directly.

Similarly, Chapter 15, titled *The Dance of Democracy*, features the writer and journalist Rasheed Kidwai narrating a story about how Bhopal came to be the capital of Madhya Pradesh. In Kidwai’s telling, Jabalpur was locked in as the capital-to-be, leading to veteran Congress leader Seth Govind Das buying up a lot of property in the city, in anticipation of future gains. Jawaharlal Nehru, enraged at even the suggestion of insider profiteering, decided to move the capital to Bhopal.

Once again, cool story, but I could not find a history book that actually backs this up with proof.

Overall, though, I really enjoyed reading *The Hindi Heartland*, not least because its ambitions are not limited to historiography and journalism. When it wants to, the book also unlocks a deeply literary mode, without diluting its focus. This is a work of non-fiction where syncretism is demonstrated via an Amir Khusrau poem with both Braj Bhasha and Persian bits, where the poet Ramdhari Singh Dinkar’s world view is expertly connected to the median Bihari take on communal violence, and where the berserk linguistic diversity of the Hindi belt is shown through a novelistic detour (Rahi Masoom Raza’s *Topi Shukla*). I can visualise this book becoming a staple at educational institutions and libraries in the country. The few missteps can be ironed out in future editions.

Aditya Mani Jha is a writer based in Delhi.







## Figure of speech

### The Prime Minister held out assurances even while feeding apprehension

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 12th consecutive Independence Day address from the Red Fort was notable not only for highlighting national security and self-reliance but also for laying stress on a communally coloured demographic threat to the country. While showering praise on the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, Mr. Modi repeated its refrain by saying that the seeds of a new crisis were being sown. The launch of a High-Powered Demography Mission, to address what he described as “a deliberate conspiracy” to alter the demography of the country, is little more than a thinly disguised effort to polarise the country on religious lines by pointing to the different rates of growth in population among different communities and to the “infiltration” of undocumented migrants from the neighbouring countries. However, the speech also dwelt on substantive issues with a considerable focus on self-reliance in all fields including the economy, defence and technology, and youth empowerment. Mr. Modi also presented an account of the developments in India's national security and developmental landscape in the last year, and previewed what to anticipate ahead.

Mr. Modi lauded the armed forces for Operation Sindoor, which, he said, showcased the effectiveness of India's defence capabilities and indigenous weaponry. He also used the occasion to warn India's adversaries, particularly Pakistan, underscoring the policy of zero tolerance toward terrorism and cross-border attacks. Recent successes in the combat against the Maoist insurgency also found a mention. As in a plan announced by Mr. Modi, Mission Sudarshan Chakra, a fully indigenous defence system, will be developed and deployed by 2035. The details were scarce, but he described it as “a powerful weapon system” which “will not only neutralise the enemy's attack but will also hit back at the enemy many times more”. Speaking amid rapid changes in global power equations, Mr. Modi's Independence Day message was also aimed at the United States, which has announced tariffs as high as 50% on many Indian products. While promising to focus on revving up the domestic economy, Mr. Modi showed an awareness of the challenges that the Indian economy is facing. The next generation GST reforms would be rolled out by Deepavali 2025, which would reduce the tax burden on core goods and services and boost business. On the one hand, Mr. Modi is trying to cultivate his ideological ecosystem while on the other, he is trying to tackle the material challenges facing the nation. The success of one, however, can only come at the cost of the other.

## A paradigm shift

### India needs to think anew on its trade relations and strategies

On August 11, the central government explored India's seafood industry, that provides livelihoods to about 28 million people, to “bravely face” the U.S.'s tariffs of 25% that kicked in on August 7 and which could be raised to 50% on August 27, contingent upon the outcome of trade negotiations. On Wednesday, highly placed sources in the Commerce and Finance Ministries told *The Hindu* that the government is exploring “tweaking” the Export Promotion Mission (EPM), that was announced in the 2025 Union Budget, with an outlay of ₹2,250 crore for the current fiscal year. The EPM, a multi-Ministry project to drive access to cheaper export credit, overcome non-trade barriers and insure payments from overseas buyers, focuses on India's micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME). Initially meant to be driven by the Ministries of Commerce, MSME and Finance, discussions are on to include the Textiles and Fisheries Ministries. These two industries, which collectively support about 135 million Indians, form among the largest segment of MSMEs that are likely to face the most impact due to the sanctions. The U.S. typically accounts for roughly a third of India's apparel and seafood exports annually.

The government's imploration to also diversify into other markets is a tacit admission that the Bilateral Trade Agreement negotiations with the U.S. are deadlocked, and that the personal equations between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and U.S. President Donald Trump have not translated into a win for either side. Bilateral relations have arguably hit a level lower than during the Cold War, as the two nations were not as enmeshed as they are now, economically, culturally and militarily. Trade and service routes and supply chains take decades to build and undoing them overnight is not possible. This has been clear from the European Union's reliance on Russian oil and the global dependence on rare earth elements from China. While consultations have been ongoing between the government and MSME sector stakeholders ever since Mr. Trump announced “reciprocal tariffs” in April, there is a chorus now for drastic governmental intervention to safeguard the backbone of the economy – it contributes nearly half (45.79% in FY25) of goods exports and employs over 28 crore people. The fisheries sector has sought a 240-day moratorium on pre- and post-shipment credit repayment, while the textiles, apparel and gem and jewellery sectors want interest subvention. The government has, however, ruled out direct subsidies. But unprecedented challenges require novel responses. The government must include in its arsenal a drastic refashioning of near-term trade ties with neighbours, in particular, China, which it had ignored in the hope that the assiduous cultivation of ties with Washington would pay off.

