

## Overvalued market

The result of retail rush in 2024 and 2025 is that stocks have become very expensive

**S**ANJEEV PRASAD HAS for some time now highlighted the very rich valuations of Indian stocks, pointing out the big disconnect between potential earnings growth and the price multiples that companies are trading at. He has a point. A whole bunch of stocks is trading at absurdly high multiples which price in earnings growth that would be hard to achieve on a sustained basis. In an interview to *The Ken*, the managing director and co-head of Kotak Institutional Equities has sought to temper the hype surrounding mutual funds. He observes that around 40% of retail flows, post-2021, have possibly yielded nil or poor returns primarily because a good chunk of this money was invested after the markets had rallied a fair bit. Approximately ₹4.2 lakh crore is estimated to have come in between 2021 and 2023 and another ₹4 lakh crore in 2024 when the markets had already run up. The early birds would have made good money but not the latecomers.

Prasad argues that the weighted average return of an average retail investor would probably be lower than market returns over the past 4+ years. That is not really surprising. With stocks over-valued, the starting point for many retail investors would have been somewhat unfavourable. So, while the markets should move up over the long term, and investors will no doubt make money, the returns would be more moderate. Ideally, investors should start investing in a fairly valued market, says Prasad, and keep going over a long period of time. In that case, with the economy growing, earnings also growing in line with the nominal GDP growth, and the market cap of the country rising too, they will be fine.

That's a fair point. But retail investors tend to be swayed by sentiment and are less focused on ground realities. Typically, they should invest more when the markets are down but it's the reverse that happens possibly because of the fear of missing out. Also, they are probably hoping that systematic investment plans (SIPs), which are designed to enable what is called dollar cost averaging, should play out over the longer term. That could well happen; if the markets see a correction, their acquisition costs would fall.

Right now, though, the deluge of cash into mutual funds is supporting an overvalued market. The result of the retail rush in 2024 and 2025 is that stocks have become very expensive. This is despite the not-so-favourable outlook for the economy and corporate earnings, the heightened competitive intensity in many sectors, and disruptions from geopolitics. And it is the small investors that are keeping the market afloat. Domestic institutions have invested a whopping \$82 billion in mutual funds since October 1, 2024, after the markets indices hit a peak on September 26. In contrast, foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) have sold a little over \$27 billion. Moreover, promoters of listed companies as also investors in start-ups—venture capitalists (VCs) and private equity (PE) firms—have also been sellers in the last couple of years, with the latter cashing in on the appetite for initial public offerings. In a sense, small investors provided an exit to FPIs, promoters, and PE/VCs. Fund houses, of course, are not complaining. Prasad points out the Association of Mutual Funds in India no longer provides data on net SIP flows. The information would give us a more realistic picture of the flows.

## Up to Gucci and Chanel to make luxury matter again

**THE MODELS ARE** primed. The paparazzi are poised. Welcome to fashion month. It's a fixture of the calendar, but there is more riding on this season's extravaganza than ever before. Not only will a record number of new designers be sending their creations down the catwalk, but the world's biggest luxury companies must re-engage with disaffected shoppers they have either priced out or simply bored with uninspiring collections. Big bling needs its new hires to unleash a wave of energy and creativity, to catapult fashion back to cultural relevance.

The reason why the event—which began in New York on Thursday and lands in London this week before moving on to Milan and finally Paris—is so crucial lies in the luxury boom and bust of the past five years.

As consumers—particularly in the US—had little else to spend their money on from late 2020 to early 2023, they turned to Rolex watches and Gucci handbags. Amid this demand, brands pushed up prices, without having to innovate too much.

With the industry facing the first slowdown since the financial crisis (excluding the pandemic dip) the luxury giants are battling on multiple fronts. To win back priced-out customers, companies are introducing products in less-expensive categories, such as beauty, although I'm not sure Louis Vuitton's \$160 lipstick is cheap enough.

They have also turned to a cadre of new names to rejuvenate their offerings. Over the past 18 months, more than a dozen top designers have switched roles. Many will show either debut or fledgling collections in the coming weeks. Key moments will be Matthieu Blazy's first outing for Chanel; Jonathan Anderson's womenswear show for LVHM's Dior and Demna Gvasalia's presentation for Kering's Gucci.

Of course, companies are hoping for a slew of must-have products to turbocharge sales. Even the wealthy need a reason to shift spending from experiences to goods. That could be little more than a novel bag shape or silhouette.

But many shoppers—particularly the young and simply comfortable—are completely disengaged from luxury. To flourish, the industry needs journalists and influencers to extol the virtues of collections, and consumers to buy them. That circle has been broken by a combination of greedflation and boredom. While there are still some exceptions, dining, travel, fitness, and wellness have become the new signifiers of status.

Although Project Runway has gotten a reboot, entertainment is now more focused on food than fashion. "Fashion needs heroes," Mario Ortelli, CEO of luxury M&A advisory firm Ortelli & Co., told me. So, who could capture the imagination in the way Jean Paul Gaultier, Miuccia Prada, John Galliano, the late Gianni Versace and Giorgio Armani have done over the decades?

Dior's Anderson is an obvious contender. At sister house Loewe, he combined craftsmanship with a sense of fun. He also had a commercial eye, transforming the raffia bag, for example, into a new, lucrative category for the industry. He is already showing such flair at Dior, with a generally well-received menswear show in June.

I'm also hopeful for Blazy at Chanel. Not only did he cement Bottega Veneta as Kering's most successful brand the past few years, but Chanel has handled the transition, effectively from Karl Lagerfeld who died six years ago, with aplomb.

It would have been unseemly to appoint another big name too soon. Lagerfeld's right-hand woman Virginie Viard took the reins from 2019 until last year. Not only was the delay respectful, but it enabled enough time to pass between the Lagerfeld era and Blazy. More houses should be left fallow in this way. But Chanel is privately owned by the Wertheimer family. Investors in publicly listed firms have shorter time horizons.

Gucci, by accident rather than design, has also taken a back seat for the past three years. I'm sceptical of Demna's appointment at Gucci. But if he can create a compelling vision, the unintended fallow period could help it feel fresh again.

As shows are streamed and images shared on social media, it's worth remembering that sometimes a new aesthetic can be a slow burn. Take Hedi Slimane's first collections for Celine, where he was installed in 2018. Many shoppers yearned for his predecessor, Phoebe Philo. But under the careful management of LVHM, Slimane's combo of Paris cool girl style, and "Triomphe" double-C logoed accessories more than doubled the brand's annual revenue to over €2 billion. But with sales sluggish, and share prices languishing, the industry and its investors don't have what may be the biggest luxury of all: time. Fashion month must deliver a captivating new look—fast.

## NEW IPO NORMS

BIG-SIZED FIRMS CAN GO PUBLIC WITH LIMITED INITIAL OFFER, BUT HOPEFULLY THEY WILL MAKE BIG OFFERS

# An enabler for big unlisted firms

**T**HE MINIMUM PUBLIC offer (MPO) and the minimum public shareholding (MPS) norms are seeing yet another round of interesting changes. One of the important regulatory-policy steps taken by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) board on September 12 is to go for a fine, granular calibration of these norms. Both the minimum offer in the initial public offering (IPO) and the time frame for eventually reaching the 25% level have been relaxed considerably for companies with high market capitalisation, post-IPO. However, the new norms are only Sebi's recommendations to the ministry of finance which has to notify them as amendments to the Securities Contract (Regulation) Rules, 1957 (SCRR), in order to be effective.

There is no change in existing norms for small- and medium-cap companies up to a post-issue market capitalisation of ₹50,000 crore. Companies above this threshold are split into three categories: ₹50,000-1 lakh crore; ₹1-5 lakh crore; and more than ₹5 lakh crore market capitalisation post-IPO.

For category 1, the MPO has to be higher than ₹1,000 crore or 8% of the post-issue market capitalisation; for category 2, ₹6,250 crore (2.75% of post-issue market capitalisation); for category 3, ₹15,000 crore and at least 1% of the post-issue market capitalisation, subject to a minimum dilution of 2.5% equity. The time frame for reaching MPS of 25% in all these categories also has been revised upwards, broadly from three/five years to five/10 years.

Clearly, Sebi's proposals are enablers for the big unlisted companies, reportedly waiting in the wings to enter the public market. It is up to the issuers to decide the ceiling of their IPOs. Sebi has also, rightly, taken the rule-based route to effecting these changes, rather than using its discretionary power of provid-



CKG NAIR

Former member, Securities Appellate Tribunal, and former director, National Institute of Securities Markets

ing case-by-case exemption. And, hopefully, when notified by the finance ministry, ownership neutrality—a missing but much needed policy-regulatory norm—too will be restored.

The initial public issue/holding norms in India have had a “secular decline” over the years; a rapid fall initially, followed by gradual but volatile decline. The norm was up to 60% of the issued capital for most companies before September 20, 1993, when it was reduced to 25%. During the information technology boom and with the emergence of big IT companies, relaxations (MPO of 10%) for such companies were provided in 1999. Similar relaxations were extended to media, entertainment, and telecom companies in April 2000.

However, with the rapidly growing importance of the securities market as a major vehicle for mobilising capital, widening and deepening the market with a sizeable public float for all listed/intending companies was considered essential. The finance ministry simplified and notified the public issue/holding norms in June 2010. Accordingly, all companies had to reach 25% public (non-promoter) holding; those with less than ₹4,000 crore market capitalisation on IPO and for those above that level within three years from the IPO with a minimum 10% issue. For existing companies falling short of the

25% level, a three-year time frame was also given to reach the minimum 25%.

While the simplified, standardised norms also aimed to achieve ownership neutrality, concerns about more than a dozen public sector undertakings (PSUs) having to go for quick follow-on public offers (FPOs) restored a 10% norm for PSUs of all sizes. After various amendments to SCRR, these norms got further diluted, both for private and private sector firms. PSUs, however, got the maximum flexibility, which allowed LIC to list by diluting only 3.5% of government shareholding in May 2022.

There have been several large public issues in other countries; but only one, ARAMCO, with very small 1.73% of market capitalisation—still by far the largest ever IPO in the world. Other large IPOs include Alibaba (\$21.7 billion, 2014, 13%); Softbank Corporation, (\$21.3 billion, 2018, 33%); NTT Mobile (\$18.1 billion, 1987, 13%); and Facebook, (\$16.01 billion, 2012, 15%). All these big IPOs were at least 13% of the post-issue market capitalisation. ARAMCO is a special case with market capitalisation averaging about 120% of the GDP of Saudi Arabia, with no parallel.

There are few Indian companies of such magnitudes. However, there are a few with reportedly large market cap (Jio Communications, NSE, Tata Capital). Is the dilution in norms in tune with the

What about the objective of deepening the market, in tune with the growth and dynamism of the economy?



VIRAL MEHTA

Lead, private equity and financial services regulatory, Nishith Desai Associates

**THE PROMOTION AND** Regulation of Online Gaming Act, 2025 (PROGA), appears to be founded on the belief that money is the root of all evil. It imposes a nationwide ban on online games played with money. PROGA's proponents argue that online money games are addictive, entice the youth to squander their earnings leading to financial distress, and are at times connected to illicit financial activities, posing a threat to public order. Apprehensive of these harmful effects, the Indian government enacted PROGA. While its objectives are laudable, PROGA raises three noteworthy questions of constitutional importance.

First, does an individual have a fundamental right under the Indian Constitution to play online games of skill with money? Children often play games purely for fun. However, as they grow older, games without tangible rewards lose their appeal. Adults seek more than just bragging rights; they crave the thrill of placing a monetary bet and winning a contest. This leads them to play games with money. Until now, these were permitted; but moving forward, they will no longer be allowed online. PROGA enforces an absolute prohibition on online money games, even those based on pure skill or played with trivial amounts. PROGA's opponents contend that this sweeping ban infringes on an adult's fundamental right of free speech and expression guaranteed by the Constitution. They point out that other financially risky activities, such

as stocks and options trading, are permitted. If adults use their own money to engage in stock trading as a hobby, it is a protected activity under free speech rights. This seems odd since both activities involve skill and risk and both can lead to significant financial losses. Last year, securities regulator, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi), was concerned that millions of young Indians were playing in the derivatives market, aiming to make quick money amid the booming stock market. Its study showed that nine out of 10 Indians lost money in the futures and options market. Despite this, Sebi imposed trading restrictions rather than an absolute ban. If stocks and options trading is a protected fundamental right, then it's hard to imagine why online money gaming is not.

Second, should online money games be regulated or outright banned? Consider stock trading as an example; it operates within a framework regulated by Sebi. Sebi's main goal is to safeguard the investing public, and it has established rules for those wishing to trade in the stock markets. These include obtaining a permanent account number, opening a bank account, and a dematerialised securities account to be able to trade in securities. Sebi has a separate set of rules prohibiting insider trad-

ing and unfair dealing. It also mandates risk disclosures. A similar regulatory regime could be devised for online gaming. Such a framework could include minimum age requirements, compulsory registration, reporting obligations, advertisement bans, and explicit risk warnings. It can also set limits on deposits and losses, and require players to opt out once thresholds are reached. By enforcing

The Constitution allows Parliament to legislate on matters within the State List if it serves the national interest

a stringent set of regulations with appropriate safeguards, online money games could be made safer, serving as a better solution than an outright ban.

Third, does the Indian Constitution grant the Centre or the states the authority to regulate online gaming? In 2018, the US Supreme Court decided a similar question of whether

sports betting should be regulated by the federal government or the individual states. The federal law challenged in that case prohibited state-sanctioned sports betting. The court invalidated the law, ruling that its restriction on state authorisation of sports betting violated the anti-commandeering doctrine inherent in the Tenth Amendment of the US Constitution. This doctrine prevents the US Congress from compelling states to enforce federal policies on matters not delegated to it. PROGA raises similar anti-commandeering concerns. Online gaming is con-

current stature of the Indian economy, its much acclaimed growth potential, and the rapid rise of investors? Are the public offer/holding norms swimming against the current? At \$4.2 trillion, India is the fourth-largest economy aiming to capture the third spot. Don't these statistics convey that well-governed companies should have no difficulty in raising public capital of substantial amounts? A strong pointer to this capability is the strong data on over-subscription of IPOs (very often multiple times the offer size even during a bee-line of IPOs). For instance, on the day the Sebi board approved the new norms Urban Company's IPO was reportedly oversubscribed 104 times. That is ₹1.97 lakh crore blocked for an IPO of just ₹1,900 crore.

What about the objective of deepening the market, in tune with the growth and dynamism of the economy, financial and securities markets? And possibilities of market manipulation? While Jane Street-type episodes show the capability of big-ticket trading using algorithms to manipulate even highly liquid securities with large public floats, market manipulation by some promoters/promoter groups are also not unheard of.

To be sure, Sebi is fully conscious of these issues and hopes that big company IPOs will provide depth and solidity to the market. Moreover, small size issues will be a big problem for issuers as the burden of FPOs, even with the five/10-year compliance window, will be hanging heavily over their heads.

While the latest Sebi proposals on public issue/holding norms—once notified as rules by the finance ministry—will allow big companies to go public with small jackets, hopefully they will make their public entry with big offers rather than the minimum permitted offer sizes. In tune with their growth plans, and the stature and aspirations of the economy and the country.

In its pursuit of the public good, the legislation overreaches by wielding an axe when a scalpel could have sufficed

sidered a state subject falling within the category of betting and gambling under the State List of the Constitution. Critics contend that the central legislation encroaches upon state authority because it seeks to regulate an area exclusively reserved for the states. The issue is compounded by PROGA's definition of “person”, which expressly includes the states themselves. As a result, by banning any person from engaging in online money games, PROGA effectively imposes a direct prohibition on states that have laws permitting such activities, creating a clear conflict with existing state legislation.

PROGA is an ambitious attempt by the Indian parliament to tackle the societal ills associated with online gaming. It is designed to create a uniform national law for the online gaming industry. The Constitution allows Parliament to legislate on matters within the State List if it serves the national interest. PROGA can be viewed as a bold move toward that objective. However, in its pursuit of the public good, the legislation overreaches by wielding an axe when a scalpel could have sufficed. Its approach—promoting and regulating online gaming while imposing a blanket ban on online money games, even those that are entirely skill-based or involve trivial stakes—misses the point. It is akin to promoting root beer while banning alcoholic beer altogether. The difference between the two is clear and palpable.

Views are personal

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Not a tariff king

“Shed the ‘tariff king’ crown” (*FE*, September 16) was an interesting read, particularly the data on tariff of some of the G20 countries. One agrees with the authors’ assertion that India must move from being a protector of inefficiency to a competitiveness champion. They make a valid point that we must reform and rationalise independent of external pressures. But the suggested reforms, such as

precision farming, direct benefits schemes, and strengthening value chains, are rhetorical. Without first testing their efficacy, one cannot make farmers vulnerable by removing protections, given that agriculture employs 46.1% of India's workforce. It is also wrong to claim that India is the tariff king for agri-products, with a 64.3% trade-weighted tariff (TWT). The data tell a different story, with South Korea leading both in simple average tariff and TWT, at 57% and

89.6% respectively.

—Anwar Shaik, New Delhi

### Safeguard investors

Apropos of “Bolstering markets” (*FE*, September 15), the regulator's move to expand access to capital markets is welcome. But, wouldn't retail investors need adequate protection in a relaxed framework? With complex disclosures and aggressive valuations, there is a strong case for independent ratings of initial public offerings (IPOs).

Much like credit ratings in debt markets, IPO assessments by credible agencies could broadly guide small investors. They could highlight risks, business viability, and governance standards in simple terms. Granted that equity is inherently subjective and ratings may create false comfort, yet the absence of a benchmark could impact investor vulnerability. —R Narayanan, Navi Mumbai

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# Grand Old Man who told us of an empire’s loot

SANTHOSH MATHEW

History often rewards those who speak for the voiceless, even when their words are unwelcome." In his 200th birth anniversary year, Dadabhai Naoroji stands tall not merely as a nationalist icon, but as a polymath, thinker, parliamentarian, social reformer, and above all, the conscience-keeper of colonial India. If today Shashi Tharoor reminds the world that India once contributed nearly a quarter of global GDP in the 18th century, it was Naoroji who, more than 150 years earlier, laid the intellectual foundation of this argument. His Drain of Wealth Theory revealed how Britain's prosperity was being built on India's ruin. It was not merely economics - it was a manifesto of awakening for a nation yet to be politically mobilized.

Born on 4 September 1825, in a modest Parsi family in Bombay, Dadabhai Naoroji's early life embodied the fusion of tradition and reform. Married at the tender age of 11, he nevertheless became a pioneer of modern education and social progress. He excelled in mathematics at Elphinstone College and soon became one of its first Indian professors - a rare feat in colonial India where academic chairs were jealously guarded by Europeans. Naoroji was not just a man of letters; he was an institution builder. In 1851, he founded the Gujarati fortnightly Rast Gofar (The Truth Teller) in the aftermath of communal unrest in Bombay, to address Parsi social reform and the grievances of the middle and poor classes. The paper also became a platform for his wider reformist ideas, including women's education and religious reform, and soon emerged as one of the most widely circulated newspapers in Western India, giving Naoroji a powerful public voice.

He would later help establish organizations like the Zoroastrian Fund and spearhead campaigns against casteism and social inequality. His was a reformist mind as much as a nationalist one. His ventures in London demonstrated his global outlook. He co-founded Cama & Co. and later Naoroji & Co., becoming one of the earliest Indian entrepreneurs in Britain. For him, commerce was not merely about profit; it was about building bridges, establishing credibility, and breaking stereotypes of Indian inferiority. His business pursuits gave him entry into British circles, which he would later use as platforms to articulate the Indian cause.

Naoroji's career was remarkably versatile. He briefly served as Dewan of Baroda, where he proved his administrative acumen. In Bombay, he was elected as a municipal councillor and later as a member of the Bombay Legislative Council. These experiences honed his understanding of governance and exposed him to the structural injustices of colonial rule.

But it was in London that Naoroji made his greatest impact. Through his writings in journals like The Voice of India and The Friend of India, and his lectures such as The Wants and Means of India (1870), he educated not only Indians but also the British public about the economic exploitation of India. His meticulous use of statistics, budgets, and trade data gave his arguments an irrefutable credibility.

Naoroji's most enduring contribution remains his Drain of Wealth Theory. He argued that India's poverty was not the result of laziness or cultural backwardness, as colonial propaganda suggested, but the systematic siphoning of wealth by the British. Through "home charges," excessive military expenditure, and the repatriation of salaries of British officials, wealth that should have stayed in India was enriching England.

His landmark book, Poverty and

Un-British Rule in India (1901), crystallized these arguments. The very title was an indictment: colonialism was not just oppressive, it was "un-British," violating the very ideals of fairness and justice the empire claimed to uphold. For a colonized people, this was a revolutionary assertion - that poverty was political, and that freedom was economic as much as political. Naoroji was not merely an economist; he was a political organizer. As one of the founders of the Indian National Congress in 1885 and later its second president in 1886, he provided the nascent body with intellectual credibility and moral leadership. It was Naoroji who first articulated the demand for Swaraj - self-rule - long before it became the battle cry of Gandhi and Tilak. His presidential addresses to the Congress were not fiery slogans but carefully reasoned appeals, balancing moderation with national pride. The fact that he was often called the Grand Old Man of India was not only because of his age but because of his fatherly guidance to the nationalist movement.

Naoroji broke barriers that no Indian before him had even dared to dream of. In 1892, he was elected to the British House of Commons as the Liberal Party MP for Central Finsbury, making him the first non-European ever elected to Parliament. It was a symbolic victory for India - proof that an Indian voice could be heard in the very citadel of imperial power. In the House, he tirelessly raised the Indian question - on poverty, on governance, on economic injustice. His presence itself was a rebuke to colonial arrogance.

While his political career in Britain was brief, its impact was profound. He gave confidence to Indians that they could match the English on their own ground. From The Voice of India to The Indian Spectator, from The Wants and Means of India to Poverty and Un-British Rule,

Naoroji's writings created an intellectual scaffolding for the freedom movement. They injected nationalism into the bloodstream of educated Indians, transforming passive discontent into active demand. Even British thinkers were forced to acknowledge his erudition. John Bright, William Gladstone, and other leaders of liberal politics interacted with him. His economic critique inspired a generation of Indian leaders - Gokhale, Ranade, and even Gandhi, who once described Naoroji as a father figure. Naoroji's vision was not limited to politics and economics. He advocated women's education, campaigned against child marriage, and opposed rigid caste barriers. For him, national progress was impossible without social progress. His reformism was grounded in his Zoroastrian ethics of truth and justice, but it transcended sectarian lines. He believed in combining tradition with modernity - arguing that Indians must embrace education, rationalism, and civic responsibility, while retaining their cultural identity. In this sense, he was both a nationalist and a cosmopolitan.

What makes Naoroji remarkable even today is the sheer range of his pursuits. He was an academic, a businessman, a legislator, a journalist, a reformer, a parliamentarian, and a nationalist thinker. He could move from lecturing on mathematics to debating imperial finance in Westminster, from editing a vernacular newspaper to advising reformist movements. Few Indians before or after him embodied such polymathy. In an age of specialization, Naoroji reminds us of the power of being a generalist - of connecting economics to politics, social reform to nationalism, and ideas to action. Two centuries after his birth, Naoroji's relevance has only grown. When global discussions on reparations, colonial responsibility, and historical injustice are taking place, his Drain Theory



stands vindicated. The world now recognizes, as Tharoor recently iterated, that India once accounted for a quarter of the world's wealth before colonial plunder. Naoroji saw it, wrote it, and fought against it when it was unfashionable to do so. For India, he remains more than a historical figure. He was the moral compass of early nationalism, the intellectual who gave a fragmented society the confidence of argument, and the reformer who insisted that freedom was not only political but social and economic. In a sense, the Indian freedom movement had three phases: the moderate awakening of Naoroji, the assertive nationalism of Tilak, and the mass mobilization of Gandhi. Without Naoroji's groundwork, the latter phases would not have found their intellectual legitimacy.

Naoroji@200 is not merely an occasion for nostalgia. It is a reminder of how one man's pen shook an empire, how meticulous reasoning can challenge brute power, and how a life lived with integrity can inspire generations. The Grand Old Man of India lived to the age of 91, passing away in 1917, a decade before India's political struggle would enter its mass phase. Yet, his voice continues to echo: in the cries for justice, in the debates on economic fairness, and in the unfinished conversations about colonial responsibility.

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## 100 Years Ago



Front page of The Statesman on 15 September, 1925

## OCCASIONAL NOTE

The French attempt at a non-stop flight to Karachi has quickly closed in a lamentable disaster. The aeroplane with its two pilots crashed over the Black Forest and M. Thierry was killed and his companion, M. Coste, seriously injured. There is no present explanation of the fall, but there seldom is in such cases. A mechanical shortcoming, equally with a momentary mistake on the part of the aviator, may cause a crash. Yet men are not deterred by such accidents more than sailors have been by disasters at sea or railwayman by accidents to trains. Mankind pays for its conquest of the elements and its devouring of space and goes on unappalled. The real marvel is that flight should have been made comparatively safe within a few years and with so small a death-roll. The epitaph of the men who fail is that, even in their deaths they add something to human knowledge and human progress.

## News Items

### SPEED RECORD

## FRENCHMAN'S GREAT ACHIEVEMENT

Etampes, Sept.

The French airman Lasne to-day beat the speed record of over 2,000 kilometres, doing it in nine hours eight minutes 32 4/5 seconds, averaging 219 kilometres per hour, as compared with the American record of 184. —Reuter's Special Service.

### RESCUED AIRMEN

## ENTHUSIASTIC WELCOME AT HONOLULU

London, Sept.

A Santiago (Honolulu) message states that Rodgers and his four comrades on the rescued American seaplane received a wild welcome on their arrival here. All were ordered to hospital for further examination, food and sleep. One of them stated that big black sharks followed them daily. — Reuter.

### MISSING PRINCE

## RUMOURED STAY IN PARIS HOTEL

(Special Cable.)

Paris, Sept.

The manager of a hotel in the suburb of Brunoy states that a man, with two attendants, who resided there from September 3 till last evening when a motor-car took them off, admitted that he was the missing Egyptian Prince Seifeddin, and enjoined secrecy on the manager. — Copyright

### STRIKERS REPLACED

## DEFEAT OF SYDNEY EXTREMISTS

London, Sept.

When the Royal Mail steamer Ohio arrived at Southampton, from Hamburg, bound for New York, 140 seamen and firemen and 60 stewards struck and left the ship. They were replaced and the vessel proceeded to New York. — Reuter.

### TENNIS BATTLE

## TILDEN AND LACOSTE IN THREE-HOUR DUEL

Philadelphia, Sept.

In the Davis Cup Challenge Round, Tilden beat Lacoste by three sets to two, 3—6, 10—12, 8—6, 7—5, 6—2. Johnston (America) beat Borotra (France) by 6—1, 6—4, 6—0. Tilden was nearly three hours in saving the match against the confident Lacoste, who played a faultless game in the first sets, after which Tilden was four times within view of defeat, but recovered in invincible style. Johnston overwhelmed Borotra in under an hour. The Californian's driving and placing were superb. — Reuter.

## IT CAME TO MIND | MANISH NANDY

# A stellar secret

When I left the university and joined a large company, I found myself among older people few of whom shared my interests. I became friendly with the young set of secretaries all of whom were Eurasians. I was especially friendly with Ellie, petite and charming, with large eyes and long hair. She smiled often, and each time she smiled there was a beguiling dimple in her cheeks.

Ellie had a close friend, Stella, who joined us periodically. Stella was statuesque, noticeably well-dressed, her glistening hair cascading to her waist. She had left school to join work but loved to read and had a reputation for good work. I liked her instantly and enjoyed her company. Ellie and I would invite her, and Saturdays we would have coffee at Flury's or a gimlet at Trinca's.

A big change occurred when Oliver arrived in town from the company's headquarters in London as a young auditor. No two youths were more unlike: I was earnest and gregarious; Oliver was pleasant but asocial. Strangely, from the moment my boss asked me to show him around town, we hit it off. He was older and taller, devoted to his work and clearly of the new English generation devoid of colonial pretensions. We became friends. I helped him meet people

he needed to know, in the company and outside, took him around showing him the main stores and streets, clubs and cafés. Eventually he met Ellie.

"Is she your girlfriend," Oliver asked.

"She is a girl, and she is my friend," I replied as accurately as I could.

I invited Stella and Oliver, and the four of us went to a dance party where I had been invited. I thought of it as an icebreaker for the four of us and it turned out to be an event festive enough to break the biggest iceberg. I danced with Ellie, but we also exchanged partners. Oliver, in his quiet way, seemed comfortable with Stella. They too danced several times; in between, they sat by themselves in a corner and talked. I was glad to see them talk, for both Oliver and Stella were economical with their words.

I was a rudderless young man in a lively town and the four of us soon became a number. When I moved from my tiny apartment to a larger home, it became a congenial base for us to get together often. Stella was a good cook, Ellie was always spirited, and even the quiet Oliver turned slowly friendlier, especially toward Stella.

Even those early days I noticed how charmingly protective Stella was of Ellie. She often covered

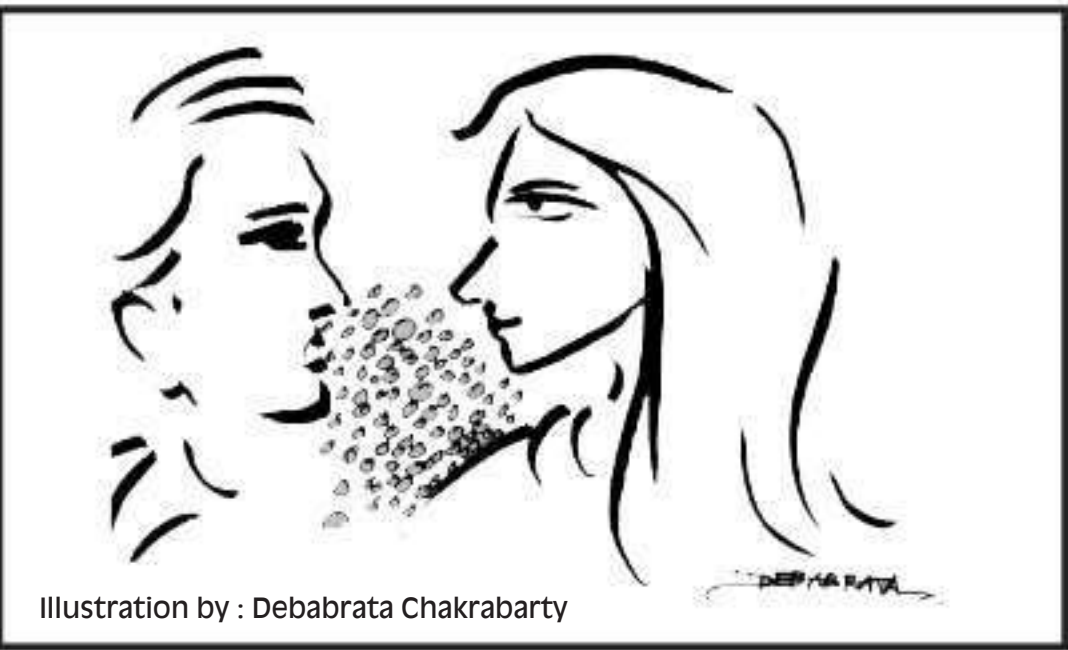
Ellie's expenses. If Ellie and I had differing views on any subject, she invariably took Ellie's side. I thought it was an endearingly loyal gesture and perhaps a sign of comradeship support. I liked Stella, thought her a great sport and was titillated by her quiet tenderness toward the relatively retiring Englishman.

Our best days together came to an end when I took another job and got busy with my new responsibilities, which entailed repeated travel to out-of-town mining areas.

I sensed Ellie was keen to get married and settle down, but marriage was nowhere on the horizon of my expanding world. Ellie emigrated with her elder brother to Australia after two years.

My work grew more demanding. I also taught in a local university as a side gig and my days were full. I occasionally saw Oliver and Stella who remained dear friends. That too ended when I left my job and went overseas.

Like most newcomers, my initial years in the US were one of many uncertainties, swift changes and a slow process of settling down. I took a job with the UN group which entailed repeated travel to a large variety of countries. Then I landed in a small Emirate with a large assignment that involved



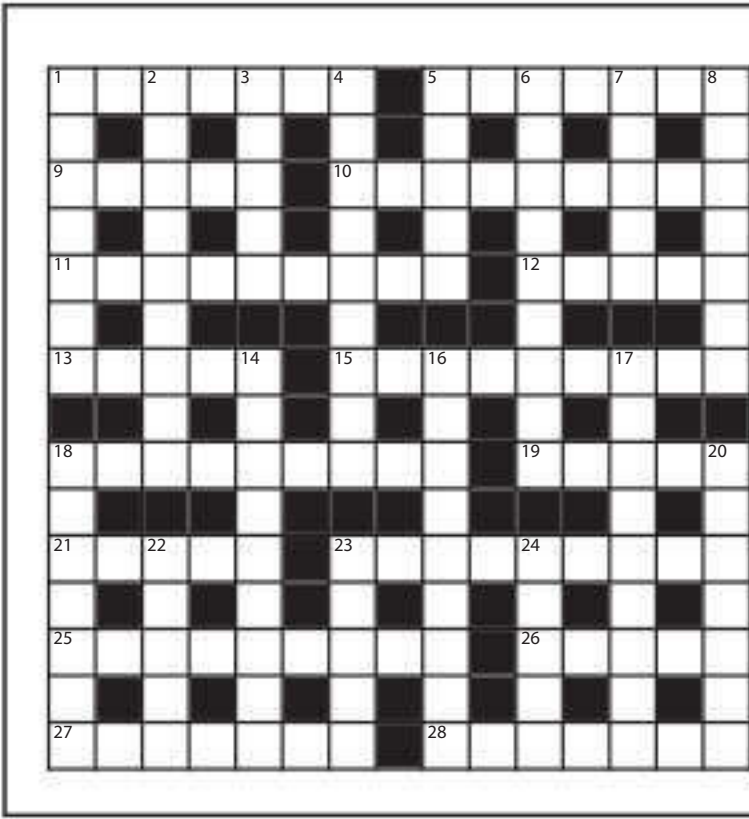
several months' work.

Two months later I was in a business conference and the opening ceremony was to be addressed by the director of a large British investment group. It turned out to be Oliver. We were delighted to be reunited and had a long chat over lunch.

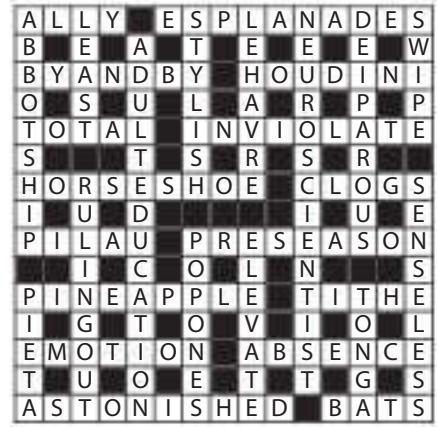
So it was that the following week I sat at a glittering large dinner party at Oliver's sumptuous home. I was invited to sit at the main table, next to Oliver's wife. I could barely recognize Stella. She looked even more statuesque, in a spectacular Givenchy long black-and-white outfit, with a snakish necklace with a diamond centerpiece. She politely asked about me and my life in the US.



## Crossword | No. 293235



### Last Saturday's Solution



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

### ACROSS

- 1 Flyer almost primeval in construction (7)
- 5 Regularly bring me my feed like a bushbaby (3-4)
- 9 Wine region right to improve (5)
- 10 Go again and tear up invite (9)
- 11 Artists' medium with colours which can sharpen with a little effort (9)
- 12 Locations losing last English mollusc (5)
- 13 Costumes which chatterboxes like (5)

- 15 Gets authorisation for drug free area (5,4)
- 18 Modifiers transposing late tirades (9)
- 19 Priest possibly saw about Israeli actor (5)
- 21 Middle Earth is back to front (5)
- 23 Back in Parliament, sense rampant confusion (5,4)
- 25 Arabs embarrassed about being converted to Catholicism (9)
- 26 Famous quintet finally meet defeat (5)

- 27 Unknown faces, arse-covering (1-6)
- 28 Duplicate parcel one lost (7)

### DOWN

- 1 Check up on marine working to penetrate Green Mountain State (7)
- 2 Spooner's Canadian diver could possibly have a second job (9)
- 3 Still at home, regret regularly missing out (5)
- 4 Country and neighbouring province study

- peace proposition (9)
- 5 Prohibits importing European haricots? (5)
- 6 What people on bridge intend to give otter in distress (3,4,2)
- 7 Country where Alchemi's come into money! (5)
- 8 Information contained in recording is mostly a shocker (4,3)
- 14 Mood regulator translated into Norse (9)

- 16 Film horse-trader's plug for docile pony (4,5)
- 17 Sausage season starts to overwhelm Norwegian island (9)
- 18 Criminal has a go holding a smoker's accessory (7)
- 20 Clickbait I televised turned up some woman (7)
- 22 After 1 in the morning, I'm not sure I have targets (5)
- 23 Covers 1000 questions (5)
- 24 Arrange coat for strange sheep (3,2)





Editor's  
TAKE

## Unite the Kingdom: Pride to Prejudice

Britain stands at a crossroads. It can either allow fear-driven nationalism to redefine its identity or reaffirm its legacy as a multicultural democracy

Blame it on economic collapse, the mobile revolution, or the dominoes of geopolitics, but the world is drifting steadily to the far right – marked by chaos on the streets and hatred in hearts. The “Unite the Kingdom” rally in London is a telling example. More than a hundred thousand people joined the “Unite the Kingdom” rally led by far-right activist Tommy Robinson in London. Their ire is fixed on immigrants, whom they accuse of bringing misery and tarnishing the pride of the Empire. What was supposed to be a “festival of free speech” turned into a showcase of racist conspiracy theories, anti-Muslim slogans, and open hostility towards immigrants. Clashes with police, assaults on officers, and incendiary speeches marked one of the largest gatherings in the UK in recent times. The far right’s rise in the UK is not sudden – it has been simmering for years. Economic insecurities, post-Brexit disillusionment, and a surge in asylum seekers arriving across the English Channel have fuelled resentment. Robinson and his allies have channelled this discontent, painting migrants as a threat to British culture, jobs, and security. The rhetoric of a so-called “great replacement”, echoed by European extremists, has gained traction among Britons who are struggling in life. Flags, chants of “stop the boats”, and slogans about “taking our country back” reflect how narrow nationalism is being rebranded as patriotism.

The implications of this surge are not confined to Britain alone. For India, the consequences are significant. The UK has one of the largest Indian diasporas, deeply embedded in its professional, academic, and political life. Rising hostility towards immigrants – especially those of Asian and Muslim origin – threatens not only the safety of Indian-origin communities but also the bilateral ties that London and New Delhi have carefully cultivated. Episodes of xenophobic violence or policy tightening on migration could directly impact Indian students, professionals, and families seeking opportunities in Britain.

Moreover, such developments can cast a shadow on ongoing trade negotiations and cooperation in technology and education. The UK Government must give far rightists a strong message that they cannot be allowed to trample the British values of democracy and openness. The resentment against immigrants is bound to have repercussions, as there is a sizeable immigrant population in the UK. It must firmly enforce law and order against violent rallies without appearing to stifle legitimate debate.

Second, it should craft a transparent, fair immigration policy that balances security concerns with the economic necessity of migrant labour and skills. Finally, it must invest in dialogue and community programmes to rebuild trust between native populations and immigrant communities. What is at stake here for the UK is not only its social cohesion but also its reputation as a free and fair country!

# Ten years of India’s digital revolution

As India moves toward its \$5 trillion economy goal, new frontiers are emerging: AI-enabled governance, decentralised commerce, and multilingual, mobile-first digital services that can reach the last person in the line



RAO INDERJIT SINGH

Over the past decade, India has undergone a digital revolution that is nothing short of extraordinary. What began as a series of targeted technological interventions has now evolved into a sweeping transformation, touching nearly every aspect of Indian life – economy, governance, education, healthcare, commerce, and even the lives of farmers and small entrepreneurs in the remotest corners of the country. This journey has not been accidental.