Across history, making predictions has been a hazardous task. Nevertheless, leaders of all types continue to make predictions, only a few of which turn out to be true. In today's world, where Artificial Intelligence (AI) is leading to more uncertainty, making predictions has become still more hazardous. For most of history, the safest prediction has been that things will continue to be much as they are. Political leaders should heed this.

### A case of contrasts

A concern across the world is that a quarter of century after the September 11, 2001 attack on the Twin Towers in New York, the threat of terrorism, far from receding or abating, still remains alive. Many instances of ‘copycat killings’ continue to take place. There has also been a spurt in Islamic State (IS)-inspired vehicle rammings of late, the most publicised case being the one which took place in New Orleans, U.S. on January 1 this year. Well before the New Orleans attack, the IS had orchestrated and inspired several other attacks of a similar nature across Europe. Counter-terrorism experts believe that Jihadist groups were only beginning to intensify their terror attacks in several countries. Online campaigns were, meanwhile, inciting more ‘lone wolf’ attacks. Alongside this, anti-Israel protests in many parts of the world, seemed to provide more grist to IS and al-Qaeda-sponsored terror campaigns.

Doomsday predictions that tomorrow's terrorists will be even involved in more sanguinary campaigns than earlier ones are emerging. This is thanks to the advent of AI. The warnings are that AI-enabled terrorists, together with terrorists, are gaining access to ‘bio weapons’, which could lead to the killing of thousands. Another given prediction is that misaligned AI could break free of all human control to unleash unthinkable harm on society and the world at large.

The scenario above is, however, very different from what is being seen in India of late, which features a declining curve in militancy, at least of ideologically-oriented terrorism. The accepted wisdom is that the current declining curve of Naxalite or Maoist violence heralds an end to ideological terrorism in the country. A normally taciturn Union Home Minister himself indicated that the end of Naxalism is near, and that mid-2026 would mark the final demise of Naxalite violence. If so, it would spell the end of what was once perceived to be a vibrant, ideologically-driven, militant movement which, in its heyday, had captured the imagination of youth and intellectuals, and also energised what philosopher Frantz Fanon had referred to as the ‘wretched of the earth’, viz., tribals in the deepest forests and the ‘urban poor’ in the cities. Till now, however, what had been witnessed were several ‘false dawns’ (as for instance towards the end of 1970s and at least twice thereafter prior to the



**M.K. Narayanan**

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Doomsday predictions about tomorrow's global terrorists are very different from what is being seen in India of late — a declining curve in militancy, or ideologically-oriented terrorism

end of 20th century). The elimination of Naxalite violence had, however, never been officially pronounced till date.

The revolutionary fervour seemed to evaporate all too soon. Even while revolutionary leaders such as Charu Mazumdar, Kanu Sanyal, Satyanarayan Singh, and Kondapalli Seetharamaiah were being extolled, the movement had slowly started losing much of its sheen, degenerating into mindless violence — initially in the urban areas, but soon thereafter even in the interior jungles of the country. A once integrated revolutionary movement soon split into separate regional entities, though the Communist Party of India (Marxist-Leninist) remained for quite some time, the leading light of the movement. An all-India fervour was markedly absent, and the movement became centered around the hilly and forested regions of central India, especially in States such as Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh.

The promise of a ‘Spring Thunder Over India’ in the early 1960s, had, no doubt, attracted some of the best and the brightest of the generation at the time, who were fired by a revolutionary zeal (following the successful revolutions in China and other parts of the world, including South America). The heroes of the time were revolutionaries such as China's Chairman Mao, Vietnam's Ho Chi Minh, and South America's Che Guevara and the like. Even as Charu Mazumdar of Bengal was being hailed as ‘the new Messiah’, the resounding slogan was ‘China's Chairman is our Chairman’. Yet, the early promise has begun to be dispelled.

### The campaign against Naxalism

Beginning in 2024, and under directions from the Union Home Minister, a sustained offensive was launched against militant Naxalite groups in different States. The data on Naxalites killed in encounters vary, but it is generally accepted that a few thousands were eliminated. Police chiefs in the worst Naxalite-affected areas have provided their own counts of the numbers of Naxalites eliminated or killed. But perhaps, the most authentic figure on the numbers could be found in a booklet released by the once banned CPI (Maoist), which admitted that during the past year alone, 357 Naxalites had been killed in encounters with security forces across the country. Among the killed, according to this report, more than a third belonged to the women's cadre.

The epicentre of violence was the Dandakaranya region which spans parts of Bastar district in Chhattisgarh, Gadchiroli in Maharashtra and several areas of Odisha and Andhra Pradesh. The shrinkage of territory was compounded by internal bickerings and a series of leadership crises since the removal of M. Lakshman Rao alias Ganapathi in 2018.

On the surface, the war on Naxalism might seem to parallel United States President Donald Trump's ‘war on terror’, launched soon after he

# Balancing code and commerce in U.K. trade compact

India's digital trade compact with the United Kingdom breaks new ground. Chapter 12 of the India-U.K. Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) sets out a bargain that trades some oversight tools for access, credibility and scale. The trade-off has sparked a policy debate. Supporters call it a strategic step into the global digital economy. Critics call it a retreat from digital sovereignty. Such agreements rarely produce winner-take-all outcomes. They usually end in negotiated compromises. On balance, the gains look real, but they signal a need for guard rails that keep pace with evolving risks.

### The digital wins

The digital wins are clear. The agreement recognises electronic signatures and contracts and commits both sides to work towards mutual recognition. That trims paperwork for software-as-a-service firms and also lowers barriers for small and medium enterprises. Paperless trade and electronic invoicing make cross-border documentation and payments easier. And policy continuity on zero customs duties for electronic transmissions protects a software export pipeline that the Commerce Ministry estimates at \$30 billion a year.

Cooperation on data innovation can help too. The text encourages pilot projects that use regulatory sandboxes where required. That gives payments and other data-driven firms a way to test and scale tools under supervision, which builds credibility abroad. Beyond the digital chapter, the broader India-U.K. deal is expected to improve day-to-day commerce. Industry expects that as the agreement is implemented, close to 99% of Indian merchandise exports could enter the U.K. duty-free, with textile tariffs falling sharply, including from 12% to zero on key lines, increasing growth prospects in textile export hubs such as Tiruppur (Tamil Nadu) and



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The gains look real but also signal a need for guard rails

Ludhiana (Punjab). Analysts also point to more doors opening in British public procurement for Indian IT suppliers. Employers say social-security waivers for short assignments could cut payroll costs by roughly one-fifth. These moves promise a wider and more predictable trade corridor.

### The digital costs

Nevertheless, the possible digital costs deserve attention. Critics have contended that India has stepped back from source-code checks as a default regulatory tool, as there is a ban on code-inspection under the agreement. Regulators can demand access on a case-by-case basis, tied to an investigation or a court process.

Government procurement is excluded from the scope of digital trade. Hence any access to source code in products procured by government is not restricted. While the agreement aims to enhance business trust, it does not sacrifice essential interests. A general security exception exists. It preserves national supervision of power grids, or payment systems and other critical infrastructure, even if privately owned. The restriction is only of good governance, ensuring that action is not taken in a manner which would constitute a disguised restriction on trade. Should additional reassurance be required, a practical step could be to accredit trusted labs for reviewing sensitive code, under tight safeguards.

On government data, the posture is voluntary. There is no legally binding commitment. India decides what to publish and in what form. When it does open a dataset, it should be machine-readable and easy to reuse. This is not a blank cheque for anyone to demand access. India could also seek clear audit trails for cross-border data intermediaries so that accountability follows the data.

There is no “automatic MFN (most favoured nation)” for cross-border data flows. Instead, the

took over as President for a second term. Yet, there are marked differences. The U.S. President's offensive was launched not so much against ideologically inspired militants or terrorists, but against those elements who did not believe in any ideology other than that of attacking the ‘great Satan’. The offensive launched by the U.S. was, hence, markedly different from that employed in India, where Naxalites lived and identified closely with villagers and their ilk. The use of brute force was not seen till recently as the answer, except in exceptional circumstances. To compare the U.S. President's attacks against Jihadists in Somalia and Yemen — based on the logic that Jihadist groups were plotting against the U.S. — with the tactics employed by the Indian security forces against Naxalites would, hence, be an error. There were, and still exist, many checks and balances in the Indian context on the use of deadly force, even against adversaries who believe in overthrowing the established order through violence.

The campaign against Naxalites and Naxalite violence, has, by and large, been conducted along certain well-defined lines. Preventing revolutionary groups, however high-minded they may proclaim to be, and irrespective of the grievances they have, from disturbing the established order has, however, been the set objective of whichever government has/governments have been in power in Delhi or in the States. Admittedly, the original Naxalites were filled with revolutionary fervour and were intent on putting in place a more democratic order. However, having failed to achieve their objective, they soon began to resort to indiscriminate violence. Having said this, it is also true that even while they resorted to indiscriminate violence, most groups retained a veneer of ideology.

### A new term

The distinction is important and vital. Currently, the misuse of the term ‘urban naxals’ has given a distorted view of the original Naxalite movement. The origin of the ‘Spring Thunder Over India’ initiated in the late 1960s, was based on certain principles, however misdirected these might have been. The Marxist-Leninist Movement also had a well-defined structure and a robust philosophy. While not denigrating today's ‘urban naxals’, the latter seem, at least for the present, to be a loose-knit group of intellectuals who are opposed to the actions of the administration and the government on several policy aspects. Today's ‘urban naxals’ have little in common with the original Naxalites.

Wrong classification could and would have unintended consequences. Inability to identify, comprehend and implement policies to address such matters can again magnify the risk they pose. Better understanding of the factors involved is needed to avoid incurring high latent costs. It is vital to avoid blind spots that arise due to cognitive bias or short-sightedness.

agreement creates a forward review mechanism. If one side later signs a trade pact with tougher data rules, the two sides consult on whether to extend equivalent terms. There is a promise to talk; not an autopilot extension.

A formal review is stipulated within five years. As multiple versions of ChatGPT in under three years show that AI is developing rapidly, future pacts should have a review every three years to align rules with risks.

Aligning with modern trade norms marks a departure from past Indian practice, but this makes sense for a country that is seeking a larger role in the global digital economy. It reflects India's shift from trade scepticism to strategic engagement.

Domestic foundations usually anchor external commitments. The Digital Personal Data Protection Act of 2023 still needs notification of final rules. For future trade texts to build on that framework, the rules need to institutionalise open consultations before deals are closed so that inputs are sought and concerns surface early and can be addressed in time.

### Steps to take

Digital treaties decide what governments can regulate, what companies can expect, and what citizens can protect. Chapter 12 of the India-U.K. agreement is a milestone in terms of a first step. In future, India should integrate market-openness with regulatory oversight. It could accredit trusted labs to review sensitive code under strict safeguards and also mandate audit trails for cross-border data flows. It could also institutionalise broad-based pre-negotiation consultations and schedule regular three-year reviews of digital treaties. Together, these steps show that sovereignty and global engagement need not pull in opposite directions but, instead, can power the modern Indian economy.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Stray dog control

A statement made by an animal rights activist, that rabies is a ‘*halki beemari*’ (mild illness), is outrageous. Rabies is a lethal virus with 100% mortality. Such a statement reflects an indefensibly callous attitude, which ignores the danger that aggressive street dogs pose to working

people, and who cannot sequester themselves in their houses like the elite. However, the Supreme Court of India's directive that all dogs in Delhi must be captured within eight weeks is unfeasible and inhumane. The scientific method to control the canine population is by implementing the Animal

Birth Control rules. The Municipal Corporation should partner with welfare organisations to sterilise and vaccinate dogs. The Public Health Department should ensure that all hospitals and *mohalla* clinics have stocks of rabies and tetanus vaccines. It should also run an awareness campaign that

both injections must be administered within 24 hours of a dog bite.