It has been carefully stewarded by the Government of India through a combination of bold policymaking, cross-ministerial collaboration, and a commitment to inclusive growth. While the line ministries – such as the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), the Ministry of Finance (MoF), the Ministry of Agriculture, and others – have executed large-scale projects on the ground, NITI Aayog has served as the policy engine, fostering convergence, driving thought leadership, and nudging the system toward scalable, citizen-first innovations.

A major inflection point came with the rollout of the Jan Dhan-Aadhaar-Mobile (JAM) trinity. With over 55 crore bank accounts opened, millions who were previously excluded from the financial system suddenly gained access to banking and direct benefit transfers. In a small village in Odisha, a single mother was able to receive welfare benefits directly into her bank account, bypassing middlemen for the first time. Her story is echoed by millions across India. This massive financial inclusion movement, supported by the Ministry of Finance and enabled by Aadhaar and mobile penetration, laid the groundwork for what came next: A fintech explosion.

The Unified Payments Interface (UPI), developed by the National Payments Corporation of India under the guidance of the RBI, revolutionised the way Indians transacted. What began as a novel way to send money to a friend quickly became the lifeline of small businesses, vegetable vendors, and gig workers. Today, India records over 17 billion UPI transactions each month, and even roadside vegetable sellers accept digital payments with a simple QR code. At the same time, the backbone of India’s digital infrastructure was being built – quietly and persistently – under MeitY. Projects like BharatNet brought broadband to over two lakh gram panchayats, while India Stack created the architecture for paperless, presence-less, and cashless services. DigiLocker allowed students to access their certificates digitally, and e-Sign enabled remote authentication for important



## The Pioneer SINCE 1865

THE  
CONVERGENCE  
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NITI PLAYS —  
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INTEROPERABLE,  
INCLUSIVE, AND  
SCALABLE

Author is Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) in Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation; Planning and MOS in Ministry of Culture

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 raoinderjitsingh

documents. DigiYatra is a pioneering initiative that enables seamless, paperless, and contactless air travel using facial recognition technology. It ensures faster check-ins, enhanced passenger experience, and improved airport efficiency, all while safeguarding data privacy through decentralised identity management. This marks a major step in making Indian aviation future-ready and passenger-centric. These were not just apps – they were building blocks of a digital republic.

Digital governance also took a leap forward with the launch of the Government e-Marketplace (GeM). Designed to bring transparency and efficiency into public procurement, GeM has connected over 1.6 lakh Government buyers with more than 22 lakh sellers – including a growing number of women entrepreneurs and MSMEs. For a small handicraft seller from Rajasthan, this meant access to Government contracts that were previously unimaginable. The agriculture sector, often seen as resistant to change, too began embracing digital tools.

Platforms like PM-Kisan ensured that income support reached farmers directly. e-NAM connected agricultural mandis across states, enabling farmers to get better prices for their produce. The digital Soil Health Card helped them understand what crops to grow and what nutrients to add to their land. In rural Jharkhand, CSCs (Common Service Centres) run by local entrepreneurs became digital lifelines – offering everything from telemedicine to banking and skilling programmes. The pandemic was a stress test for India’s digital infrastructure – and it passed with flying

colours. With schools shut, platforms like DIKSHA and SWAYAM ensured that learning did not stop. Children in Ladakh and Kerala could access the same content, curated by teachers across India. Simultaneously, the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission took shape, allowing citizens to access their health records through a digital ID and creating a seamless experience across hospitals and states. Commerce, too, witnessed a quiet revolution.

The Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC), an initiative of DPIIT, is now enabling small kirana shops and handloom weavers to compete with large e-commerce giants. By unbundling the functions of digital commerce, ONDC is levelling the playing field, ensuring that small businesses can access logistics, payments, and customer feedback systems with ease.

The convergence role that NITI plays – bringing ministries, states, startups, and industry together – has ensured that digital public goods are interoperable, inclusive, and scalable.

As India moves toward its \$5 trillion economy goal, new frontiers are emerging: AI-enabled governance, decentralised commerce, and multilingual, mobile-first digital services that can reach the last person in the line. But this is not just a Government success story. It is the story of a nation – of millions of citizens who adopted change, entrepreneurs who built on digital rails, and local leaders who reimagined service delivery. India’s digital decade is not just about technology – it is about transformation. And the story is only just beginning.

## PIC TALK



A man scatters corn for pigeons on the premises of the Pashupatinath Temple in Kathmandu, Nepal.

PHOTO: PTI

TANUSHREE

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

Each year on September 16, the world comes together to celebrate World Ozone Day, a reminder of the ozone layer’s importance and the shared responsibility of safeguarding it. This thin band of gas in the stratosphere acts as Earth’s sunscreen, filtering out ultraviolet rays that can damage human health, ecosystems, and food systems. Without it, life as we know it would be at grave risk. The 2025 theme, “From Science to Global Action,” underlines the journey of ozone protection – from early scientific warnings about its depletion to unprecedented international cooperation through the Montreal Protocol of 1987. This year is especially significant as it commemorates the 40th anniversary of the Vienna Convention (1985), the treaty that created the foundation for these landmark agreements. Together, they

remain models of how science-led diplomacy can resolve a global environmental crisis. Encouragingly, the ozone layer is on a path to recovery. But the struggle is far from over. For India, World Ozone Day represents both a celebration and a challenge. Since joining the Montreal Protocol in 1992, India has phased out harmful substances like CFCs, Halons, and carbon tetrachloride. Its progress in eliminating HCFCs – expected to be fully phased out by the end of 2024 – illustrates the country’s seriousness.

Central to this success has been the Ozone Cell of the Ministry of Environment, which coordinates policy, industry action, and international collaboration. However, while stratospheric ozone heals, surface ozone pollution is emerging as a pressing danger. Unlike the protective upper layer, ground-level ozone is a pollutant created by chemical reactions involving nitrogen oxides and volatile compounds, often worsened by extreme heat. India’s increasing heatwaves magnify this problem, making it a public health crisis. The threat also extends to food security. Ozone damages crops such as wheat and rice, reducing both yield and quality. In a country where agriculture sustains millions, this poses grave economic and social risks.

With 13 of the world’s 20 most polluted cities located in India, the crisis is compounded by dense populations, industrial growth, and an ageing demographic more vulnerable to respiratory illness. Addressing surface ozone is

complex, since ozone is not emitted directly but formed in the atmosphere. Effective action requires cutting precursor gases, strengthening monitoring systems, and adopting innovative urban policies. Cities could reduce exposure by restricting fuel refilling during peak sunlight hours or shifting energy-intensive industrial activities to cooler times of the day. Expanding clean energy, electric vehicles, and stricter emission standards are critical to tackling the root causes. The India Cooling Action Plan (ICAP) promotes sustainable, energy-efficient cooling, cutting reliance on harmful HFCs. Transitioning to renewables, investing in public transport, and cleaner urban planning are shaping the way forward. World Ozone Day 2025 offers two powerful lessons. First, international cooperation works – the near-recovery of the ozone layer is proof of what science-guided policy can achieve. Second, new challenges demand new solutions – surface ozone pollution must be tackled urgently, especially in vulnerable nations like India.

Protecting the stratospheric ozone and reducing surface ozone are vital not only for the planet’s health but also for humanity’s survival. By embracing innovation, collaboration, and accountability, India can stand as a global example of resilience and leadership.

The writer is a Doctoral Fellow and Visiting Faculty, FDDI, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India

## INDIAN VICTORY OVER PAKISTAN SENDS STRONG MESSAGE

The victory, podium finish, and lifting of the trophy are nothing less than the most awaited moments for any cricket team to dream of. The Asia Cup is once again at our home now.

The excellent bowling skills of spinner Kuldeep Yadav (3/18) and Axar Patel (2/18), along with Suryakumar Yadav’s commendable leadership as Team Captain, have won everyone’s hearts. The victory of India over Pakistan in cricket is not merely a point of celebration.

The real cherry on the cake is that the win has been dedicated by our men in blue to the victims of Pahalgam and to the armed forces. The manner in which the Indian players avoided greetings and handshakes with their Pakistani counterparts after the match, played in Dubai, while cruising Pakistan on a tight score,

is a welcome gesture. This match will be remembered in cricketing history forever.

The triumph not only highlighted the exuberant talent of the Indian Cricket Team but also sent a lesson that India will never tolerate harm to its people. We shall avenge every wound at the right time and at the right place. Pakistan has not only lost a cricket match but has also lost its image as a respected sporting counterpart.

This victory will be remembered in cricketing history for its skill, spirit and significance. It stands as a heartfelt tribute to the victims of Pahalgam and to our armed forces. Above all, it underlines India’s resolve to protect its people and pursue justice through lawful means.

KIRTI WADHAWANI | KANPUR

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

## Beggars’ homes need urgent reform

Appropos the news item “SC issues directives on beggars’ homes” (September 15), every human being is entitled to live with dignity. Unfortunately, Governments of the day tend to favour some sections of society over the rest. A strong sense of repulsion overcomes people when they observe the unkempt Government – run institutions and houses. Severe poverty and displacement push men and women to beg.

According to the 2011 Census, there are more than four lakh beggars in India. Laws regulating begging, like the Bombay Prevention of Begging Act, 1959, have done more harm than good in rehabilitating beggars into mainstream society. Moreover, the intent of criminalising begging has not exactly passed muster in courts.

Additionally, beggar homes have failed in purpose as they remain overcrowded and poorly ventilated. Against this backdrop, the Supreme Court’s verdict that beggar homes be treated as a “constitutional trust” and not charity houses offers hope to the community in despair. Among other directives, the Court has made medical tests within 24 hours of admission, monthly check-ups, nutritional adequacy, and safety of women inmates mandatory. This judgement can transform lives if sincerely implemented.

GANAPATHI BHAT | AKOLA

## Mizoram gets a rail link

The opening of the 51.38-km Bairabi-Sairang railway line is a blessing for Mizoram as it links the capital, Aizawl, with Silchar in Assam. Travel time will be cut from 10 hours by road to three hours by train, and cost from ₹1,000 to ₹80. The route also has India’s second-highest railway bridge after Chenab – standing 114 metres, taller than Qutub Minar. It would be an understatement to call it historic, as it took 172 years after the British introduced Railways in India for Mizoram to get this facility. From Bairabi to Guwahati, a diesel engine will be used since the Bairabi-Sairang line is not electrified, and from Guwahati to Delhi an electric engine will run. Construction took 10 years from 2015.

The biggest challenge was sourcing construction materials such as sand, stones, and chips, which had to be procured from Assam, West Bengal, Jharkhand, and Meghalaya. Residents of Kolasib and Aizawl districts will now enjoy affordable travel, healthcare, education, and business opportunities.

One hopes Sikkim, the only state without a railway line, also gets one soon. The Bairabi-Sairang line marks a historic milestone for Mizoram’s connectivity and growth. It promises affordable travel, improved access, and new opportunities for its people.

BAL GOVIND | NOIDA

## SC protects fundamental rights

The Supreme Court has rightly ruled that the Centre cannot remain a silent spectator when taxpayers’ dream homes are jeopardised. Housing is a fundamental right under Article 21. An average homebuyer invests life savings expecting a roof over their family’s head. The anxiety of being left without a home despite paying a fortune takes a severe toll on health, productivity, and dignity.

The Court directed the Union Government to consider a revival fund under the National Asset Reconstruction Company Ltd (NARCL) or expand the SWAMIH (Special Window for Affordable and Mid-Income Housing) Fund.

This would provide bridge financing for stressed projects undergoing Corporate Insolvency Resolution Process (CIRP), preventing liquidation of viable ventures and safeguarding buyers. The Court also passed directives ensuring protection of bona fide homebuyers and stabilisation of the real estate sector.

A home is not merely a roof but a reflection of hopes and dreams – a refuge from the world’s worries. Citing Samatha vs State of AP (1997), the Court affirmed that shelter is integral to the right to life. Home-buying cannot be reduced to a commercial transaction.

YASH PAL RALHAN | JALANDHAR





# India's roadmap to a global knowledge powerhouse

Beyond economic might, the true strength of a developed India will rest on its intellectual, social, ethical, and innovation-driven ecosystem. To achieve this, a comprehensive roadmap for higher education must be envisioned – one that builds an inclusive, future-ready, and globally competitive learning environment

FIRST  
Column

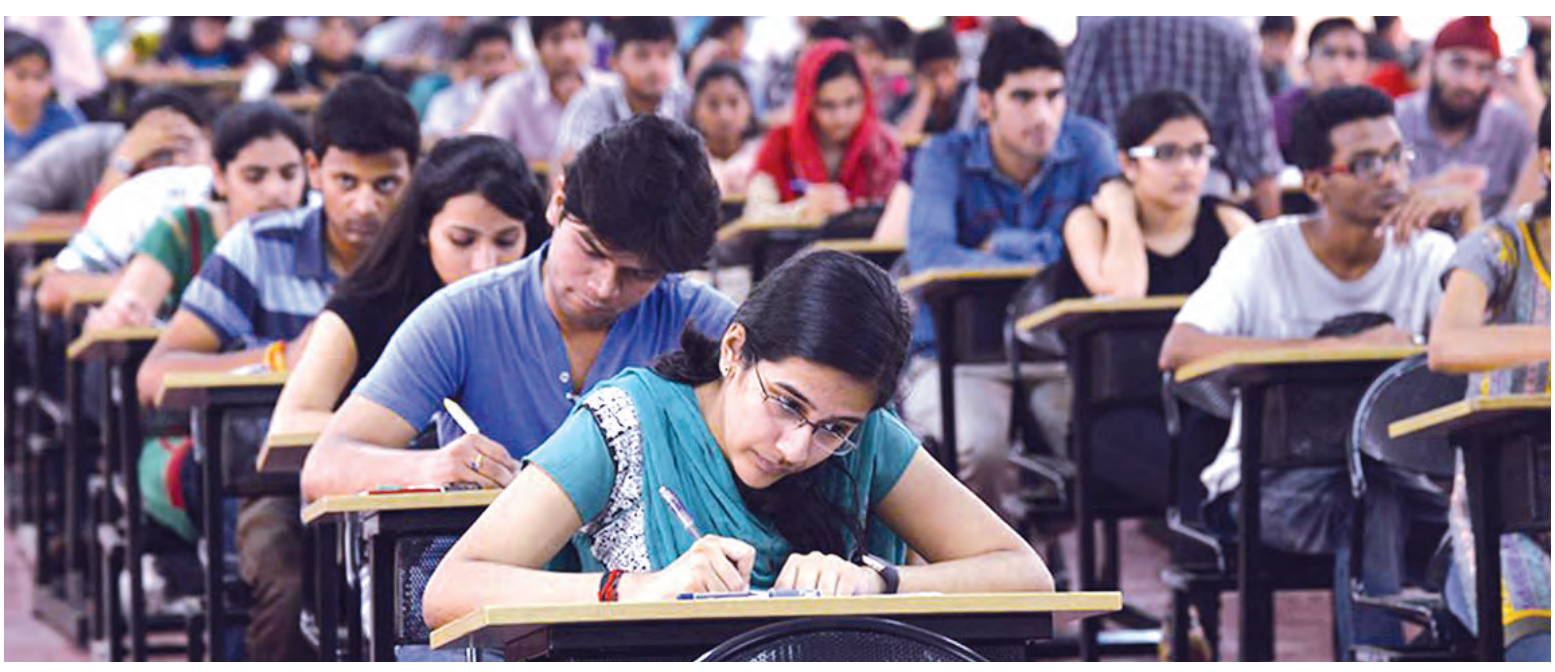


RAGHAVENDRA  
P TIWARI

By 2047, when India celebrates a century of independence, higher education will emerge as one of the most powerful forces shaping the nation's transformation into a global knowledge superpower. The future of a developed India depends not only on its economic power but also on the intellectual, social, ethical and innovation ecosystem it must nurture. In this context, a comprehensive roadmap for higher education has to be envisioned. The roadmap should seek to build an inclusive, future-ready, and globally competent learning ecosystem that ignites innovation, research, employability, and cultural leadership. The goal should be to position India among the top three higher education systems globally, where higher education institutions (HEIs) act as engines of socio-economic growth, social equity, and global competitiveness.

The rationale behind this ambitious transformation rests on four key foundations. Firstly, India's demographic dividend presents both an opportunity and a challenge. A young and aspirational demography requires world-class, accessible higher education to unlock its true potential. Secondly, as India transitions into a knowledge economy and aims for a \$40 trillion GDP by 2047, cutting-edge research, innovation, and highly skilled talent have become indispensable. Thirdly, to strengthen its global competitiveness, India must take a quantum leap to enhance its standing in research, technology, and education in order to lead in the 21st century. Finally, higher education must reflect India's civilisational traits, where ancient knowledge systems are harmoniously blended with modern scientific and technological advancements to add unique value to contemporary civilisational discourse.

Achieving this vision requires a grand strategy. Access, equity, affordability, and inclusion must become integral components of this strategy to enable every aspiring learner to pursue outcome-based higher education, regardless of gender, geography, or socio-economic strata. By 2047, the Gross Enrolment Ratio should reach 75 per cent, supported by expanded institutions, community colleges, open digital learning platforms,



THE GOAL SHOULD BE TO POSITION INDIA AMONG THE TOP THREE HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEMS GLOBALLY, WHERE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS ACT AS ENGINES OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC GROWTH, SOCIAL EQUITY, AND GLOBAL COMPETITIVENESS

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The Pioneer

and targeted support for disadvantaged groups. Massive use of digital infrastructure and local/regional language content will be crucial in bridging existing divides.

Alongside inclusivity, India ought to promote academic excellence and multidisciplinary. All HEIs should embrace flexible, multidisciplinary curricula on existing and emerging disciplines that integrate vocational, academic, and research pathways through the National Credit Framework (NCF). A STEAM-based curriculum, enriched by AI-enabled personalised learning pathways, will help prepare students to negotiate the complexities of the future. Concurrently, inter- and transdisciplinary learning should be cultivated through interfacing disciplines across sciences, engineering, humanities, and social sciences, empowering youth with real-life problem-solving skills.

Equally important is the alignment of higher education with skills, employability, and entrepreneurship. Industry-integrated curricula, mandatory internships, apprenticeships, and entrepreneurship modules must become integral parts of the curricula, enabling learners not only to seek but also to create jobs. Special emphasis should be laid on social entrepreneurship for promoting employment opportunities for social science graduates. Universities should nurture start-ups and spin-offs, strengthening India's innovation

ecosystem. For this, HEIs should become creative centres for skill development, innovation, and entrepreneurship to thrive in a highly competitive and fast-changing learning landscape. HEIs should strive to promote critical thinking, creativity, and exploration.

Technology-enabled higher education is the future. A digital and technological transformation of higher education will accelerate growth at an unprecedented pace. Every campus must become digitally enabled, blending physical and virtual learning seamlessly. AI tutors, AR/VR-enabled labs, and metaverse classrooms will redefine pedagogy, while blockchain-based credentialing will ensure seamless global credit mobility.

Yet another equally vital aspect is the strengthening of research, innovation, and knowledge economy ecosystems. The Anusandhan National Research Foundation will have to serve as the backbone of India's translational research ecosystem, driving the establishment of over 100 Centres of Excellence in frontier areas such as artificial intelligence, quantum technologies, biotechnology, green energy, defence, space, and social sectors. These must be complemented by world-class research parks, incubators, and innovation clusters. The ultimate target is for India to rank among the top three nations globally in real-world

problem-solving research output by 2047.

Massive curricular, pedagogical, and assessment reforms are essential for holistic education and for transforming India's classrooms into centres for shaping her destiny. These critical components of education should not limit the learning of youth. This is not possible without a renewed focus on faculty development and leadership. Curricula should be industry-aligned, pedagogy has to become engaging and immersive, and assessment should measure transformation in students. The establishment of a National Higher Education Leadership Academy will ensure continuous faculty training in curriculum design and development, pedagogical and assessment reforms, research, and industry exposure. India must also attract global faculty and encourage cross-border mobility of faculty and researchers.

Another crucial aspect is internationalisation. India must emerge as a global hub of higher learning, attracting more than two million international students annually by 2047. This requires accelerated collaboration, expanding joint and dual degree programmes, building international campuses, and showcasing India's civilisational knowledge systems on the global platform.

For such an ambitious vision to succeed, governance and funding reforms are

essential. The focus must shift from input-based regulation to outcome-driven governance, with institutions enjoying autonomy coupled with accountability. Public investment in higher education should be raised from the current 4.6 per cent to at least 6 per cent of GDP, complemented by resource mobilisation through philanthropy, endowments, and public-private partnerships.

In line with India's commitment to sustainability, HEIs must evolve into green campuses, embracing renewable energy, net-zero practices, and research aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals. Social responsibility must also be central, with students engaging in rural immersion programmes, community service, and social innovation and entrepreneurship projects.

A vibrant cultural ecosystem is central to India's emergence as a globally respected knowledge and innovation hub. By 2047, India's cultural ecosystem must reflect the harmony of tradition and modernity. Her cultural landscape must envision the synthesis of its ancient civilisational discourse and modern global outlook. A culturally vibrant India will not only nurture its own citizens but also inspire and lead the world in creative, intellectual, and civilisational excellence. Therefore, the vision for Viksit Bharat 2047 should place equal emphasis on inclusivity, sustainability, creativity, and international cultural engagement.

To ensure accountability, a robust monitoring and evaluation framework must be created. This will have to include a National Higher Education Dashboard offering real-time data on enrolment, outcomes, employability, and research; an independent evaluation agency to track institutional performance; and an annual "State of Higher Education Report" presented to Parliament.

The outcomes of India's education system have to be transformative by 2047. India's universities will have to be globally benchmarked for producing thought leaders, innovators, entrepreneurs, and cultural ambassadors. Higher education should be able to serve as the engine of India's \$40 trillion knowledge economy.

Most importantly, India will have to reclaim its place as a global knowledge superpower, offering inclusive, sustainable, and future-ready higher education that contributes not just to national progress but also to global well-being.

## India must learn from Albania's bold AI-powered governance leap

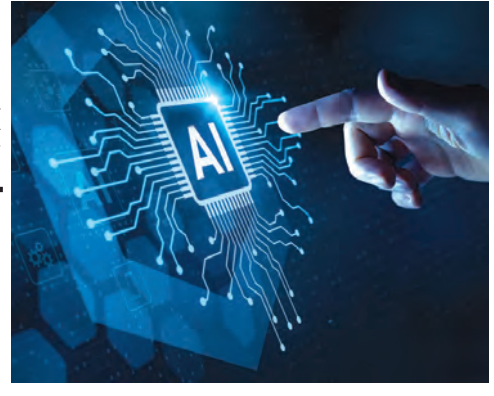


SANTHOSH  
MATHEW

On 11 September 2025, Albania took a decision that left the world stunned. Defying conventional political wisdom, the Albanian government appointed an Artificial Intelligence system named Diell as the country's Public Procurement Minister. In an unprecedented move, this digital administrator identified 17 suspicious government contracts within just 48 hours, annulled three of them, and made all procurement data publicly available in real time through an interactive dashboard. This was not a science fiction scenario, nor an isolated experiment – it was a powerful demonstration of how AI could redefine governance, transparency, and public accountability.

While Albania is a small nation with limited resources, its bold experiment holds a significant lesson for India – one of the world's largest democracies facing enormous governance challenges. With a population of 1.4 billion and a sprawling bureaucracy often criticised for inefficiency, delays, and corruption, India stands at a crossroads. The need for bold, systemic reform in public administration has never been greater. Albania's decision shines a spotlight on the potential of Artificial Intelligence not as a futuristic luxury but as a pragmatic tool that can transform how governments function.

Across the globe, governments are increasingly harnessing AI to improve governance. Singapore's chatbot Ask Jamie handles over five million public enquiries annually across more than 70 government websites, drastically reducing response time and human workload. Estonia, already a digital governance pioneer, uses AI-driven platforms for digital identity cards, e-medical records, and e-voting systems, enabling efficient, secure, and accessible services for all citizens. Canada has integrated AI into tax audits, helping authorities recover billions of dollars in lost revenue while increasing the detection of tax fraud by 35 per cent. Japan employs AI to predict earthquakes and accelerate rescue operations, safeguarding lives in one of the world's most disaster-prone regions. Brazil's São Paulo has cut traffic congestion by 20 per cent using AI-powered traffic systems, while South Korea reduced waste collection costs by 43 per cent through AI-managed waste disposal strategies. In Dubai, AI is used to monitor road conditions and forecast maintenance needs, ensuring infrastructure reliability. Meanwhile, in the United States, AI helps detect welfare fraud, saving up to 521 billion dollars annually.



These are not isolated pilot projects or academic studies. They are real-world applications proving that intelligent machines can deliver faster, more transparent, and more efficient governance than traditional bureaucratic methods. India has already begun its journey towards digital governance with significant initiatives like Aadhaar, Digital India, and the Goods and Services Tax Network (GSTN). However, the adoption of Artificial Intelligence in governance remains scattered and tentative. Projects are often small-scale, fragmented, or stuck in pilot phases. The challenge is not technological incapability but a lack of political will, vision, and systemic strategy.

Public procurement in India, for instance, is notorious for corruption, delays, and opaque processes. Billions of rupees are siphoned off through irregular contracts, inflated costs, and bureaucratic loopholes. Albania's experiment shows that assigning rule-based procurement oversight to an impartial AI system can automatically detect anomalies, flag suspicious deals, and recommend annulments without fear of political pressure or personal interests.

Moreover, transparency is a pillar of good governance. By publishing real-time procurement data in an accessible dashboard, Albania empowered its citizens, media, and civil society to participate actively in monitoring government decisions. India must learn from this by making data-driven governance more open and participatory, rather than buried in inaccessible government portals or hidden under the pretext of confidentiality. The potential for efficiency gains is another critical lesson. Manual decision-making in India's bureaucracy leads to unnecessary delays, whether in welfare disbursement, tax collection, or infrastructure approvals. An AI-based system can analyse vast amounts of data in seconds, automatically applying predefined rules to make decisions swiftly. This not only saves time but also ensures consistency and reduces opportunities for discretionary abuse.

Cost is another factor where AI governance holds an edge. India spends thousands of crores

of rupees annually on running its administrative apparatus. An AI system, once designed and implemented, operates at a fraction of the long-term costs associated with human labour, absenteeism, and corruption. Canada's success in tax audits proves that intelligent systems can also recover lost revenues, which in India's case could mean additional resources for development. Disaster management is another area where India can gain from AI models. Japan's success in earthquake prediction and rescue coordination demonstrates how technology can save lives. India's National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) should incorporate AI models to improve forecasting, pre-disaster planning, and real-time coordination during calamities like floods, cyclones, and earthquakes.

Policy action must begin now. The central government should develop a comprehensive National AI Governance Policy, focusing specifically on key areas such as public procurement, tax audits, welfare distribution, infrastructure monitoring, and disaster management. Clear data protection laws must be enacted to safeguard citizen information. Civil servants should receive training on how to work with AI systems, enabling them to transition into more strategic roles. Moreover, public-private partnerships can accelerate the development of scalable AI solutions while encouraging innovation. India's thriving tech ecosystem, including start-ups and established IT giants, should be brought into the fold, contributing expertise and developing practical solutions for governance challenges.

The time for small, isolated AI projects is over. India needs systemic change. Albania's bold decision to hand over a ministerial role to AI is not an impractical experiment but a wake-up call. It is a statement that rule-based governance tasks – free from political bias and human inefficiencies – can and should be automated for the public good. If India continues to cling to outdated bureaucratic methods, it risks falling further behind in global governance reforms. The Albanian example proves that embracing Artificial Intelligence is not a matter of technological advancement alone; it is a moral imperative to ensure better governance, greater transparency, and improved service delivery for citizens.

The future of governance does not belong to politics or bureaucracy alone; it belongs to intelligent systems that work for people without prejudice or delay. Albania has already shown the way. It is time for India to follow the path of innovation, responsibility, and transparency.

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## India's journey in Swachh Bharat Mission-Grameen



T SENTHIL SIVA  
SUBRAMANIAN

India's significant cleanliness initiative brought in a huge transformation in sanitation drive through the Swachh Bharat Mission-Grameen (SBM-G), which meets the UN Sustainable Development Goals (#SDG 6 – clean water and sanitation), thereby creating green model villages. India is on the rapid march and making a bold and strong move to make our nation a Sustainable-Smart-Swachh Bharat (3S). India, over a decade of successfully completing the sanitation drive, our nation is a major torchbearer for transforming rural and urban society into a sustainable hygiene community. Swachh Bharat Mission makes every individual socially responsible. India's dedication towards a holistic approach in adopting the best practices of the sanitation drive led to successful public health hygiene. India has been leading in eradicating open defecation (ODF) through several cleanliness campaigns and awareness initiatives under the inspiring vision and realising the dreams of Honourable Prime Minister of India Shri Narendra Modi. Swachh Bharat forms a key contributor for Mission LIFE – Lifestyle for Environment. India has successfully built pioneering sanitation green infrastructure like Community Sanitary Complexes (CSCs), which gave ease-of-access to every Indian citizen to utilise the sanitation facilities. Our nation's successful cleanliness cutting-edge interventions like plastic waste management, decentralised operation and maintenance of community sanitation assets, grey water management through soak pits, faecal sludge management through Sewage Treatment Plants (STPs), waste to wealth through GOBARDhan, biodegradable waste management through composting and biogas plants have accelerated India to achieve greater height in cleanliness drive.

India celebrates 10 years of successful completion of Swachh Bharat Mission with 2025 marking a special campaign on e-waste such as unserviceable or discarded electronic devices and systems like computers, laptops, printers, LEDs, storage devices like hard disks, e-display boards, which will pave the way for extraction of critical minerals like lithium, cobalt, nickel and rare earth metals as well. Swachh Bharat Mission is a bold beginning to accelerate the National Critical Mineral Mission, thereby fuelling the achievement of a recycling green economy. The year 2025's theme for World Ozone Day is From Science to Global Action. The significance of the theme is to emphasise the vital link between scientific research, innovation, and collective global and community efforts in preserving nature's ozone layer. The Swachh



Bharat Mission (SBM) is actively transforming many neglected Indian landfills into preservative landmarks by utilising bioremediation and biomining to clean waste and then reinventing, redesigning, and redeveloping the reclaimed land into green eco-spaces and digital public infrastructures that benefit every citizen.

Swachh Bharat Mission harnesses the potential of future-ready Industry 4.0 technologies like robots, artificial intelligence, and drone technologies in addressing cleanliness.

Indian start-up like Solinas, incubated at the Department of Science and Technology (DST) – Technology Business Incubator (TBI), NIDHI of IIT Madras, has developed a cutting-edge technology Homosep Atom, which has emerged and transformed traditional and manual cleaning methods into custom-designed robotic solutions. Drone technology has empowered and plays a pioneering role in the Swachh Bharat Mission through cleaning and post-cleaning assessments.

Indian Railways has successfully implemented the drone-based cleaning of railway coaches, thereby ensuring best practices of public hygiene. Drone technology is also being utilised to identify unhygienic and garbage locations, thereby facilitating cleanliness drives.

Swachh Bharat handshakes with India's Smart City Mission, thereby transforming India to a Viksit Clean Bharat @2047 and realising the vision of several UN Sustainable Goals like SDG 9 (Build Resilient India's Digital Green Infrastructure; Promote Inclusive and Sustainable Modern New-age Industrialisation and Foster Frugal Innovation), SDG 13, an action to combat climate change thereby reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and SDG 11, a Clean and Sustainable Smart Swachh Bharat.

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**AF NAZARETH, *Alto Porvorim***

RAJU RAMAMURTHY, *Vasco*



# TRUMP TARIFF VS GST RATE CUT: THE BATTLE OVER INDIAN POCKETS

## OPINION

SHWETA SHALINI



During the British colonial rule in India, the capital city of Delhi was infested by reptiles of which king cobra was the deadliest. To tackle the risk, the British devised a bounty program. They offered money for every cobra caught and ended up creating a perverse incentive. The strategy worked exceedingly well and local population teamed up to earn a quick buck by capturing snakes. The number of cobras in the city rapidly dwindled. However, the initial success backfired later. The British incentive program had unwittingly attracted enterprising people who began breeding the cobras. Sensing that cobra bills are rising again because of monetary incentive to breed them, British

government quickly called off the program. It made the bad situation worse. The breeders simply let off the cobras as the previously valuable cobras were now worth nothing. The abandoned cobras became a nightmare. The “cobra effect” in English lexicon is a situation where an attempted solution to a problem actually makes the problem worse. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the short-sighted foreign policy of Indian allies are leading to cobra effect on a grander scale. In August 2025, the American government imposed tariffs on India seeking to deter Indian purchase of Russian oil. By levying a 50% tariff, the US threatened Indian exports of over \$80 billion. Exemptions covered about \$28.4 billion leaving more than \$50 billion trade susceptible to losses. The US didn’t imagine that a visionary enterprising government is in power in India. Instead of cowering under pressure or reducing Russian oil, India increased its purchase orders attempting to plug the huge foreign exchange hole. In-



*By levying a 50% tariff, the US threatened Indian exports of over \$80 billion. Exemptions covered about \$28.4 billion leaving more than \$50 billion trade susceptible to losses. The US didn’t imagine that a visionary enterprising government is in power in India.*

dia now had incentive to gobble maximum cheap Russian oil to make up for possible losses. The Modi government turned the tables as the world watched with amazement. Indian government also earned the admiration of global community for standing by it’s reliable ally. “Keep them on” asked the Trump administration recently trying to coerce EU officials deliberating over trade tariffs. After levying a 50% tariff on Indian

goods, US is now lobbying European Union (EU) for 100% tariffs on India and China. Contradicting their hardline arm-twisting tactics via Europe, US emphasized that India and US are “continuing their negotiations to address trade barriers”. Meanwhile, Indians are merrily going about their business as if nothing happened. A prominent news headline in *The Times of India* read “Nissan passes on GST benefits, prices re-

duced by up to Rs. 1 Lakh”. *India Today* portal noted “Kia cars get cheaper after GST reduction, Syros sees price cuts up to Rs. 1.86 lakhs”. As the festive season kicks in, Indians are cheering this price cuts. It’s not just European brands. All major brands including BMW, Hyundai, Tata, Mahindra and Toyota have announced major price changes gearing up for a festive season sales. Modi government’s move of GST reduction has dampened

the expectation of Trump administration that Indian economy would get bogged down. On 3<sup>rd</sup> September, Modi government announced that GST on common man and middle-class items has been reduced from 18 per cent or 12 per cent to 5 per cent. The Finance Minister informed that items such as hair oil, toilet soap, soap bars, shampoos, toothbrushes, toothpaste, bicycles, tableware, kitchenware, and other household articles will now have only 5 per cent GST. She further said that GST on ultra-high temperature milk, chena and paneer has been reduced to zero from 5 per cent, while all Indian breads will now see a nil rate. GST on food items such as namkeen,

bhujia, sauces, pasta, instant noodles, chocolates, coffee, preserved meat, cornflakes, butter and ghee has been reduced from 12 per cent or 18 per cent to 5 per cent. With a drastic reduction of GST on everyday items, India is leveraging it’s key strength – domestic consumption. Domestic demand has always been a major component of Indian growth story. The Indian consumption has allowed our foreign policy to not be dictated by the economic whims of foreign leaders. The huge population and infrastructure investments have made us an attractive investment destination. Unlike export-oriented economies earning their GDP growth by manufacturing to meet foreign de-

mand, India isn’t a manufacturing hub serving the world. Indian economy serves India and remains immune to global headwinds. Our factories run primarily to meet Indian demand. This self sufficiency makes us a resilient economy that survived economic crisis like the Great financial recession of 2008. It is the same resilience why India was the fastest growing major economy clocking 7.8% in first quarter of FY 2025-26. Fitch ratings has already upgraded growth forecast from 6.5 to 6.9% this year. With a smart combination of foreign policy moves and economic self-sufficiency, Modi government is setting up a precedent for international policy observers. The message from India is clear- we won’t be bullied into submission. The cobra effect has kicked in for the Trump administration because the current Indian government is crafty enough to deal with a conniving bully. Whether US smartly wriggles out of this situation or not, India has proved its economic strength to withstand the crisis and diplomatic clout to stand its ground. When US-India trade talks commence this week, India will have the upper hand. With Modi government in power fuelling domestic consumption, nobody can dare pick from the Indian pockets.