**Aarti Sethi,**  
New Delhi

**Doorstep ration delivery**  
I was pleasantly surprised when the two women who usually handle the sale of ration items in the government shop in my

area called me to say that they were at my gate. They were from the women's co-operative stores. Everything was executed smoothly but the women looked exhausted and were struggling with poor wi-fi connectivity. If senior citizens are to benefit from this scheme — it is called the ‘*Thaayumanavar*

*Thittam*’ and is meant for senior citizens — they should have their cards and containers ready. With this step, the mobile delivery of rations would be much easier for government staff.

**Mini Krishnan,**  
Chennai

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



# GROUND ZERO



Rescue operations after a landslide and flooding flattened Dharali village in Uttarkashi district of Uttarakhand on August 5. SHASHI SHEKAR KASHYAP

## The day a village in Uttarkashi disappeared

On August 5, a deluge of rain that led to a landslide and flooding flattened the village of Dharali in Uttarakhand. So far, only one body has been retrieved and 69 people remain missing. Rescue teams are battling challenging conditions to do their work. Many, in this village of less than 1,000 people, have lost lives and livelihoods in the tragedy, reports **Ishita Mishra**

**B**efore August 5, when the first rays of the sun hit the houses of Dharali, a village situated 2,700 metres above sea level in the Himalayas, the sounds of conch shells and temple bells would fill the air. Hundreds of pilgrims travelling to the Gangotri temple – one of the Char Dhams, among the most sacred pilgrimage circuits in northern India with four holy destinations – would stop at Dharali to rest, sip tea, and take in the breathtaking views of snow-capped mountains. On the afternoon of August 5, a deluge of rain led to a landslide. The Kheer Gad stream, which flows through the village, swelled up with debris. Within seconds, the floodwaters swallowed the multi-storey hotels and homestays offering river views. A blanket of sludge, piled as high as 30-40 m, now covers the village, which had a population of less than 1,000 and also a high floating population of tourists. The rumbling noises of earth movers and the thud of spades striking the ground reverberate through the air. There is only devastation as far as the eye can see. Since the tragedy hit Dharali, the Uttarakhand government has been able to recover only one body. Sixty-nine people remain missing, including nine Army personnel and 25 Nepali workers. Rescue teams have airlifted around 1,400 people by chopper from the flood-hit site. The government said in a statement that around 150 hotels and homestays, several other establishments, and apple orchards have been destroyed. The State government has formed a three-member team to rehabilitate the residents of Dharali, the latest site to be affected by rain, landslides, and floods in the fragile Himalayan region.



**Swept away**  
Rescue teams say it is next to impossible to retrieve the bodies buried under the mountains of sludge, but they nevertheless persist. A team of the State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) holds thermal imaging cameras, which detect body heat, and walks through what was once a three-storey hotel. After searching for several minutes, they conclude that there are no signs of life. They proceed to the next location. Lekhraj Singh's heart sinks when the team moves on. A labourer from the Bijnore district of neighbouring Uttar Pradesh, Lekhraj had come to Dharali to find his son, Yogesh, who had been working at a construction site in the village since May. "My wife and daughters have stopped eating since they heard of the disaster. Yogesh's phone is silent and he has been untraceable since then. I want my son back," Lekhraj says. Pressing his palms together in prayer and looking at the mountains, he shouts as loud as he can: "Yogesh, are you there?" Officials ask him to sit in a chopper so that he can be dropped at Uttarkashi town, about 70 kilometres away. Tears stream down Lekhraj's cheeks. "*Bhala ho sarkar ka jo hume do din se roz yaha laati hai helicopter me taki hum apne bacche*

**It would have been better if I had died. At least my family would have got some compensation from the government to start life afresh**  
**SANJAY PANWAR**  
Resident of Dharali

*ko khoj sakein* (I am grateful to the government for bringing me for the last two days by chopper here so I can look for my son)," Lekhraj says, as he picks up a mud-covered jute bag carrying two sets of clothes, warmers, and a postcard-sized picture of his son. Kali Devi, a construction worker, had gone to the market when the floodwaters hit Dharali. She says her son had dialled her husband when the disaster hit the village. In a video that went viral on social media, a dazed Kali says, "All he could say is that he won't survive. Since then, his phone is not reachable." She has been running from pillar to post to find her husband, her three sons, daughter-in-law, and two grandchildren. Some people have lost their kin and some have lost their land in the tragedy, but Jai Bhagwan Panwar has lost nearly everything he had. The waters swept away his nephew, Akash Panwar, in front of his eyes. His two-storey hotel is nowhere to be seen. His apple orchards have been washed away. Jai was attending an annual fair, the Hardu Mela, organised for the Hindu god Someshwar, on the outskirts of the village, when he heard the thundering noise of the waters from the Kheer Gad crashing into the village. "The priest was all set to perform the *aarti* when we heard the noise. People started running and shouting for help. I made frantic calls to my nephew and to workers at my hotel, but I couldn't reach anyone. A girl from Rajasthan was the only guest at my hotel at that moment. She is also missing along with the others," he says. Jai performed the last rites of Akash at his house in

Uttarkashi's Barethi village. Sanjay Panwar lost his entire life's savings in the floods. He has no idea how is going to repay a loan that he had borrowed from a bank to open an apple drying plant. "It would have been better if I had died," Sanjay says. "At least my family would have got some compensation from the government to start life afresh."

**Living in trauma**  
Villagers say that the floodwaters hit the village again and again, from 1:45 p.m. to 5 p.m., leaving them traumatised. People with complaints of anxiety and sleeplessness have started making a beeline for the temporary health check-up posts that have been set up by the government. "The locals say whenever they close their eyes, they feel they are drowning. The trauma is not letting them rest," says Dr. Meghna Aswal, who was on duty at a health post till August 12. Dr. Aswal found that several pregnant women were depressed thinking of delivery and child-care in the village. She prepared a list of 12 women whose delivery dates were approaching. The women were airlifted to Uttarkashi. Among them is Radhika Sai, 21, from Nepal, who is nine months pregnant. Radhika worked at an apple orchard in Dharali with her husband Gopal Sai. On the day of the tragedy, she was sitting in her room somewhere up in the hills. Radhika had planned to go to Nepal for her delivery, but she is now in Uttarkashi with no female family member around. She has developed a skin infection due the dampness. With no undergarments left, Radhika has tied a red stole around her body to support her heavy breasts. She walks around in a daze and with a limp. Her husband Gopal, who is left with only a few hundred rupees, is struggling to find a way to earn some money to afford childcare.

**Back to square one**  
The water in the Kheer Gad stream has not just destroyed Dharali, but also the Army camp in Harshil, another Himalayan village next to it. Officials say the continuous and heavy water flow from Kheer Gad has led to the formation of an artificial lake in Harshil. Arpan Yaduvanshi, chief of the Uttarakhand SDRF, says 120 Army personnel are working day and night to rescue people at Dharali along with 100 personnel from the National Disaster Response Force, 75 from the SDRF, and 70 from the



Landslides continued intermittently even a week after the Dharali tragedy on August 5, hampering relief work. SHASHI SHEKAR KASHYAP



The locals say whenever they close their eyes, they feel they are drowning. The trauma is not letting them rest.  
**MEGHNA ASWAL**  
Doctor

Indo Tibetan Border Police (ITBP). The rescue teams, who have divided the spot into three zones, have deployed tools such as ground penetrating radars, victim locating cameras, and thermal imaging cameras to locate survivors. Dog squads, engineering and medical staff, and scientists and geologists are also at the spot. Arpan says the biggest challenge in the rescue operation is the water. "It continues to flow beneath the debris. This poses serious risks for the rescue teams. This is also one of the reasons why we are unable to use heavy digging and excavation machines at the spot – their vibrations are too high to be used in this fragile area."

Weather changes have also added to their woes. "Every day, we work for several hours to clear the sludge. Then it rains and everything goes back to being what it was. We keep coming back to square one," explains Arpan. The rains are also hampering helicopter services, leaving the rescue teams with scanty petrol, ration, and equipment for digging, he adds. The rescue teams are not just struggling in Dharali, but also across the hill in Uttarkashi. Incidents of landslides, and roads getting washed away due to incessant rains, are being reported from multiple spots every day since August 5. A bridge connecting Dharali and Mukhba, another neighbouring village, has been declared unfit for use by the Army. As a landslide washed away a major portion of the road that connects Gangnani village to Dharali, people now have to trek 12-15 km to reach Dharali by road. Another landslide near Dabrani village halted vehicular movement from Uttarkashi for hours. During road construction near Dharali, an excavator toppled into the river with its driver inside. The driver remains missing.

Amid the strenuous rescue efforts, helicopter pilots make multiple sorties every day, to pick up and drop people from Dharali to the Matli and Chilyanisaur helipads. There are 17 choppers involved in rescue efforts in the region at the moment – five from the Indian Air Force, nine from the Uttarakhand Civil Aviation Development Authority, and three from the Army. At the Matli village helipad, every time a chopper lands, SDRF and ITBP personnel, along with doctors, rush towards it to ensure that those disembarking are fine. The helicopters are filled with rations, bedding, and other essentials, which are distributed across the villages surrounding Dharali. The choppers also airlift critical and injured people to higher centres in Rishikesh and Dehradun.

**The built-up area**  
Environmentalists believe that 'extremely heavy rains' up in the hills caused a landslide and flooding from the Kheer Gad. In their letter to the Environment Ministry after the Dharali disaster, Navin Juyal, a geologist, and Hemant Dhyani, convenor of the Ganga Ahwan Movement, wrote that there has been an influx of tourists in the upper Ganga catchment in recent years. To meet this demand, people have been constructing new hotels and home stays in the hills in defiance of all rules, they said. Both Navin and Hemant served as members of the expert body appointed by the Supreme Court after the 2013 Kedarnath disaster as well as the 2019 High-Powered Committee on the Char Dham road widening project. "Dharali and similar settlements along the Gangotri highway are built on the debris flow or alluvial fan deposit. In the upper reaches, say above 2,500 metres, the streams are fed by the cirque glaciers or ice packs and tend to carry large volume of paraglacial and landslide generated sediments," they stated.