# The deep web: NGOs and political activism

## OPINION

DIVYANSH KALA

Recently, in her editorial in *The Hindu*, Congress Parliamentary Chair Sonia Gandhi has criticised the Greater Nicobar project by calling it as a “planned misadventure”. She made claims that the project was “insensitively pushed through, making a mockery of all legal and deliberate processes.” She further argued that “it will cause a large scale influx of people and tourists on the island. Ultimately, the Shompen will find themselves cut off from their ancestral lands and unable to sustain their social and economic existence.” She has also alleged that due process of law and regulations has been overlapped by the Government. She claimed that “The country’s laws are being mocked wholesale. Unconscionably, one of the country’s most vulnerable groups may have to pay the ultimate price for it.” She also made criticism on the basis that the proposed port under the project is “controversial” because some part of it is the part of the Coastal Regulation Zone (CRZ) 1A. In the concluding part of her article she made an appeal that “We must raise our voice against this travesty of justice and this betrayal of our

national values.” so that the central government can halt the Greater Nicobar Project. But the question is why the Grand Old Party of this Democracy is against the project which is crucial for Bharat to attain maritime supremacy in Indo-Pacific region? Greater Nicobar Islands Development Project is a \$ 9 billion mega project conceived by the NITI Aayog and being implemented by the Andaman and Nicobar Islands Integrated Development Corporation (ANIDC). The Project constitutes the development of a port, airport, power and township facilities. This will become a catalyst for the enhancement of Bharat’s maritime security and trade. Today the Indian Ocean region has emerged as the global power axis of 21<sup>st</sup> Century. At present, our 80% external trade and 100% energy imports happens through this region. Great Nicobar island is situated at the southernmost tip of the Andaman and Nicobar group in Bay of Bengal and near the Six Degree Channel, a crucial passage near the Malacca Strait through which 30-40% of global trade and most of China’s Energy imports take place. Building a port right in a strategic pinpoint location at Indian Ocean will help

the Bharat to cut its cargo transport costs to a drastic level. Major eastern ports of Bharat are having drafts of 8-12 metres only which are not capable to handle large vessels, whereas other global ports have maintained the depths of 12- 20 metres which allows them to easily handle the vessels having a weight of 1,65,000 tonnes or more! For nearly 25% of our Cargo, Bharat had to rely on other global ports thus costing a loss of Rs. 1,500 crores annually in direct port revenue and Rs. 3000-4000 crore to the economy as a whole. Galathea Bay where this port is proposed to be constructed is having a natural depth of 18-20 metres and thus helps to lower down our dependence on other ports. It is important for us in a strategic way also. At present China is controlling one terminal of the Colombo Port, which is handling 25% of our cargo and 40% of our trade, thus facilitating China to keep a surveillance on our cargoes! The development of this port will counterbalance the Chinese “String of Pearls” strategy, in which it is building ports and facilities to exert its influence over the Indian Ocean region. The development of this port will enhance our surveillance infrastructure as it keeps major maritime chokepoints under Bharat’s check and helps us to become a logistics hub for this crucial trade region. Thus we are not building only a port rather we are fixing decades long weakness of our maritime infrastructure. But there are powers who



are inimical to Bharat’s growing influence in the Indopacific region. Thus they have exhorted to different ways to check our growing influence in the region. The weaponisation of the ecological concerns and tribal welfare narratives has been their weapons to thwart Bharat’s influence. Just a week before Sonia Gandhi’s article, the Leader of Opposition of the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi wrote a letter to the Central Tribal Welfare Minister Jugal Oram to stall this project on grounds that it will adversely impact the indigenous populace of the island. However, Central Environment Minister Bhupendra Yadav has aptly replied to the so called genuine queries of mother and son duo by penning down an article in *The Hindu* itself. But there seems to be a larger nefarious design to hamper the project by an NGO called Survival International. According to its official website it works to “prevent the annihilation of Indigenous peoples and secure their land rights. We work with tribes around the world, and our uncompromising campaigns are rooted in these deep and enduring relation-

ships. We offer them a platform to speak to the world, so that they can denounce the genocidal violence and racism they face on a daily basis.” And for achieving its goals it relies on lobbying, advocacy and public campaigns. Since the announcement of the project, Survival International has been campaigning against this in the name of tribal rights. In April 2024, twelve Academics, NGO activists wrote a letter to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands Integrated Development Corporation (ANIDCO) that the project is disregarding the rights of the tribals there. And demanded the scrapping of this critical project. Ironically Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi have also made the same basis for the impeding the project! Later on this letter by these Activists was quoted by Survival International on its website in an article titled “Indian experts say mega-project will lead to uncontacted island tribe’s extinction”. In 2025, Survival International submitted a report to the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) to compel the

Government of Bharat to “abandon all current and future plans for the Great Nicobar Project.” In its initial pages the report made the concerns about the imaginary adverse impacts upon local tribes which will happen due to the influx of tourists. The report also mentioned the April 2024 letter sent to the ANIDCO by the so called experts. A critical analysis of the signatories of the aforementioned letter will expose the real and sinister agenda veiled in the name of tribal welfare and ecological concerns. One of the signatories of the letter was Ashish Kothari. Kothari was the founder of Kalpvish and Vikalp Sangam. He was the person who was also the part of Narmada Bachao Andolan, a neo-Marxist movement to hamper the agricultural infrastructure development of Bharat. And strangely Kothari has served on the Government’s Environmental Appraisal committee on River Valley Projects and expert committees to formulate Biological Diversity Act, despite being a Narmada Dam Antagonist! It is well known to the world that the decadelong UPA regime was famous for giving places to the urban naxals in the pow-

er corridors of Dilli Darbar. But what is worth mentioning is that Kothari has also been associated with a so called independent media platform Open Democracy. But interestingly this media platform has been receiving regular grants from notorious entities linked to the chaotic George Soros’s Open Society Foundation, Omidyar Network, Ford Foundation etc. In 2021, Open Society Foundation (OSF) has given \$6,00,000 for a period of 24 months for Tracking the Backlash project. In the same year OSF again granted a sum of \$ 1,60,000 for the period of 24 months to support its oDR project. And again OSF released a grant of \$25,000 for seven months to “enrich awareness and debate around the climate crisis and constitutional reforms in Chile by open Democracy’s democracy Abiertaproject. In 2020 another Soros’s entity Open Society Policy Centre has issued a grant of €40,000-60,000 to Open Democracy. Similar grants were made in different years between the period of 2012 to 2021 by different entities malefic to Bharat’s growth story. The funding of any NGO binds it to carry the agenda of its funding masters. The same happens in the case of Greater Nicobar Islands project also. This was not the first time that Survival International has made efforts to hamper the growth trajectory of Bharat! In its annual reports of 2021 and 2022 one can find the mention of a campaign “Adivasis against

coal”. In the garb of Adivasis against coal project, it tried to disrupt the energy infrastructure of Bharat so to thwart our energy security issues. Income Tax (IT) department sent a 104-page letter to Environics Trust in which it outlined some serious allegations against the NGO regarding its funding activities and involvement in anti-corporate protests. The letter alleged that Environics Trust aligned with the London-based Survival International to incite protests against Adani’s Godda Plant in Jharkhand, thereby aiming to bolster the anti-Adani movement. Clearly, there is a visible pattern against the Bharat to disrupt its growth trajectory by forces inimical to it. They weaponise the propaganda against the Bharat by infusing fake narratives. Through propaganda the motive is to decrease the trust of the public from the State by producing Fake alternate Narratives through Disinformation and narratives is a vehicle which infuses certain ideas and thought into the public consciousness. But the bigger question is that why the grand old party of this democracy has become part of the sinister design to hamper the growth momentum of Bharat? Does Congress, in its desperation to grab power has aligned itself with the forces which poses a threat to Bharat?

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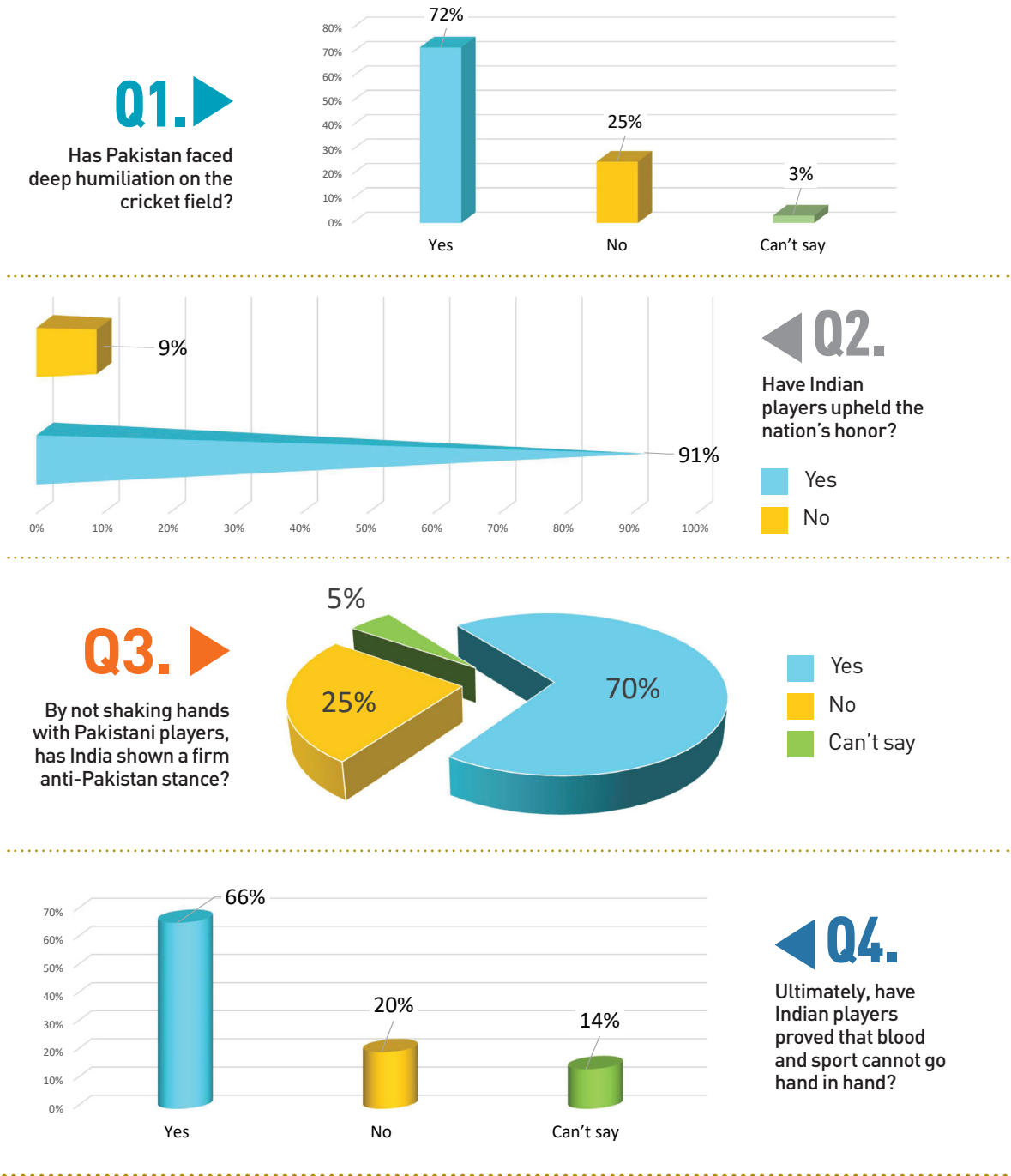


THE DAILY GUARDIAN SURVEY ON IND VS PAK MATCH HANDSHAKE ROW

91% respondents said that Indian players have upheld the nation's honor.

A survey conducted on September 15, 2025, about the India-Pakistan cricket handshake row revealed strong nationalist sentiment among respondents. Seventy-two percent felt Pakistan faced humiliation,

while 91 percent believed Indian players upheld national honor. Seventy percent said refusing handshakes showed India's firm stance, and 66 percent agreed blood and sport cannot be separated.



'Govt should not interfere in Waqf'

CONTINUED FROM P3

the Waqf Amendment Act, Jagdambika Pal, on Monday reaffirmed the validity of the law, after the Supreme Court refused to stay the entire law but put on hold certain provisions of it. He said that while the government would consider the interim stay, the

Act was framed after consultations and extensive debates in both Houses of Parliament. He said that while the government would consider the interim stay, the Act was framed after consultations and extensive debates in both Houses of Parliament. "The Supreme Court has given its approval to the

Waqf Amendment Act, which was passed by the legislature after 14 hours of discussions in Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, and after six months of deliberations in the Joint Parliamentary Committee. It is clear that the law that has been passed is valid," the BJP MP said in Bhubaneswar.

RJD, Cong prioritise own family: PM

CONTINUED FROM P3

ing the Makhana farmers of Bihar and the country.

Addressing a public rally in Purnea, the Prime Minister said, "For RJD and Congress, the biggest concern is to worry about their own family. These people will never worry about your family. But for Modi, you all are Modi's family. And that is why Modi says 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas'."

PM Modi also highlighted his government's commitment to reducing expenses and boosting savings for citizens, announcing significant GST reductions effective September 22, coinciding with Navratri, ahead of Diwali and Chhath festivals. "Modi cares about your expenses, cares about your savings. Many festivals are coming in the coming days. This time, before Diwali and Chhath, our government has given a very big gift to the poor and the middle class. From the first day of Navratri, 22nd September, GST will be drastically reduced in the country," he said.

Notably, daily essentials are cheaper now.

BMW accident: 38-year-old lady held

CONTINUED FROM P3

2 PM yesterday, a medico-legal case related to a road accident involving a car and a motorcycle was brought to our hospital. First aid was offered, and the police were informed. A man aged between 50 and 57 years was brought in dead, and his wife, who sustained injuries but was vitally stable, was also brought in."

She said the wife opted for further treatment elsewhere.

"As per the choice of this lady, who was brought

along with this man, after first aid and necessary stabilisation, she was transferred to another hospital for further management on her request," she said.

"Both were provided immediate medical aid. One female patient, after initial observation and treatment, has been discharged in stable condition. The male patient, following advice from our critical care team, has been referred to a higher centre for advanced management," she said.

Meanwhile, deceased Navjyot's cousin Shailendra

said accountability was essential if the accused driver was found responsible.

"First thing is that if she (accused) has made mistakes, whether it is before the accident, rash driving or after the accident. If there are mistakes, intentional and unintentional, and if the police find this thing in the inquiry, then definitely she has to pay the price," he told ANI.

He also raised questions about why Navjyot was not immediately taken to the nearest hospital with emergency facilities.

SC stays key provisions of Waqf Amendment Act 2025

CONTINUED FROM P3

against any parties, and the provision dealing with such powers to the Collector shall remain stayed.

The apex court also said that the provision that not more than three non-Muslim members should be included in the state Waqf Board, and that, in total, not more than four non-Muslims shall be included in the Central Waqf Councils for now. The court also noted that as far as possible, the CEO of the Board should be a Muslim.

It, however, did not interfere with the provision mandating registration,

considering that it is not a new requirement, as this condition was there in the previous enactments of 1995 and 2013 as well.

The top court passed the interim order on several petitions challenging the Constitutional validity of Waqf Act.

During the hearing, the Centre had argued in favour of the provision barring non-Muslims from creating Waqfs.

It had said that only in the 2013 amendment, non-Muslims were given such rights but in the 1923 law, they were not allowed to create Waqfs, as there were concerns that this could be

Rahul in flood-hit Amritsar, meets affected families

CONTINUED FROM P3

After arriving in Amritsar, Gandhi travelled to Ghone-wal village in Ajnala, one of the worst-hit areas, where he sat with affected families and enquired about the losses they had suffered. The Congress leader also assessed the extent of damage to homes, crops and infrastructure in the area.

Later in the day, Gandhi is scheduled to offer prayers

at the historic Gurdwara Baba Budha Sahib in Ramdas area of Amritsar before heading to Gurdaspur district to review the flood situation there.

Punjab has witnessed one of its worst flood disasters in decades, triggered by swollen Sutlej, Beas and Ravi rivers, along with seasonal rivulets carrying excess water from heavy rainfall in catchment areas of Himachal Pradesh and J&K.

Mann seeks reopening of Kartarpur Sahib corridor

CONTINUED FROM P3

anti-Punjabi mentality? They hate Punjabis, maybe because Punjabi farmers forced them to withdraw the three farm laws," he remarked.

Mann also said that the announced amount of Rs1,600 crore for Punjab's flood disaster has still not been credited to the state treasury. He added that he had confirmed this from his Chief Secretary.

Top Maoist with Rs 1-cr bounty, 2 others killed

CONTINUED FROM P3

Area Committee and carried a reward of Rs 25 lakh. Meanwhile Birsan Ganju (alias Ramkhelavan), member of the regional committee carried a reward of Rs 10 lakh.

The police have also recovered multiple weapons including an AK-47 from the spot. The encounter is currently ongoing, with security forces searching for any other Naxalites. Earlier on Sunday, the 209 CoBRA battalion and the Hazaribagh police carried out a joint search operation, during which an encounter broke out with Naxalites in the Pati Piri forest under Gorhar police

station area of Hazaribagh district.

Earlier in July, CCM member Sahdev Soren was involved in another exchange of fire in which a security official lost his life. According to Bokaro SP Harvinder Singh, a bullet hit the jawan of the 209 battalion during a search operation carried out by Bokaro police. The officials had received information that a "major incident will be carried out by the group".

Earlier on September 7 in Chaibasa, a prominent leader of the banned Communist Party of India (Maoist), Aaptan, was killed during a gunfight, according to Superintendent of Police (SP) Rakesh Ranjan.

Bhajanlal cabinet expansion stalled

CONTINUED FROM P3

However, in Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, the delay centers around the formation of state executive committees at the organizational level. These appointments have been pending, largely due to the absence of a decision regarding the new national president of the Bharatiya Janata Party.

As a result, organizational changes in several states, including Rajasthan and Madhya Pradesh, have been put on hold. With Navratri approaching this month, there is growing anticipation that the party will begin clearing these pending matters. The first major decision is expected to be the appointment of the national president. Once that is finalized, the process of forming state executive

committees in various states is likely to begin. Senior state leaders are also expected to be accommodated within these committees. All key decisions will be taken from the central leadership in Delhi.

The political scenario in Rajasthan remains complex, primarily due to internal factional dynamics within the Bharatiya Janata Party. The formation of the state executive is particularly tricky, as leaders from multiple camps are vying for representation. Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma is reportedly planning to induct fresh faces through a reshuffle, but balancing this with factional demands is proving to be a challenge.

While the BJP appears united on the surface, deep divisions remain. Former Chief Minister Vasundhara

Poll officers' training as part of roll revision in WB

CONTINUED FROM P3

the voter list revision process smoothly and accurately," he told PTI.

Assistant district magistrates (ADMs) and electoral registration officers (EROs) from across the state will be trained in the coming days, the official said.

"These officials will then train the BLOs, who are responsible for direct voter outreach at the grassroots level," he said. Once the ADM and ERO training is complete, the BLOs will receive detailed instructions on assisting voters in filling requisite forms during the SIR drive, he said.

"The BLOs are expected to visit households across the state to verify details and ensure proper documentation is in place. This is part of the pre-SIR groundwork," the official said.

Deputy Election Commissioner Gyanesh Bharti is scheduled to visit Kolkata later this week to review preparations and oversee the rollout of the revision exercise, he said.

Meanwhile, during a meeting with ADMs here, officials were asked to begin voter mapping activities at the district level.

A key directive was to compare the 2002 voter list – the last time SIR was conducted in West Bengal – with the latest electoral roll published in January 2025.

Raje continues to wield considerable influence and has a dedicated faction within the party. The central leadership is cautious about ignoring her supporters, especially given her recent meetings with RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and Union Home Minister Amit Shah during the monsoon session. These meetings have reaffirmed her importance within the party's national structure.

Similarly, supporters of Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla and former state BJP president Satish Poonia also expect positions in the government and party organization. While Birla and Poonia may not actively interfere in day-to-day state politics, the central leadership understands that sidelining their loyalists could lead to further internal

discord. In this context, the decisions regarding cabinet expansion under CM Bhajanlal Sharma and the formation of a new state executive under BJP state president Madan Rathore are far from straightforward. The party high command is working to ensure all factions feel represented to maintain internal harmony.

A similar situation is unfolding in Madhya Pradesh, where the high command must balance the influence of former Chief Minister and current Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan and Union Communications Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia. In both states, inclusion and careful management of power blocs remain key to moving forward.

used as a device to defraud creditors.

It had also defended the five-year practice condition to be eligible for the creation of Waqf.

According to the Act, Waqf refers to an endowment made by a Muslim for charitable or religious purposes, such as building mosques, schools, hospitals, or other public institutions. "Another defining feature of a Waqf is that it's inalienable- which means it cannot be sold, gifted, inherited or encumbered," it said.

A batch of petitions challenging the Act was filed before the apex court, sending that it was discrim-

inatory towards Muslim community and violates their fundamental rights.

All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimen (AIMIM) Member of Parliament Asaduddin Owaisi, Congress MPs Mohammad Jawed and Imran Pratapgarhi, AAP MLA Amanatullah Khan, MP and President of the Azad Samaj Party Chandra Shekhar Azad, Samajwadi Party MP from Sambhal Zia Ur Rehman Barq, Rajya Sabha MP Manoj Jha and Faiyaz Ahmad, Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) through its MP A Raja, President of the Islamic cleric's body Jamiat Ulema-i-Hind Mau-

lana Arshad Madani, Kerala Sunni scholars' body Samastha Kerala Jamiatul Ulema, Social Democratic Party of India, Indian Union Muslim League, and NGO Association for Protection of Civil Rights, All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) among others moved the top court.

They had strongly objected to the amendments passed by Parliament for being "arbitrary, discriminatory and based on exclusion."

Six Bharatiya Janata Party-ruled states had also moved the apex court in the matter, in support of the amendment.

Will stay with NDA: Nitish vows again

CONTINUED FROM P3

ployment drive, the Chief Minister announced an ambitious plan to create one crore jobs over the next five years. Kumar lauded Modi for the measures taken by the Union government for the state, and made a special mention of the budget presented earlier this year,

which had a number of announcements, including establishment of a National Makhana Board, which was inaugurated by the PM at Purnea. The chief minister also touched upon recent moves of his government, including making 125 units of power free and a hike in social security pensions. Before ending his speech,

Kumar turned towards the female crowds present at the venue, and urged them to stand and salute the PM.

The women promptly got up, greeted Modi with folded hands before bursting into a round of applause. Earlier, the prime minister launched multiple development projects worth around Rs36,000 crore in Purnea district.

US trade negotiator to hold talks

CONTINUED FROM P3

March this year, aiming to complete the first stage of the Agreement by October-November 2025.

Initially, US President Donald Trump announced 25 per cent tariffs on Indian goods, even as there were hopes of an interim India-US trade deal that would have otherwise helped avoid elevated tariffs. A few days later, he imposed another 25 per cent tariff, taking the total to 50 per cent, citing India's continued imports of Russian oil.

US President Donald Trump had imposed reciprocal tariffs on dozens of

countries with which the US has a trade deficit. Since assuming office for his second term, President Trump has reiterated his stance on tariff reciprocity, emphasizing that his administration will match tariffs imposed by other countries, including India, to "ensure fair trade".

Earlier this week, Prime Minister Narendra Modi responded warmly to US President Donald Trump's affirmation of the India-US ties, saying he "deeply appreciates and fully reciprocates" the US President's sentiments and positive assessment of the bilateral relations.

PM Modi noted India-US ties as "forward-looking"

towards a "Comprehensive and Global Strategic Partnership," in a post on X.

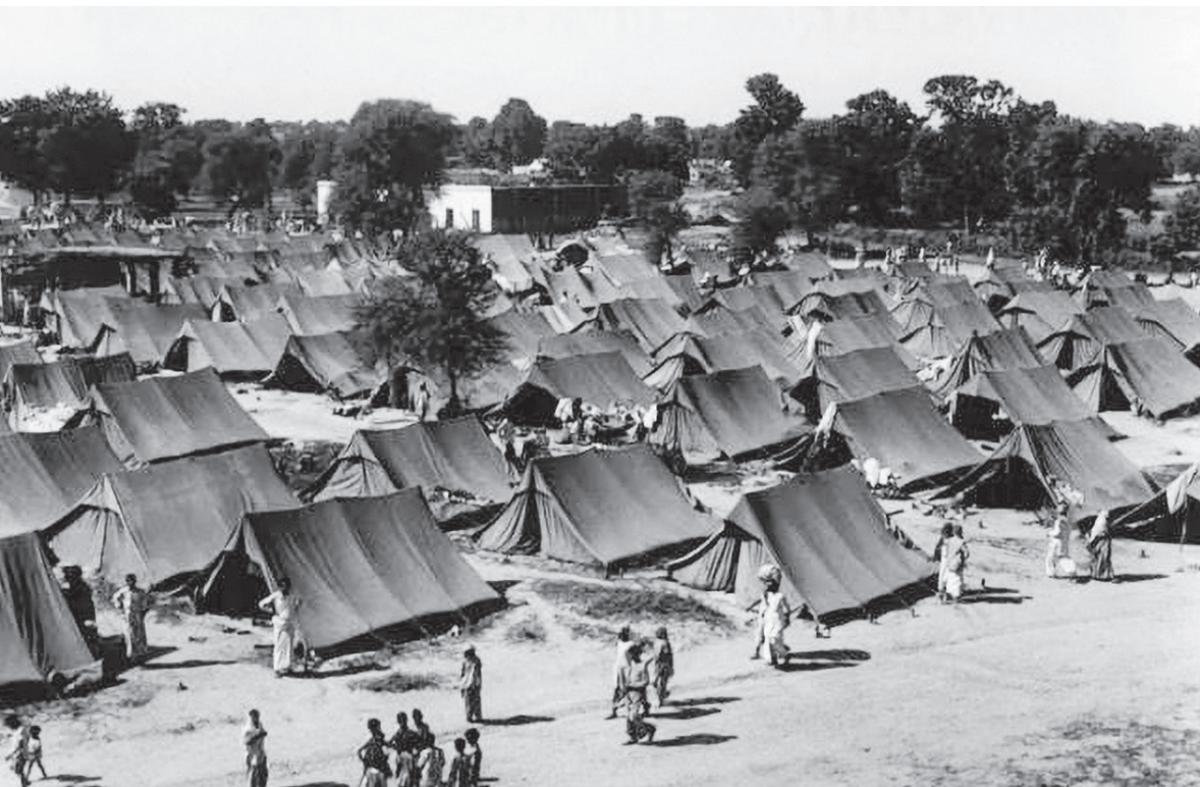
"Deeply appreciate and fully reciprocate President Trump's sentiments and positive assessment of our ties. India and the US have a very positive and forward-looking Comprehensive and Global Strategic Partnership," the Prime Minister stated in his post.

President Trump, while making an announcement in the White House, recalled that the India-US ties are a "very special relationship" and affirmed that he and PM Modi would always be friends, asserting that there is "nothing to worry about".





Indians crowded onto trains during the partition of India into a predominantly Hindu state (India) and a predominantly Muslim state (Pakistan) in one of the largest population transfers in history, 1947.



Tents at Kingsway Camp, Delhi, provided shelter to Partition refugees who couldn't be accommodated in the barracks. (Courtesy The Partition Museum Project)

# PARTITION TO CAA: WHO HAS BELONGED IN INDIA?

TDG NETWORK  
NEW DELHI

In March 2024, the Indian government finally notified rules to implement the Citizenship (Amendment) Act of 2019 (CAA), ending over four years of uncertainty since the law's passage. This marked a new chapter in India's long debate over citizenship and belonging. The CAA offers a fast-tracked path to Indian citizenship for migrants from six minority religious communities – Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jains, Parsis, and Christians – coming from Pakistan, Bangladesh or Afghanistan, so long as they entered India by 2014. By explicitly excluding Muslims, the CAA breaks with India's post-independence legacy of religion-neutral citizenship laws. The delayed rollout has begun modestly: early data from regions like Assam and Vidarbha indicate only a handful of approvals so far (just 2 people in Assam by early 2025, and around 55 in Vidarbha by late 2025). Yet, even as these numbers trickle in, the Act's implementation is rekindling fundamental questions first posed at India's birth: Who belongs in India, and on what terms? To answer that, one must look back at the subcontinent's tumultuous history of partition, migration, evolving citizenship laws, and the shifting sands of national identity.

**PARTITION AND THE BIRTH OF CITIZENSHIP**  
*Columns of non-Muslim refugees trekking from West Punjab (in newly formed Pakistan) toward India in September 1947. The Partition of India triggered one of the largest mass migrations in human history.* The modern notion of Indian citizenship took shape amid the trauma of the 1947 Partition. When British colonial rule ended, British India was carved into two nation-states – a secular but Hindu-majority India, and an explicitly Muslim-majority Pakistan. This division along religious lines uprooted an estimated 12 to 20 million people who fled either west or east to find safety among their co-religionists. Amid riots and chaos, hundreds of thousands – perhaps up to 2 million – lost their lives. In this crucible, the question of “who belongs” demanded an immediate answer. People who had always been neighbors suddenly found themselves labeled foreigners based simply on which side of an arbitrary new border they were on. Both India and Pakistan had to define their citizens and deal with an unprecedented refugee crisis. India's founding leadership, under Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, was com-



Protesters gather at Shaheen Bagh to oppose the amended Citizenship Act, in New Delhi, Tuesday, Dec. 31, 2019.

mitted to a pluralistic vision: despite the religious logic of Partition, India chose not to establish itself as a Hindu nation. Approximately 35 million Muslims remained in India after 1947, instantly becoming Indian citizens in the new Republic. The framers of India's Constitution (adopted in 1950) crafted inclusive citizenship provisions that did not discriminate by religion. Instead, citizenship was largely based on domicile and migration criteria. For example, Articles 5 and 6 of the Constitution guaranteed citizenship to anyone born or domiciled in India, including those who had migrated from Pakistan to India before July 1948. Article 7, however, dealt with the tricky scenario of those who had fled to Pakistan but later wished to return. It denied Indian citizenship to people who had migrated to Pakistan after March 1, 1947, unless they came back to India on a government-issued permit for permanent resettlement. In other words, a Muslim family that left for Pakistan during the turmoil could not automatically claim Indian citizenship if they had a change of heart – they needed to obtain a re-entry permit by July 19, 1948, to be treated as having migrated back to India. This “permit system” underscored that early on, India tried to favor those who returned (often these were minorities—Hindus and Sikhs—from Pakistan) by easing their path to citizenship. Yet it also tacitly acknowledged that a permanent exchange of populations was occurring: those who left India for Pakistan were presumed to have “transferred their loyalty” and would generally cease to belong to India. Citizenship, once a non-issue under a unified British Raj, had become sharply bifurcated by the new international boundary.

**PASSPORTS, PERMITS AND THE NEW BORDERS**  
In the first years after Partition, movement across the India–Pakistan border remained somewhat fluid. Both dominions hoped to stabilize their newly drawn frontiers without completely severing people-to-people ties. In 1950,

following communal massacres in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) and West Bengal, the Nehru-Liaquat Pact was signed by India and Pakistan's prime ministers. This pact aimed to reassure minority communities in each country (Muslims in India, Hindus and Sikhs in Pakistan) of safety, and it temporarily allowed displaced persons to move freely to join their families or seek refuge. For a brief period, travel between India and East Pakistan did not require passports or visas. However, this leniency soon gave way to stricter controls as distrust mounted between the two states. By late 1952, both governments agreed that passports and visas would henceforth be mandatory for cross-border travel. This decision – essentially creating an international passport regime – caused panic among minorities on either side who suddenly feared being trapped in hostile territory. As the deadline for passport requirements approached in October 1952, an exodus erupted: an estimated 70,000 Hindus fled East Pakistan into India within days, while about 6,000 Muslims in India fled to East Pakistan. The spectacle of overloaded trains, bullock carts and on-foot columns of refugees once again replayed the trauma of 1947. So chaotic was the flight that India and Pakistan temporarily suspended the new rules for 15 days to let people catch their breath. By 1953, however, the Indo-Pakistan passport and visa system was firmly in place, symbolizing the cementing of two separate national identities – and the hardening of the notion that to “belong” in India or Pakistan, one needed documentary proof of nationality.

The 1950s thus saw the evolution of India's citizenship and immigration framework in response to Partition's fallout. India passed its **Citizenship Act in 1955**, which laid out five paths to citizenship: by birth in Indian territory, by descent from an Indian citizen parent, by registration (a simplified process for certain cases like spouses of Indians), by naturalisation (a residency-based process for foreigners), or by incorporation of new territory into

*How the 1952 passport/visa regime suddenly hardened a once-porous Partition border, turning “belonging” into a documentary test and setting the template for today's citizenship politics.*



People stage a demonstration against the CAA, NRC and NPR, at Shaheen Bagh in New Delhi.

India. Notably, this 1955 law did not categorize citizens by religion – a Hindu from Pakistan and a Muslim from Pakistan were treated the same under eligibility rules. The secular principle was clear in law, even as refugees arriving in practice were mostly non-Muslim. Another law, the Passports Act of 1920 (amended in independent India), and the Foreigners Act of 1946 governed entry and exit: they empowered the government to require visas and to deport illegal entrants. Over time, using these laws, India developed a practice of issuing “Long Term Visas” to certain groups of refugees (especially Hindus and Sikhs from Pakistan) allowing them to reside in India pending citizenship. But formally, an “illegal migrant” – defined as someone entering without a valid passport/visa – was barred from citizenship registration.

**REFUGEES, MIGRATION AND THE QUESTION OF BELONGING**  
Even after Partition's initial exchange, waves of migration into India continued through the 1950s and 1960s, especially from East Pakistan (present-day Bangladesh). Communal violence and political instability in East Pakistan drove hundreds of thousands of Bengali Hindu families into Indian states like West Bengal, Assam and Tripura. The cumulative effect was profound. By 1971, an estimated **8 million** refugees from East Pakistan were living in India, with particularly heavy concentrations in border states. Then came the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971 – a cataclysmic event that both solved and worsened the refugee problem. As East Pakistan fought for independence from West Pakistan, around **10 million** civilians (mostly Hindu Bengalis) poured into India in just a few months. India opened its borders to support them during the conflict. When the war ended with the birth of Bangladesh, the vast majority of these refugees returned to

their new country. Even so, perhaps **1-1.5 million** chose to remain in India permanently, adding to the ranks of undocumented migrants in the northeast. No region felt these demographic pressures more acutely than **Assam**. There, the influx of Bengali-speaking migrants (both Hindu and Muslim) fueled fears among the indigenous Assamese of being culturally and politically overrun. During the 1970s, a vigorous Assam Movement rose demanding the expulsion of “foreigners” – by which they meant post-1971 immigrants from Bangladesh. This led to the 1985 **Assam Accord**, an agreement between the movement's leaders and India's government. The Accord set a specific cutoff: anyone who entered Assam from Bangladesh after **24 March 1971** (the eve of the Bangladesh war) would be deemed a foreigner and deported, but those who came before that would be allowed to stay and eventually granted citizenship. To implement this, a special section 6A was added to India's Citizenship Act, making Assam a unique case where citizenship rules differed from the rest of India. For the first time, the law tied citizenship to a **historic date** in one specific state. This highlighted how contested the notion of belonging had become on sub-national levels – in Assam, language and ethnicity were as important as religion in deciding who is accepted as “Assamese” (and thereby Indian). Elsewhere in India, other refugee situations were handled in ad-hoc ways. For example, after the Sri Lankan civil war's outbreak, **Tamil refugees** fled to India in the 1980s. India sheltered tens of thousands of Sri Lankan Tamils in camps in Tamil Nadu state but did not confer citizenship on them (many remain stateless or as refugees to this day). Similarly, **Tibetan** exiles including the Dalai Lama arrived from Chinese-occupied Tibet in 1959; India gave them asylum and land to settle but not citizenship. These cases

showed India's willingness to host people in need, yet a reluctance to formally absorb large groups except those with perceived civilizational ties. The thread connecting most refugee policies was an implicit hierarchy of belonging: Hindus and Sikhs from neighboring Islamic countries were often tacitly favored in regularizing status, whereas Muslim refugees (or others like Buddhist Tibetans) were kept at arm's length legally. Still, before 2019, **no Indian law explicitly granted or denied citizenship on the basis of religion** – it was mostly an unstated practice.

**THE EVOLUTION OF CITIZENSHIP LAW**  
India's citizenship regime has tightened over the decades in response to these migration waves. Originally, India was quite liberal in granting citizenship by birth: any person born on Indian soil was an Indian citizen. This jus soli principle held until 1987, when an amendment required that at least one parent be an Indian citizen for a child born in India to qualify. In 2004, another amendment barred citizenship by birth for children if **either parent** was an illegal migrant. These changes were clearly aimed at discouraging undocumented migrants (particularly from Bangladesh) from using births to secure a legal foothold. By the 2000s, the government also began contemplating a **National Register of Citizens (NRC)** – essentially an official list of all bona fide citizens, against which “foreigners” could be identified. In fact, the concept of an NRC was first implemented in Assam in 1951 and then resurrected decades later as part of the Assam Accord's fallout. In 2019, after years of complex verification of documents, Assam published an updated **NRC**: about **1.9 million residents** (roughly 6% of Assam's population) were excluded from the citizenship list for lack of sufficient proof of Indian lineage. Those left out were not only Muslims; they included Bengali Hindus, impoverished tea laborers, and other marginalized groups who simply had trouble producing old records. This hinted at a larger issue: across India, documentation is often patchy, and any nationwide NRC would likely put millions of poor and uneducated citizens through a harsh ordeal to prove their identity. It was against this backdrop that the **Citizenship (Amendment) Act, 2019**

(CAA) emerged. The CAA is actually the latest in a series of amendments to the 1955 Citizenship Act – but by far the most controversial. Previous amendments (in 1986, 2003, 2005, etc.) had not touched the foundational secular character of the law. The CAA 2019, however, made religion a criterion for the first time: it created an expedited path to citizenship for certain religious minorities from India's Muslim-majority neighbors. Government leaders portrayed it as a humanitarian gesture to shelter persecuted non-Muslim minorities from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Afghanistan – groups like Hindus and Sikhs who had indeed faced discrimination or violence in those countries. Critics countered that the Act's exclusions were glaring. **Ahmadiyya and Shia Muslims** persecuted in Pakistan, **Rohingya Muslims** fleeing genocide in Myanmar, or **atheists and secular dissidents** from Bangladesh – none of these would qualify, purely because of their religion. By drawing a line around Muslims, the CAA effectively announced that Indian citizenship – and by extension Indian national identity – could hinge on faith.

**CITIZENSHIP, SECULARISM AND IDENTITY DEBATES**  
The CAA's passage in December 2019 ignited a firestorm of protest across India. For many, it wasn't just about the fate of a relatively small number of refugees; it was about the soul of the Indian Republic. The law seemed to violate the secular, egalitarian ethos enshrined in India's Constitution, particularly Article 14's guarantee of equality. In conjunction with the prospect of a nationwide NRC, the CAA rang alarm bells. Indian Muslims – even families who have lived in India for generations – feared that if they ever failed to produce some document in an NRC process, they could be declared “illegal” and, unlike their non-Muslim neighbors, have **no CAA safety net** to restore their status. This dread was not abstract: the images of detention camps being built in Assam, and accounts of poor people suddenly asked to prove grandparents' residencies, made the threat tangible. In early 2020, a remarkable grassroots movement arose in opposition to CAA and NRC, exemplified by the sit-in protest at **Shaheen Bagh** in New Delhi – led largely by Muslim women who camped for months through the winter, demanding the law's repeal.

*Protesters in Delhi's Shaheen Bagh neighborhood, early 2020, demonstrating against the CAA and a proposed nationwide NRC. The protest, led by women, became a symbol of resistance in defense of India's secular foundations.* Nationwide, university students, civil society groups, and citizens of all faiths took to the streets. They voiced that determining “who belongs” in India by religion betrays the inclusive vision of leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and B.R. Ambedkar. In their eyes, the CAA-NRC combination was a project to redefine India from a pluralistic republic into a Hindu-majoritarian polity. On the other side, the law's supporters argued that India, as a civilizational home for South Asia's oppressed non-Muslim minorities, was morally justified in giving them priority. They noted that Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan are officially Islamic states where Muslims are unlikely to face religious persecution, whereas Hindus, Sikhs and others have dwindled in those countries and deserve refuge. These proponents often framed the issue as one of **reciprocity** – since Pakistan and Bangladesh had effectively driven out most of their Hindus since 1947, why shouldn't India preferentially absorb those refugees as rightful returnees to their cultural homeland? Some also saw the CAA as correcting an “injustice” by which secular India had given equal treatment to those who didn't believe in its secular values. The clash of viewpoints essentially revisited a fundamental question: Is India *a territory or a homeland*? The secular view treats India as a territory belonging to all its current citizens equally, regardless of lineage or creed – thus any religious selection is anathema. The opposing view leans on the idea of India as a natural homeland for certain cultures (especially Indic religions), implying that others (notably Muslims, who have other homelands) do not belong in the same way. This debate isn't new; it echoes pre-independence discussions when figures like Veer Savarkar (who formulated Hindutva ideology) claimed that only those for whom India was both motherland and holy land (i.e., Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, Buddhists) could be truly loyal Indians. Such ideas were strongly rejected by secular nationalists then, but today they have resurfaced in mainstream politics, reflected in laws like the CAA.



# BEYOND BEHAVIOR: WHAT CHILDREN AND TEENS ARE REALLY GOING THROUGH



DR AMIT AVASTHI

In recent years, mental health has emerged as one of the most critical components of overall well-being, particularly for children and teenagers. As young people navigate the complex stages of development—marked by physical, emotional, and social changes—their mental health becomes a key factor in shaping their future. However, mental health challenges among children and adolescents are on the rise, demanding attention from parents, educators, healthcare providers, and society at large.

### THE GROWING CONCERN

Mental health disorders in children and teenagers are more common than many realize. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), one in seven 10-19-year-olds globally experiences a mental disorder. Anxiety, depression, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and conduct disorders are among the most prevalent. The consequences of untreated mental health issues can be profound, affecting academic performance, relationships, physical health, and future employment opportunities.

What's more concerning is that many mental health conditions go undiagnosed or untreated. Stigma, lack of awareness, and limited access to mental health services prevent many young

people from getting the help they need.

### FACTORS INFLUENCING MENTAL HEALTH IN YOUNG PEOPLE

**Biological and Genetic Influences:** Mental health conditions can have genetic components. A family history of mental illness may increase the likelihood of similar issues in children. Neurobiological changes during puberty also play a role in emotional regulation and behavior.

**Family Environment:** A stable, supportive home environment is crucial for emotional development. Exposure to domestic violence, parental neglect, substance abuse, or divorce can significantly impact a child's mental well-being.

**School and Academic Pressure:** As children grow older, academic expectations increase. Pressure to perform well, standardized testing, and competition can cause stress and anxiety. Bullying and social isolation at school also contribute to poor mental health.

**Social Media and Technology:** The digital age has introduced new challenges. While technology can foster connection, excessive use of social media is linked to low self-esteem, cyberbullying, sleep disturbances, and anxiety in teenagers.

**Trauma and Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs):** Traumatic events—such as abuse, neglect, or the loss of a loved one—can lead to long-term psychological effects. ACEs have been shown to increase the risk of mental illness, substance abuse, and suicidal behavior in adolescents.

**Cultural and Societal Pressures:** Teenagers often face pressure to conform to societal expectations, which can conflict with their sense of identity. Minority youth



may experience discrimination or cultural dissonance, increasing the risk of mental health struggles.