The two of them claimed that the disaster which struck the village was inevitable. During the Kedarnath disaster in June 2013 too, Dharali had undergone significant damage due to the sediments mobilised by the Kheer Gad, they said. Even after the 2013 disaster, people were not discouraged from going to locations near the stream. A reinforced cement concrete wall was constructed to prevent flood debris from entering the settlement. This encouraged people to build resorts and hotels next to the stream, which explained the extent of the damage, they wrote. Brijesh Sati, general secretary of the Uttarakhand Teerthpurohit Mahapanchayat, a body of priests of the Char Dham temples, believes that lives were saved because villagers had gathered at the Hardu Mela. "The *aarti* was being performed at the Mela site, so most of the villagers had come there. Had this been a normal day, the loss of lives would have been much higher," he says. The debris that flowed into the village, which was surrounded by apple orchards, pine trees and mountains, also flattened the oldest monument, the Kalp Kedar temple. According to Hindu mythology, the temple, dedicated to Lord Shiva, was built by the Pandavas during their exile. The story goes that Lord Shiva had refused to absolve the Pandavas of their indiscretions. Brijesh believes that the Kalp Kedar is now back to its original form. He says, "It is said that the Shivling (a symbolic representation of Lord Shiva, often depicted as a smooth, cylindrical stone with a rounded top) in this temple has been hidden beneath the ground for generations. It has never been fully seen. Several excavations were been done at this site, but the Shivling has always remained partially hidden. After the floods, Lord Shiva has again gone beneath the ground. Even the meaning of Kedar is sludge." Nandan Bisht, a hotelier in Uttarkashi, says about the river, "When rivers decide to claim their course, everything that comes in their way witnesses a similar fate."



## Under-rated, still

India deserves an even higher rating

**S** &P Global’s decision to upgrade India’s long-term sovereign debt rating from BBB minus to BBB and short-term ratings from A3 to A2 is a positive development that was long overdue. S&P has said that it expects India’s ‘cautious’ fiscal and monetary policy to moderate the government’s elevated debt and interest burden over the next 24 months. It has assigned a stable outlook citing continued policy stability and high infrastructure investments, which will support long-term growth.



S&P expects the impact of US tariffs on the Indian economy to be manageable and estimates 6.8 per cent GDP growth over the next three years. The report lauds India for a ‘remarkable comeback’ from the pandemic, averaging real GDP growth of 8.8 per cent between FY22 and FY24. India’s sovereign rating of BBB after the upgrade is still just two notches above speculative grade. This does not reflect India’s strengths as a growing economy with sound institutions, a stable financial system and an unblemished track record in meeting its international obligations.

India handled the financial fallout from Covid much better than many advanced economies. The Centre, after allowing the fiscal deficit to shoot past 9 per cent in FY21 on stimulus spending, embarked on ruthless fiscal consolidation thereafter, which moderated the deficit to 4.8 per cent by FY25. It set tight deficit targets in the last three Budgets which it bettered in performance. The strong rebound in GDP growth post-Covid has also helped India maintain its general government debt-to-GDP ratio at 83 per cent. This compares well with about 124 per cent for the US, over 110 per cent for France, 96 per cent for the UK and over 230 per cent for Japan. Yet, these advanced economies enjoy high investment grade ratings of between A plus and AA plus, while India barely makes investment grade.

The case of the US is particularly striking. US federal debt, which stood at \$27.9 trillion just before Covid, has climbed to over \$37 trillion now, with the fiscal deficit expanding from 4.5 per cent to 6.2 per cent of GDP. Yet global rating agencies continue to rate it AA plus. But while rating agencies have been tardy in recognising India’s improving fiscal position, financial markets already seem to be doing so. In the last two years, government bond yields in India have softened, reducing borrowing costs for the government, even as yields in the US and other advanced economies have spiked. S&P’s rating upgrade will likely also temper borrowing costs for Indian companies and financial institutions keen to borrow overseas. It could support foreign portfolio investor (FPI) flows into the government securities market. In the near term, the upgrade may, however, create pressure on the government to persist with conservative fiscal policies. This could reduce the headroom for fiscal measures to offset the US tariff threat.

### OTHER VOICES.



#### China-US academic exchanges must return

For some time, the US has been interfering in normal educational and academic exchanges between China and the US under the pretext of “national security”, subjecting Chinese scholars and students to intrusive questioning, and even arrests and prosecutions on fabricated charges. Three recent cases have raised public concern over such practices. In the first, a Chinese scholar travelling to the US for postdoctoral research was taken into a “secondary inspection room” at the airport by US Customs and Border Protection officers upon arrival. His phone and computer messages were seized and examined. He then faced intense questioning about whether he was involved in research projects funded by the Chinese government. Ultimately, the US authorities insisted on cancelling his visa, and sending him back to China. (BEIJING, AUGUST 14)

## THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

#### Now we know who’s paying the tariffs

President Trump knows the public is sceptical about his tariffs, which is why Administration officials are anxious to convince voters someone somewhere else in the world will pay for them instead of American households. Inflation data released Thursday tell a different story. The producer-price index (PPI) in July rose 0.9 per cent in the month and 3.3 per cent over the last year. Consumer-price data released Tuesday (0.2 per cent monthly and 2.7 per cent for the last 12 months) implied households weren’t experiencing tariff-induced price increases, except in some services such as medical care. The PPI numbers tell us this is partly because companies are paying higher prices but haven’t passed them on to customers — yet. (NEW YORK, AUGUST 14)



RAVI VARANASI

**I**ndian regulators have long viewed “crypto” as a dirty word. The Reserve Bank of India has warned repeatedly that cryptocurrencies threaten macroeconomic stability and monetary sovereignty. In 2022, the government slapped a 30 per cent tax on crypto gains and a 1 per cent TDS on every trade — measures so punitive they drove 90 per cent of Indian crypto volumes offshore within a year.

Yet, Indian users remain interested. Major domestic exchanges still count tens of millions of users. This paradox — official hostility vs. public curiosity — reveals a policy vacuum. India hasn’t banned crypto, nor did we regulate it meaningfully. Instead, we resorted to ambiguity and tax deterrence, driven by fears that private digital currencies could destabilise the rupee, invite illicit flows and undermine financial order.

But crypto today is not just about volatile coins or meme coins. What’s unfolding globally is a quiet revolution in financial infrastructure — and India risks missing it.

#### THE GLOBAL SHIFT

Until recently, Wall Street largely dismissed crypto as a playground for retail speculation — dominated by meme coins, NFTs and pump-and-dump cycles that reinforced its reputation as financial frivolity. But that perception is beginning to shift.

Two developments — stablecoins and tokenisation — are gaining legitimacy in mainstream finance. In July this year, the US passed the GENIUS Act, offering regulatory clarity to dollar-backed stablecoins. Wall Street incumbents are now racing to launch tokenised versions of money market funds, stocks and even deposits.

Stablecoins — digital tokens fully backed by fiat currency — now account for over \$250 billion in circulation. They offer near-instant settlement, sidestepping legacy systems like SWIFT or Visa. For cross-border remittances, this is transformative: faster, cheaper and available 24/7. It’s no surprise that major retailers, including Amazon, are exploring stablecoins as a potential alternative to traditional card networks.

On a parallel track, tokenised assets — blockchain-based representations of stocks, bonds or funds — promise around-the-clock trading, even for typically illiquid or private assets. While I remain sceptical of their value for mainstream equities (given that traditional exchanges themselves are moving towards 24/7 models, with the usual liquidity concerns), some institutional adoption is noteworthy. BlackRock’s tokenised money-market fund has surpassed \$2 billion and Robinhood now offers tokenised US stocks to European investors, expanding both access and trading hours.



REUTERS

# Rethink India’s ‘crypto’ strategy

**FUTURE OF MONEY.** Well-designed rupee-backed stablecoins could strengthen the rupee’s role in digital payments

What ETFs did for diversification, tokens could do for access. This isn’t hype. It’s plumbing.

#### INDIA’S MISSED OPPORTUNITY?

India, one of the world’s top remittance recipients, could save billions by enabling crypto rails for cross-border flows. A well-designed rupee stablecoin could strengthen the rupee’s role in digital payments. Tokenised assets could expand retail access to infrastructure projects, municipal bonds or start-up equity. But current policies are proving self-defeating. The imposition of a 1 per cent TDS on every crypto transaction has severely damaged liquidity on domestic platforms, forcing serious traders and investors to shift to foreign exchanges. This has not only drained trading volume from India’s regulated ecosystem but also weakened enforcement visibility and tax compliance.

More broadly, India’s tax treatment of crypto reflects a punitive mindset. By grouping it with gambling and lottery winnings, with no provision for loss offsets, the regime effectively treats all crypto activity as speculative vice rather than legitimate financial innovation.

Meanwhile, India has yet to permit or regulate any stablecoin for domestic use, even as global markets push ahead. Jurisdictions like the US, Singapore and the EU are crafting frameworks to safely integrate stablecoins into payments and

capital markets. In contrast, India remains in a holding pattern — neither banning nor enabling stablecoins.

The RBI sees stablecoins as a threat to monetary sovereignty and worries about “dollarisation” of the economy if USD-backed coins become widespread. These concerns are valid. But freezing innovation is not the solution.

India must move from blanket suspicion to calibrated regulation.

#### NAVIGATING THE RISKS

Crypto’s disruptive potential cuts both ways. Stablecoins could displace bank deposits, raising banks’ cost of funds. Tokenised assets might blur lines between private and public markets, weakening disclosure norms. Bad actors could exploit gaps to issue securities disguised as tokens. Exchanges could fail without custody safeguards, as seen globally.

Money laundering and illicit finance are genuine threats. Crypto is pseudonymous, global and fast — traits that aid evasion. The RBI and SEBI are rightly concerned about investor protection, systemic spillovers and loss of policy control.

But these are not arguments for prohibition. They’re arguments for building capacity, coordination and oversight.

#### THE WAY FORWARD

India doesn’t need to love crypto. But we must learn to live with — and shape — it. Here’s a possible pathway:

**Classify and regulate differently:** All tokens are not the same. rupee-backed stablecoins can be overseen by RBI. Tokenised securities can fall under SEBI. A differentiated, use-case based approach is more realistic than a one-size-fits-all ban.

**Sandbox innovation:** Regulators should pilot controlled experiments, for

example, sandboxing stablecoin-based remittances or tokenised municipal bonds. Such models will yield data which could help us get over dogma.

**Licensed exchanges and custodians:** Set clear standards for crypto businesses to operate safely — capital buffers, audits, disclosures, investor protection norms. This will reduce fraud and build trust.

**Tax rationalisation:** Scrap the 1 per cent TDS. Align crypto taxation with equities or commodities. Incentivise compliant behaviour instead of forcing users offshore.

**Leverage global norms:** Adopt global best practices like the FATF Travel Rule and FSB’s stablecoin standards. India doesn’t need to reinvent the wheel — it just needs to steer in sync.

**Build a domestic alternative:** Instead of worrying about dollar-pegged coins, India can launch a credible rupee stablecoin via regulated entities — or accelerate its digital rupee’s interoperability with global CBDCs for cross-border use.

#### CRYPTO AS PUBLIC INFRA

The future of finance is being tokenised. That doesn’t mean India must follow blindly. But nor can we stand still. Just as we built UPI to democratise digital payments, we can build a regulatory framework that brings crypto under the rule of law — without stifling its potential.

Crypto can be dangerous in the wild — but powerful in the right cage. India has the talent, infrastructure and scale to shape the next financial architecture. But only if we move beyond fear. The question isn’t whether crypto should exist. It’s whether India wants a seat at the table when the future of money is being written.