### RECOGNIZING THE SIGNS

Early identification is essential in addressing mental health issues. Parents, teachers, and caregivers should watch for warning signs, including:

- Persistent sadness or irritability
- Withdrawal from friends and activities
- Sudden changes in behavior or personality
- Decline in academic performance
- Difficulty concentrating
- Changes in eating or sleeping patterns
- Expressions of hopelessness or thoughts of self-harm

Not every mood swing or

emotional episode indicates a mental health disorder, especially during adolescence. However, if symptoms persist or worsen over time, professional help should be sought.

### THE ROLE OF PARENTAL COMMUNICATION

Parents play a pivotal role in supporting their child's mental health. Creating a safe, open, and nurturing environment encourages children to express their feelings without fear of judgment. Active listening, consistent routines, and quality time can foster emotional security.

Open and supportive communication between parents and children plays a crucial role in promoting mental health. When parents actively listen, show empathy,

and create a safe space for emotional expression, children are more likely to feel understood and valued. This foundation of trust helps reduce anxiety, build self-esteem, and improve emotional regulation.

Conversely, poor communication—characterized by criticism, neglect, or emotional unavailability—can contribute to feelings of isolation, confusion, and low self-worth. Children who lack healthy communication at home may struggle to express their emotions, leading to behavioral issues or mental health challenges like depression and anxiety.

Consistent, honest conversations—tailored to a child's age and emotional maturity—strengthen the parent-child bond and help children feel secure. By validating emotions and encouraging dialogue, parents empower their children to navigate challenges more effectively, laying the groundwork for lifelong emotional well-being. Effective communication isn't just helpful—it's essential.

Equally important is reducing the stigma associated with mental health. Children should be taught that seeking help is a sign



of strength, not weakness. Parents should model this behavior by being open about emotions and mental health discussions.

### THE ROLE OF SCHOOLS

Schools are not just centers for academic learning but also for emotional development. Implementing mental health education, peer support groups, and access to school counselors can create a more supportive atmosphere for students. Educators should be trained to recognize mental health issues and respond with compassion and appropriate referrals.

In recent years, some schools have adopted "mental health days," allowing students time to rest and recharge, much like sick days for physical illness. This progressive approach acknowledges the importance of mental well-being.

### THE NEED FOR BETTER ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

A significant barrier to improved youth mental health is access to care. Many communities lack enough mental health professionals,

especially those trained to work with children. Long waiting times, high costs, and geographical limitations can delay treatment.

Governments and healthcare systems must invest in accessible, affordable, and youth-centered mental health services. Telehealth and mobile apps have emerged as promising tools to bridge the gap, offering therapy and support to those who may otherwise go without.

### PROMOTING RESILIENCE AND WELL-BEING

Preventing mental health issues is just as important as treating them. Teaching children coping skills, emotional regulation, and stress management from a young age can build resilience. Physical activity, a balanced diet, good sleep hygiene, and mindfulness practices also contribute to mental wellness. Encouraging hobbies, creative expression, and social connections can foster a sense of purpose and belonging. When young people feel supported, understood, and valued, their risk of mental health issues significantly decreases. The mental health of children and teenagers is

a vital aspect of their overall development and future success. As society continues to evolve, so too must our approach to supporting young people emotionally and psychologically. By prioritizing early intervention, breaking down stigma, and creating environments that nurture emotional well-being, we can help the next generation thrive—not just survive.

Mental health matters at every age. For children and teenagers, timely support can make all the difference—shaping not only how they feel today, but who they become tomorrow. The writer is Senior specialist Jk lon hospital Jaipur

*Disclaimer: The information provided in this article is for general informational and educational purposes only and is not intended as, nor should it be considered a substitute for, professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified health provider with any questions you may have regarding a medical condition or health objectives. We do not endorse or guarantee the accuracy of the information provided. Reliance on any information provided in this article is solely at your own risk.*

## International Conference ‘India Valves 2025’: A Global Confluence of Cardiac Science

### TDG NETWORK

Leading heart experts from across the globe shared their experiences on the latest technologies for the treatment of heart valve diseases at the International Conference India Valves 2025, organized for the first time in Rajasthan. The experts also discussed complex cases of structural heart disease and explored new possibilities for the future.

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Course Director Dr. Ravindra Singh Rao informed that more than 30 international speakers participated, sharing the latest research and innovations in structural heart disease. Eminent experts from the USA, Canada, Japan, Australia, and Europe joined the event. Notable names included Dr. Samir Kapadia, Dr. Samin Sharma, Dr. Raj Makkar, Dr. Vinayak (USA), Dr. John Webb (Canada), Dr. Kentaro Hayashida (Japan), and Dr. Bernard Prendergast (UK).

Dr. Rao highlighted that the main focus of this year's conference was Transcath-

eter Valve Therapy, a minimally invasive treatment for valve-related heart diseases. Sessions covered technology updates, live case demonstrations, bicuspid aortic valve, advanced imaging, hybrid procedures, and minimally invasive valve repair. Special workshops for doctors included coronary and TAVR workshops, 3Mensio imaging analysis, and electro-wire surgery sessions.

### TIMELY TREATMENT IS CRUCIAL

Dr. Rao emphasized that medications are often ineffective in patients with aortic stenosis. If left untreated, survival rates fall to 50% in the first year and only 20% in the second year. Many patients misinterpret the symptoms as simple weakness or fatigue, but untreated disease may lead to heart failure, pulmonary hypertension, or sudden cardiac arrest. Experts stressed that regular check-ups and timely treatment can help prevent permanent damage and enable patients to live normal lives.

### NEW DRUG TO LOWER CHOLESTEROL

Renowned cardiologist Padmashri Dr. Praveen Chandra (Delhi) shared that high cholesterol is one of the leading causes of heart disease. A new injectable drug, Inclisiran, has been introduced which reduces cholesterol rapidly and its effect lasts up to six months. It can lower cholesterol levels by almost 50% within a few months

and requires only two doses per year.

### NEW-GENERATION BIOPROSTHETIC HEART VALVE – 25-YEAR LIFESPAN

Dr. Raj Makkar (USA) presented new-generation bioprosthetic heart valves made with special tissue that delays calcium deposition. These valves are more durable and can last up to 25 years. If needed in the future, another valve can be implanted inside the existing one, avoiding major surgery.

### COMPLEX CASES HIGHLIGHTED

During the conference, complex cases were presented. Dr. Rao shared the case of a 70-year-old Mumbai patient who had undergone TAVI five years ago and later developed severe chest pain and breathlessness. Tests revealed heavily calcified arterial blockages. Since earlier angioplasty had failed, rota-angioplasty was performed along with a new stent, resulting in successful treatment despite the technical challenges.

### RHEUMATIC FEVER IN CHILDHOOD – MAJOR CAUSE OF VALVE DISEASES

Padma Bhushan Dr. Ashok Seth (Delhi) cautioned that rheumatic fever in childhood remains a major cause of serious valve diseases later in life. Starting from throat infections, it can cause permanent valve



damage. Nearly 300,000 deaths annually are linked to this. Around 30–40% of children suffering from repeated throat infections and rheumatic fever develop valve disease in the future, most commonly affecting the mitral valve, followed by the aortic valve. Many such patients eventually require valve repair or replacement surgery.

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THE ASIAN AGE

16 SEPTEMBER 2025

SC strikes a fair balance in Waqf Act case verdict

The Supreme Court’s interim order staying some of the contentious provisions of the Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025, while refusing to put the Act in its entirety on hold appears to do justice to the law in that it allows some timely modifications and disallows those that would create more problems than it could possibly solve.

The court has offered relief to the petitioners in three important areas in which they sought its intervention. Among them, the stay on the provision allowing the district collector to derecognise a disputed waqf land is most welcome. The court has found that allowing a government officer to decide such a dispute is against the principle of separation of powers and also held that disputed waqf properties will not be affected till the question is decided by the tribunal or the court. The court has, in fact, taken off the immediate threat of government takeover of waqf properties under dispute now.

The court has also upended the government’s attempt to fill the waqf boards and councils with non-Muslims and ruled that there will be no more than four non-Muslim members in the 20-member Central Waqf Council and a maximum of three non-Muslims in the State Waqf Boards.

**The court has offered relief to the petitioners in three important areas in which they sought its intervention. The stay on allowing the district collector to derecognise a disputed waqf land is most welcome.**

The law, in its original form, had envisaged a situation where non-Muslims could be in majority in a mechanism that is authorised to manage properties dedicated to an Islamic cause. It was an attempt to undermine Article 26 of the Constitution which allows every religious denomination to own and acquire movable and immovable property and to administer them. The court, in its final order, ought to explain why it would allow a non-Muslim to be the chief executive officer of the State Waqf Boards.

The court has stayed the condition that a person should be a practitioner of Islam for at least five years for dedicating a property as waqf, holding that it could lead to arbitrariness unless there is a proper mechanism to decide who is a practising Muslim. The court has flagged the fear that some smart people would convert to Islam and dedicate their property as waqf only to avoid legal confiscation. This is welcome, but the court, while making the final order, will have to explain as to how the dedication of property to a religious institution or cause can be limited to the practitioners of Islamic faith and not others.

The court has chosen not to intervene in the condition that all waqf properties must be registered, saying that the provision has been there since the 1923 Act; it has also allowed the scrapping of the provision for ‘waqf-by-user’ and the bar on creating waqfs over Scheduled Areas and protected monuments. The court has pointed out that there is no retrospective effect for these provisions.

The provision for ‘waqf by use’ may have been misused in certain cases but there are waqf properties which have remained so for centuries but without registration or documents. There has to be a mechanism to protect such bona fide claims. The court may probably suggest one in its final verdict.

Reforms are a continuous process in a democracy which help various arms of society move with the times. In that sense, the waqf amendment law was a laudable exercise but was coloured by the political agenda of the ruling party. The judiciary has stepped in to correct the imbalance, and it will hopefully come up with a more balanced and fair system when it pronounces its final verdict.

‘No handshakes’ is not cricket

Sport is war minus the shooting’, George Orwell wrote because he believed sporting contests evoked hypernationalism and would only help increase the ill-will between nations. Proof of Orwellian perspicacity may have been seen in the way the India-Pakistan cricket match in the Asia Cup in Dubai unfolded with Team India players refusing to observe the sporting code of conduct in shaking hands with their opponents after soundly beating them in a neutral arena in Dubai, UAE.

Coming so soon on the heels of the Pakistan-sponsored terror attack in Pahalgam in April and the consequent military conflict in May, the fact that India was playing against Pakistan at cricket had raised the hackles of the people. It was in fear of the adverse reaction of much of India which bristled against any contact with Pakistan that the team may have thought up this bizarre way of showing its contempt for the opponent.

**If sport, especially a non-contact game like cricket, does not follow the spirit in which it is to be played, it may lose its very purpose.**

A reason for their playing Pakistan was not purely commercial as the two nations have always kept their commitments to play in multi-lateral events since 1984 when they first met in the Asia Cup in Sharjah. But, once they had chosen to play in conformity with the principle that participation in such events is the norm and boycotts are the exception, they should have observed all the courtesies associated with the gentleman’s game of cricket, particularly that of the captains shaking hands before the toss and the players and the support staff after the game.

If sport, especially a non-contact game like cricket, does not follow the spirit in which it is to be played, regardless of the outcome which may depend on which team played well on a given day, it may lose its very purpose. Not without reason has the phrase ‘It’s not cricket’ become such a telling metaphor for fair play. The BCCI, which controls the game with its financial clout, may have seen its purpose served in participating in the Asia Cup which it is hosting in the UAE, but it is guilty of running with the hare and hunting with the hounds.

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Aakar Patel

Where the Chinese State has succeeded; and what the Indian State has focused on

An American scholar has written a book in which he tries to explain China’s recent rise. Dan Wang’s thesis is that China is a society of engineers and its government is the rule of engineers, as compared to the United States, which he classifies as a society of lawyers. China is good at manufacturing and building things, he says, while the US is not. So why is this the case?

The answer is regarding the choices that the Chinese State has made, especially in 2015 when it laid out the ‘Made in China 2025’ plan. Sometimes these choices do not work, as Wang points out. An engineering-led mindset produced China’s brutal lockdown in Shanghai or unacceptable things like the ‘one-child’ policy. But it is also why China has succeeded in industrial policy at the highest level – high-speed rail, renewable energy, electric vehicles, ship-building, and has caught up in aviation, semiconductors, rocketry and artificial intelligence.

In all these areas, what the State has intended to achieve, it has delivered. This is an interesting theme and we

will keep returning to it in this column. Today, I wanted to ask ourselves the same question: What has the Indian State intended to achieve, and has it been successful in doing this?

On the side of the economy, jobs and, especially, foreign policy, the answer is now clear, and on both sides of the argument the debate is only about who is to blame. That does not concern us here today. Let us look at an area where the Indian State has succeeded in the choices it has made.

This month was passed the Rajasthan Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Bill 2025. It is aimed at two things – criminalising interfaith marriage between Hindus and Muslims and preventing people, particularly the marginalised communities, from becoming Christians.

Like with other laws of this type, the Rajasthan law punishes conversions, but not all of them. It says: ‘If any person re-converts to the original religion, i.e. ancestral religion, the same shall not be deemed to be a conversion’, and explains ancestral religion as ‘the religion in which the forefathers/ance-

sors of the person had faith, belief or was practised’.

Readers will not need to be told what this means because it is clear. This phrasing was introduced to us in the first law of our era on this subject. This was the Uttarakhand Freedom of Religion Act 2018. It was followed by similar laws in Himachal Pradesh (2019), Uttar Pradesh (2020), Madhya Pradesh (2021), Gujarat (2021), Haryana (2022) and Karnataka (2022).

All of these laws were passed by the BJP. The Rajasthan law adds something new. It also has criminalised all forms of propagation. It says that the dissemination of information, ideas, or beliefs through the media, social media and messaging apps is unlawful if this is interpreted as propagation of religion intended for conversion.

It also increases punishment, now being at up to 14 years in jail and 20 years, if the person changing faith is a Dalit or Adivasi. All of these BJP laws are in violation of pretty much the entire panel of fundamental rights, but they have become acceptable in our society. It will be the rare reader, even

of this column, who knew about the Rajasthan law, cleared on September 9, because this is no longer news as our TV debates understand that word.

To tie the argument up, it is important to accept that the State has succeeded in achieving what is set out to do. Politically it is difficult to reverse the laws because socially they have been made acceptable. The number of people either in favour of these laws or disinterested in them outnumbers those who are in favour of their repeal.

The Karnataka law came into effect on May 17, 2022. Like the others, it requires people wanting to convert to give 30 days’ notice to the district magistrate. This bureaucrat will then put the application up on a notice board in his office and in the office of the tehsildar, calling for objections.

After it won the Assembly elections in May 2023, the Congress said it would undo this law. The following month, on June 15, news under this headline was published: ‘Siddaramaiah-led Karnataka government withdraws anti-conversion law’.

That did not happen. A few days ago,

on September 8, it was reported that the government ‘will seek legal opinion on the Karnataka Protection of Right to Freedom of Religion Act, popularly known as the anti-conversion law, and decide on further action’.

This means that the law is still intact. The state under the BJP made some choices on behalf of Indians beginning in 2014 and resulting in laws on beef that began in 2015, on freedom of religion which began in 2018, on citizenship which began in 2019, and on other things linked at ending pluralism and at the targeting of minorities.

It has achieved what it has intended to achieve here. We may not have had a ‘Made in China 2025’ policy and whatever unserious efforts we have made on this and other fronts have flopped. But it is hard not to accept the total victory of the ‘Remake India 2025’ policy, whose fruits we can see in the laws, the media and indeed in the society all around us.

The writer is the chair of Amnesty International India. Twitter: @aakar\_patel

Subhani



South Asia’s youth crisis: A warning bell in Nepal



Patralekha Chatterjee

Dev 360

There are two ways to process the turbulence around us. One is to comfort ourselves with comparisons — India is bigger, more diverse, more resilient than its neighbours, and therefore we need not worry. The other is to be quietly grateful we are not in freefall, but self-aware enough to recognise that pockets of social upheaval, deep pools of distress and youth joblessness are already derailing India’s goal of becoming the best version of itself.

That is why youth outmigration must be seen not as a statistic, but as a signal — the canary in the coal mine of South Asia’s development crisis.

Nepal provides the latest warning. Nepal has long faced political turmoil, but its Gen Z-led protests in September 2025 reveal how pent-up youth frustration can erupt in unpredictable ways. Gen Z, born between 1997 and 2012, is the first generation raised in a hyperconnected world shaped by digital fluency and economic precarity.

In September 2025, Kathmandu erupted in youth protests after the government blocked 26 major social media platforms. But as Atul Chandra and Pramesh Pokharel wrote: ‘Kathmandu is on edge not because of ‘apps’, but because a generation raised on the promise of democracy and mobility has collided with an economy and political order that keep shutting every door.’ The ban was the spark. The fuel was structural: mass youth outmigration, elite impunity, and a broken development model.

After a week of violent and destructive protests, Nepal finally has a caretaker Prime Minister. Former Chief Justice Sushila Karki — Gen Z’s choice and Nepal’s first woman PM — will lead an interim citizens’ government.

The lessons are clear. In 2024-25, Nepal issued 839,266

labour permits. Remittances made up 33% of GDP, among the highest ratios worldwide. Chandra and Pokharel describe this migration as ‘the silent plebiscite’, and ‘a referendum on a model that exports its youth to low-wage contracts while importing basics, and that depends on patronage rather than productivity’.

The public square, online and offline, is the only space left for asserting dignity. When that square was shut down, the explosion was inevitable.

Nepal’s youth are broadly divided into two archetypes. The fighters — urban, educated, digitally fluent Gen Z protesters who demanded transparency and representation. And the leavers — rural, economically marginalised youth who board planes for low-wage jobs abroad, often exploited and invisible. They may not often seem residents of the same space, but they share the same grievance: a system that rewards inherited privilege and punishes aspiration.

Over three million Nepalese (14% of total population) are working abroad, primarily in Malaysia, the Gulf countries, and India. Migration is now a public spectacle of government failure: visible in remittance-fuelled inequality, social media posts from abroad, and stories of disillusioned returnees. There is widespread anger against corruption. The slogans during the mass protests were blunt: ‘No More Nepo Babies’; ‘Nepal belongs to us, not the corrupt’.

This dynamic is not unique to Nepal. ‘Remittances are often the most important source of foreign inflow for countries in South Asia, ahead of foreign direct investments and other capital inflows, and has contributed significantly to the region’s development. In fact, South Asia is the largest recipient of remittances for a sub-region in the world, with

**Nepal has long faced political turmoil, but its Gen Z-led protests in September 2025 reveal how pent-up youth frustration can erupt in unpredictable ways.**

the majority of them directed at India, which is the largest recipient of remittances in the world by country,’ notes the ‘South Asia Migration Report 2024’, edited by migration expert S. Irudaya Rajan. Across Asia, in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, youth-led uprisings have echoed similar frustrations. These uprisings are part of a regional reckoning with inequality, exclusion and flaunting of privilege.

Migration also creates social divides — between those who leave, those who stay and those who return. These divides can align with ethnic, religious, or political fault lines, turning protests violent when targeted against perceived beneficiaries of the status quo.

India’s scale and diversity buffer it from systemic collapse. But complacency is not an option. ‘India is not quite in the same position as Nepal, Bangladesh or Sri Lanka, where street revolts have toppled governments. It is too vast; its economy is too diverse. And critically, though India has huge inequalities and millions of young jobless citizens — and has experienced mass protests — there are safety valves. Even if flawed, we have a federal structure, Opposition-ruled states, and an active judiciary. The ruling party understands that agitations can act as safety valves, and they carefully leverage this. But disaffection has shown up in fewer votes for the ruling party, as we saw in the 2024 general election,’ says Niranjan Sahoo, senior fellow at the Observer Research Foundation. Mr Sahoo, who focuses on governance, democracy, and federalism, adds: ‘Youth outmigration and remittances are not guaranteed, especially as the world becomes increasingly protectionist and anti-immigrant sentiments sweep across many countries. Many of those who would have left will now have to

stay back. These are warning signals we cannot afford to ignore.’

India’s urban youth (15-29) unemployment hovered around 19% in July 2025, according to the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS). Young people scramble for unstable gig work. The desperation is real, and rising. Beneath the surface of growth lie districts where migration has long been the escape valve. The valve is tightening.

Punjab is the epicentre. With over 13% of rural households having a member abroad, it has been hit hard by US deportations and visa crackdowns. Kerala, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh also have pockets where remittances mask deep joblessness and economic fragility.

What Nepal shows us is that youth outmigration is not just an economic trend; it is a political signal. It is the quiet protest that precedes the loud one. When young people leave en masse, it is not just for better wages. Nepal’s protests show what happens when inequality is ignored, when corruption is normalised, and when youth are treated as a problem rather than a constituency.

No one can predict the eventual outcome of Nepal’s street protests. The two other recent examples from South Asia point in two different directions. Sri Lanka now has a government that is at least more responsive to citizens’ aspirations than previous governments. Bangladesh remains in turmoil more than a year after the government fell. All three shows Gen Z cannot be ignored.

India’s median age is 28; it must act — not out of fear, but out of foresight. That means fixing the skilling pipeline, investing in local economies, and creating dignified employment. It means replacing remittance-complacency with an employment-first development model.

Because when the youth have nowhere to go, they can turn hostile.

*The writer focuses on development issues in India and emerging economies. She can be reached at patralekha.chatterjee@gmail.com*

LETTERS

LAND OF THE FREE?

The killing of conservative activist Charlie Kirk while he was addressing students raises worries about American democracy’s sheen. Debates and dialogues are the beauty of a sound democratic system, which should not be marred by fears of gun violence and the hate agenda of vested interests. Further, the rise of iconic youthful figures like Kirk in the US also speaks of the wider vacuum in which citizens, particularly the youth, find themselves, always waiting for readymade answers from such frivolous influencers to age-old social issues. Such killings are only manifestations of frustration. It’s high time for US to do some soul-searching.

Brij B. Goyal  
Ludhiana

ETHANOL ROLLOUT RISK

**INDIA’S PUSH** for E-20 fuel, a 20 per cent ethanol-petrol blend, signals ambition to cut oil imports, reduce emissions and boost farmer incomes, but its hurried rollout risks backfiring. Vehicle owners face engine damage, lower mileage, unclear repair costs and insurance gaps, while ethanol’s higher procurement price and water-guzzling feedstocks add economic and ecological strain. To ensure sustainability, the government must slow down and adopt a phased rollout, keep E-10 and pure petrol options, support retrofitting or scrapping of older vehicles and mandate insurance protection. Unless backed by consumer safeguards and environmental prudence, the ethanol project risks eroding trust and undermining India’s green energy goals.

Amarjeet Kumar  
Hazaribagh

ACTORS & ALLIES

**AFTER SECURING** Kamal Haasan’s support, the DMK is now keen to draw superstar Rajinikanth closer, which is seen as a calculated response to counter the rising political influence of actor and Tamil Vettri Kazhagam chief Vijay ahead of the coming Tamil Nadu Assembly elections. Rajinikanth recently referred to chief minister M.K. Stalin as his friend and praised him, signalling an implicit alignment with the DMK. While Kamal Haasan adds ideological weight, Rajinikanth’s unparalleled charisma could provide the DMK with a mass connect crucial to offset Vijay’s surge.

N. Sadhasiva Reddy  
Bengaluru



{ OUR TAKE }

## Build consensus for waqf reforms

The Supreme Court offers all stakeholders an opportunity to avoid fractious politics

The Supreme Court’s decision to suspend some of the most controversial provisions of the contentious Waqf (Amendment) Act is a significant moment in the evolving debate around the Islamic charitable endowments. It offers all stakeholders, especially the government, an opportunity to take a step back from the fractious politics enveloping the debate that is preventing genuine reform in the decades-old regulation that governs such charities.

Hearing a batch of petitions, the apex court on Monday suspended the collector’s powers to unilaterally decide whether a property is waqf (an endowment) or government land and alter revenue records, and the requirement that only a practising Muslim for at least five years can create waqf. It also stayed provisions allowing the authorities to derecognise waqf land during the pendency of decision or in the middle of a dispute, adding that no third-party rights should be created on such lands till the dispute is decided. The top court also said the Central Waqf Council cannot have more than four non-Muslim members and state waqf boards cannot have more than three non-Muslim members.

But the court refused to stay the legislation in its entirety, upheld the scrapping of the waqf-by-user provision and the registration of new properties on a national portal, and agreed with the bar of declaration of any land in scheduled or tribal areas as waqf. These developments may be interpreted by the government as a vindication of its stated aim to modernise the law regulating waqfs. But the court’s warning that adopting the law in full, without safeguards, could lead to “serious consequences” for property rights showed that there are some genuine concerns about federalism, separation of powers, and concentration of powers in the hands of some government officials, potentially leading to harassment and misuse.

All laws need to evolve over time. This newspaper has noted in the past that management of many waqf properties in India is blighted by neglect, mismanagement, encroachment and poor oversight. Only well-intentioned moves towards establishing transparency can ensure a genuine overhaul. But polarised politics, unnecessary rhetoric, and a trust deficit have created a minefield of misunderstanding. The top court’s decision offers a moment to the Centre to initiate broader consultations, build consensus on issues involving the states and lend an ear to the fears and concerns of the community. A considered and empathetic view will pave the way for a more inclusive and efficient waqf management system.

## A rail link between Aizawl and Delhi

The departure of the train that left Sairang, a town on the outskirts of Aizawl (Mizoram’s capital), on Saturday morning to arrive in Delhi’s Anand Vihar station on Monday, marks a milestone moment. Railway connectivity between Delhi and Aizawl is significant in many ways. One, it connects one of India’s farthest state capitals with the national rail grid. Until recently, the railways did not service much of India’s North-East. In the past decade, Arunachal Pradesh, Tripura and Mizoram have seen trains chugging in, connecting their respective state capitals with the national capital. Two, a railway link eases trade. In the case of the train to Aizawl, the track is eventually expected to stretch all the way to the Sittwe port in Myanmar, opening up a new alternative route to the North-East. This project, now hobbled by the civil war in Myanmar, has strategic implications and holds great potential for travel and trade. Third, easing the entry of people and goods from the rest of India will have ramifications in a society protective of its identity.

A nuanced language of politics and development is needed to engage with the openings and concerns that arrive with trains. The North-East is particularly concerned about migration, as evident in the political mobilisations in the region. Provisions such as the Inner Line Permit (applicable in Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram) are remnants of a protective vision that built guardrails against land alienation and cultural loss. These fears will have to be assuaged so that local communities and markets plug into the national economy. However, constant reiteration of migration as infiltration can entrench an insular vision that fosters fear of the “outsider”, not necessarily from another country but even from neighbouring states, and stalls economic integration.

## Nepal’s uncertain course after the Gen Z protests

The protests foregrounded the disillusionment with the ruling class, but the country must now confront questions on the path ahead

There are decades when nothing happens and days when decades happen. Nepal has literally lived these lines from Lenin in the past week. Deeply entrenched crony capitalism and a nexus between businesses, political parties, and their close circles of party workers suddenly found themselves at the receiving end of youth-led protests.

This Gen Z Revolution is perhaps the shortest-lived groundswell in Nepal, one that started on a Monday afternoon and led to the collapse of a three-party regime the very next day. By late afternoon, the seemingly defiant Prime Minister (PM), KP Sharma Oli — who had ordered the shutdown of 26 social media platforms, including Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, YouTube, and X midnight on Thursday (five days ago) — had gone into hiding. He had fled Baluwatar, the PM’s official residence. The PM-in-waiting, Sher Bahadur Deuba, and his wife, Arzu Deuba (also the foreign minister), were attacked at home by an angry mob. Countless political party properties and private residences of party heavyweights were ransacked across the country. Also set on fire were the Supreme Court, Parli-

ment, and Singha Durbar, the seat of government.

While many of the old-party leaders had gone underground overnight amid the youth charge, the angry crowd refused to be cowed down by the police, even the day after the protests broke out. The brutal police crackdown on the young protesters, many of them in school uniforms, on the first day of the protests, had galvanised people across the country. Confined to their homes by curfew, Nepali people were in total disbelief.

While those who had been part of the national exuberance in 1990 and in 2006 mass movements found their hopes dashed to the ground by the corrupt political class — the Nepali Congress, Communist Party of Nepal-United Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML), and CPN (Maoist) in the main — GenZers felt little ownership of either of these movements. They had come of age at a time when Nepal saw out-migration in record numbers, when despair reigned and hope was in super-short supply.

GenZers, meanwhile, refused to conform to the fatalist worldview of their parents and grandparents and decided to exercise political agency instead, as they saw that rampant corruption in the political cohort had spread to the bureaucracy and businesses. And they decided that this system had to go while they were still young. They had seen Nepal make global headlines for all the wrong reasons: One of these was its steady climb in the global corruption index brought

out by Transparency International each year. If the national economy has been afloat all these depressing decades, it is not because of trade or foreign aid, not least because of the parties. Far from it. It is the remittances sent home by Nepalis working abroad — from West Asia to Malaysia, from Norway to New Zealand. Notably, individual household incomes have continued to climb, including in remote villages, and continue to go up. In that sense, Nepalis have never been richer.

Nineteen school and college kids, 17 of them in Kathmandu, were killed in a police crackdown ordered by Oli and then home minister Ramesh Lekhak last Monday. By the next day, Nepal saw an unprecedented turn of events. Oli had not only resigned but had gone into hiding. “The office of the president, held by Ram Chandra Poudel,” a young documentarian, Pranaya Rana wrote in *Kalam Weekly*, “is the last [civilian] institution standing.”

Amid all this change, some apprehensions remain. Not all the leaders from the three dominant old parties are discredited; in fact, some are still well-connected to their local constituencies. Could we then see a counter-revolution? Could the old parties merge in a desperate bid for survival, or would it lead to defections to the fourth-largest party, the Rashtriya Swatantra Party (RSP), which has the largest group of young technocrats? Will the RSP — registered with the Election Commission only six months



Nineteen school and college kids were killed in a police crackdown ordered by Oli and then home minister Ramesh Lekhak last Monday. PTI

before the 2022 general election to quickly become a national party — and the popular young mayor of Kathmandu, Balen Shah, come together? Or, will Shah, who has strangely never bothered to expand his party base outside Kathmandu, lead a new party of GenZers?

And where will the GenZers stand in all this themselves? In less than a week, and two days after a standout Gen Z voice, Sudan Gurung, reverentially bowed to the newly sworn-in Sushila Karki, Nepal’s first-ever woman PM and former chief justice, the Gen Z protestors, in Sudan’s presence, demanded her resignation. In late-night protests on Sunday, the GenZers said Karki had not consulted them while expanding her cabinet. They took exception to the appointment of Om Prakash Aryal, the legal advisor of Balen Shah, as home minister.

Equally important will be the Nepal army’s role. Could it switch loyalty to the monarchy, as it did until sovereignty shifted to the people in 1990 and parliament abolished the monarchy in

2008? There is a groundswell of cultural resurgence among Nepalis centred on various expressions of Hinduism. But Nepalis have never voted along the lines of political Hinduism. Could the election scheduled for early March 5, 2026 become a turning point? How will the current wave of politico-cultural and nationalist revivalism be received in such a diverse society?

Though a large section of the Nepali population is riding a political euphoria at present, the question that stares at the new government is how it will navigate the transition, and if it will prioritise institutions over individuals. This period will be accompanied by deep apprehension until the Nepali people give a fresh political mandate in March, six long months away.

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{ GRAND STRATEGY }

Happymon Jacob



## India can’t wait for a post-Trump America

Historically speaking, it is true that India and the US have never been closer as they have been over the last decade. But after a week-long visit to Washington, I am not so sure. I came away with a strong sense that there are dramatically divergent views in New Delhi and DC on the state of the bilateral relationship, and that the strategic partnership is perhaps more fragile than ever.

While the sentiment in New Delhi is that Washington under President Trump has severely damaged the India-US strategic partnership for no credible or justifiable reason, the feeling in DC is that India has not done enough to save the relationship and has been slow to react to fast-changing developments in the US. While New Delhi continues to view the relationship through what India can offer the US in terms of market, geopolitical convergence, Indo-Pacific, and common concerns about China, Trump’s DC no longer sees India through the China prism and is more directly questioning what is it that India can give the US beyond the symbolism and “promises of future”. For the India-US relations to get back on track, there must be more honest conversation between the two sides on what they mean to each other. But whether Trump has the patience for such elevated conversation is doubtful. Realism, rather than wishful thinking, and expectation management are what we need more than ever.

India watchers in DC seem to argue that New Delhi has not been creative and agile in its outreach to Trump, and that we have missed the bus on several occasions to get back into his good books. Trump doesn’t care for substance as he does for symbolism and optics, and that is something India should have kept in mind while designing a policy to engage Trump. Some of that creative diplomacy involves, I suspect, bending the knee before Trump, which is a non-starter as far as India is concerned. And perhaps rightly so.

There are two clear examples before India: America’s military allies and partners, who cowed down to Trump (which was the only choice they had), and China, which pushed back against Trump’s tariffs using its leverage over rare earths crucial to the US. India is not a weak American ally dependent on the US for its security — and so it finds no reason to give into unjustified American pressure. But it is also not as powerful as China to push back Trump’s bullying. Put differently, it’s neither too weak to be humble nor is it strong enough to have credible leverage against American bullying.

The big question on everyone’s mind is whether the Trump administration will be able to push the European Union (EU) to impose sanctions on India for buying Russian energy. Trump’s pressure to do so would be

problematic for the EU at several levels. For one, the EU has been a bigger importer of Russian gas than India, which will deny Brussels any solid foundation to base its sanctions against India. Second, imposing sanctions on India could derail the growing proximity and the free trade agreement talks between the EU and India, creating a major setback in the relationship. Third, technically, New Delhi has not violated any sanctions by buying Russian energy as there are no sanctions in place against buying Russian energy. There is a price cap that the EU has imposed on the purchase of Russian energy, which India has abided by. So there is not even a legal basis to impose sanctions on India.

There appears to be some consensus on how Indo-Pacific and even Quad might take a beating under Trump. If Trump doesn’t see the US locked in a great-power competition with China, Indo-Pacific loses its value *ipso facto*. Trump’s idea of great-power competition is to make friends with great powers, not to compete with them which changes the geopolitical calculation of countries such as India.

Analysis in DC also pointed out the importance of noting the fact that so far, Trump has restrained from personally attacking Prime Minister Narendra Modi — if anything he has only reiterated the friendship between himself and the latter, which is a good sign. This is something that could be built on, the argument goes. On its part, New Delhi too has been cautious in responding to the rather loose statements by Trump and his close associates such as Peter Navarro. There is an overwhelming feeling that New Delhi must calm its nerves in the face of provocations from DC, however unjustified they may be, since this is not only about India. But more importantly, for all you know, this is a typical Trump strategy, which is to escalate and then, de-escalate. So hold your nerve because Trump has a short attention span and, in the meantime, offer him something positive to focus on (maybe some huge investment by Indian business houses in America).

As for the newly nominated US ambassador to India, there appeared to be two divergent views: One view is that since Sergio Gor is part of Trump’s inner circle, he might be in a position to positively influence Trump towards India (with a little charm offensive from New Delhi). There is also the opposite view: Being as young as he is and knowing his boss as well as he does, he might not want to say anything that Trump might not want to hear. However, Gor seems to have started out well by claiming that a trade deal is imminent and the bilateral strategic ties are intact.

The overwhelming sentiment is that India-US relations are strong enough to outlive Trump’s tantrums. However, unless corrective measures are taken soon and parties concerned on both sides attempt to steady the relationship, he will leave the relationship severely damaged. Waiting for Trump to leave office is not a viable strategy for New Delhi. It needs to deal with the US as shaped by Trump, not the US that it is used to.

Happymon Jacob is the founder and director of the Council for Strategic and Defense Research and the editor of INDIA’S WORLD magazine. The views expressed are personal

{ KEIR STARMER } PRIME MINISTER, THE UK

Our flag represents our diverse country and we will never surrender it to those that use it as a symbol of violence, fear and division

In response to the far-right Unite the Kingdom march

## Why personality rights need legislative protection

In September, actress Aishwarya Rai Bachchan approached the Delhi High Court (HC) seeking protection of her personality rights. In her petition, she alleged that several websites, e-commerce platforms, and YouTube channels were misusing her name, likeness, image, and even voice without authorisation. The alleged violations included the sale of unauthorised merchandise such as posters and mugs, the operation of impersonating chatbots, and the circulation of AI-generated deepfakes that distorted her persona. The court granted interim relief, restraining these platforms from continuing such activities. At first blush, this may appear to be just another “celebrity rights” dispute. However, it raises an important feminist question: Whose bodies, voices, and identities are considered available for use, and who has the autonomy to resist such appropriation?

The unauthorised exploitation of Rai’s image is not gender-neutral. Women celebrities, far more than men, face the indignity of their likenesses being commodified, distorted, or sexualised without consent. Actresses Alia Bhatt, Rashmika Mandanna, and Kajol have all been the victims of deepfake videos in the last two years, pointing to the systematic pattern of this violation. What underpins this pattern is entitlement: Because women are already visible in the public sphere, there is a cultural assumption that people are entitled to their images for further use, whether in indecent memes, doctored photos, or merchandise.

This entitlement is not trivial. It reflects a patriarchal logic where women’s bodies are treated as public property, stripped of dignity and objectified. In Rai’s case, the harm is not confined to commerce. While her endorsement rights do generate revenue, unauthorised advertisements and online endorsements deprive her of that income. However, more troublingly, the unauthorised use of her persona (especially in sexually suggestive ways) undermines her fundamental right to live with dignity. Indian courts, by recognising personality rights as grounded in Article 21’s guarantee of privacy and dignity, are beginning to challenge this entitlement in law.

Judicial decisions from *ICC Development v. Arvee Enterprises* to *Anil Kapoor v. Simply Life India*, and now *Aishwarya Rai Bachchan v. Aishwaryaworld*, have clarified that personality rights contain two distinct but overlapping dimensions — publicity rights and privacy rights. Publicity rights (commercial) protect one’s name, likeness, and image from unauthorised commercial exploitation. Courts treat this as a passing off harm, and thus prevent misrepresentation that a celebrity has (falsely) endorsed or sponsored a product. Privacy

rights, grounded in Constitutional law, protect one’s image and persona from violation, humiliation, or misuse, grounded in the right to life and dignity under Article 21 of the Constitution.

What connects both is autonomy. When Rai consents to appear in a film, advertisement, or public campaign, she exercises her choice to shape her public identity. She chooses what to put out in the public sphere. When third parties impersonate that identity (whether by printing her face on mugs or creating AI chatbots in her likeness), they erase her agency and autonomy about her public image. The law must respond by affirming that autonomy, not unauthorised entitlement, is the anchor of personality rights.

Critics argue that strong personality rights can curtail free expression. But Indian courts have drawn a clear line. Free speech protects information, news reporting, satire, parody, and criticism of public figures. It does not protect the sale of unauthorised merchandise, impersonation, or deepfake pornography. The

Delhi HC in the *Anil Kapoor* judgment stressed that while parody and criticism enrich public discourse, unauthorised use of a celebrity’s name, voice, dialogues, or images for commercial purposes could not be permitted. The *Rai* case carries that reasoning forward into the age of AI, where new technologies make identity theft easier and more damaging.

India lacks a codified law on personality rights, relying instead on other intellectual property laws and principles, constitutional interpretation, and piecemeal judicial precedent. The *Rai* case shows why a legislative framework is urgent. There is a need to define personality rights to include name, likeness, voice, signature, and digital impersonations. However, any such law should codify exceptions for news, parody, and criticism to safeguard free speech. Further, it is important to recognise that personality rights are not privileges of celebrities alone. Ordinary citizens, especially women, are increasingly targeted through deepfakes and revenge pornography. Thus, criminal law should also catch up to what can essentially be considered as cyber sexual harassment and other forms of cyber-crimes.