The writer is Founding Partner, SPRV Consultants

# Coming to grips with handling stray dogs

Sterilising and vaccinating all the streeties and culling the very sick and rabid seems to be the best way forward

#### Lokeshwarri SK

**T**he Supreme Court’s order to make the streets of Delhi and the NCR region free of street dogs may have been well-intended, to address the hazard created by homeless dogs on the street, but its implementation could face legal as well as infrastructural challenges. While the three-judge Bench, set up to hear the plea against the order, has reserved its judgment, it is hoped that a more practical solution will be provided by it.

The Supreme Court’s *suo motu* order delivered on August 11, which directs stray dogs to be shifted into shelters on city outskirts, is not without basis. The number of street dogs has been exploding due to inaction by the local bodies and poor oversight and funding from the State and Central government. India has 5.2 crore homeless dogs as of 2024, accounting for 37 per cent of the global homeless dog population.

With the local bodies being very tardy in sterilisation and vaccination for

rabies, cases of dog bites and rabies death have grown at an alarming rate. There were 37 lakh dog bite cases in 2024 and 4 lakh cases in January 2025 according to the Centre. More than 20,000 die annually in India due to rabies. With the free movement of the vulnerable section of the population such as the children and elderly getting increasingly curtailed, some action was overdue.

But the order delivered by Justices JB Pardiwala and R Mahadevan has adopted a sledgehammer approach to tackle the issue, rankling dog-lovers and activists. It had ordered the Delhi government and the local bodies to capture all street dogs immediately, detain them in pounds created across the national capital territory and never release them into public spaces again. Anyone resisting this action is to face contempt action from the Supreme Court.

#### CONTRADICTS THE PROVISIONS

The order contradicts the provisions in the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act, 1960 and Animal Birth Control



**UNFAZED.** Let sleeping dogs lie?

Rules, 2023 which lay down that stray animals should be sterilised and vaccinated to prevent rabies and released in their original location. Relocation of sterilised and vaccinated stray animals is unlawful under the Act. It lays down that very ill and mortally wounded dogs can be killed only after receiving clearance from local ABC monitoring committee. Besides the legal problem, there also exists a severe constraint of dog pounds and shelters and trained staff in Delhi NCR area.

According to reports, there are 8-10 lakh homeless dogs in the area, but the Municipal Corporation of Delhi runs only 20 shelters, that too for housing the street dogs temporarily after vaccination. Even if these facilities are used and new ones created, it cannot house even 10 per cent of the street dogs in humane conditions.

The situation is the same in other parts of the country. The task is gargantuan, if the entire street dog population in India has to be housed in pounds. It could lead to inhumane culling of these animals, disease and further health hazard.

Following the ABC Act, sterilising and vaccinating all the street dogs on a war footing is the right way ahead. They can be released back to the locality where they belong and the rabid and very sick dogs can be identified and culled. This can bring down street dog population over time. Meanwhile, better coordination among resident communities to find a place for the homeless dogs and for taking care of their needs will be a better solution.

✉ **LETTERS TO EDITOR** Send your letters by email to [bleditor@thehindu.co.in](mailto:bleditor@thehindu.co.in) or by post to ‘Letters to the Editor’, The Hindu Business Line, Kasturi Buildings, 859-860, Anna Salai, Chennai 600002.

#### India-US relations

That US and China extended the tariff truce deadline for each other till November 10 shows the ice between them has considerably melted. Of course, China attracts 30 per cent levy during the interregnum. It is unfortunate that 25 per cent tariffs levied by the US on India have already kicked in, even as the country awaits with suspense the outcome of the Alaska Summit between President Trump and President Vladimir Putin, hoping to avoid an additional 25 per cent tariff. The diametrically opposite turn of fortunes clearly proves that relationships at the international level have ceased to be ideological, and is now essentially transactional.

India needs to work on a more pragmatic appraisal based on its recent experiences  
**Angara Venkata Girija Kumar**  
Chennai

#### Focus on human capital

This refers to the editorial ‘Musings @78’ (August 15). Economic development of a nation hinges on the minds of its people. If India has to achieve the exalted status of developed nation, it is imperative that it invests considerably on education and healthcare, the two components of human capital formation, and ensures that every adult is employed productively and leads a healthy life. With the life expectancy of both males and

females increasing in this part of the world, the nation should intensely focus on enhancing the skills of the youth to accelerate the per capita real income on a sustained basis. It is not a tall order.

**S Ramakrishnasayee**  
Chennai

#### Independent directors

With reference to ‘IDs exodus marks a crisis in corporate governance’ (August 15), independent director positions, which used to be a largely ceremonial post-retirement occupation, have been made more accountable after SEBI amended the regulations, which became effective from 2022. They can no longer be passive participants in board

meetings. They need to have specialised skills and scrutinise the operations and governance of the company with due rigour and diligence. Without any executive authority, these responsibilities have put the IDs in a precarious situation, prompting many to quit rather than face legal risks that may arise from possible or suspected corporate mis-governance. In the current technological era, IDs need new-age knowledge to be able to function effectively. While equipping the IDs with latest knowledge through training would be helpful, the selection and appointment of IDs possessing the latest technological knowledge would be a better option. IDs play the crucial role of

conscience keepers of companies by giving their insights and asking probing questions to the board.  
**Kosaraju Chandramouli**  
Hyderabad

#### For a more inclusive future

PM Modi’s Independence Day speech resonated deeply, emphasising ‘Reform, Perform, Transform’. His acknowledgement of India’s diversity as our greatest strength inspires unity and progress. Let us embrace these ideals, fostering collaboration across cultures and communities. Together, we can build a brighter, more inclusive future for all Indians.  
**TS Karthik**  
Chennai