Ultimately, the *Rai* case is not only about protecting endorsement contracts. It is about reclaiming dignity and autonomy in an age where technology makes it easy to strip both away. For women in particular, who bear the brunt of this, personality rights are a legal tool to resist entitlement and reassert their autonomy to their images, voices, and bodies.

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## Divided state

The U.S. needs a new enlightened leadership in the two major parties

The shooting of Charlie Kirk, a controversial, outspoken conservative commentator and political ally of U.S. President Donald Trump, has revealed, once again, the depth of polarisation of opinion in the country and its disturbing proclivity towards using lethal violence to settle debates. Ironically, Mr. Kirk was a vocal advocate of the Second Amendment right to bear arms, even as he espoused a range of right-wing values at liberal university campuses, and in curbing abortion rights, and limiting the rights of transgender and LGBTQ persons – all the while recruiting young voters to the Republican cause. The man arrested on suspicion of shooting him, Tyler Robinson, is said to have diverged from his own conservative family roots although few specifics or possible motives are established so far. This much is clear: years of political vitriol backed by policies built on the values of nativism, revisionism, exclusion, religiosity, and a hateful intolerance of social and ideological diversity have brought the shutters down on any channels for open-minded dialogue and bipartisanship that might have existed earlier.

The U.S. is at a crossroads in terms of its standing as a moral and economic force espousing, respectively, for the merits of democracy and capitalism. Given the crackdown on and deportations of students, academics and residents protesting atrocities in Gaza, and the cruel family separations resulting from immigration raids, there are many who would doubt the claim that the U.S. remains the bedrock of substantive democracy. Economically, the rules-based international order that emerged through the years of the Washington Consensus stands in a shambles in some regards, with Mr. Trump's tariff policy that fuelled a worldwide trade war bringing global supply chains to their knees. Nowhere is the impact of these tectonic shifts in the U.S.'s ideological and policy posture more keenly felt than on its own soil, with Democrats on the retreat after two Trump terms, and Republicans embracing their President's political agenda, which is only an amorphous version of the classic conservatism that many of them adhere to. When conversations across the aisle fall silent, fear looms large, especially for minorities pushed to the fringes of the political discourse, and the desperate on all sides fall back on toxic gun culture to give vent to their frustrations with the status quo. Given that numerous past Presidents have tried and failed to start conversations on common sense gun control reform, including no fewer than 17 attempts by Barack Obama to introduce such legislation in Congress, it is only the emergence of a new, enlightened leadership in both parties that could hold out hope for a less fractured and hateful polity in the post-Trump years.

## Field and fraternity

Sport is political, but it must not be the stage for a theatre of conflict

Sports, like war, can be a continuation of politics by other means, but it always makes sense to question all the forms and avatars of politics. The India-Pakistan Asia Cup match on September 14 was preceded by demands that it be suspended. Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Uddhav Thackeray called it an “insult to national sentiment” while the AIMIM’s Asaduddin Owaisi argued that commercial gain had been valued over the lives lost in Pahalgam. Petitioners had also asked the Supreme Court to cancel the game. Yet, India captain Suryakumar Yadav had decided that his team would not shake hands with its Pakistani counterpart, calling it an “alignment” with government policy. It is striking that Mr. Thackeray and Mr. Owaisi, from different ends of the political spectrum, echoed the BJP-led government’s policy of disengagement from Pakistan, revealing how this debate has been circumscribed by notions of national solidarity. But the BCCI is also partly to blame for having long operated outside the purview of sports governance law, sustained by networks that still link administrators to ruling parties. Cricket has never been immune to politics: colonial India used it to negotiate power with imperial rulers and independent India and Pakistan invested their encounters with the weight of Partition. Yet, cricket, especially in the 1970s and 2000s, opened spaces for contact, with the field allowing a rivalry that was sporting rather than military.

Today, this tradition is being eroded by the collective transformation of cricket into another theatre of conflict. Sportspersons are not soldiers and their gestures matter because they dramatise fellowship. To withdraw from even this minimal courtesy confuses solidarity with victims of terrorism with the repudiation of fellow athletes. The Asia Cup game showed how far Indian cricket has moved from the position that sport affirms the fraternity of ordinary life, with its rituals of rivalry and joy rising in defiance of violence and bloodshed. It is bad enough that the ICC places the India and the Pakistan teams in the same group in multilateral tournaments, creating repetitive match-ups to go with the inordinate influence the BCCI exerts on these events. Rather than compound these artificialities, Suryakumar and team should adopt the more responsible course and restore hand-shaking for the rest of the tournament. Sport is political, but it does not have to be war minus the shooting. International contests might mimic warfare, but the whole point of sport is lost if sportspersons behave as proxies of political leaders seeking to inflame passions to polarise people.

Procurement policies, often designed with transparency and cost-efficiency in mind, have long had unintended consequences for research and development. While preventing fraud, these frameworks frequently kill innovation, one process at a time, by prioritising procedural compliance over scientific needs. India's recent reforms to its General Financial Rules (GFR) – particularly exemptions from the Government e-Marketplace (GeM) portal and enhanced financial thresholds for research and development (R&D) procurement – are a welcome change.

### Procurement as innovation catalyst

The tug-of-war between procurement policies and innovation is not new. Studies have shown that public procurement, when done properly, can give a push to private-sector R&D by creating stable demand for advanced technologies. Moreover, it has been found that targeted procurement spending is associated with increased patent filings and private R&D investment, forming a virtuous cycle of innovation. However, as the Brazilian case study in EconStor's 2023 report notes, generic procurement rules rarely achieve this unless explicitly designed to spur innovation. India's pre-reform framework fell into this trap: mandating GeM purchases for all sub-₹200 crore equipment, regardless of specialisation, which forced scientists into a time-consuming exemption process for globally benchmarked tools. Vendors on GeM often supplied materials of poor quality, compromising research.

The Government of India's policy changes in June 2025 directly address these issues. By allowing institutional heads to bypass GeM for specialised equipment and raising direct purchase limits from ₹1 lakh to ₹2 lakh, the reforms acknowledge that cookie-cutter procurement is incompatible with R&D's bespoke needs. Delegating approval for global tenders up to ₹200 crore to vice-chancellors and directors eliminates bureaucratic lag – a chronic grievance highlighted by the Prime Minister's Economic Advisory Council. These adjustments align with theories of “catalytic procurement”, where flexibility enables public institutions to act as early adopters of advanced technologies, stimulating private-sector innovation.

Yet, the reforms stop short of a full paradigm shift. While empowering institutional leaders, they retain safeguards such as departmental purchase committees for higher-value acquisitions. This could be argued as a necessary balance. However, even the revised ₹2 lakh direct purchase limit could remain inadequate for high-cost fields such as quantum computing or biotechnology. Additionally, the focus on global tenders, while ensuring quality, could marginalise domestic suppliers unless local R&D systems are empowered and left free to collaborate globally, and compete at that level.

The policy's success will depend to a large extent on implementation. Trusting institutional heads with procurement discretion assumes high ethical standards, which is something that will have to be built up, slowly, in a system that has been historically plagued by inefficiency. As the policy rolls out, monitoring mechanisms will be vital to prevent misuse while preserving agility.



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Research and development can be transformed by blending these changes with global best practices in market-shaping, cognitive tools and hybrid governance

# India's economic ambitions need better gender data

Women contribute just 18% to India's GDP today, but continuing with business-as-usual means that trillions of dollars will be left on the table. India's aspiration to become a \$30 trillion economy by 2047 rests on a simple truth: inclusive growth cannot happen if half its population remains invisible in the data that drive policy and investment. Nearly 196 million employable women are outside the workforce. While the Female Labour Force Participation Rate has improved to 41.7%, only 18% of these women are in formal employment. The question is not just how India creates opportunities for women, but how it ensures that these opportunities are visible, measurable, and acted on across every department of governance.

### A district-level tool

The launch of the Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) Index by the Government of Uttar Pradesh – the first in India – offers a glimpse of what is possible. This district-level tool tracks women's participation across five economic levers: employment; education and skillings; entrepreneurship; livelihood and mobility, and safety and inclusive infrastructure. Its significance lies beyond the index. It signals a shift toward embedding a gender lens in every dataset, every department, and every decision.

India produces multiple indices on health, economic well-being and infrastructure. Very few disaggregate this data by gender. Without this lens, gaps remain hidden. Without visibility, reforms stall. And without reforms, exclusion becomes entrenched.



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The Government of Uttar Pradesh's Women's Economic Empowerment Index is a model that can be replicated across the country

How has procurement evolved globally? Globally, nations leading in R&D outcomes have already reimagined procurement as something that acts as a catalyst for innovation – not just a cost-control mechanism. India can learn from their experiences. Procurement processes have evolved from ancient record-keeping to Artificial Intelligence (AI)-driven strategies. India would do well to learn from these.

Germany's approach is a good example of balancing procurement checks and R&D ambitions. Through its High-Tech Strategy, the federal government mandates that public procurement be used to promote innovative solutions, supported by KOINNO, which is a dedicated agency advising procurers, curating supplier databases, and hosting cross-sector innovation forums. This institutionalises what economist Mariana Mazzucato terms “mission-oriented procurement”, where state-purchasing power deliberately shapes technological markets. Similarly, the ‘Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) program’ of the United States reserves 3% of federal R&D funds for startups, using phased procurement contracts to derisk early-stage technologies while maintaining competitive tension among vendors. These models recognise that procuring innovation is not about buying predefined products but in fostering ecosystems where suppliers compete on breakthroughs.

India's GeM reforms partially embrace this philosophy by exempting specialised research equipment from mandatory portal use – a nod to the fact that Indian labs often face delays extending to a few months when dealing with niche instruments. However, the policy lacks Germany's proactive market-shaping elements or the SBIR's staged funding structure. For instance, India's ₹200 crore global tender limit for institutional heads still prioritises cost benchmarks over technical ambition, unlike South Korea's “pre-commercial procurement” system that pays premium prices for prototypes meeting moonshot criteria.

### Procurement's evolutionary arc

Procurement's 5,000-year journey, from Egyptian scribes tracking pyramid materials to AI predicting supply chain details, reflects an evolution from control to creativity. The Industrial Revolution looked at procurement as a cost-centric function, but the two World Wars exposed its strategic role in securing scarce resources.

Post-1945, this duality deepened: corporations adopted Just-In-Time inventory systems while governments used procurement to spur sectors such as semiconductors (via National Aeronautics and Space Administration contracts) and renewables (through the European Union's green mandates).

Today's frontier is “cognitive procurement”, where tools such as generative AI analyse supplier ecosystems, simulate scarcity scenarios, and automate compliance – freeing researchers to focus on creative sourcing. Consider Pfizer's COVID-19 vaccine effort, where AI-optimised procurement identified multiple critical suppliers within a few hours, compressing a months-long process into weeks.

The discussion over procurement policies often leads to calls for privatisation of national

labs, as that would probably open up the procurement process. However, it would be wise to consider that the debate over privatising India's national labs hinges on a false binary. As the U.S. experience shows, privatisation is not about abandoning public oversight but redefining it. When the Department of Energy handed over the management and operation of Sandia National Laboratories in 1993 to a private company, it retained mission control through performance-based contracts while unlocking private capital for laser and materials research. The result? A huge increase in patent filings and partnerships with a number of small and medium enterprises within a decade.

India's Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) could adopt this hybrid model. Laboratories working in strategic fields such as space tech or quantum computing might benefit from corporate-style agility in procurement and hiring, provided the government maintains some control to safeguard national interests. However, success requires robust accountability frameworks and some alignment with innovation road maps.

### Procurement as a research variable

India's procurement reforms are necessary but insufficient. Four systemic shifts could anchor deeper change. The first would be outcome-weighted tenders. Following Finland's example, there must be an evaluation of bids not just on cost but also on an index that weighs various qualitative factors such as supplier R&D investment and scalability potential.

The second would be providing sandbox exemptions. Allow institutions such as the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research or the Indian Institutes of Technology to bypass GFR entirely for some percentage of their purchases, provided they meet annual innovation targets audited by third parties.

The third intervention should be AI-augmented sourcing. Deploy the INDIAai ecosystem to create a procurement assistant that scans global catalogues, predicts customs delays, and suggests alternative materials – reducing decision cycles from months to hours.

And finally, go in for co-procurement alliances. Replicate the European Union's Joint Procurement Agreement, enabling multiple Indian labs to aggregate demand for high-cost items such as cryogenic coolers, achieving economies of scale.

Privatisation is not a silver bullet but a tool among many. As this study on U.S. labs warns, merely transferring ownership sans performance-linked funding or competitive pressure risks creating ineffective labs. The goal must be creating a procurement continuum where public and private entities coexist – each accessing shared innovation marketplaces but governed by distinct risk-reward matrices.

India's GeM reforms are a tentative step toward procurement systems that value time-to-lab as much as cost savings. By marrying these changes with global best practices in market-shaping, cognitive tools, and hybrid governance, the nation could transform procurement from a research impediment to its accelerant. The lesson from history is clear: civilisations that procured for monuments left ruins; those that procured for inquiry built futures.

It also calls for moving beyond surface-level counts to track retention, leadership, re-entry, and quality of employment, particularly at stages after Class 12 in school and post-graduation, where female dropout rates surge.

Equally important is the need for a rethink on gender budgeting. Too often, gender budgeting is confined to finance departments or specific women's welfare schemes. True gender budgeting applies a gender lens to every rupee spent – across education, energy, infrastructure, and more. It is simple – you cannot budget for what you do not measure.

### Help for States moving ahead

What Uttar Pradesh has piloted is a foundation that can be replicated and scaled. States such as Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha and Telangana have already set trillion-dollar economic goals. To achieve them, they must leverage their gender dividend. A robust framework such as the WEE Index can help States translate intent into implementation – turning data into district-wise gender action plans that guide budget allocations, infrastructure priorities and programmatic reforms.

India's gender gap is not new, but India's response to it must evolve. The solution would involve a fundamental change in how India sees, measures and responds to gender across every level of governance.

The WEE Index is not the finish line but the starting block. It makes visible what has long been invisible and offers a road map to move women from the margins to the mainstream of India's growth story.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### The Great Nicobar project

The article, “A project of a strategic and national importance” (Editorial page, September 12, 2025), by the Union Minister of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, Bhupender Yadav, merits a response.

The environmental impact assessment conducted was rushed, incomplete and flawed. That further impact studies have been mandated after the project has been granted clearance shows up its limitations. It is surprising that the

assessment began even before terms of reference for it were issued. The project will disrupt and displace the tribal communities of Great Nicobar. The idea that notifying additional areas as tribal reserve will

compensate for the areas being de-notified indicates a lack of understanding about the needs of the indigenous people as well as the bio-geophysical heterogeneity of Great Nicobar. Ecologically, planting trees in Haryana

(which needs to be done anyway) will just not compensate for clear-felling of multi-species, biodiversity-rich forests in the Great Nicobar Island. Scientists in public institutions themselves have spoken about being

asked to provide reports favourable to the project.

**Jairam Ramesh,**  
New Delhi

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.



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# Court’s nod to mental health as right

In July 2025, the Supreme Court of India pronounced a verdict which has been called a constitutional landmark. The case, *Sukdeb Saha vs The State Of Andhra Pradesh*, was anchored in the anguish of a father who had lost his 17-year-old daughter, a NEET candidate, in a Visakhapatnam hostel. Dissatisfied with what he believed was the failure of the local police to make a full investigation of the cause, he demanded a Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) inquiry. His petitions were rejected by the Andhra Pradesh High Court, which then saw him approach the Supreme Court. The result was not only an order shifting the investigation to the CBI but also a much-needed acknowledgment of mental health being an integral part of the right to life, under Article 21 of the Constitution.

The top court’s argument transcended the specific case and revolved around a crucial social issue: India’s runaway epidemic of student suicides. From a criminological perspective, the case highlights what can be termed structural victimisation. Student suicides are rarely framed in these terms. Yet, systemic neglect of mental health combined with the exploitative culture of coaching centres and the indifference of schools and universities, produce an environment where young people become vulnerable to harm. By failing to provide safeguards, the state and institutions become complicit. When institutions create or ignore conditions that drive individuals to the brink, the line between personal tragedy and institutional culpability becomes blurred.

The gaze of victimology, which has long examined the dynamics between victims and perpetrators, can be extended to state institutions as de facto perpetrators. Students are not just “victims” of internal psychological battles. They are the victims of an education system that treats them shabbily. It is also about social



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The Supreme Court’s judgment in ‘Sukdeb Saha vs The State Of Andhra Pradesh’, acknowledges mental health to be an integral part of the right to life

values that link self-esteem to hierarchy and of a governance collapse that subordinates mental health as a secondary concern. By recognising mental health as an inherent right, the Court was recognising the structural aspect of victimisation. It recast the problem not as a personal bereavement but as a public injustice.

Legally, the verdict fills a vital gap. The Mental Healthcare Act 2017 already enshrines the right to receive mental health care. But it has not been implemented consistently, and enforcement mechanisms are still poor. By entrenching mental health in the Constitution, the Court has established an elevated normative benchmark. Citizens can insist on safeguarding their psychic health as a fundamental right, not just a statutory right. To ensure that this did not become mere rhetoric, the Court ordered a package of binding interim orders – now referred to as the “Saha Guidelines”. Here, schools, colleges, hostels and coaching institutes are required to proactively develop support systems to address the issue of mental health. They instruct States and Union Territories to bring the rules into force in two months and obligate the setting up of district-level monitoring committees. Until Parliament passes a full code, these guidelines will have legislative force.

The ruling also poses significant criminological questions regarding state responsibility. If suicides among students are partially an outcome of institutional neglect, can this form of neglect be regarded as structural violence? Johan Galtung’s theory of structural violence posits that societal structures causing systematic harm to individuals by depriving them of basic needs are equally blameworthy as direct violence. By not creating a safe environment, the state and educational institutions indirectly perpetuate harmful circumstances. This perspective

changes student suicides from being viewed as “individual failures” to a result of systemic injustice. As a victimology case, it is a point where hidden victims become visible. Students, frequently silenced by stigma or system competitiveness, are seldom heard as rights holders when it comes to mental health. Placing psychological integrity in Article 21 means that the Court has opened up room for these victims to be heard and safeguarded. It leaves the door ajar for restorative measures – counselling, reform in institutions, mechanisms of accountability that go beyond retribution to prevention.

The way the judgment has been received by mental health activists and professionals highlights its revolutionary potential. But along with optimism there must be caution. Powerful judicial pronouncements cannot, by themselves, uproot established cultural and institutional norms. The challenge is whether schools, universities, and State governments will meaningfully apply the guidelines, invest in resources, and train personnel to deliver real mental health care.

Ultimately, *Sukdeb Saha* represents a convergence of law, criminology and victimology. It recognises that harm can be produced not just by individuals but also by institutions and systems. It acknowledges that students, often treated as passive subjects of education, are rights holders whose mental well-being deserves constitutional protection. And, it challenges society to confront an uncomfortable truth – that neglect, indifference and structural pressures can be as deadly as acts of direct violence. In affirming that the right to life must include a healthy mind, the Court has given voice to a generation of students who have too often been silenced by despair. Whether this voice translates into meaningful change will determine whether the judgment remains a beacon of hope or a missed opportunity.

# Strengthening Kerala’s secular legacy

Sabarimala’s inclusivity stands in opposition to sectarian narratives

## STATE OF PLAY

M.A. Baby



As one of the largest annual pilgrimage sites in the world, Sabarimala has long symbolised devotion, discipline and fraternity. The Global Ayyappa Sangamam – an initiative by the Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB) as part of its platinum jubilee celebrations – on September 20, is a step towards recognising this universal appeal, and strengthening Kerala’s secular legacy.

Sabarimala is more than just a temple. It is a symbol of Kerala’s social and cultural synthesis. Pilgrims from across caste-based and religious boundaries, climb the sacred hill after weeks of penance and self-discipline, reaffirming equality and collective spiritual pursuit. The presence of Vavar Nada, dedicated to a Muslim companion of Lord Ayyappa, is a reminder of interfaith harmony. The pilgrim routes also connect with Arthunkal Church, a Christian pilgrim centre of historical significance.

Equally symbolic is the rendering of the devotional song ‘*Harivarasanam*’, played as a lullaby to Ayyappa and his devotees at the temple every day. The song was composed by the late G. Devarajan, also a committed atheist and communist, and immortalised in the voice of K.J. Yesudas, an iconic singer and a Christian by birth. Together, these elements highlight Sabarimala’s secular, harmonious, and inclusive legacy – a space where devotion is never reduced to communal identity.

The TDB is celebrating and reaffirming this long-standing secular tradition. It signals a recognition that Sabarimala

belongs to the world, which is reflected in the words that greet one at the shrine, ‘*thatwam asi* (thou art that)’, indicating that the same spirit sprouts in everyone, or no one is alien. Yet, Opposition parties have opposed this progressive step. Adding to this, the Sabarimala Karma Samithi, dominated by communal forces, has announced its plan to hold a so-called ‘Viswasa Sangamam’ (Faith Congregation) at Pandalam on September 22. It is a calculated attempt to inject a communal narrative into what has historically been a unifying space.

It is crucial to recognise the distinction between believers and communal forces. The first draws from faith a sense of discipline, moral strength, and fraternity. The second manipulates religious sentiments for narrow political gain. Kerala’s history has shown that believers have often stood on the side of reform and progress. The struggles led by Sree Narayana Guru, Ayyankali, and other reformers emerged from within society and religious traditions, and yet they pointed towards liberation, equality, and social transformation. It is in this reformist tradition that the Global Ayyappa Sangamam must be located.

The secular character of Sabarimala is the outcome of centuries of reform, negotiation, and the struggles of or-

dinary devotees. Reforms at Sabarimala and other temples came from within society itself. The Left has always held that such internal reform movements are essential to weaken caste hierarchies and communal divisions. This is also why the attempts to communalise the Sangamam must be resisted. The BJP and its affiliates have long sought to weaponise Sabarimala for political gain, portraying progressive reform as an attack on faith. Sabarimala has never belonged to communal forces. Its inclusivity, its connections across communities and its history of reforms, stand in opposition to sectarian narratives. Efforts are on to portray the event as an effort by the CPI(M) to interfere in a religious gathering as communists are critics of religion. Communists study and critique all aspects of the society so that a better future can be ensured. So, quite naturally, religion also falls within their radar, as it is part and parcel of the society. Marx said, “Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature... It is the opium of the people.” He was highlighting the fact that religion helps the oppressed to forget their sufferings. Back then, opium was used by practitioners of medicine as a pain reliever.

The Global Ayyappa Sangamam is also a platform to discuss developmental projects – the Sabarimala Master Plan, the proposed airport and other initiatives. It is a political statement, which asserts that Kerala’s public sphere will not be surrendered to divisive forces. It also declares that secularism is not an abstract constitutional principle, but a living practice embodied in our pilgrim traditions.

M.A. Baby is CPI(M) General Secretary

# Rising obesity, children’s exposure to ultra-processed foods

Data show greater availability and widespread promotion of unhealthy foods and beverages

## DATA POINT

The Hindu Data Team

A recent UNICEF report, ‘Feeding Profit: How Food Environments Are Failing Children’, estimates that one in five children and adolescents between 5 and 19 years are ‘living with overweight’. It highlights that children and adolescents are increasingly being exposed to “unhealthy food environments” through advertisements and food service facilities, and even lack adequate legal protections against such environments.

Children between 5 and 9 years and 10 to 14 years make up the highest shares of children who are ‘living with overweight’ (Chart 2).

The report explores how the retail environment shapes what foods children are exposed to. UNICEF found a rise in the density of ‘chain’ outlets, which include convenience stores, supermarkets and hypermarkets with more than 10 outlets (Chart 3).

According to the report, chain outlets influence food access and diets by facilitating the widespread availability and promotion of unhealthy foods and beverages.

But children’s exposure to these foods does not stem from chain outlets alone. UNICEF’s U-Report poll in 2023, which explored both the availability and marketing of foods in secondary schools across eight South Asian countries, showed that unhealthy foods and beverages were more commonly available in schools than fresh fruits or vegetables (Chart 4a).

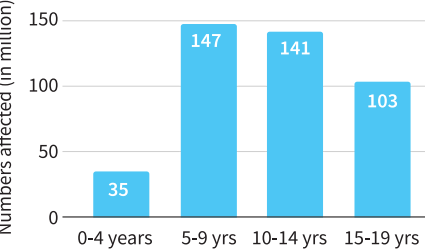
The report emphasised that mandatory national legal measures and policies are vital to creating healthy food environments. Data show that only 18% of the 202 countries analysed had mandatory nutrition standards for school meals, and only 19% have national taxes for both unhealthy foods and sugar-sweetened beverages (Chart 5).

## Unhealthy diets

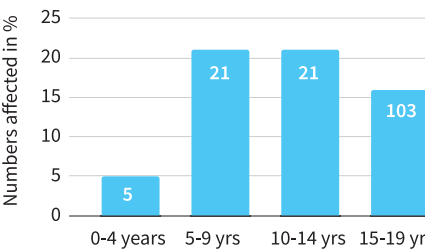
Charts were sourced from United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF)’s “Feeding Profit. How food environments are failing children”, published in September 2025. For Chart 5, the data were examined for 202 countries and for a set of 10 legal measures and policies spanning breastfeeding and first foods, school food environments, marketing to children, food reformulation, food labelling, food subsidies and taxation. \*Code refers to the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes and subsequent World Health Assembly resolutions.



**Chart 1:** The number (in million) of children and adolescents living with overweight by age group

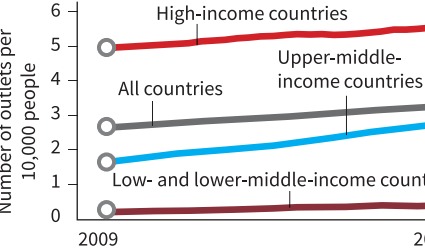


**Chart 2:** Percentage of children and adolescents with overweight, by age group, globally (in %)

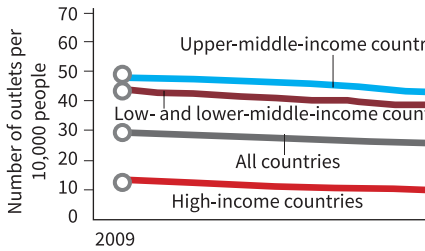


**Chart 3:** Trends of chain and non-chain outlets over time by income classifications of countries

**a) Density of chain outlets**

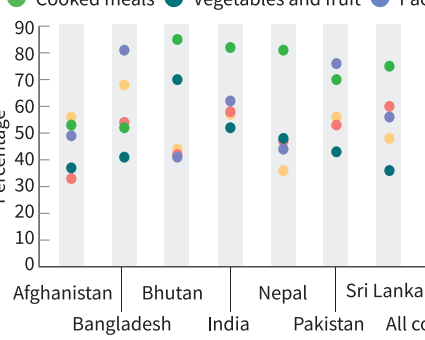


**b) Density of non-chain outlets**

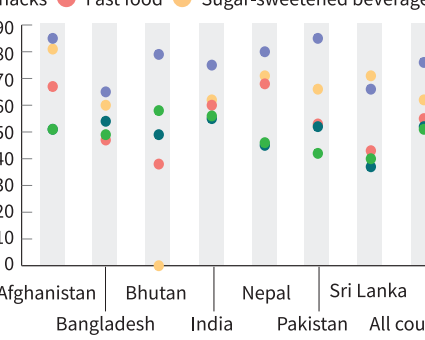


**Chart 4a and 4b:** Types of foods and beverages available in South Asia in 2023 (in %)

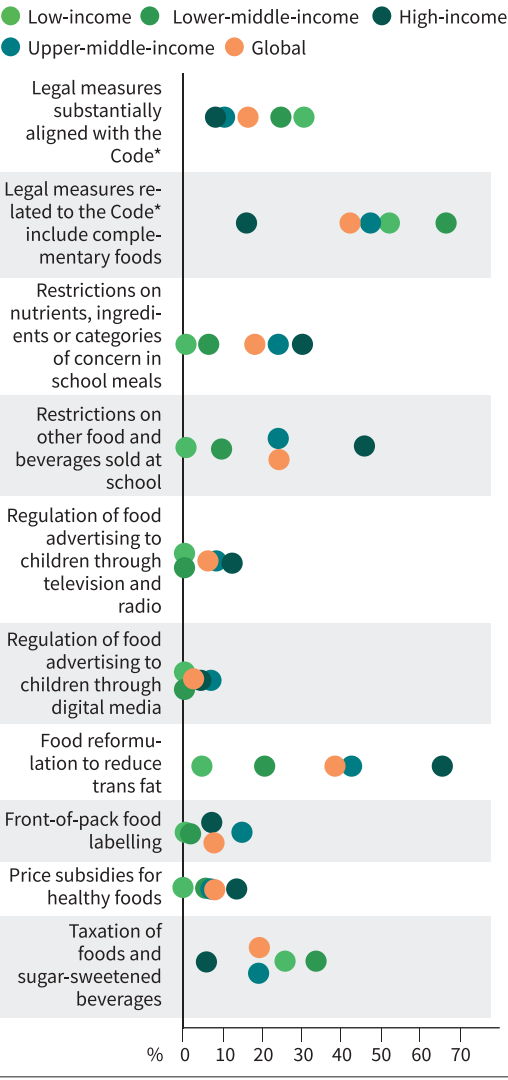
**a) At schools with food service facilities**



**b) Near schools without food service facilities**



**Chart 5:** Share of countries with mandatory measures to protect children from unhealthy food environments



## FROM THE ARCHIVES

### The Hindu

FIFTY YEARS AGO SEPTEMBER 16, 1975

## Colonial Rule Ends in Papua New Guinea

PORT MORESBY (Papua New Guinea), Sept. 15. Trumpets sounded the Last Post and drums beat the Retreat as the Australian flag was lowered for the last time in Papua New Guinea, ending 69 years of colonial rule.

Prince Charles, heir to the British throne, the Australian Governor-General, Sir John Kerr, the Australian Prime Minister, Mr. Gough Whitlam, and about 6,000 Australians and Papua New Guineans were at the dusk ceremony in the football stadium on the shore of Port Moresby harbour.

Soldiers of the Pacific Islands Regiment fired three volleys in salute as Australia’s blue flag with its white stars of the Southern Cross and Union Jack was hauled from the masthead. The Government of Mr. Michael Somare was to take control at one minute past midnight to a ten gun salute from Australian and New Zealand warships anchored off shore.

Tribesmen from parts of the world’s newest country in warrior’s paint and bare-breasted girls performed tribal dances to the beat of wooden drums before Prince Charles inspected the military guard of honour.

The red and black flag of Papua New Guinea emblazoned with a golden bird of paradise will be hoisted to-morrow morning from a flagstaff on the newly-named Independence Hill, formally marking independence for the nation’s 2.6 million people.

At to-day’s ceremony the new Governor-General of Papua New Guinea, Sir John Guise, said, “It is important that the people of Papua New Guinea, and the rest of the world realise the spirit in which we are lowering the flag of our colonisers. We are lowering the flag, not tearing it down.” He praised the Australian Government, saying the years of transition from Australian rule to independence had been “happy peaceful years.” Australia’s Governor-General, accepting the flag from Sir Guise, said Australia and its closest neighbour, Papua New Guinea, in a long period of colonisation had managed to avoid policies and relationships that “have proved so tragic elsewhere”. – AP.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO SEPTEMBER 16, 1925

## High Jump for Horses

(Special Cable – Copyright)  
VANCOUVER, Sep. 14.  
“Barrao,” a horse belonging to Welsh Brothers of Calgary, has broken the world’s record for horse high jump by leaping 8 feet 1½ inches.



# Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

**Number of cluster munition casualties in Ukraine**

**1,200** Cluster munitions have killed or injured civilians in Ukraine since Russia's invasion began. Ukraine recorded the highest annual cluster munition casualties, with 193 cases in 2024 out of 314 globally. AFP

**Pilgrims from Chhattisgarh killed in bus-truck collision**

**4** The bus carried 50 passengers, and nine others were seriously injured after their bus rammed into a truck on the Lucknow-Varanasi National Highway in Jaunpur's Sihipur village early on Monday. The driver has been detained for negligence. PTI

**Value of projects launched by the Prime Minister in Bihar**

**36,000** in ₹ crore. PM Narendra Modi launched development projects in Bihar's Purnea. He inaugurated the new Purnea airport terminal and flagged off the first flight to Kolkata. PTI

**Civilians killed in Burkina Faso jihadist attacks since May**

**50** At least 40 civilians were killed in attacks by the Group for the Support of Islam and Muslims (GSIM) in Djibo and Youba, while the Islamic State in the Sahel Province (IS Sahel) killed nine civilians in an ambush on humanitarian convoy to Gorom Gorom. AFP

**The minimum fare approved for bike taxis in Maharashtra**

**15** in ₹. The Maharashtra State Transport Authority has approved a minimum fare of ₹15 for 1.5 km for bike taxis, though the service is yet to be formally launched. Beyond that, passengers will pay ₹10.27 per km. PTI  
COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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## SC on anticipatory bail in caste crime

Supreme Court cancels anticipatory bail granted to a caste crime accused, upholding Section 18 of the SC/ST Act; the ruling reinforces protection for Dalit victims, bars pre-trial relief, and warns courts against conducting a 'mini-trial' at the bail stage

LETTER & SPIRIT

Vikram Karuna

The story so far:

**O**n September 1, the Supreme Court quashed a Bombay High Court order that had granted anticipatory bail to an accused of caste crimes. In the case of *Kiran vs Rajkumar Jivaraj Jain*, a Bench led by Chief Justice of India B. R. Gavai held that Section 18 of the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, creates a specific bar against anticipatory bail for crimes made out *prima facie*. This case involves caste-based assault, abuse, and intimidation linked to an electoral dispute.

Facts of the case

In this case, on November 26, 2024, a First Information Report (FIR) was filed by Kiran, a member of the Scheduled caste community, alleging that Rajkumar Jain and others had attacked him and his family after he refused to cast a vote as directed in the Assembly elections. According to the complaint, the accused attacked him with iron rods, abused him with his caste name, molested his mother and aunt, looted the *mangalsutra*, and threatened to burn their home with petrol bottles. The incident was witnessed by independent witnesses. The Additional Sessions judge at Paranda rejected anticipatory bail, noting clear casteist intent and corroboration. However, the Bombay High Court (Aurangabad Bench) reversed this decision, terming the case politically motivated, exaggerated, and inconsistent, and granted bail. This prompted an appeal before the Supreme Court.

Why is anticipatory bail barred under the SC/ST Act?

The Supreme Court underlined that Section 18 of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, categorically



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excludes the application of Section 438 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) (Section 482 of BNSS), which allows anticipatory bail. The Parliament has inserted this bar to protect victims from intimidation and to ensure effective prosecution.

Drawing upon precedents such as *State of M.P. vs Ram Krishna Balothia* (1995), *Vilas Pandurang Pawar vs State of Maharashtra* (2012), and *Prathvi Raj Chauhan vs Union of India* (2020), the court reiterated that offences under the Act form a distinct class tied to systemic

untouchability and caste discrimination. The bar is constitutionally valid and does not violate Article 14 or 21 of the Constitution. Courts, the Bench clarified, cannot conduct a “mini-trial” at the bail stage and are only required to examine whether a *prima facie* case exists.

In this case, the use of caste slurs, the public nature of the assault, and the electoral motive made the offence squarely fall within the ambit of the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, thereby ruling out anticipatory bail.

Key observations

The Bench clarified that insults and assaults that occur outside the complainant's house, in a manner visible to others, count as acts “within public view,” a statutory requirement under Section 3(1)(r). It further noted that the attack was triggered by the complainant's voting choice, which attracted Section 3(1)(o) of the Act that criminalises coercion or retaliation in voting against SC/ST members. Independent witness accounts, recovery of weapons, and medical evidence strengthened the prosecution's case, making the High Court's dismissal of the FIR untenable. The court also cautioned High Courts against overstepping into evidence appreciation at the pre-arrest bail stage.

Ultimately, the Supreme Court cancelled the anticipatory bail, calling the High Court's order a “manifest error and jurisdictional illegality.”

The way forward

The ruling reinforces that the SC/ST Act is not a procedural formality but a substantive shield to safeguard the dignity and security of vulnerable communities. The bar on anticipatory bail, although strict, is constitutionally sound because it addresses the very real threat of intimidation and retaliation against Dalit and tribal complainants.

Going forward, courts must respect the legislative intent of Section 18 and avoid diluting its force by treating allegations as exaggerated without trial, and apply the “*prima facie* test” strictly on the face of the FIR, without slipping into evidentiary analysis. The judgment also recognises that electoral retaliation against SC/ST voters carries broader implications for democratic participation and social justice.

The judgment strengthens accountability under the SC/ST Act and underscores that the rule of law must stand firmly on the side of protecting the most marginalised.

*Vikram Karuna is an Assistant Professor at the School of Law, Justice & Governance, Gautam Buddha University, Greater Noida*

THE GIST

▼ The court cancels anticipatory bail in *Kiran vs Rajkumar Jivaraj Jain*, reaffirming that Section 18 of the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989 bars anticipatory bail for offences like caste-based assault, abuse, intimidation, and electoral retaliation.

▼ The judgment emphasises that courts must respect the bar on anticipatory bail, avoid mini-trials at the pre-arrest stage, and apply the *prima facie* test, reinforcing protection of vulnerable SC/ST communities and accountability for caste crimes.

## What is ‘involution’ that is plaguing Chinese EV sector?

How is China tackling involution and price wars in its electric vehicle sector?

Kunal Shankar

The story so far:

**F**or some years now, the Chinese economy has faced what has locally come to be called *něijūàn*, or an involution. It is a process in which rivals in certain sectors indulge in price wars, attempting to capture market share and clear out oversupply of goods. However, these price wars are counterproductive, as they reach thresholds where the retail price of the product is so low that even the production costs cannot be realised, pushing firms into losses. This has been most apparent lately in China's electric vehicle sector, so much so that China's President Xi Jinping has prescribed corrective measures in a recent article in *Qiushi*. This phenomenon is not new in China; a similar trend has been witnessed in the solar industry as well.

Where does the phrase “involution” originate from?

Involution is derived from the Latin

phrase *involutiōn-em*, meaning ‘to turn inwards.’ According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the earliest known use of the noun “involution” dates back to 1611, in the writings of lexicographer Randle Cotgrave. But the dictionary lists nine meanings for the noun, ranging from its usage in literature to mathematics and pathology. The term appears to have been popularised by American anthropologist Clifford Geertz in the 1960s. Geertz used “involution” in his 1969 book *Agricultural Involution: The Processes of Ecological Change in Indonesia* to describe a dynamic in Java's wet-rice (sawah) economy, where ever more labour and intricacy were packed into the same agro-ecological system, raising output per acre somewhat but not per person—so incomes stagnated even as effort and social complexity increased, according to a blurb of his book in the University of California Press website.

Have EU and U.S. tariffs exacerbated involution in the Chinese EV sector?

Yes, they have. The U.S. Section 301 tariffs

on Chinese EVs, set at 100% (from 2024), along with higher duties on EV batteries and parts, effectively mean a trade embargo on Chinese EVs by the United States. Since October 30, 2024, the EU has imposed “countervailing duties” on Chinese EVs (e.g., BYD 17.0%, Geely 18.8%, SAIC -35%), on top of the standard 10% import duty. This is to ostensibly counter the “subsidies” provided by China to its EV sector. But, Europe's auto sector is at an inflection point with plummeting sales in its iconic brands as Europeans begin to buy the technologically superior Chinese EVs at highly competitive prices. The countervailing duties are a desperate attempt to save Europe's once export-heavy auto industry. The commission has also entertained talks on minimum price undertakings in 2025.

Turkiye added a 40% extra tariff on Chinese vehicles in 2024, and Mexico has moved toward a 50% tariff to head off U.S.-bound transshipment.

As a result, Chinese Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs) intensified competition at home, fuelling

price wars.

Industry leaders themselves have called this an “involution.” Beijing has begun an anti-price-war push as top executives warn of severe consolidation among the 120-130 EV makers in the country.

OEMs are localising abroad (e.g., BYD in Hungary/Turkiye) and diversifying exports to emerging markets, but timelines and capacity ramps are uneven. Meanwhile, according to the International Energy Agency, Chinese imports accounted for 75% of the increase in EV sales across emerging economies outside China in 2024.

What is the Chinese government doing to rein in the process in the EV sector?

On May 31, the Chinese Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT) assured to rein in involution in the EV sector. This was followed by June 30 news coverage in the Chinese media, which framed a Politburo communication as Mr. Xi's “war on price wars”.

On July 24, Beijing released a draft overhaul of the pricing law to curb below-cost selling and algorithmic pricing abuses.

On Monday, Mr. Xi's article in *Qiushi*, the Chinese Communist Party's theoretical magazine, called for curbing “disorderly price competition” and an “orderly exit” of outdated capacity, the clearest sign yet that the Central government plans a phased slowdown of price wars.

THE GIST

▼ Rivals indulging in price wars to capture market share amid oversupply are pushing firms into losses, a trend worsened by U.S., EU, Turkiye, and Mexico tariffs.

▼ The Chinese Ministry of Industry and Information Technology and Xi Jinping have called for curbing disorderly price competition, enforcing below-cost selling restrictions, and ensuring an orderly exit of outdated capacity to rein in involution.



CACHE

The conduct of social media companies amid political unrest

Companies stay largely passive during such unrest; their reluctance to deploy technological workarounds or challenge government orders shows the tension between profit motives and digital rights

Vasudevan Mukunth

While the insurrection in Nepal – which ousted the K.P. Sharma ‘Oli’ government after two days and descended into widespread violence and mob behaviour – raises important questions about the country’s political future, it should also raise concerns about the conduct of social media (SM) companies. In the immediate sense, the protests began after the Sharma government banned access to 26 SM platforms, but a zoomed-out view reveals a new instance of a more familiar pattern.

Specifically, the companies whose services became the spark offered little more than boilerplate statements about respecting digital rights and calls for dialogue. For the millions of people suddenly finding themselves cut off, that passivity could have heightened the abandonment they were already experiencing at the hands of their government.

This ‘strategy’ isn’t unique to Nepal, however. In Russia in 2018, Telegram fought its ban through technical evasions but offered little political solidarity to users who faced arrest for circumventing state orders. During the 2021 coup in Myanmar, a Facebook ban severed access to news and organising tools for protestors. In Nigeria in the same year, Twitter (now X.com) remained largely silent when the government suspended its operations for months, costing the economy roughly \$26 million a day and pushing many businesses to alternative platforms. In Iran in 2022, Instagram and WhatsApp issued generic appeals while millions of small businesses that depended on them collapsed.

All these instances recall the fact that platforms are multinational corporations whose interests are commercial, not civic. They fear government reprisal in profitable markets, yet they trade on the image of empowering free expression. When confronted with authoritarian restrictions, they have attempted to split the difference, issuing statements while avoiding meaningful confrontation. Ultimately, however, the users have borne the risk while the platforms have continued to profit.

Technological solutions

The reluctance to act is only partly explained by jurisdiction. These companies operate at the pleasure of host states and their executives may face legal or even personal jeopardy if they openly encourage citizens to defy local law. However, there’s an equally (if not more) pressing moral stake: when governments impose sweeping shutdowns or demand opaque surveillance, they’re not enforcing neutral regulations but attacking the basic infrastructure of civic life. And when platforms stay passive, they can become complicit in that attack.

International norms already recognise access to digital spaces as a right rather than a privilege. In 2016, the UN Human Rights Council declared internet shutdowns to be violations of international law. Civil society groups have since advanced the Santa Clara Principles on Transparency and Accountability in Content Moderation, which call for companies to disclose government demands and justify their responses. Big Social firms like Meta and Google often sign on to these frameworks



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in principle, yet their actual conduct in markets facing repression has maintained a gulf between rhetoric and compliance.

There’s an important technological dimension here. Companies have the capacity to provide workarounds in the form of decentralised infrastructure, redundancy across services, and active support for circumvention tools – yet rarely deploy them for fear of provoking government retaliation. Even when a company offers them, they tend to be limited and the company withdraws them quietly once the relevant crisis has passed.

Most of the Big Social platforms are designed as centralised services in which requests are routed through data centres under company control. As a result, they’re vulnerable to blunt government orders to, say, block a handful of IP ranges. These companies can make a technical as well as political choice by switching to a decentralised architecture that will make it difficult to enforce bans. For example, Tor and I2P networks route traffic across volunteer nodes. Mastodon uses federated servers rather than a single server that also becomes a choke point in the event of a blocking order. Signal has experimented with proxy relays that allow volunteers to keep traffic moving even when direct access has been blocked. Mainstream companies like Meta or Google could, in principle, design fallback modes that lean on decentralisation.

Google does have its Outline VPN toolkit and YouTube has content delivery networks that can disguise traffic – but these are exceptions. Generally, decentralisation and redundancy have been underdeveloped because companies don’t want to be seen as actively undermining sovereign regulation and governments.

Fortunes of Big Social

Big Social’s selective restraint is also stark in comparison with other industries. Telecom companies are often compelled to shut down networks immediately after a government order, yet unlike them, SM

firms market themselves as defenders of voice and participation. Financial companies have also shown more willingness to take explicit political stands. PayPal and Visa curtailed services in Russia after the Ukraine invasion, citing ethical concerns. Even Wikipedia fought a multi-year legal battle against Turkey’s ban (and Indian litigants’ attempts to do so), eventually winning out. These examples suggest neutrality is not preordained but a corporate choice.

Many Big Social firms also own multiple platforms – e.g., Meta operates Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp and Google operates YouTube, Gmail, and so on. Technologies exist to allow them to fail-over messages from one app to another or to automatically route traffic through less visible protocols when one channel is blocked. For example, WhatsApp could piggyback on HTTPS traffic in ways that are harder to filter.

SM bans in recent history have all tended to fail because they always lead to less, not more, state control. When a ban kicks in, many users respond by shopping for workarounds and almost always succeed, using circumvention tools like VPNs and proxies like Psiphon or Snowflake. But instead of letting them fend for themselves, platforms could integrate such tools directly – e.g., by offering an in-app VPN or proxy mode – or subsidise the use of such services in affected regions. Signal’s partnership with volunteers to host proxies in Iran in 2022 is one precedent.

The under-deployment of circumvention tools is also about profit. Decentralised or proxy-based systems complicate moderation, reduce the precision of data collection, and thus cut into advertising revenue. Federated networks such as Mastodon and volunteer relay models like Tor thrive because they aren’t beholden to ad-driven monetisation. Mainstream platforms avoid such architectures not because they’re technically infeasible but because they disrupt the business model of targeted advertising and centralised control. The technological debate is thus

inseparable from the economic logic of surveillance capitalism.

The passivity of Big Social is also striking in another dimension: some of these firms command annual revenues larger than the GDP of the very states that move to restrict them. In 2023, Meta’s revenues exceeded \$134 billion – more than the entire national budgets of countries like Nepal or Nigeria. Google’s parent Alphabet reported more than \$300 billion, putting it ahead of most economies in the Global South. These figures suggest the claim of being “helpless” before sovereign diktats is not strictly financial. These firms wield capital, lobbying power, and technical expertise on a scale that many governments can’t match. Yet in moments of crisis, they rarely leverage this power to defend the citizens who sustain their markets.

Even when companies experiment with workarounds, they’re often withdrawn soon after. Facebook once tested “Free Basics” and similar initiatives for low-bandwidth access but dropped them amid political controversies.

Equally significant are the inequities that shutdowns create. Wealthier, more technically savvy users can usually find workarounds through VPNs, but poorer citizens are left offline. In such contexts, the withdrawal of mainstream platforms doesn’t reduce risks but multiplies them: people drift to insecure alternatives, become more vulnerable to scams, and lose access to trusted sources of information. The result is a digital divide that widens precisely when a society faces a great civic emergency.

Political economy of dependence

Technological restraint is not because solutions are infeasible but because deploying them amounts to taking sides, which in turn carries business risks such as market exclusion, fines, and perhaps even arrests. Most firms are unwilling to absorb these costs.

To its advantage, however, the Global South provides some of the fastest-growing user bases and advertising markets for Big Social. India alone accounts for more than 400 million Facebook users, and Indonesia, Nigeria, and Brazil are all among the top 10 markets. That exposure gives governments significant leverage because companies fear being locked out of billion-dollar ad markets more than they fear reputational harm abroad. As a result they avoid confrontation in regions where their market share is greatest while projecting a bolder stance in the U.S. or Europe.

The Nepal case thus also serves a reminder that countries should make stronger demands of companies. For example, companies must prepare technical contingencies to keep communications alive during politically motivated shutdowns – whether through redundancy, encrypted alternatives or partnerships with circumvention tools. They should also adopt clearer policies on when and how they will resist demands for censorship and should disclose these decisions promptly. And at the political level, rather than claim to be neutral in the face of political turmoil, they should lend weight to international pressure by speaking up when people’s rights are curtailed.

One way forward could be to make transparency and resilience non-negotiable. Companies should be required to publish, in real time, the shutdown orders they receive, their legal justifications, and their corporate responses.

Industry-wide agreements could set minimum standards for technical contingencies, such as in-app proxy modes or fallback networks, like how financial regulators subject banks to stress tests. Regional blocs such as the African Union and SAARC could also negotiate common demands, making it harder for firms to play one government against another.



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

Upendran

“... they kept on arguing. They just wouldn’t stop.”

“Knowing Sujatha and Ramesh that’s not surprising. They never climb down.”

“Climb down? Climb down from where?”

“When you have an argument or a dispute and you climb down, it means you admit or accept that you are in the wrong. For example, when all the facts were presented to the Minister, he was willing to climb down.”

“Impossible!”

“What do you mean?”

“No Minister in India ever climbs down.”

“That’s true. Here’s another example. The scientists were forced to climb down after being presented with the evidence.”

“Ramesh never climbs down no matter what the evidence is.”

“Neither does Sujatha. She never climbs down however strong the arguments against her.”

“You have said it there.”

“By the way ‘climb down’ is an informal expression.”

“I see. Ramesh and Sujatha make interesting OPponents, don’t they?”

“They certainly do. O.p.p.o.n.e.n.t is pronounced OP’ponent. The ‘o’ in the first syllable and the ‘e’ in the final syllable sound like the ‘a’ in ‘China’. The ‘o’ in the second syllable is pronounced like the ‘o’ in words like ‘go’, ‘so’, and ‘no’. And the stress is ....”

“ .... is on the second syllable ‘po’. I suppose.”

“Exactly! I think you’d better leave. I have to leave for the office pretty early tomorrow.”

“What are your office timings?”

“O! We usually work between 8:30 and 5:00.”

“8:30 and 5:00! My father’s office timings are .... That reminds me. I was looking up something in my dictionary the other day and I was surprised to find that the word ‘timings’ was not included in it.”

“That’s because the word ‘timings’ does not exist in British or American English. I think it is an Indian invention.”

“You mean it’s just like the word ‘prepone’? Everybody in India uses this word, but it’s not included in any dictionary.”

“That’s right. All dictionaries include the word ‘timing’, but I haven’t come across any dictionary which includes ‘timings’.”

“I see. What do native speakers say then?”

“Well, instead of saying ‘What are your office timings’?, they usually say ‘What are your office hours?’.”

“But what if it’s not an office?”

“In that case, the usual question is ‘What are your working hours?’.”

“How about ‘What are your business hours’.”

“Sounds good to me.”

Published in *The Hindu* on February 10, 1998

THE DAILY QUIZ

On the anniversary of Mahsa Amini’s death, test your knowledge of her case, the protests it sparked, and the history of Iran’s hijab laws

Prathmesh Kher

QUESTION 1

What action sparked the 1979 International Women’s Day protests in Tehran, just a month into the Iranian Revolution?

QUESTION 2

Under whose presidency was the Guidance Patrol (Gasht-e Ershad) formally created to enforce hijab and morality codes?

QUESTION 3

Under Article 638 of the 1983 Islamic Penal Code, what punishments were prescribed for women appearing in public without hijab?

QUESTION 4

Approximately how many protesters had been killed by security forces by December 2022, according to Iran Human Rights?

QUESTION 5

What is the slogan or movement name that arose from the protests ignited by her death?



Visual Question:

Identify the protest in this photograph taken by Iranian photographer Mohammad Sayyad.

Questions and Answers to the previous day’s daily quiz: 1. Which was the first story the young Agatha Miller wrote while recovering from the flu? **Ans: ‘The House of Beauty’**

2. In which full-length novels were readers introduced to Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple? **Ans: ‘The Mysterious Affair at Styles’ and ‘The Murder at the Vicarage’.**

3. Which fictional Balkan nation makes an appearance in several stories? **Ans: Herzoslovakia**

4. One of the more eminent actors is said to have remarked, ‘He is now!’ when Christie’s daughter Rosalind Hicks did not find the actor to be ideal for the role. **Ans: Peter Ustinov**

5. Name the highly intelligent ex-Army colonel who is introduced in ‘The Man in the Brown Suit’. **Ans: Colonel Johnnie Rice**

6. Name the village where Miss Marple resides. **Ans: St. Mary Mead**

7. How are Thomas Beresford and his wife, Prudence (née Cowley), better known? **Ans: Tommy and Tuppence**

8. The films ‘Gumnaam’ (Hindi), ‘Nadu Iravil’ (Tamil), and ‘Aatagara’ (Kannada) are all based on which Christie work? **Ans: ‘And Then There Were None’**

Visual: Name the film icon on the right. **Ans: Sir Richard Attenborough**

Early Birds: Siddhartha Viswanathan | Piyali Tuli | Sunil Madhavan | Haridas Pal | Arun Kumar Singh



Governance risk

New minimum public offer guidelines raise concerns

Market regulators must strike the right balance between facilitating ease of doing business for stakeholders and maintaining correct market behaviour. The amendments proposed by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) to the rules governing minimum public offer and the timelines to achieve minimum public shareholding do not seem to tick these boxes. By appearing more favourable to large corporate issuers, these guidelines could pose a governance risk and put retail investors at a disadvantage.

According to the existing rules, initial public offers with the post-issue market cap at ₹1-5 lakh crore are mandated to set the offer size at 5 per cent of the post-issue market cap. Companies have been given five years to move the public shareholding to 25 per cent. With issuers complaining about the challenges in diluting bulky stakes, SEBI has proposed that such issuers can set the offer size at 2.75 per cent of the market cap. The time limit for achieving 25 per cent minimum public shareholding has been extended to 10 years. In the case of issues over ₹5 lakh crore, only 1 per cent of market cap needs to be offered in the issue.

Decreasing the limit for minimum public offer is far from desirable as it poses governance risk. If public shareholders do not have enough voting rights, they will be unable to call out management decisions which are not in their favour. The extended timeline for minimum public shareholding makes matters worse. SEBI has also complicated the rules by specifying varying minimum public offer sizes based on the post-issue market capitalisation. This differentiation is unnecessary given the voracious appetite being displayed by individual investors for fair priced offers, irrespective of the issue size. Specifying a uniform public offer limit of 5 per cent of market cap for all issues, to be increased to 25 per cent in five years, would have been a better way to manage this.

It is, however, welcome that SEBI is not proposing to reduce the retail investor quota in IPOs from 35 per cent to 25 per cent, as proposed earlier. This would not have been fair to individual investors who prefer taking bets on IPO listing gains. While such trades are indeed risky, regulators need not micro-manage the activities of individual investors. Stringent regulations can nudge them towards riskier segments such as derivatives, unregulated cryptocurrencies or forex trading. Similarly, a reduction in the maximum limit in mutual fund exit load from 5 per cent to 3 per cent is also good for investors. Increasing the permissible number of anchor investors in an IPO and including life insurance companies and pension funds in the anchor investor portion will help companies secure the requisite anchor investor subscriptions. Finally, at a time when foreign portfolio investors have turned net sellers, it is good that SEBI is trying to ease the compliance burden. These steps are necessary to compete effectively with countries such as China for portfolio funds.

POCKET



RAO INDERJIT SINGH

Over the past decade, India has undergone a digital revolution that is nothing short of extraordinary. What began as a series of targeted technological interventions has now evolved into a sweeping transformation, touching nearly every aspect of Indian life — economy, governance, education, healthcare, commerce, and even the lives of farmers and small entrepreneurs in the remotest corners of the country.

This journey has not been accidental. It has been carefully stewarded by the Government of India through a combination of bold policymaking, cross-ministerial collaboration, and a commitment to inclusive growth. While the line ministries — such as the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY), the Ministry of Finance (MoF), the Ministry of Agriculture, and others — have executed large-scale projects on the ground, NITI Aayog has served as the policy engine, fostering convergence, driving thought leadership, and nudging the system towards scalable, citizen-first innovations.

A major inflection point came with the rollout of the Jan Dhan-Aadhaar-Mobile (JAM) trinity. With over 55 crore bank accounts opened, millions who were previously excluded from the financial system suddenly gained access to banking and direct benefit transfers. In a small village in Odisha, a single mother was able to receive welfare benefits directly into her bank account, bypassing middlemen for the first time. Her story is echoed by millions across India. This massive financial inclusion movement, supported by the Ministry of Finance and enabled by Aadhaar and mobile penetration, laid the groundwork for what came next: a fintech explosion.

**PAYMENT REVOLUTION**  
The Unified Payments Interface (UPI), developed by the National Payments Corporation of India under the guidance of the RBI, revolutionised the way Indians transacted. What began as a novel way to send money to a friend quickly became the lifeline of small businesses, vegetable vendors, and gig workers. Today, India records over 17 billion UPI transactions each month, and even roadside vegetable sellers accept digital payments with a simple QR code.

At the same time, the backbone of India's digital infrastructure was being built — quietly and persistently — under MeitY. Projects like BharatNet brought broadband to over two lakh gram



K RAGESH

Digitisation has transformed India

**DIGITAL DECADE.** It's having a positive impact on almost every aspect of life, thanks to bold policymaking, cross-ministerial collaboration, and a commitment to inclusive growth

panchayats, while India Stack created the architecture for paperless, presence-less, and cashless services. DigiLocker allowed students to access their certificates digitally, and e-Sign enabled remote authentication for important documents. DigiYatra is a pioneering initiative that enables seamless, paperless, and contactless air travel using facial recognition technology. It ensures faster check-ins, enhanced passenger experience, and improved airport efficiency, all while safeguarding data privacy through decentralised identity management. This marks a major step in making Indian aviation future-ready and passenger-centric. These weren't just apps — they were building blocks of a digital republic.

Digital governance also took a leap forward with the launch of the Government e-Marketplace (GeM). Designed to bring transparency and efficiency into public procurement, GeM has connected over 1.6 lakh government buyers with more than 22 lakh sellers — including a growing number of women

The pandemic was a stress test for India's digital public infrastructure — and it passed with flying colours

entrepreneurs and MSMEs. For a small handicraft seller from Rajasthan, this meant access to government contracts that were previously unimaginable. The agriculture sector, often seen as resistant to change, too began embracing digital tools. Platforms like PM-Kisan ensured that income support reached farmers directly. e-NAM connected agricultural *mandis* across States, enabling farmers to get better prices for their produce. The digital Soil Health Card helped them understand what crops to grow and what nutrients to add to their land. In rural Jharkhand, CSCs (Common Service Centres) run by local entrepreneurs became digital lifelines — offering everything from telemedicine to banking and skilling programmes.

**PANDEMIC STRESS TEST**  
The pandemic was a stress test for India's digital public infrastructure — and it passed with flying colours. With schools shut, platforms like DIKSHA and SWAYAM ensured that learning didn't stop. Children in Ladakh and Kerala could access the same content, curated by teachers across India. Simultaneously, the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission took shape, allowing citizens to access their health records through a digital ID and creating a seamless experience across hospitals and States.

Commerce, too, witnessed a quiet revolution. The Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC), an initiative of DPIIT, is now enabling small *kirana* shops and handloom weavers to compete with large e-commerce giants. By unbundling the functions of digital commerce, ONDC is levelling the playing field, ensuring that small businesses can access logistics, payments, and customer feedback systems with ease.

The convergence role that NITI plays — bringing ministries, states, startups, and industry together — has ensured that digital public goods are interoperable, inclusive, and scalable. As India moves toward its \$5 trillion economy goal, new frontiers are emerging: AI-enabled governance, decentralised commerce, and multilingual, mobile-first digital services that can reach the last person in the line. But this is not just a government success story. It is the story of a nation — of millions of citizens who adopted change, entrepreneurs who built on digital rails, and local leaders who reimagined service delivery.

India's digital decade is not just about technology — it's about transformation. And the story is only just beginning.

The writer is Minister of State (Independent Charge), Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation; Planning and MoS Culture

GST 2.0 shouldn't reduce effective tobacco rates

Worse still, the new soft rate on *bidis* can raise consumption and health problems for the poor

Pritam Datta

The 56th GST Council meeting marked a significant shift in India's indirect tax framework, but its approach to tobacco taxation has raised both hope and concern. Under this framework, there would be a merit rate of 5 per cent for essential goods and services, a standard rate of 18 per cent for most items, and a special de-merit rate of 40 per cent applicable only to a select few goods and services.

It has long been awaited that tobacco products move from the 28 per cent slab to the 40 per cent GST 'special de-merit rate,' which would also cover sin goods like sugary products, aerated waters, and carbonated fruit-based beverages. However, one can only wonder what special "merit" the Council discovered in items like *bidi* wrapper 'Tendu' leaves or Indian 'Katha', to justify slashing their GST rate from 18 per cent to 5 per cent.

*Bidis*, though dubbed the "poor man's luxury," are as harmful as any tobacco product and place heavy health and financial burdens on vulnerable populations. Cutting their GST rate from 28 per cent to 18 per cent only risks encouraging more consumption among those least able to bear the cost. Moreover, the 18 per cent slab is designated as the "normal rate," and by the Council's logic, *bidis* are now treated

as just as normal as dishwashers, televisions, or set-top boxes.

The Council has recommended adopting a retail sale price (RSP) based valuation under GST for products such as pan-masala, cigarettes, gutkha, chewing tobacco, zarda, scented tobacco, and unmanufactured tobacco. In RSP-based GST, tax is collected upfront at the manufacturing stage and passed down through prices, reducing leakage from informal vendors in the supply chain. However, RSP-based GST may also include an abatement rate, which reduces the RSP to an abated value (closer to the manufacturer's ex-factory price) for tax calculation at the manufacturing stage. The remaining margins are then taxed separately through GST on value addition at later stages of the supply chain. This shifts part of the tax base downstream, but also leaves room for leakage due to the presence of informal vendors at lower levels.

**THE ABATEMENT FACTOR**  
Currently, Central Excise Duty (CED) and National Calamity Contingent Duty (NCCD) on tobacco products are applied with a 55 per cent abatement, meaning that for an RSP of ₹100, the duty is calculated on ₹45. If the same abatement continues under GST, a 40 per cent rate would apply to ₹45, resulting in an effective tax burden of



**HEALTH OF THE POOR.** Should not be undermined JOTHI RAMALINGAM

just 18 per cent. If the government aims to strongly discourage harmful products like cigarettes, it can lower or even remove abatement altogether. For sin products, reducing or eliminating abatement ensures the tax base is not understated and maximises the deterrent effect.

*Bidi* and other tobacco products are equally harmful to health. By placing cigarettes and other tobacco products in the newly created higher GST bracket of 40 per cent — the 'Special Demerit Rate' — while keeping *bidis* in the lower 18 per cent slab alongside normal goods, is the government not undermining or undervaluing the health of the poor and vulnerable? Moreover, the Government aims to achieve Universal Health Coverage (UHC) by 2030, with the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya

Yojana—Ayushman Bharat (AB-PMJAY) as the key instrument. AB-PMJAY seeks to provide secondary and tertiary care to the poor and vulnerable through an insurance-based model. However, tobacco-induced diseases place a heavy burden on this programme. The question that lingers is whether, in the name of tax simplification, the government has actually made tobacco cheaper for the poor while making the burden on public health even heavier.

The revised GST rates for all goods, except tobacco products, will take effect from September 22, 2025. For tobacco products, the current rates will continue until the loan and interest obligations under the Compensation Cess account are fully discharged. In the current system, the GST Compensation Cess plays a crucial role in creating a higher tax burden on tobacco products, except *bidis*. With the cess scheduled to be discontinued from March 2026, the government will need to determine an appropriate abatement rate for the newly introduced RSP-based GST on tobacco products (excluding *bidis*) to sustain the existing tax burden. Additionally, it is anticipated that the Ministry of Finance may introduce a health cess to further ensure that the high tax pressure on tobacco products is maintained.

The writer is Fellow, NIPFP, New Delhi

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Telecom tariffs

Apropos, 'The right call' (September 15). Telecom service providers are slyly hiking tariffs by discontinuing lower-tier data plans and coercing users into higher-value options, thereby inflating Average Revenue Per User (ARPU) without direct, across-the-board increases. With the subscriber market stable, operators are less focused on new user acquisition and more on squeezing existing customers. In India, where the customer base is enormous and revenue streams already strong, these indirect hikes are unwarranted. The much-touted 5G rollout has failed to translate into

wider coverage or better service quality. Adding insult, consumers often doubt the accuracy of data usage measurements, as they are pushed to purchase extra vouchers prematurely. In a digital-first economy, where internet connectivity is essential, such exploitative strategies are retrograde, burdensome, and deeply unjustified.

**N Sadhasiva Reddy**  
Bengaluru

Graded pricing

At a time when the data usage is growing at a significantly high rate,

with rural consumers primarily driving the growth, it would be unwise to apply breaks to such fast paced growth by resorting to another round of tariff hikes, as the tariffs were increased only last year. A large percentage of existing or potential consumers are price sensitive. Existing consumers may reduce the usage of data if tariffs go up further. Telecom companies may "adopt graded pricing" as suggested in the editorial or design innovative plans with more attractive bundled benefits to users to improve data usage.

**Kosaraju Chandramouli**  
Hyderabad

Cess woes

This refers to 'Are cesses serving their intended purpose?' (September 15). The government is prone to adding one cess after another in any sector it fancies. This weighs on an already higher consumer price base. Worse, some of the cesses collected lie unspent on the professed sectors for which they were collected. When a new cess is levied, the government must present before Parliament the utilisation of previous cesses. This will at least ensure that every cess is meaningfully leveraged.

**R Narayanan**  
Navi Mumbai

GST on medical aids

The recent GST reform, which continues taxing medical aids, is a grave oversight in catering to the needs of differently-abled individuals. While luxury items see tax reductions, essential prosthetics and assistive devices are taxed at a high rate of 18 per cent. These individuals are already burdened by the high costs of healthcare and mobility aids. By maintaining such taxes, the government not only ignores their needs but also discourages their access to necessary treatments.

**Vijaykumar HK**  
Raichur, Karnataka



# Credit for planting trees

Revamped green credit scheme has pluses, minuses

Aditya KS  
Kiran Kumara TM

Agriculture contributes to climate change and is also among the sectors most severely impacted by its effects. Adoption of sustainable practices at scale remains limited due to lack of adequate incentives for voluntary adoption. Green credit aims to provide additional incentive for farmers to adopt sustainable practices through market mechanism.

The green credit programme (GCP) was initially introduced in 2023, for the eight activities that generate green credits; however, detailed methodology was notified only for tree plantation activities on February 22, 2024, and it was modified on August 29, 2025.

The programme is designed to encourage large-scale plantations on degraded forest lands, wastelands, and open scrub areas. It required a minimum density of 1,100 trees per hectare, and participants could earn one green credit per tree planted.

Credits were to be issued within two years of plantation, based primarily on the number of saplings planted rather than their survival or ecological performance. The system allowed these credits to be traded or used for meeting CSR, ESG, or compensatory afforestation obligations.

## THE NEW FRAMEWORK

The August 29 notification replaces the earlier tree-plantation methodology under the Green Credit Rules with a performance- and survival-based approach that ties the issuance of green credit to the ecosystem outcomes rather than mere planting counts, and it also tightens fungibility and trading scope of credits pursuant to Rule 5(1) of the 2023 Rules.

The 2025 notification now requires at least five years of restoration on degraded forest land and achievement of a minimum 40 per cent canopy density before any claim. The credits will be calculated based on vegetation status (change in canopy density and surviving trees) and award one credit per new tree older than five years only after the 40 per cent threshold is met. However, these credits are non-tradable and non-transferable except intra-group (holding-subsidiary) transfers.

Although the new proposed methodology is a much-refined



GREEN CREDIT. Regulatory balance

version and outcome-oriented, some concerns still remain. First, the financial model constraint. By delaying the issuance of credit by five years, the cost of such afforestation projects will rise substantially and would require a lot more upfront financing.

Further, failure to achieve the 40 per cent canopy requirement, would result in no credit being issued, increasing the risk for private financing. A possible solution is to introduce phased credit issuance to ease financial pressures and lower investment risks.

Second, the projects could target survival and canopy over everything else, and might start planting species, ignoring the local ecology. This could lead to serious ecological trade-offs such as depletion of water tables, wildfires, etc.

Third, making the green credits non-tradable and potentially single use will limit the role of the market and stifle innovation.

Fourth, communities are ignored again. All the outcomes and targets listed in the new methodologies exclusively focus on bio-physical targets — survival, area, canopy cover, etc. However, the rights of communities which depend on these wastelands and whose lives are interwoven with forests are completely ignored.

Developing regulatory framework for market mechanisms to promote voluntary climate action is a balancing act — enough to ensure integrity of the traded instrument, not too much that would stifle innovation. Green credit is an idea worth pursuing, and the government and stakeholders need to come together to ensure that it is implemented in the right spirit and will result in desirable outcomes across levels.

The writers are scientists with ICAR-National Institute of Agricultural Economics and Policy Research, New Delhi. Views are personal

## MACROSCAN.



Well before US President Donald Trump upended the rules of the international trade game with his tariff aggression, it was well-known — most of all in global financial circles — that the US had a special place with regard to cross-border capital flows.

Obviously, the unique strength of the US derives from its position as the holder of the global reserve currency, but that is in effect a circular argument: it holds the global reserve currency because of its perceived strength. And that is not just about its size, or its wide and deep capital markets, or even its perceived “stability”. (In fact, when it was at its most unstable as an economy, during and just after the Global Financial Crisis, the US attracted even more capital from abroad because of investors’ “flight to safety”).

Rather, it is fundamentally about perceptions of relative power, which can be economic, or financial, or military, or more broadly geopolitical. Financial markets, which operate more on perceptions and expectations than any other markets, are particularly sensitive to this, even when they do not always get it right.

## MARKET RESPONSE

That is what explains the apparently peculiar response of capital markets — and bond markets in particular — to changes in fiscal stance across the US and other countries. Orthodox economists would have us believe that bond markets respond to fiscal deficit-to-GDP ratios and public debt-to-GDP ratios, such that higher ratios lead to adverse reactions that cause capital to flow out.

As we have argued before (see <https://tinyurl.com/8kk5mm56>), in practice the opposite has often been true, especially in the past decade. High income countries get away with fiscal deficit-to-GDP and public debt-to-GDP ratios that are significantly higher, sometimes several multiples higher, than those of middle and low income countries, yet bond markets punish the latter much more severely.

But a closer look at the data suggest that the pattern is complex and the cross-country analysis therefore needs to be more nuanced. It is important to separate the two most powerful players in the global economy, the US and China, and then look at the fiscal patterns and their implications for sovereign debt.

Figure 1 provides the total fiscal deficit-to-GDP ratios for countries grouped according to per capita income, with the US and China taken out of their respective groups and examined separately. (Data for all figures are from the IMF Fiscal Monitor, April 2025.) It is evident that since 2019, the US and China have both been much more fiscally “ambitious” (or profligate, depending on your viewpoint) than either other high income countries or other middle income countries. Indeed, the high income countries seem to be the most caught up by the doctrine of “austerity” after 2021, while low income country governments have also tightened their belts.

## FISCAL BALANCES

The primary fiscal balances shown in Figure 2 make this point even more emphatically. While the increase in the primary deficit of the US in 2020 was by far the largest in both absolute terms and as share of its GDP, China’s was also significant, and much more than for all other country groups. And China’s primary deficit has remained high in subsequent years, even higher than the US.

Figure 3 plots the government interest expenses, which are obviously

determined by both the legacy public debt and interest rates. Here the pattern is reversed, at least for China. The US shows the highest interest burden as share of GDP, but followed closely by middle income countries other than China. The substantial increase in the US interest burden in 2023 and 2024 also reflect the rising interest rates that were imposed as a response to the inflation. Yet both the US and China (which, like the US, has its public debt held in its own currency the RenMinBi) have the benefit of lower interest rates compared to other countries, especially low- and middle-income countries that face higher spreads on their sovereign bonds.

This is why middle-income countries (other than China) as a group also have high interest expenses in terms of GDP. Low-income countries generally have even higher spreads on their sovereign bonds, but that concern and the fear of capital flight have forced them to rein in their spending to such an extent that their public debt-to-GDP ratios are very low. Despite that, many of them face external debt crises.

The costs of borrowing are further complicated by the difference between the bond coupon rate and the yield. The coupon rate of a sovereign bond is the fixed, annual interest rate paid on the bond’s face value. The nominal yield, by contrast, is the market interest rate reflecting the bond’s current price, which can rise or fall depending on demand for the bond. Yields will rise when the price of the bond falls.

## YIELD PATTERNS

In this regard, the recent pattern of yields of the US Treasury Bills is of interest. They have clearly fluctuated over time — the 10-year bond nominal yield reached a historic high of nearly 16 per cent in September 1981, but has been coming down continuously since then. By 2020 the yield was at a historic low of only 0.6 per cent, because of the US Federal Reserve’s policy of lower interest rates and even more monetary easing. Since then, it has been rising, and in the past year has been in the range of 3.8 to 4.6 per cent.

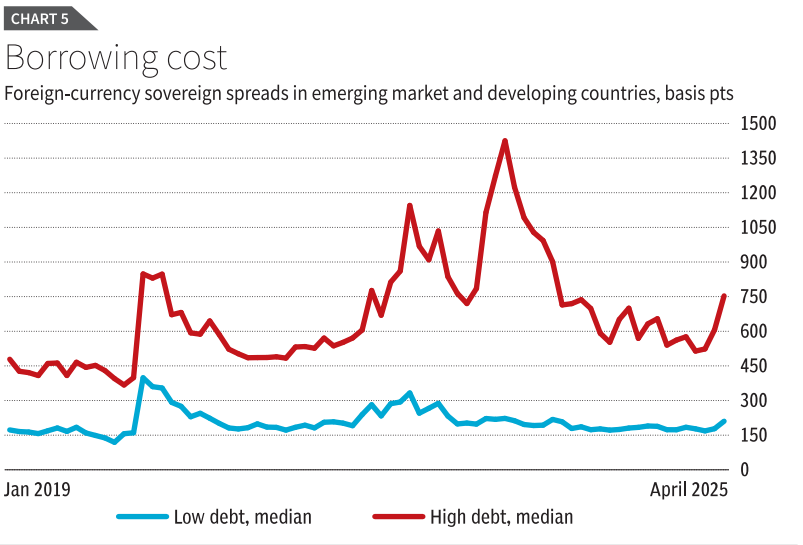
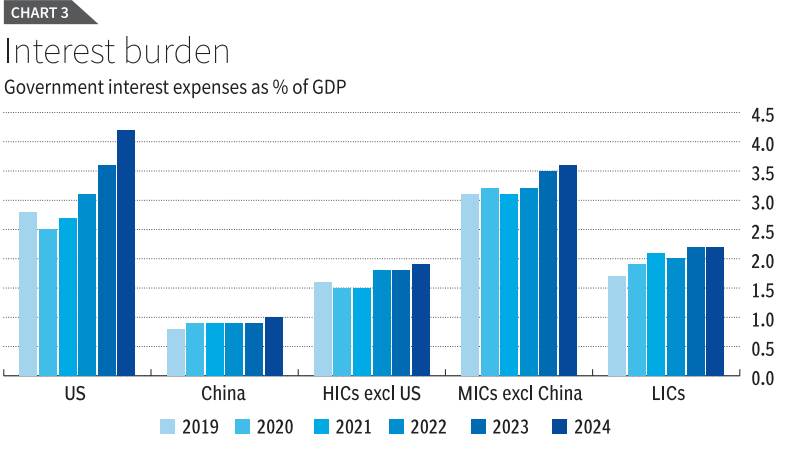
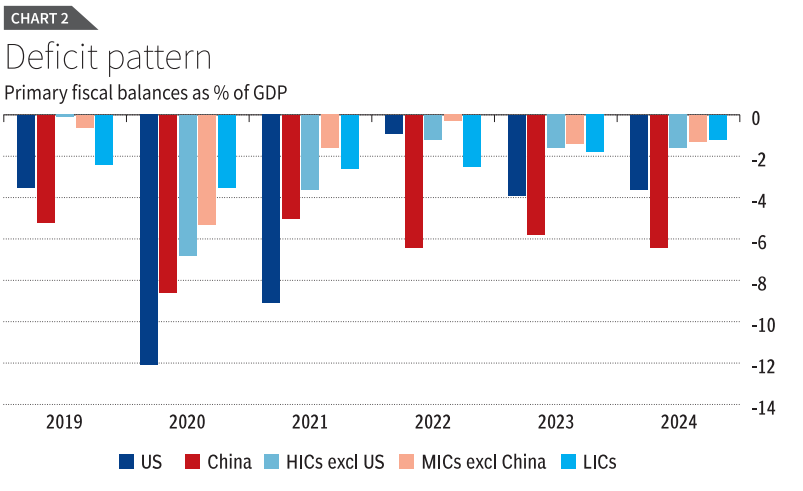
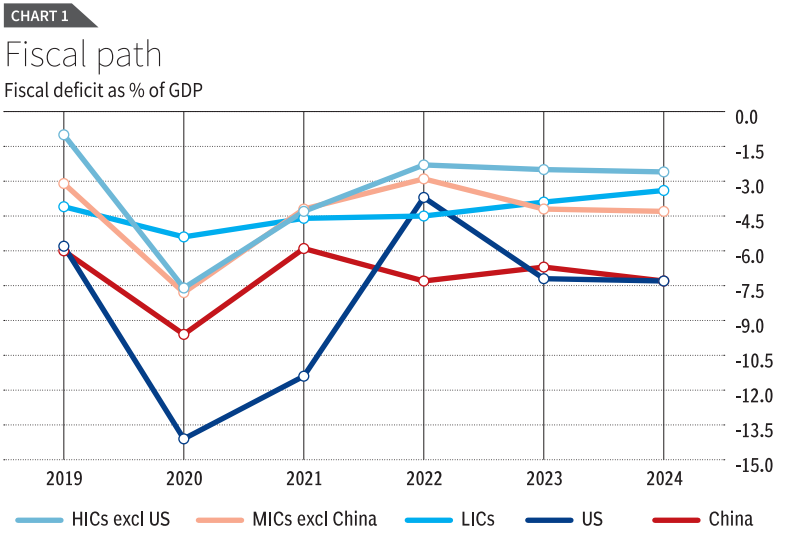
More significant for the rest of the world is the further cost imposed on their sovereign borrowing by the spread over the US Fed rate, reflecting financial investor perceptions of “risk”. That such risk has little to do with actual fiscal or economic performance, and everything to do with relative power that result in currency hierarchies, is evident in the recent trends of such spreads, as shown in Figure 5.

The low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) (here referred to as emerging market and developing countries) have experienced varying trends depending on whether they are seen to be highly indebted or only moderately indebted.

But note that even the “high debt” countries have public debt-to-GDP ratios that are much smaller than those of the US and other rich countries. Their problem rather is the foreign currency component of public debt, which becomes difficult to service whenever a foreign exchange constraint emerges, increasingly for reasons beyond their control.

The median increase in the spread over the US Fed rate for LMICs rose dramatically up to the middle of 2023, to as high as 14 percentage points above the US Fed rate. They have come down since, but still remain extremely high, at more than 7.5 percentage points. Such high borrowing costs are obviously unviable, especially for poor countries struggling to meet the most basic social and developmental objectives in an ever more hostile international environment.

Middle, low income countries get punished by bond markets despite having lower deficit and debt levels than high income countries



## thehindubusinessline. TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

September 16, 2005

### Dabhol revival plan may trip on costlier LNG

Fresh question marks have arisen on the revival of the Dabhol power plant in Maharashtra with the eGoM now confronted with a likely tariff of Rs 2.75 per unit against the earlier estimate of Rs 2.30 per unit. At the last week’s eGoM meeting, GAIL, which is to tie up fuel supply for the project, reported that the LNG market was “very tight” and was expected to ease only from 2009 onwards.

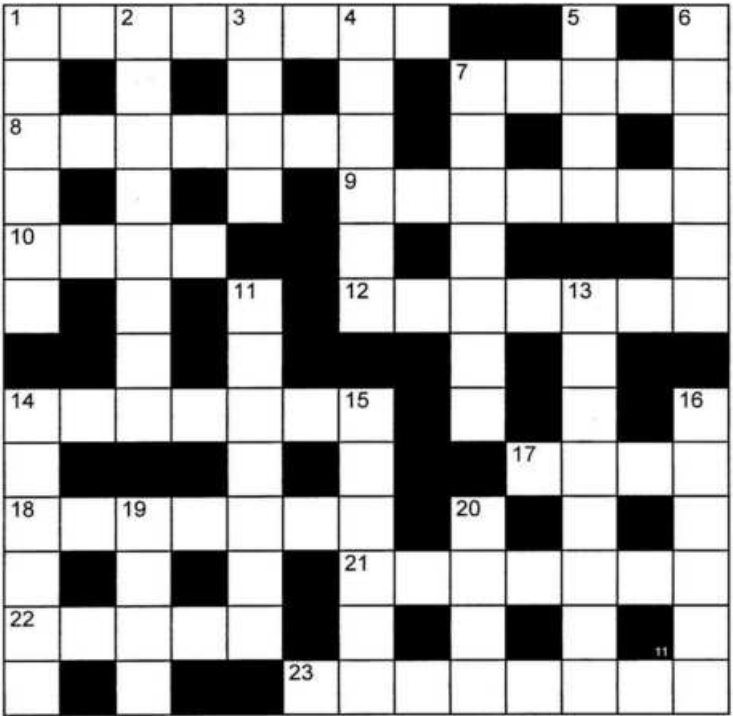
### Cess on construction proposed

A cess on construction sector projects has been proposed for the benefit of construction workers across the country. The draft National Housing and Habitat Policy, 2005, has proposed that such a cess should be considered for upgrading the skills of construction workers.

### 107 clean development projects get Ministry nod

With the Environment Ministry having given the host country approval to 107 clean development mechanism (CDM) projects, the Government said that these could attract revenues worth \$2.6 billion. Each CER stands for one tonne of carbon dioxide reduction and can be traded globally. A total of Rs 7,816 crore has gone into these projects that could potentially generate 132 million CERs.

## BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2783



## EASY

### ACROSS

- Send to lower division (8)
- Tubular bell sound (5)
- Hiker, wanderer (7)
- A letter (7)
- Line doubled-back (4)
- Misled (7)
- Amount left over (7)
- Male-only (4)
- Prominent; projecting angle (7)
- Lean towards (7)
- Liquor sediment (5)
- Felt a grudge (8)

### DOWN

- Infrequently (6)
- Personal satires (8)
- Sea-bird (4)
- Put cotton through eye of needle (6)
- Vapour, atomised spray (4)
- Fight against attack (6)
- Cooled, iced (7)
- Buy back pledge (7)
- Locality (8)
- To dwell (6)
- Complete (6)
- Tallied (6)
- Was fibbing (4)
- Protracted pain (4)

## NOT SO EASY

### ACROSS

- Tell tale that’s about, for example, to send one down (8)
- Man involved in crime first and last is sound as a bell (5)
- Stroll along and get taken in by posh car as a hiker (7)
- Is the French to take in the Greek ‘p’ as a letter? (7)
- It doubles back on itself where one may swim backwards (4)
- Under a misapprehension, it may escape one in divine degree (7)
- Turn forbidden in 14 Down for the rest of the estate (7)
- Men-only affair at which to buy shares for immediate sale (4)
- Angle of defence of line being broken, sat around (7)
- Tend to be at home with chorus-leader and have a row (7)
- Among medical men, for instance, they are left in a bottle (5)
- Dispatched when mouthpiece was about to be begrudged (8)

### DOWN

- Gunners depend on it, but not often (6)
- Light that soon changes when they satirise people (8)
- One easily conned a bird at sea (4)
- Could be a dearth of what a needlewoman may need (6)
- Soundly regretted the absence of such obscurity (4)
- Half made to look out for oneself, and so resist attack (6)
- Kid is holding the French just off the ice (7)
- For a second time judges how one buys back a pledge (7)
- I’d turned up, sticking to the rules somewhere thereabouts (8)
- Take up abode that’s non-u in 14 Across (6)
- Ten are upset by anger but are all there (6)
- Decided silver buck should be given up to it (6)
- German art song told stories (4)
- Bach eventually revealed how he had to suffer (4)

## SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2782

ACROSS 7. Complimentary 8. Redundantly 12. Reveal 14. Tinsel 16. Polite 18. Sloops 19. Speedometer 23. Preternatural

DOWN 1. Boar 2. Sped 3. Signal 4. Depart 5. Stet 6. Pray 9. Envelop 10. Lissome 11. Plus 12. Rope 13. Act 15. Ill 17. Elders 18. Simian 19. Sure 20. Eats 21. Tout 22. Roam



OUR VIEW



# Data centres don't need the state's fiscal support

Booming demand for these units should suffice to attract investment and boost supply. India needs an AI leap but a subsidy for AI infrastructure isn't an optimal use of public funds for it

India's draft data centre policy proposes a 20-year tax holiday for the sector. Whether this would be worthwhile, given that fiscal resources are always scarce, demands a close look. Rather than subsidize an industry that is booming worldwide, policy could act as an enabler in areas that range from the low-cost supply of uninterrupted power to the training of people. Data centres are hardware sites needed for shifting data and software services to the digital cloud in general and for the development and running of artificial intelligence (AI) in particular. Developing AI is vital to India in a way it is not to many other countries, given the impact AI will have on information technology (IT) and IT-enabled services (ITeS), apart from all manner of human activity. The IT and IT-eS sectors play a role that goes beyond their direct share in national output. As employers, they offer a path to social mobility for large swathes of first-generation college-goers and spur demand for a host of other industries. They can count education, construction, transport, hospitality and entertainment among their indirect beneficiaries. They not only generate salaries, wealth and unicorns, they absorb much of the venture capital that flows into India and remain integral to the dynamics of future economic growth.

Globally, data centres are all the rage. Beyond serving near-term IT needs, they are expected to form a backbone for the evolution of today's digital world into the AI age, in which India must actively participate or risk being left out as a mere user of foreign tools. But that does not call for a data-centre subsidy. At the moment, demand is rising robustly for large installations that host processing power

and data storage. How it drove up Oracle's stock price—and Larry Ellison's wealth—has been a clear sign of this boom. In time, demand should attract enough data centres by way of supply without any state incentive needed to set them up. What we must avert, particularly, is an excessive build-up. Data centres guzzle power and our baseload may not expand fast enough to feed such ravenous IT infrastructure. While renewable energy offers an answer, we must not find clean capacity failing to keep up with the sector's appetite. Instead of back-end infra, we should focus resources on gaps at the innovative end of AI. Success here requires us to raise the country's R&D spend from its dismal level of 0.64% of GDP. An ambitious AI thrust would call for innovation in almost everything IT related, including high-end chip design and manufacture. While public funds are going into various fields, chip-making included, fiscal resources are best used for basic research and development work—to plug a void left by private investors.

Morgan Stanley, as cited by *The Economist*, has forecast \$2.9 trillion in AI investments to be made till 2028. Revenues of the top Western AI companies still add up to only \$50 billion, though. Even if sales rise at a dizzying pace, they may struggle to justify the money going into an IT infra frenzy. Many analysts reckon that AI hype has created an investment bubble that could burst, just as the dotcom one did in 2000. The Indian market, while partly driven by data localization norms and other local requirements, would not be insulated if that happens. Private builders of data centres should be asked to venture forth without the support of public money. This isn't a sector that needs a special incentive to reach its ideal capacity.

THEIR VIEW

# Gig workers deserve a better deal in cases of insolvency

DEVENDRA MEHTA



is an INSOl fellow & interim leader.

India's Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) Amendment Bill, 2023, intends to iron out incongruities. However, it does not adequately address an important constituency: that of gig workers, who are currently classified as 'operational creditors.'

India's urban economy relies heavily on them. Delivery riders weave through traffic, couriers move parcels and drivers ferry passengers, all on behalf of digital platforms that call them 'partners,' yet treat them as anything but. If a platform collapses, gig workers may discover that their place in the insolvency queue is right at the end, far from that of formal employees.

That blind spot is turning more dangerous. By 2030, India may have 90 million gig workers. Their legal status remains ambiguous. In insolvency proceedings, they risk losing unpaid dues, incentives and social-security contributions. This is not just an ethical failure, but an economic hazard.

Deregulation in the developed world in the 1970s and 80s, combined with globaliza-

tion and automation, accelerated the gig economy. America's railroad workers, for example, still nominally permanent, were placed on call like gig workers. Truck drivers were reclassified as independent contractors, bearing fuel and maintenance costs while earning less than minimum wage.

Now automation and artificial intelligence (AI) are threatening gig jobs. Globally, robots are delivering pizzas and driverless cabs are on streets. The lesson from Britain's industrial revolution is sobering: wages for artisans collapsed for decades before recovering. India risks a similar depression.

Our ranks of gig workers have swelled partly due to high youth unemployment—over 40% of Indians aged 20–24 are jobless and many graduates settle for delivery work. Some appreciate the flexibility, but for most, gig work is full-time, low-paid and insecure. Workers get suspended for taking water breaks in blazing hot summers, women face harassment from customers, musculoskeletal injuries from long hours on bikes are common and platforms can deactivate worker accounts based on opaque ratings, with little recourse available to them.

Half-hearted steps have been taken. The Code on Social Security 2020 (COSS), though not yet notified, defines gig and plat-

form workers and advocates the creation of a welfare fund. Rajasthan, Karnataka and Telangana have gone further. Yet, the COSS places gig workers outside the traditional employer–employee framework. Under the IBC, that omission is stark. Wages of 'workmen' rank high in the payment waterfall, but the dues of gig workers, in contrast, like those of other operational creditors, are low priority and often left uncovered.

Further, Section 151 of the COSS disadvantages them. It grants priority to claims related to provident funds, insurance and gratuity during insolvency, but it specifically excludes Chapter IX, which covers social security for unorganized, gig and platform workers, leaving them without protection.

Indian courts have long interpreted the term 'workman' broadly, lifting the corporate veil when companies hid behind contractors, as in the case of *Hussainbhai, Calicut vs Alath Factory Thozhilali*. Supreme Court rulings in cases ranging from salt-pan

workers in *Dharangadhara Chemical Works Ltd vs State of Saurashtra* to beedi rollers in *Messrs. P.M. Patel & Sons vs Union of India* suggest that gig workers could well be considered employees under a functional test of control and integration.

The EU has passed a directive, applicable from December 2026, presuming gig workers to be employees. It will apply to all administrative and judicial proceedings. Mexico reclassified them as employees with certain conditions for insolvency protection. British Columbia in Canada has granted equivalent rights and Ontario makes directors liable for unpaid claims of gig workers in insolvency.

In Canada, Foodora's bankruptcy led to a financial settlement with couriers after they were recognized as "dependent contractors." In the Netherlands, Helping cleaners were deemed temporary agency workers.

The rights of gig workers in insolvency cases need to be addressed because when a platform fails, thousands of workers may go

unpaid. When gig workers, heavily reliant on microloans and unsecured credit, miss repayments, the non-performing assets of banks rise. Lower disposable incomes could hit consumption just when India needs such demand to power its economic growth. State governments, faced with stress, may be tempted to give fiscal freebies that weaken public finances. Some workers retreat to farming, reversing decades of urbanization.

India's insolvency law should balance the interests of all stakeholders. By according gig workers low priority, India risks an imbalance. Three reforms are a must. *First*, amend the IBC to recognize gig workers as 'workmen,' at least where economic dependence on a single platform is clear. *Second*, revise the COSS to ensure their claims are prioritized. *Third*, institute rules that cover gig workers as a separate class.

Terms like 'partner' or 'independent contractor' should not imperil a worker's fate. The law must pierce contractual facades and look at control, dependence and integration. India will reap a demographic dividend only if we invest wisely. Treating tens of millions of gig workers as expendable creditors in bankruptcy is unwise. Gig workers kept so low down the pecking order not only fails them, it could also fail our economy.

THEIR VIEW

# Why India should invest in solar radiation modification research

We need knowledge to shape a climate debate that might shift to the idea of blocking the sun's rays



**HISHAM MUNDOL**  
is director, Environmental Defense India Foundation.

India is on the front-line of climate change. Unpredictable rainfall, rising temperatures, stressed groundwater tables and inconsistent crop yields are everyday realities for millions of us. The world is rightly accelerating the adoption of renewable energy, driving energy efficiency, investing in adaptation and exploring carbon removal. But even with all this, the graph of global emissions is not bending downwards anywhere near fast enough for us to avert increasingly severe impacts.

This is why a set of ideas under the banner of Solar Radiation Modification (SRM) might hold appeal. SRM refers to technologies that have the ability to cool the planet by reflecting a fraction of sunlight back into space. The closest analogy is the temporary cooling effect often observed after major volcanic eruptions. This is caused by volcanic eruptions pumping aerosols in the air. One possible method of using SRM as a climate action tool is to inject aerosols into the stratosphere.

To be clear, SRM is neither a substitute for cutting emissions nor a cure for climate change. It does not stop ocean acidification or address the underlying drivers of warming. But it can act as a temporary measure to reduce extreme heat and buy time while mitigation and adaptation catch up. As with all emerging technologies, it is not without risk. The scientific jury is out on any

unintended effects on rainfall or weather ecosystems, especially in places like India where the livelihoods of tens of millions are linked to monsoon rains.

*Research versus deployment:* A concern raised by some is that research on SRM will inexorably lead to deployment—that once nations dip their toes in the waters of experimentation, political or commercial interests will create so much momentum that we will be pushed to use it, whether doing so is wise or not. What's often also inferred is that this will then reduce our emphasis on what should be the North Star—reducing emissions.

This is a genuine concern. But there is a graver risk in avoiding research altogether. If the world reaches a point where SRM is actively considered, decisions will have to be made in conditions of crisis. Without transparent and policy-relevant science, governments would be forced to decide in the dark, relying on knowledge produced elsewhere and shaped by others' interests.

The more responsible path is to conduct it with clear guard-rails: transparency in methods and data, an emphasis on public engagement and separation of the research portfolio from future considerations of deployment. Note that research does not commit the world to use SRM. It gives decision-makers evidence of the viability of such interventions so that informed calls can be taken in the future and governance arrangements made if need be.

*India cannot sit out:* Our agriculture, water systems and ecosystems are among the world's most sensitive to changes in temperature and precipitation. SRM could, for example, alter the strength or timing of the monsoon in ways that could either cushion us against heat extremes or disrupt food production. Without India-specific research, we will not know which of these outcomes is more likely. We will also not know what possible SRM deployment strategies will mitigate these risks.

Other countries are moving forward. The UK recently launched a £50 million SRM research programme, the largest of its kind. If decisions on global governance are eventually debated at multilateral forums, will India bring credible science, expertise and a clear perspective to the table? This is not only about climate science. It is also about sovereignty and preparedness.

Amid today's turbulent geopolitics, India must pay close heed to where the leadership of emerging technologies like SRM lies as well as the risks of not studying them adequately. We should not find ourselves dependent on imports of modern climate technology.

As the world's most populous country and one of the most climate-vulnerable, India has the responsibility and right to shape the global SRM debate. We must invest in research through our scientific institutions even as we forge networks of scientists, policymakers and civil society leaders for that purpose.

*A pragmatic approach:* We helped create the International Solar Alliance, set ambitious renewable energy targets and have consistently balanced climate action with developmental priorities. India's is a credible voice of leadership for the Global South. We can bring this pragmatism to SRM by insisting on transparent publicly-funded research plus decision-making frameworks with clear limits and off-ramps that can ensure nobody slides into premature deployment. We need an Indian voice at global forums informed by science that reflects our realities and interests.

SRM might never see the light of day as the risks may outweigh the benefits. However, the idea will almost certainly move from the margins to the mainstream of climate action in the years ahead. India cannot afford to be a late-comer or bystander when those debates unfold. We should engage now—invest in science, build capacity and shape SRM governance—so that we have the body of knowledge and bench of experts to credibly contribute.



BARACK OBAMA









# The EDITORIAL PAGE

## WORDLY WISE

THE END OF LAW IS NOT TO ABOLISH OR RESTRAIN,  
BUT TO PRESERVE AND ENLARGE FREEDOM.

— JOHN LOCKE

## The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

## A WELCOME PAUSE

SC's interim ruling on waqf law checks executive's sweeping powers on Muslim charitable bodies, affirms due processes

THE SUPREME COURT'S interim order on Monday, pausing some key aspects of the contentious amendments to the Waqf Act, is significant. A bench led by Chief Justice of India BR Gavai and Justice Augustine Masih has put on hold provisions that gave district collectors sweeping powers over waqf properties and capped the number of non-Muslims who can be appointed to the waqf boards. The SC also paused the provision mandating that only those practising Islam for at least five years can create waqfs. The stay will continue till state governments frame rules on how to determine who is a practising Muslim. The interim order will be in effect till the SC hears a detailed constitutional challenge. As the SC underlined, it is meant to "protect the interests of all parties and balance equities during the pendency of the matters."

The waqf law was introduced in 2024 and was referred to a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) that included members of the Opposition. However, in the JPC, none of the issues raised by the Opposition were taken on board. And, in Parliament, it ultimately came down to the fact that the government had the hard numbers. The interim order addresses some of the key issues raised by the Opposition. On the district collector's role, for instance. Under the 2025 law, a waqf property would lose its status if a district collector identified it as government land. This power, earlier with the Waqf Tribunal, essentially makes the government a judge in its own case – the district collector's decision would hold till a court adjudicates on the disputed land. The SC underlined that this provision is arbitrary and not in tune with the principle of separation of powers. "The question of determination of the title of a property will have to, in our considered opinion, be resolved by a judicial or quasi-judicial authority," and a "revenue officer cannot be entrusted with the work of determination of the title of a property, keeping in view the principle of separation of powers," it said. On the issue of representation of non-Muslims in waqf boards, the Court noted that the functions of these bodies are largely secular and advisory and do not directly interfere with religious activities. It capped the number of non-Muslim members to four out of 22 in the Central Waqf Board and three out of 11 in state councils. It is not as if the Court agreed with all the arguments of those who had petitioned against the law. It deemed a key provision that does away with the concept of waqf-by-user – land used for Muslim religious or charitable purposes for a long period of time is deemed as waqf even if it was not registered as such – as prima facie constitutional.

The SC's intervention is also crucial because it usually reserves interim relief in exceptional cases. Laws enacted by Parliament carry a presumption of constitutionality. As the Court said, interim relief is only given when "provisions are ex facie in violation of fundamental rights or constitutional principles, or are manifestly arbitrary". The government should read the message in this extraordinary order: It must pay scrupulous attention to due processes, especially on complex matters that pertain to religious practices of minorities.

## A CALL TO REASON

Israel should heed message of UN General Assembly resolution on two-state solution. It cannot have security by force alone

THE IDEA OF a two-state solution to the Palestinian issue – a sovereign State of Palestine alongside Israel – dates back to 1937 (when the present-day State of Israel didn't exist). Since then, multiple efforts to implement the policy have failed, the most notable being the Oslo Accords of the early 1990s. Israel's occupation of Gaza and the West Bank after the 1967 war, and its subsequent settlement expansion in the latter, gradually eroded the possibility of such a solution. Today, Israel effectively controls all territory from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean. But Israel's brutal war in Gaza, launched in response to Hamas's October 7 terrorist attack, has revived the global debate on the two-state framework. At its 80th session, the UN General Assembly on September 12 overwhelmingly endorsed a declaration – stemming from a July UN conference hosted by Saudi Arabia and France – calling for "tangible, timebound, and irreversible steps" towards a two-state solution. The resolution, which also demanded an end to the war and the establishment of a Palestinian Authority government in Gaza, passed with 142 votes in favour, 10 against, and 12 abstentions. Among the notable votes in support was that of India.

Significantly, India's vote in support comes after three abstentions at the UN: In October 2023 (calling for a humanitarian truce), September 2024 (demanding Israel end its unlawful presence in the occupied Palestinian territories), and June 2025 (calling for a ceasefire in Gaza). New Delhi's decision is welcome, especially at a time when Israel seems to be losing global support, including that of its traditional supporters, and there is growing opposition to the war within Israel as well.

General Assembly resolutions are not binding. But at a moment when, in the words of the UN, Israel is "systematically" and "permanently extinguishing the Palestinian presence" in parts of Gaza, such votes keep the flame of a two-state solution alive. The creation of a State of Palestine will be extraordinarily difficult, not least because the US, Israel's closest ally, refuses to support it. Washington opposed the September 12 resolution, dismissing it as "another misguided and ill-timed publicity stunt" and a "gift to Hamas". Yet, the resolution has also called for a Hamas-free Gaza. Israel cannot achieve security through force alone. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who has repeatedly and unapologetically rejected a two-state solution, would do well to heed the world's renewed call for a political compromise, end the bloodshed of Gazans and save the hostages, and work towards a future in which both Israelis and Palestinians can live in peace.

## IN A RICH MAN'S WORLD

Monopoly turns 90. In the board game's enduring popularity, a realisation: Money as a form of keeping score is fun

LONG BEFORE WHATSAPP groups, social-media algorithms and the general atmosphere of polarisation in the digital age, the most analogue of pastimes has led to roaring arguments and even lasting rifts within families and among friends. Monopoly, the board game in which players compete to become real estate barons and push their fellows into bankruptcy, turned 90 earlier this week. The Royal Mint in the UK, to celebrate the occasion, has issued a commemorative 50 pence coin which, somewhat fittingly, will cost anywhere from 15 to 1,500 pounds. The game of Monopoly, now forgotten, was meant to be a parable on the dangers of monopolies.

In 1903, Lizzie Magie, an anti-monopolist and feminist, devised The Landlord's Game to advance the principles of Georgism. The latter was a single tax movement that proposed that people should own what they produce and rent derived from land, natural resources, and commons, which should be collectively owned by society. From the cautionary tale that was The Landlord's Game emerged Monopoly. It was meant, in essence, to highlight the dangers of the concentration of public resources in one or a few hands. But, as with the economy itself, the game evolved its own logic.

Any regular player of Monopoly will attest to the fact that the game is not fair. In fact, the rules are so skeletal that they allow side deals and collusion. Then there's always that one player who skims a little of the top from the bank when no one's looking. Clearly, without meaning to, a board game began to mimic the economies it wanted to criticise. And for all the acrimony, Monopoly (and its various unlicensed knock-offs) continues to be popular. Few now look at the game as a critique of capitalism. In that, perhaps, there's a truth. For all its faults, accumulation – and money as a form of keeping score – is fun. For those who find that problematic, it might be time to figure out a different game, just as engaging.



FAIZAN MUSTAFA

Waqf IS THE most direct expression of Islamic philanthropy. The Quran does not use the expression "waqf". However, some 20 verses encourage people to spend their wealth on charity. The Prophet created seven waqfs of date palm gardens. The Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025, that tried to regulate such philanthropy, invited controversy and was challenged in the Supreme Court.

On Monday, the Court gave an interim order in response to the petitions. At 128 pages, the order is unusually long. Interim orders should ideally be brief, as the arguments on the merits of the case have yet to be heard. The Court examined a challenge to most provisions of the Act and stayed just a couple of them. The petitioners' celebration of the small victory is largely unwarranted, as the court has rejected their arguments on most provisions.

Parliamentary provisions are indeed stayed in the "rarest of rare" cases, as laws are generally assumed to pass the test of constitutionality. Generally, no law is stayed in its entirety because the Constitution's Article 13(2) clearly says that only the provisions that contravene fundamental rights are void. CJI B Ravai and Justice AG Masih's bench did exactly this in the interim order and stayed a few provisions of the Act.

The Court has temporarily stayed Section 3(r) of the Act till rules to determine who is a practising Muslim for five years are framed. This section of the interim order is problematic as it gives the executive officials powers to adjudicate the religiosity of citizens. Are we going to have moral policing along the lines of Iran? A person's claim should be enough to determine his or her religious identity. Section 3(r) uses the term "professing Islam", but the CJI Gavai-led bench has used the expression "practising Islam". This gives state officials a say on religious rectitude – on the performance or non-performance of religious duties. In other words, a Muslim who prays just once a week on Friday or does not keep fasts or lies or takes bank interest or does not pay zakat may not be certified as "practising Islam". Should a modern, liberal, and secular state be allowed to classify good Muslims and bad Muslims? The court's justification that peti-

# Policing charity

SC's interim order offers no relief from problematic provisions of waqf law

tioners have themselves argued that waqf is unique to Islam is not a convincing reason to justify this exclusion. This is because the argument is in the context of a concept novel to Islam, where the owner loses control over his own property.

The right of a property owner has nothing to do with any religious law as it is part of the general jurisprudence, common to all legal systems. An owner is free to do whatever he wants with his property, including destroying or alienating it the way he or she wants. By denying a non-Muslim owner of properties the right to create a waqf, the Act infringes the ownership rights of non-Muslims. The petitioners must be disappointed that the Court did not find this provision problematic. Voluntary conversions are not prohibited. Religious conversion does not mean a loss of ownership rights over property. The Court's response that he may create a trust or donate his property in any other way – a trust, for instance – is nothing short of restricting his freedom. A waqf is different from a trust. A waqf's founder cannot take any benefits for himself or herself. Unlike trusts, a waqf is perpetual, irrevocable, and inalienable. The property in trust vests rights in the trustee, but in waqf, it vests them in God. If an owner does not want to create a trust, can the law force him?

Since a waqf can be set up for secular and social purposes like the construction of a road, hospital or school, how can a non-Muslim be prohibited from this philanthropy? The denial of this right appears controversial, especially because non-Muslims are permitted to be on the Central Waqf Council and Waqf Boards. It's true that this right of non-Muslims was not specifically mentioned in the 1954 and 1995 Waqf Acts and was indeed included in the 2013 amendment. However, in judgments such as *Peda Venkatsubbaranydu* (1930) and *Arur Singh* (1940), the High Courts of Madras and Lahore upheld this right of non-Muslims. After independence, in *Motishah v. Abdul Gaffar* (1956), the Nagpur High Court upheld the right of non-Muslims to create a waqf.

Similarly, the Court's refusal to stay the application of a limitation law on the ground that it applies to all properties is a huge setback to the petitioners. Some Hindu endowment laws – such as those in Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Tamil Nadu – do have such exemptions.

The biggest setback to the petitioners was on waqf by user. The Court found the abolition of such a waqf perfectly justified on the ground that a lot of government lands have been encroached upon. We should not forget that waqf boards are not private land mafia but a statutory authority under Article 12. It is the state government that notifies waqf properties in the gazette after a survey by public servants and recommendations by waqf boards. Moreover, a waqf by user has been consistently upheld by the larger benches of the apex court, including in the Babri Masjid judgment. Not extending the registration time beyond six months should be equally disappointing for the petitioners.

The court's fixing of the number of non-Muslims in the Central Waqf Council and waqf boards may give some solace to the petitioners, but such a change should not have been opposed in the interests of diversity, even though Article 26 of the Constitution is categorical that the right to manage religious properties is the right of a religious denomination or any section thereof. Even Jains, Buddhists, and Sikhs who are Hindus as per Article 25 of the Constitution, are not allowed to become members of some Hindu Endowment Boards.

The petitioners should, however, be hugely relieved that the Court has found determination of title by the executive officers a violation of the separation of powers and stayed this provision in Section 3(c).

The matter is unlikely to be heard on merit any time soon, and the Waqf Act, 2025, would now be implemented with a few small modifications. Whether the government brings one law for all religious endowments is something that remains to be seen. The Waqf Act was a lost opportunity to initiate UCC.

The writer is vice-chancellor of Chanakya National Law University, Patna. The views are personal



SRIRAM VEERA

WHEN SURYAKUMAR YADAV and his men decided not to shake hands with the Pakistan team at the Asia Cup, the last shaky distinction between sports and politics ended. It used to be said that sports shouldn't be mixed with politics, that players only want to get on with the game – "yeh sab siyasat ka khel hai". But in a game between nations that is kicked off with national anthems, the denial of the connection was hanging by a thin thread. When Yadav said that "the government, BCCI, we are all aligned", that thread snapped. Cricket, politics, and the politicking in the sport have all aligned now.

With that alignment, the idea of the "sportsmanship spirit", too, has been stubbed out in the desert air of Dubai. There are no easy sides to take on this. Critics of the Indian team's action can say that the no-handshake incident is an act of weaponising sport in the political tussle between the two countries. The other side will, as they have already done, say that no goodwill can exist when the bloodshed in Pahalgam hasn't dried yet.

Handshakes at sporting events hint at civility, a recognition that after the heat of the game, one can call a ceasefire on bitter rivalry. Between two warring nations, handshakes offer the possibility of peace and people-to-people reach. But, what is the scope of peace when two nations are at loggerheads with each other? Does it not reduce the handshake to mere pretence, an act of hypocrisy?

India, it seems, is trying to normalise a

## DIFFERENT BALL GAME

Asia Cup no-handshake moment shows India is redrawing lines of sportsmanship

new kind of civility: We shall play when needed, we won't engage in any symbolism. Sport is a business now, let's get done and move on. It's an interesting way to play a sport, but its fallouts cannot be ascertained just yet. It's one thing to do it for a game or a tournament, but to sustain this kind of "civil animosity" would leave a trail in its wake.

For starters, what is the fan at the stadium now expected to do? On Sunday night, there was an easy vibe in the stands – Indian and Pakistani fans could be seen sitting together, bantering and chatting. Now, with India refusing to shake hands and a miffed Pakistan captain absenting himself from the presentation ceremony, lines have been redrawn.

Should the fans now sit together or will they wonder if it's best to segregate themselves too? Will it create a stadium with separate islands of fandoms? Would organisers move in such a direction to ensure no untoward incidents happen? What message will it send out to young fans? Where does this leave former cricketers from India and Pakistan who are friends and who share the commentary box? Ravi Shastri and Wasim Akram once ran a show called *Shaz-Waz*. Will they now have to set boundaries to their friendship? A video of Shubman Gill advising the Hong Kong team players was criticised on social media on the assumption that he was helping Pakistan players. It raises the point about smaller cricketing nations in this very tournament, be it UAE or Oman, who

have a mix of Indian and Pakistani expats. Forget the internal dynamics of those teams, will India selectively shake hands when they play against them or is it just reserved for the cricketing entity representing Pakistan?

India's no-handshake stance has a recent precedent. During the 2023 World Fencing Championship, Ukraine's Olga Kharlan refused to shake hands with a Russian opponent in protest over the war, offering instead to tap blades. The Russian declined and protested, leading to Kharlan's disqualification. But the International Olympic Committee later recognised the right of the athletes to not shake hands, and allowed Kharlan to participate in the Paris Olympics in 2024. She won gold. One caveat is that Ukraine and Russia continue to be locked in war. But it's an easy caveat for many to shrug over.

It would be interesting to see how the Pakistan cricket team responds in the next game. Will they go the India way or will passions charge up? What's India's response going to be if there is sledging? Will they not engage or is that kind of interaction allowed?

In the end, it's a free world. Not shaking hands is a choice the Indian team has exercised. Whether it becomes the new normal remains to be seen, depending on how both teams and fans adjust to the stance. One thing is clear, though: "Don't politicise sports" is an empty slogan now.

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## SEPTEMBER 16, 1985, FORTY YEARS AGO

### ENLFP-PM MEET

LEADERS OF THE four-group Eelam National Liberation Front (ENLFP) are leaving for New Delhi to meet the Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, an ENLFP spokesman told PTI. The ENLFP received a message from the Prime Minister's office asking the militant leaders to come to Delhi for talks. According to ENLFP sources, the front leaders are likely to meet Gandhi after the prime minister returns from electioneering in Punjab.

### ASIAN SOLIDARITY

THE 10 ASIAN members of the Birmingham community relations council were being

pressured to form an independent council after they resigned following a dispute with West Indian members on their attitude to the Handsworth riots. The Indian community in the riot-spread Handsworth area felt that the Asian leaders should take the initiative in this regard and defuse racism as the Asian community was being singled out for attacks.

### GADDAFI SHOT AT

LIBYAN LEADER Muammar Gaddafi narrowly escaped an assassination attempt last week when Libyan army officers opened fire on him, missing the head of state but seriously wounding two bodyguards, the

Egyptian news agency Mena reported. The press in Egypt has in the past reported other unconfirmed rebellions by Libyan soldiers.

### INDIA AND NASA

INDIA IS PLANNING to launch an additional satellite in 1987, as the demand for satellites in the country has outstripped earlier expectations. Indian space authorities have approached the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) to find out whether the American space agency could accommodate it for launching in any of the space shuttle flights scheduled for 1987. NASA will be launching India's INSAT-1C, in one of its shuttle flights next year.





# The don'ts of SIR

In carrying out the Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls in Bihar, Election Commission is going against its own well-laid norms and processes



THE DEBATE OVER the Special Intensive Review (SIR) of electoral rolls must go beyond Aadhaar. With the Election Commission of India (ECI) preparing to roll out the exercise across the country and the Supreme Court fixing dates for the final hearing on the matter, we must turn to some key procedural issues. We have discussed earlier how SIR represents a tectonic and unconstitutional shift in the architecture of universal adult franchise. But there has been insufficient attention to the proper norms, processes and protocols required. It is critical to address these issues before thinking about replicating this exercise outside Bihar.

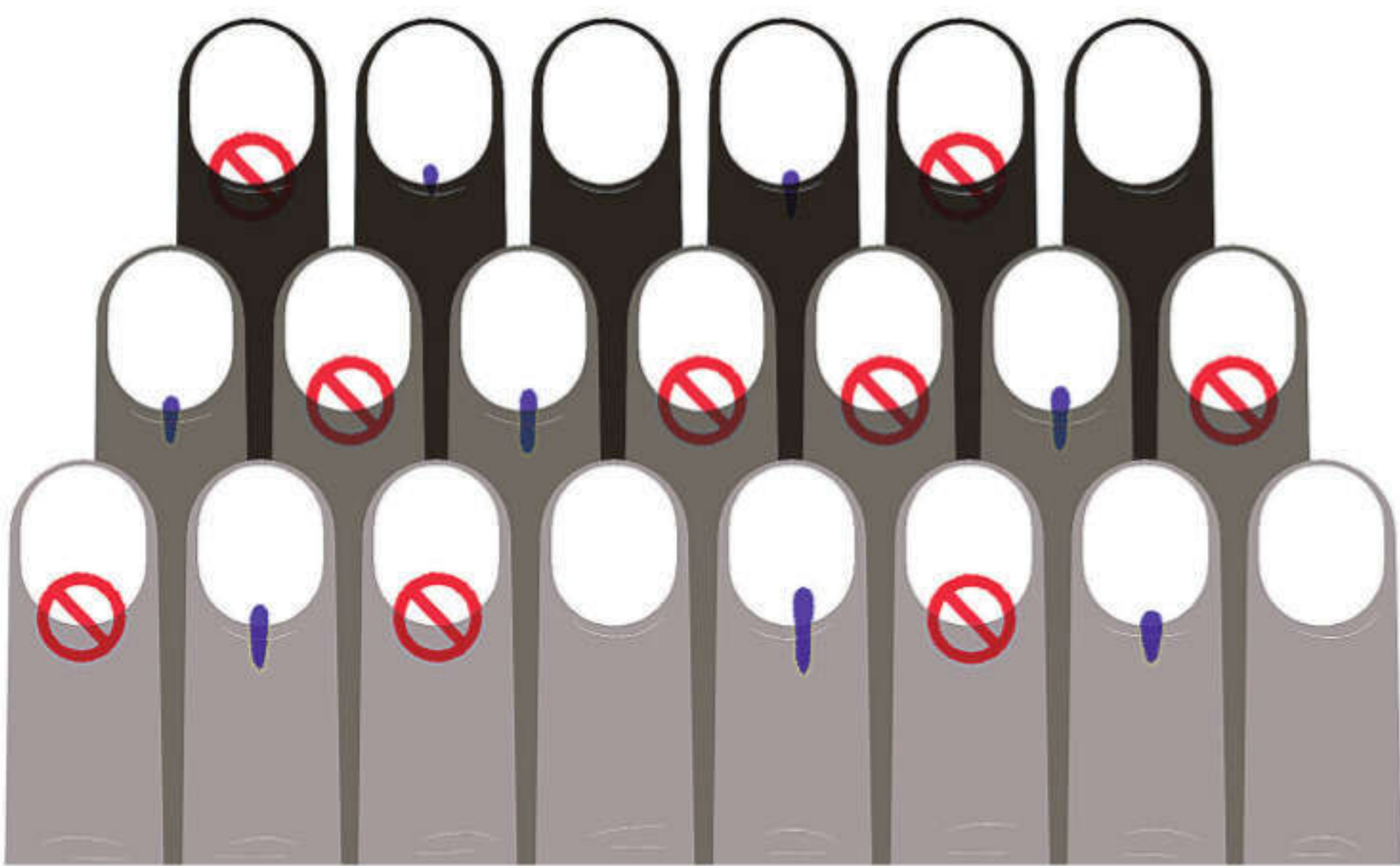
Fortunately, we don't have to reinvent the wheel. Over the decades, the ECI has evolved very detailed, sensitive and fair procedures for making and revising electoral rolls for truly universal adult franchise. Indians can be proud that these procedures have been copied by a large number of post-colonial democracies. The *Manual on Electoral Rolls* (New Delhi: ECI, 2nd edition, 2023) brings together all the laws, rules and orders to provide step-by-step instructions on everything to do with electoral rolls.

The written order and the unwritten practice of SIR violate the ECI's own Manual at every step. The foundational violation was the SIR order itself. A bolt from the blue, this order of June 24 invented a new type of revision called "Special Intensive Revision" that did not exist in law. Taking cover behind an exceptional provision [Section 21(3) of the Representation of the People Act, 1950] that has been invoked only once to rewrite the voters' list in the Thakurdwara assembly segment of UP in 2003, the ECI unrolled a new kind of nationwide rewriting of electoral rolls.

The useful exercise of "Intensive Revision" was now armed with two weapons of disenfranchisement. One, each potential voter was required to submit an Enumeration Form or face deletion from the draft list. This Form or the requirement for such a form did not exist in law. Two, each elector was asked to provide evidence of citizenship from a list of documents, although the ECI did not possess the power to carry out any such verification, and the apex court orders in the *Lal Babu Hussein* case barred the ECI from doing so. Not just that, the ECI invented a new list of 11 documents by junking its existing list of documents of high evidentiary value and coverage in favour of documents of dubious evidentiary value and negligible coverage. The exemption provided to those on the voters list in 2003 also did not enjoy any legal basis, as that revision had nothing to distinguish it from other revisions before or after 2003.

Further violations followed once the SIR was rolled out in practice. Let us note here some of the most egregious lapses from the ECI's meticulous Manual.

The exclusion of over 65 lakh voters in the earlier list should have triggered multiple provisions of the Manual that ask the officials to pay very special attention to any significant deletion. All polling stations "where number of deletions exceeds 2 per cent of the total electors" must be cross-verified personally



C R Sasikumar

by ERO (Manual, Para 11.4.5). If the ECI had taken this mandate seriously, it would have had to order verification of over 93 per cent of all booths in the state, 84,675 booths to be precise. Besides, all EROs have been mandated to check booths with high additions or deletions (Para 11.4.3). That would have required checking of the 1988 booths where more than 200 previous voters were deleted. There is no public record that any ERO carried out any such verification.

The publication of draft electoral rolls invites another set of red flags from the Manual that the ECI seems to have disregarded. The Manual (Para 11.4.3) instructs each ERO to personally and physically verify households with 10 or more electors. If the ECI had followed its own instructions, it would have had to visit 16.9 lakh households (excluding houses marked "0") in Bihar and double-check nearly 2.78 crore voters who live in such houses, some of which shelter more than 800 voters each. The ECI also turned a blind eye to its mandate (Para 11.4.3) of cross-verification of booths with "abnormal gender ratio". There are 29,509 booths where women accounted for more than 60 per cent of the total deletions. In the draft electoral rolls, 13,006 booths show a significantly lower (over 1 standard deviation) from the average gender ratio, and 2,023 booths fall in the highly abnormal (2 standard deviations or more) category.

Let us turn to the next phase of "claims and objections". The Manual mandates a very high degree of transparency: Every single claim of inclusion and exclusion must be published on the CEO's website on a daily basis. Not just that, "the web application used for this purpose should also provide a facility that, on clicking on any row in the list, the concerned application form can be printed by any citizen" (Para 11.3.4). Besides, a list of all claims and objections should be personally handed over by the ERO to representatives of all political parties at the end of every week (Para 11.3.5).

Eight weeks since these provisions kicked in, the ECI has not fulfilled any of these requirements. As of September 14, a fortnight after the deadline for claims and objections, the website of the CEO of Bihar had uploaded only 51 per cent of the records of objections and 39 per cent of the records of new claims.

As of September 14, a fortnight after the deadline for claims and objections, the website of the CEO of Bihar had uploaded only 51 per cent of the records of objections and 39 per cent of the records of new claims. The mandate of allowing the downloading of each form was not followed in a single case. In most cases, the EROs have not held weekly meetings with political parties, let alone hand over the list to them. The three leading opposition parties have written to the ECI pointing out these violations, but to no avail.

The mandate of allowing the downloading of each form was not followed in a single case. In most cases, the EROs have not held weekly meetings with political parties, let alone hand over the list to them. The three leading opposition parties have written to the ECI pointing out these violations, but to no avail. As per the ECI's own norms [Para 11.3.6 (iii) of Manual], no claim or objection can be disposed of until one week after the publication of these lists in the prescribed format. Yet, the ECI proudly announced that it disposed of more than 1.3 lakh applications by September 1 without following this mandate.

Finally, let us note the ongoing exercise of notices being issued to "ineligible electors" for deficiencies in their documentation. Media speculation abounds as no one quite knows how many notices have been issued, to whom and where. This again violates the mandate of strict transparency in Rule 21 A(b) of The Registration of Electors Rules, 1960, which requires every such notice to be displayed on notice board.

These are not just legalistic issues of formal procedures. An analysis of the data on claims and objections uploaded so far confirms the apprehension that these transgressions could hide very substantial acts of mischief. Among the applicants who have filed claims for being a new voter, only 27 per cent belong to the relevant age group of 18-20 years. As many as 41 per cent are older than 25 years and there are 65 applicants who are 100 years or above! Among the objections, as many as 57 per cent are self-objections: the person who filled an Enumeration Form a month ago has objected to his or her own name. More than 500 persons have done so on the ground that they themselves are foreigners! Not to put too fine a point on it, something is fishy here.

All this raises some basic questions: Why is this exercise being carried out in a shroud of secrecy, disregarding the well-laid norms that have evolved over the years? Will the apex court allow this to be repeated in the rest of the country? The nation wants to know.

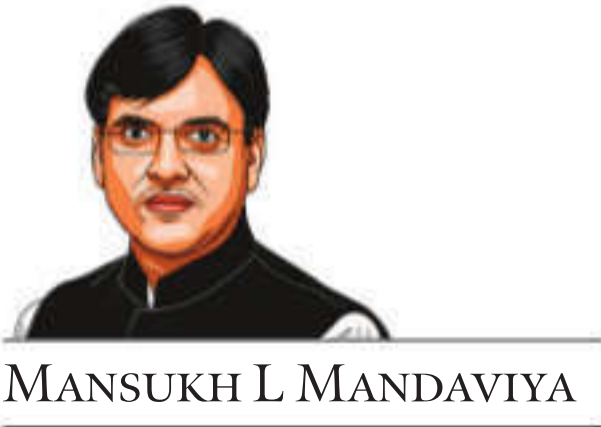
The writer is member, *Swaraj India*, and national convener of *Bharat Jodo Abhiyaan*. He has filed a petition in the Supreme Court challenging the SIR

## WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"The conviction of Bolsonaro has sent a powerful signal heard not only in his country but more broadly: that leaders must be held accountable if they undermine democratic norms."  
— THE GUARDIAN

# From Gujarat Model to Viksit Bharat

PM Modi's experience as chief minister has shaped his governance philosophy. The Centre today promises action – not just policy ideas



FEW LONG-SERVING Prime Ministers of Bharat have served as Chief Ministers in states. Most have been "national" leaders, with little federal experience. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is an exception.

When PM Modi assumed office in 2014, he brought a working philosophy sharpened by a decade of state-level governance in Gujarat. In those years, he closely observed why programmes failed or succeeded at the last mile, and refined an approach that made him the first PM to place execution, and not merely policy design, at the centre of governance. From electricity to banking, welfare to infrastructure, this philosophy has since redefined how the Indian state serves its citizens.

PM Modi's conviction in execution as the central through-line for policy can be seen in his approach to the power sector. In Gujarat, he observed that villages had poles and lines but lacked actual electricity. The solution was the Jyotigram Yojana, which separated feeders so that households had 24-hour supply and farms a predictable share. As Prime Minister, he scaled up this principle through the Deen Dayal Upadhyaya Gram Jyoti Yojana, providing reliable power to 18,374 villages. By 2023, that supply had become the backbone for the country's MSMEs, which collectively employ over 110 million people and contribute nearly 29 per cent of India's GDP.

The same principles resurfaced in banking. On paper, rural families had bank accounts, but in practice, they lay dormant. Jan Dhan changed that. By integrating Aadhaar and mobile phones to individual bank accounts, what was a weak system became the bedrock for direct transfers that went on to reach citizens without middlemen, plugged leakages and saved the exchequer enormous sums.

Housing was next. The Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana linked payments to construction milestones, used geotagging to monitor them, and insisted on better design. For the first time, beneficiaries received complete and livable houses, reversing the trend of inaugurating unfinished shells of previous governments.

Gujarat also showed PM Modi how progress depended on Centre-state alignment. At the national level, this became a philosophy of cooperative as well as competitive federalism. The Goods and Services Tax, blocked for decades, was passed by brokering a consensus with states. The GST Council institutionalised fiscal negotiation and created a unified national market.

Beyond these, he expanded the share of central taxes devolved to states. This gave them greater fiscal room and autonomy in shaping their priorities. At the same time, he promoted competitive federalism by ranking states on ease of doing business and rewarding reform. These shifts encouraged states to act not only as recipients of funds but as stakeholders in Bharat's

growth story. In infrastructure, Gujarat's BISAG mapping experiments were scaled into PM Gati Shakti, where 16 ministries and all states now plan 1,400 projects on a single digital platform, cutting approval times and harmonising execution.

For PM Modi, welfare schemes were always productivity investments meant to empower their recipients. Gujarat's enrolment drive, Kanya Kelavani, lifted female literacy from 57.8 per cent in 2001 to 70.7 per cent by 2011. Nationally, this translated into the Beti Bachao Beti Padhao programme, which has been linked to improvements in the child sex ratio from 918 in 2014 to 934 by 2023. Keeping girls in school delayed marriage, improved their health, and raised long-term productivity, enabling them to enter the paid workforce and thereby participate more effectively in nation-building.

Maternal health was treated with the same care. Gujarat's Chiranjevi Yojana subsidised institutional deliveries, thereby reducing mortality. At the Centre, the Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana added maternity benefits and nutrition, supporting more than three crore women. The guiding idea was consistent: Social spending should reduce vulnerability, expand choice, and raise future workforce capacity.

Perhaps, the most subtle impact of the Gujarat Model is a mindset shift. The Vibrant Gujarat summits showed how consistent engagement could alter perceptions, turning a state into a credible investment destination in the eyes of investors and making bureaucrats business-friendly. It is this experience that shaped Make in India, which prioritised predictability via streamlined clearances, land corridors, and infrastructure readiness. Between 2014 and 2024, India attracted Rs 83 lakh crore of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), signalling confidence in its execution capacity and reliability.

Expectations shifted at the citizen level as well. Earlier, schemes were judged by announcements. Today, ordinary Indians assume government-backed essentials – electricity, toilets, bank accounts, subsidised gas – will actually reach them. That quiet normalisation of delivery has created a political culture where promises are measured by their execution, not intent. In many ways, this raised expectation is the Gujarat Model's deepest legacy.

*Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas, Sabka Prayas* is not rhetoric. Its imprint is visible in daily realities: Electricity is no longer a luxury, welfare delivered directly, infrastructure planned with digital coordination, health and education designed for measurable outcomes rather than optics. This is now the Bharatiya Model that has taken governance to the very last mile, touching lives in every corner of the nation.

When the country realises the Viksit Bharat ambition by 2047, it will be because one Prime Minister redefined governance itself. By making execution the test of administration, he has turned Bharat's vast machinery from promising to delivering. That imprint, first trialled in Gujarat and then scaled nationally, is Narendra Modi's decisive legacy.

The writer is the Union Minister for Labour, Employment, Youth Affairs and Sports. Views are personal



SHUBHRA CHATTERJI

# It never rains, it pours

In Uttarakhand, the quiet churn of climate change and seasons out of rhythm

WE ARE IN the thick of the apple harvest season, late July to late October. The upper Tons Valley breathes apples this time of year. Gumboots squelch through *keechar* as farmers tug bright red fruit off branches. Filled apple crates stack up along the roadside. Camper vans thud and groan down broken mountain tracks, carrying the season's haul in a slow, bone-rattling descent. And it pours, ceaselessly.

A couple of weeks ago, I sat with our neighbours Priyanka and her husband, Devinder Negi in their kitchen, drinking hot tea. We were drenched. They had been plucking apples, I had been filming them. Their orchard is in Kotgaon. Priyanka remembers winters when snow swallowed her whole, even as she stood on tiptoe – today Kotgaon gets barely more than a powdery dusting in late winter. "Now, if it snows even an inch, we go to the temple and give thanks, as we will have a good apple crop," she said. Apples need a long winter dormancy when the temperature holds steady between 0°C and 7°C. Those cold hours act like a reset button for the tree, letting it rest, gather strength, and prepare to blossom come spring.

Without enough of that deep, restive cold, the tree doesn't flower fully, and the fruit it bears are fewer, weaker.

We've been battling incessant rain here this year. Here is the Mori Tehsil of the Upper Tons Valley, 38 far-flung villages stitched between thick pine and deodar forests, where a hundred mountain springs roar back to life each monsoon. A wildlife sanctuary sprawls around us, scattered with leopard and snow leopard, porcupine, bear, jackal, mountain deer, and the endless troops of monkeys that farmers are forced to wage war against. The monkeys strip the apples off trees, raid the rajma fields and dig out the potatoes, the three lifeline crops here that fill the *kothars* alongside ragi, amaranth, rice, and seasonal vegetables. This year, the rains, which usually slow down after August 15, are still unrelenting. They have wrecked the roads, landslides pushing us to take dangerous *kachcha* detours. Trucks loaded with fruit crawl towards the *mandi* in Dehradun, 200 km away, sometimes stranded for hours while the apples soften in their crates, the farmers' year-long labour bleeding away on the roadside.

This is not the immediate violence of the river breach in Dharali, Harsil – just 35 miles away as the crow flies, in the same district of Uttarkashi – that drowned fields and flattened buildings. Here, and across the breadth of the Himalaya, even in the places untouched by reportable disaster, the ones that never make it to the news, the damage seeps in quietly, but cruelly. It gnaws at livelihoods, chews through what people grow, what they eat, the way they live.

Rajmohan, who works with us, tells me one evening. "The word is that the rajma crop is destroyed by the long-drawn monsoon this year." The leaves are turning yellow. Last year, the rains came too late. The year before, hail tore the almost-ready beans in early October. We built a seed bank, not only to save the old varieties which are fast disappearing, but just so farmers would have enough seed to plant next year. Rajmohan is convinced rajma will disappear from the valley within five years. "*Itni mehnat, sab barbaad*." So much effort, all wasted.

The unabated monsoons themselves are a deluge of inconveniences. Trees crash into power lines, plunging villages into darkness

for days. Three times over the last month we lost electricity for nearly a week at a stretch. The lines get patched up only for the next storm to rip them apart again. Here, you feel the wrath of nature without a filter. Thunder ricochets off the cliffs. Rivers froth and howl. Rain batters rooftops until your pulse syncs with the downpour. Climate anxiety doesn't feel abstract in a place like this, it feels very real, the breath quickening in your chest as lightning strikes a tree with a resounding crack.

This is our 14th year in the mountains, and the first year we felt summers so stifling we caved and bought a fan. A table fan, not yet a ceiling fan, holding on to the hope that next summer will return to "normal". That winters will bring back their three feet of snow, that spring will bring ample blossom, that rains will end in rainbows. But it's been five years since we saw what we once called a regular weather year. Maybe this irregularity is regular now. Is that what they call climate change? We still pine for what we used to know.

The writer is a filmmaker and co-founder of Tons Valley Shop & SAYB

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### PM IN MANIPUR

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Building bridges' (IE, September 15). After skipping 30 long months, his stay in Manipur was restricted to just three hours. He did not visit the affected people languishing in relief camps but interacted with only a few people in a closed-door meeting. No wonder, the Opposition has termed his visit a "be-lated farce" and accused him of organising a ceremony for himself.

Tharcus S Fernando, Chennai

### REVOLT, LIVE-STREAMED

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'The many revolutions that have shaped Nepal' (IE, September 14). The recent youth protests in Nepal prove a new golden rule for governments: You can try to ban social media, but you can't ban a revolution. These young protesters successfully demanded and secured the resignation of the Prime Minister, a jaw-dropping outcome that sends a clear message. The fight against impunity is no longer confined to parliament; it's being hashtagged, live-streamed, and won on the streets. This is a crucial lesson for governments everywhere.

Shivika Papneja, Rajpura

### COMPETITION READY

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Resist pressure, lower tariffs' (IE, September 15). India's agricultural tariffs, though higher than many G20 nations, have historically served to protect farmers from global price fluctuations and ensure rural stability. At the same time, the article rightly highlights that lowering duties on essential inputs like fertilisers, food processing equipment, and technology can help improve productivity, reduce costs, and build stronger value chains.

Dattatray S Giri, Pune

### PROTECT EXPORTERS

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'On Govt table: How to help exporters not lose market share due to 50% US tariff' (IE, September 14). The government's plan to roll out measures like subsidised interest rates, collateral-free loans and credit guarantees is welcome. These must be executed with urgency and clarity. Exporters need more than reactive relief; they need strategic support. Identifying alternative markets, easing compliance burdens, and securing access to domestic demand are key aspects.

Jap Ishman Kaur, via email





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If there are questions of current or contemporary relevance that you would like explained, please write to [explained@indianexpress.com](mailto:explained@indianexpress.com)

# Lutnick’s fury: Why India finds it difficult to buy US corn

**HARISH DAMODARAN**  
NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 15

UNITED STATES Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick has questioned India for not opening up its market to American corn. “India brags that they have 1.4 billion people. Why don’t 1.4 billion people buy one bushel of US corn?,” he has asked.

“Doesn’t that rub you the wrong way that they (India) sell everything to us and they won’t buy our corn? They put tariffs on everything,” Lutnick said on *The Axios Show* on Saturday.

## India imports, US exports

The US official isn’t entirely wrong. Out of India’s total corn (maize) imports of 0.97 million tonnes (mt) in 2024-25, a major chunk came from Myanmar (0.53 mt) and Ukraine (0.39 mt). Corn imports from the US were minuscule in comparison, only 1,100 tonnes.

There are two reasons why India’s corn imports don’t amount to much.

The first has to do with tariffs. India allows up to 0.5 mt of corn imports annually at 15%, with quantities beyond that attracting 50% duty.

Secondly, it does not permit the import of any corn that is genetically modified (GMO).

Both these conditions are major irritants for the US, which is the world’s biggest producer as well as exporter of corn.

During 2024-25 (October-September), the US produced 377.63 mt and exported 71.70 mt of the cereal grain that is used as a source of energy-providing carbohydrates for poultry and live-stock, and also as a feedstock for making fuel and industrial-grade ethanol.

## Shift in the China trade

With both production and exports for 2025-26 projected to hit new records of 427.1 mt and 75 mt respectively, the Donald

Trump administration is looking at new markets for export.

Corn is grown by farmers mainly in the midwestern states of Iowa, Illinois, Nebraska, Minnesota, Indiana, South and North Dakota, Kansas, Missouri, Ohio and Wisconsin, the majority of which were won by Trump in last year’s presidential election.

That urgency is even more, considering that China was until recently the largest buyer of US corn.

Out of the \$18.57 billion worth of its exports in 2022, \$5.21 billion was accounted for by China, followed by Mexico (\$4.92 billion), Japan (\$2.99 billion), Canada (\$1.34 billion) and Colombia (\$957.9 million).

But in 2024, US corn exports were valued at only \$13.70 billion, with China’s purchases at just \$331 million, far less than Mexico (\$5.51 billion), Japan (\$2.73 billion), and Colombia (\$1.52 billion).

In the current calendar year (from January till July), as the trade war with China has escalated, the latter has further cut its corn imports from the US to a mere \$2.4 mil-



Howard Lutnick. AP

lion. That explains the desperation behind Lutnick’s statement.

## The GM complication

For the US, India is a huge potential market for corn, given the rising consumption of

animal products — milk, eggs, fish and meat — in India. As the per capita GDP increases, it will drive the demand for feed and ingredients such as maize and soyabean meal.

In a recent report, the US Department of Agriculture projected India’s domestic corn consumption to increase from 34.7 mt in 2022-23 to 98 mt in 2040 and 200.2 mt in 2050 under a scenario of “rapid” per capita income growth of 6.6% per year. At a “moderate” rate of income growth at 4.6%, consumption would rise to 62.5 mt in 2040 and 93 mt in 2050.

Meeting this demand will require imports of 46 mt and 134 mt in 2040 and 2050 respectively under the “rapid” income growth scenario, and 11 mt and 26 mt under the “moderate” growth scenario.

The US would obviously want to grab a big piece of this pie. However, the problem is that an estimated 94% of its total area planted to corn in 2024 was under GM varieties.

These varieties incorporate genes from bacteria that code for proteins, enabling the crop to “tolerate” the application of chemical herbicides such as glyphosate and glufosi-

nate, and resist attacks by specific insect pests.

At present, India permits neither the import of GM corn nor its planting by farmers in the country. One proposal that was mooted in a NITI Aayog report that has now been withdrawn, was to allow GM maize imports exclusively for use as a feedstock for manufacturing fuel ethanol. Such maize would then not enter the food chain — whether directly, or as milk, eggs, and meat coming from cattle and poultry birds fed on the grain.

For now, it is unlikely that India will relent to the US demand to cut tariffs or allow the import of GM corn, especially ahead of Assembly elections in Bihar: the state is India’s third largest producer of maize after Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh.

American maize is incidentally also the world’s cheapest. The average farmgate price of American corn in July was \$4.29 a bushel (25.4 kg), which works out to less than Rs 15 per kg. Ruling wholesale prices in India are Rs 22-23 per kg, and the government’s declared Minimum Support Price (MSP) for the 2025-26 crop was Rs 24/kg.

## EXPLAINED GLOBAL

### WITH US-CHINA DEAL ON TIKTOK, RECALLING THE APP’S JOURNEY

UNITED STATES Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent on Monday announced a framework deal for the ownership of the social media app TikTok, after trade talks with Chinese officials in Spain. It follows repeated official extensions, which were aimed at preventing a ban on the Chinese-origin app in the US.

Bessent said that US President Donald Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping would speak on Friday to finalise the deal.

## How did TikTok arrive in the US?

TikTok was formally launched in 2016 by the Chinese company ByteDance as a challenger to the wildly popular Musical.ly, also a Chinese company. TikTok and its Chinese counterpart, Douyin, replicated Musical.ly’s short video format, where users lip-synched to audios and songs.

ByteDance acquired Musical.ly in 2017 and later merged it with TikTok. The app subsequently gained global popularity, a rare feat for a Chinese tech company. One key factor was its algorithm, which accurately predicted user interests based on the topics they engaged with.

## Who owns TikTok?

Concerns have long been raised by US officials about user privacy and data, with several media reports claiming that TikTok censored information critical of the Chinese government.

Its ownership has been contentious. TikTok’s Singaporean CEO, Shou Zi Chew, told a congressional hearing in 2023 that the app was not available in China (only Douyin was) and that TikTok was headquartered in Los Angeles and Singapore.

But a *CNN* report said the app is owned by California-based TikTok LLC, which in turn is controlled by Shanghai-based TikTok Ltd. TikTok Ltd is ultimately owned by ByteDance Ltd, also based in Beijing.

Also of concern is China’s unique political structure, where the state exercises significant power over private entities. ByteDance might potentially have to



TikTok was launched in 2016. *The NYT*

hand over user information if the state demanded it.

In 2022, TikTok claimed that it migrated its user data to US servers managed by the US tech firm Oracle, but officials continued to exercise caution.

## What has happened under Trump?

At the end of his first presidential term (2017-21), Trump was critical of TikTok, claiming it mishandled the Covid pandemic and spread conspiracy theories. He banned American companies from entering into any “transaction” with ByteDance and its subsidiaries. He later ordered ByteDance to divest from TikTok’s US operations within 90 days. TikTok then sued the Trump administration for allegedly violating due process in its executive orders.

There was further bipartisan scrutiny of the app in Joe Biden’s (2021-25) presidential term, with a Bill to transfer TikTok’s ownership to a US company clearing congressional approval and getting Biden’s assent in 2024.

After his re-election, Trump approached the US Supreme Court to pause the TikTok ban until a “political resolution” could be reached. The court upheld this ban in January 2025, leading to a temporary blackout of the app in the US.

Following his inauguration in January, Trump issued an executive order to delay the ban and eventually gave the app several extensions. The last deadline was September 17.

ENS WITH AP INPUTS

## VINEET BHALLA

NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 15

THE SUPREME Court on Monday passed an interim order, staying certain provisions of the Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025, until the petitions challenging the constitutional validity of the law are conclusively decided.

A Bench of Chief Justice of India (CJI) B R Gavai and Justice Augustine George Masih declined the petitioners’ plea to stay the entire law.

The order came in response to a batch of nearly 65 petitions challenging the law, which was passed by the Parliament in April.

## What is Waqf?

A Waqf is a permanent endowment of movable or immovable property by a Muslim for a purpose recognised by Islamic law as pious, religious or charitable.

Once a property is dedicated as Waqf, its ownership is considered to be vested in God, and it cannot be sold, gifted, or inherited. The property is managed by a designated individual known as a *mutawalli*, who acts as a supervisor to ensure that the income generated from the property is used for the intended purpose, such as the upkeep of a mosque, running a madarsa, or supporting the poor.

## What did the Amendment change?

The Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025, introduced some far-reaching changes, which the Union government argued were necessary to curb mismanagement and prevent encroachment on public lands. These changes were:

**Doing away with “Waqf by use”:** The new law abolished the concept of “Waqf by use” (referred to in the Act as “Waqf by user”) for any future dedications. The concept was a legal principle that allowed properties to be recognised as Waqf based on long-term Muslim religious or charitable purposes even when they were not registered as such.

The Amendment mandated that from now on, a Waqf could only be created through a written deed. This was the most significant structural change, aimed at preventing what the government saw as the misuse of the principle to claim government or private land.

**New powers for the District Collector:** The Amendment introduced a new section — 3C — to the Waqf Act, 1995, which empowered a state government to designate an officer (not below the rank of a Collector) to inquire if any property currently listed as Waqf is, in fact, government property.



People protesting against the Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025, at Gandhi Maidan in Patna, Bihar, in June . *Rahul Sharma*

quire if any property currently listed as Waqf is, in fact, government property.

The new law stated that the moment such an inquiry began, the property would automatically cease to be treated as Waqf. If the officer concluded it was government land, they could directly order corrections in revenue and Waqf board records.

**Inclusion of non-Muslims in Waqf boards:** The Amendment changed the rules for the composition of the Central Waqf Council and State Waqf Boards. Previously, these bodies were predominantly composed of Muslims. The new rules opened the door for several positions to be filled by non-Muslims, creating the possibility of non-Muslim majorities in these administrative bodies.

**“Five-year rule” for creating a Waqf:** The definition of who could dedicate a property to Waqf status was also altered. The new law stipulated that a person must be able to show or demonstrate that they have been “practising Islam for at least five years” to be eligible to dedicate a property as a Waqf.

**Applicability of the Limitation Act:** The 1995 Act had given Waqf properties a special status by exempting them from the Limitation Act, 1963. This meant a Waqf board could initiate legal proceedings to recover encroached land at any time, without a deadline. The Amendment removed this exemption, bringing Waqf properties under

the same time-bound legal framework as all other properties.

## Why was the Amendment challenged?

The Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025, was challenged by a wide array of petitioners, including All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) MP Asaduddin Owaisi, Trinamool Congress (TMC) MP Mahua Moitra, Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) MP Manoj Kumar Jha, Samajwadi Party (SP) MP Zia Ur Rehman, Congress MPs Imran Masood and Mohammad Jawed, former MP Udit Raj, Maulana Mahmood Asad Madani (principal of Darul Uloom Deoband), Yuvajana Samika Rythu Congress Party (YSRCP), and the Communist Party of India (CPI).

The petitioners argued that the law violated Article 26 of the Constitution, which guarantees every religious denomination the right to establish and maintain institutions for religious and charitable purposes, and the right to manage its own affairs in matters of religion.

The petitioners also said that the new powers of the District Collector were an executive overreach that bypassed the judicial process. They argued that a revenue officer was being given the power to decide complex questions of title — a function that should belong to a court or a judicial tribunal.

The potential for non-Muslim majorities on Waqf boards was, according to the peti-

tioners, a direct interference in the community’s right to administer its own religious and charitable institutions.

Abolishing “Waqf by use” was argued to be impractical and something that would endanger countless historic properties that have served the community for centuries, but lack formal deeds.

The petitioners called the “five-year rule” discriminatory and arbitrary, with no clear mechanism to prove one’s religious practice.

## What provisions did the SC stay?

**Collector’s powers:** The top court stayed the provision in Section 3C that allowed a property’s Waqf status to be suspended merely upon the commencement of an inquiry. It also stayed the power of the designated officer to make corrections to revenue records.

The Bench found these provisions *prima facie* arbitrary and violative of the principle of separation of powers. However, it directed that no third-party rights can be created on such disputed properties until a Waqf Tribunal gives a final decision.

**Composition of boards:** To prevent the possibility of non-Muslim majorities on Waqf boards, the apex court issued a directive, capping the number of non-Muslim members at four (out of 22) for the Central Waqf Council and three (out of 11) for State Waqf Boards.

**“Five-year rule”:** The SC stayed this provision on practical grounds, stating that it cannot be implemented until the government frames clear rules and a mechanism to determine how a person’s religious practice over five years is to be verified.

## What provisions did the SC not stay?

**“Waqf by use”:** The SC refused to stay the abolition of this concept. It reasoned that if the legislature, after noticing instances of misuse over many years, decides to act prospectively to prevent encroachment of government properties, such a move cannot be considered *prima facie* arbitrary.

**Limitation Act:** The SC also did not stay the implementation of the Limitation Act. It observed that this change, rather than being discriminatory, actually “removes discrimination” by placing Waqf properties on an equal footing with all other properties under the law.

The court clarified that its order is based on a *prima facie* view for interim relief, and the final decision on the law’s constitutionality will be taken after detailed hearings.

# Check, mate: Plans for a second indigenous population of cheetahs in MP

**ANAND MOHAN J**  
BHOPAL, SEPTEMBER 15

TO BUILD a second home for the cheetah in India, Madhya Pradesh plans to introduce a female into the Gandhi Sagar Sanctuary, the Chambal river valley wildlife park into which two males were released in April.

Kuno National Park, the cheetahs’ first home, now has 29 of the big cats. The cheetah had been extinct in the wild in India before 20 individuals were transported from southern Africa in two batches in 2022 and 2023.

The planned relocation of a female to Gandhi Sagar, which straddles the districts of Mandsaur and Neemuch in Madhya Pradesh’s border with Rajasthan, carries the exciting prospect of a potential new population of cheetahs some 280 km from Kuno.

Nineteen of the cheetahs now in Kuno were born in India, and are doing well. The plan for a mating program at a second

location is being pursued against the backdrop of deadlocked talks to get more of the animals from South Africa, Kenya, and Botswana.

## Reproduction in cheetahs

A female cheetah reaches physiological puberty at age 25-30 months, and typically has her first litter at 29 months. Males, on the other hand, look to mate after reaching prime adulthood when they are capable of acquiring and holding territory, typically between the ages of 4 and 8 years.

A male cheetah may mate with multiple females; likewise, a female may mate with more than one male during her receptive period.

A receptive female sprays urine on vegetation and rocks and often moves around extensively. Other behavioural signs include frequent rolling, rubbing, sniffing, and vocalising, and an increased tolerance for male cheetahs nearby.

Males react to a female in estrus with a

series of yelping or stuttering calls. After mating, the male and female stay together for a few days, during which they may continue to mate three to five times every day on average. The female leaves the male when she is no longer receptive.

## Pregnancy, birth of cubs

Indications of pregnancy may include increased appetite and weight of the female. Gestation lasts for three months, and a litter could include up to six cubs.

Female cheetahs give birth in bushy patches, tall grass, or in rock cavities where the cubs are well protected. Since all introduced cheetahs in India are radio-collared, the location of the mother, which tends to stay put with her cubs for 2-3 days post-parturition, can be pinpointed.

After the first few days, she begins moving in a ‘star’ pattern in various directions,

but always coming back to the den.

The female nurses her cubs for about 4 months, and during this period and in the latter weeks of her pregnancy, she expends 2-5 times more energy in attempts to avoid predators and search for water and food.

Cheetah cubs grow faster than the young of any other large felid, gaining about 45 grams of weight daily. To maintain adequate milk production for cub growth, the mother needs more than 1.5 kg of food every day.

## Threats to mothers & cubs

J S Chauhan, architect of the Kuno National Park and a former Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife) of Madhya Pradesh, told *The Indian Express* that it is a “good idea” to try to increase the cheetah population, and more females should be introduced into Gandhi Sagar. However, it is important to ensure there are enough prey

to support more of the animals, he said.

The presence of leopards, a co-predator, in the same area is a major concern. Twenty-four leopards were counted in the 64-sq-km cheetah enclosure at Gandhi Sagar Wildlife Sanctuary in late 2024, and 17 of them were relocated by March 2025.

The leopard density in Gandhi Sagar is now less than in Kuno, while the enclosure in which the female will be housed is much larger.

Officials will monitor the female, which is likely to be moved to Gandhi Sagar after the monsoon, and the two males, Prabhash and Pava, closely before they are allowed to mate.

In May 2023, Daksha, a female, died after suffering grievous injuries in a violent interaction with two male cheetahs during a mating attempt.

## Monitoring the process

A dedicated team will monitor the female cheetah’s hunts and watch out for

mating instances. Females at Kuno were constantly assessed for signs of pregnancy.

An adequate prey base was provided inside the enclosure through frequent supplementation and, in some cases, the supply of dressed meat. Feeding was closely monitored for quantity and frequency of meals.

Once the den is located, wildlife officials typically begin surveillance of the cubs from a distance. When the mother goes out hunting, a veterinary team inspects the site within the first weeks of denning to evaluate litter size and cub survival.

Since a cheetah lost three cubs in extreme heat in 2023, veterinarians in Kuno have begun to physically examine the cubs for their weight, health, and well-being once they open their eyes, typically around 10 days after birth. This continues for about six weeks.

After the cubs emerge from the den site, cameras are set up along probable trails and around the den to monitor them and their mother.



## On the frontline

### DPM 2025 addresses industry’s concerns

Coming a full 16 years after the last Defence Procurement Manual, the latest one (DPM 2025) makes a great leap forward in streamlining and rationalising the Ministry of Defence’s (MoD’s) revenue procurement, valued at ₹1 trillion for this financial year, creating a realistic enabling system for the armed services to acquire goods and services needed for ongoing operations. It seeks to address the recurrent concerns raised by defence firms about harsh penalties, long delays, and the lack of stability in orders.

The 2025 version squarely addresses these issues and also seeks to promote the important goal of competitive self-reliance. To this end, DPM 2025 has significantly softened liquidity damages — or the pre-agreed sum paid by a contractor to the MoD for breaching a contract (such as for delivery delays). It has done away with liquidity damages during the development phase, imposed a minimal 0.1 per cent for the post-prototype development phase, and capped damages at 5 per cent, rising to 10 per cent only for extreme delays. The manual also seeks to stabilise conditions for developers by guaranteeing orders for up to five years, extendable to 10 years in some cases. DPM 2025 also bakes in a 15 per cent upfront provision for repair, refit, and maintenance, and doubles the scope of limited tendering from ₹25 lakh in DPM 2009 to ₹50 lakh, and beyond that in exceptional circumstances. Most critical, perhaps, is DPM 2025 removing the stipulation of obtaining a “no-objection certificate” from defence public-sector undertakings before open bidding. Now that all tenders will be awarded on a competitive basis, the scope for the emergence of a vibrant private sector in defence manufacturing has been considerably enhanced. As part of this agenda, DPM 2025 has added a chapter to promote innovation and indigenisation, encouraging technical collaboration with institutions such as Indian Institutes of Technology, the Indian Institute of Science, and universities.

This much-needed flexible top-down procurement framework also imposes on the system challenging standards of responsibility and accountability. For instance, to speed up the procurement process and free it from red tape, competent financial authorities (CFAs) at field and lower formations have been empowered to make independent decisions on various matters. Under the new guidelines, CFAs can grant extensions of delivery periods in consultation with their financial advisors without approaching higher authorities. DPM 2025 also empowers them to extend bid-opening dates when participation is thin, without referring to their financial advisors. A wider collegiate decision-making process acts as an automatic check and balance, but given the extensive revenue-procurement needs of one of the world’s largest militaries and the corruption scandals of the past, this issue demands vigilance.

The effort to modernise and restructure revenue procurement should also be matched by a similar exercise for capital acquisition, which remains plagued because of a lack of planning and labyrinthine and opaque procurement processes. The result is that purchase decisions, often made on a stop-gap basis in response to service demands, have had a deeply adverse impact on India’s combat readiness. For example, the Indian Air Force operates seven combat aircraft types — Russian, French, Anglo-French, and indigenous — resulting in a platform diversity that seriously hinders interoperability. DPM 2025 is a good start. But in a neighbourhood that is growing increasingly hostile, India’s defence readiness urgently needs an efficient all-round procurement ecosystem.

## The problem with schools

### Growth in private coaching reflects systemic decay

The government recently released highlights from the Comprehensive Modular Survey of Education, part of the 80th round of the National Sample Survey, conducted in April-June. Several aspects of this study are of interest. For example, two-thirds of students in rural India are in government schools, while in urban India the reverse is true, with 70 per cent of students in private aided or unaided schools. One major concern that deserves greater policy attention arising from the report is, however, the unchecked growth of private coaching. According to the survey, average expenditure per student on private coaching is over ₹2,400 a year. In urban areas and for higher-secondary students, that rises to almost ₹10,000 — a significant proportion of the median household budget. In rural areas, over a quarter of students are enrolled in coaching classes; the proportion in urban areas is more than 30 per cent. This is up from 17 per cent and 26 per cent, respectively, in 2017-18.

There could be varied cultural or other reasons for growth in private coaching. For example, the east has a far higher enrolment rate than the west. But at its root, this reflects poorly on the education infrastructure in India — not just government schools but also private schools. That even the latter are not considered sufficient to prepare students for the competitive pressures is a sad indictment of the broader system. Revenue growth in private coaching in recent years underlines this. Market-research agencies say it will double further between 2024 and 2033, ending up at almost \$8 billion in value. Meanwhile, learning outcomes have remained weak. The Annual Survey of Education Report (Aser) for 2024 suggests that less than a quarter of Standard III students in government schools in rural India could read a Standard II-level text. Similar problems are associated with quantitative skills, with only a third of Standard III students able to solve a simple subtraction exercise. India no longer participates in international comparisons — under the Programme for International Student Assessment — for learning achievement in schools. The last time it did, it ranked 73rd among 74 nations.

Under such circumstances, it is not surprising that parents are turning to private coaching for assistance. Yet that has its own pitfalls. The industry has had its share of high-profile disasters — fraud allegations were levelled, for example, at former edtech leader Byju’s. But even at retail, grassroots level, there is minimal regulatory control and no reliable standards. Parents of teenagers in urban India have no clear idea what they are receiving in return for the ₹10,000, on average, they are spending on coaching. In some other countries, explosive growth in private coaching has had to be curbed by state action. The Chinese government, for example, practically shut down the \$100 billion private-tutoring business by banning for-profit coaching on the core-school curriculum, as well as imposing timing and licensing restrictions. India cannot go that far, but it will have to work harder on improving school quality. The first step should be to link teacher pay and tenure in government schools to achievement, which should once again be benchmarked to international standards.

# Justice in climate cooperation

Effective climate action requires the restoration of common but differentiated responsibilities, based on differences in per capita emission rates



In my last month’s column, I had focused on the rising threat of climate change and the serious shortfalls in the promise of commitments under the Paris Agreement of 2015. I had argued for an acceleration of commitments, particularly by developed countries. In this column, I try and elaborate on what the 30th Conference of the Parties (COP30), to be held in Brazil this November, can do to secure agreement on the principles that should drive faster global cooperation and national action.

In my view, the most important principle that should be reasserted is the notion of common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR). This was agreed in the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which was negotiated in the early 1990s and came into force after sufficient ratification in 1995. At that time, the differentiation of commitments was between Annex 1 countries, which were members of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and the Economies in Transition (EIT) in Eastern and Central Europe and the rest of the countries, which were placed in the Non-Annex 1 category. At that time, these two were seen as developed and developing countries and the commitments of emission reduction negotiated in the Kyoto Protocol applied only to the Annex 1 countries.

The group of Non-Annex 1 countries can no longer be fully identified with the developing states, as 20 Non-Annex 1 countries are now included in the World Bank’s list of high-income countries. However, the counter-argument to CBDR has focused more on the growth of emissions in China, which rose sharply from 2.9 tCO<sub>2</sub> per capita in 1995 to 8.4 tCO<sub>2</sub> per capita in 2023. This has led to the virtual elimination of the common but differentiated responsibility between developed and developing countries.

The public ranking of countries in climate change presentations is based on the volume of current emissions, ignoring the difference in cumulative emissions, which is the true basis for determining responsibility. But countries differ greatly in size and the number of people who are citizens. That is why the evaluation of impact on global climate change must

compare the per capita emissions of each country, not the total amount. To ask India to accelerate its emission rates because its CO<sub>2</sub> emission in 2023 was about 8 per cent of global emissions ignores the fact that its per capita emissions were less than half the global average. Total annual emissions are the basis of concerns raised, not just by European governments but also by several non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in the West. This is wrong. Any meaningful assessment of the strength of emission reduction for each country should be based on per capita emissions, not total emissions.

The table presents the country-wise distribution of per capita CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in 2023. This data shows that the developed Annex 1 countries have moved downwards in their per capita emissions, while the mostly developing Non-Annex 1 countries have moved upwards. But the substantial difference between the two groups continues. In 2023, 100 Non-Annex 1 countries had per capita emissions below 3 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>, while none of the Annex 1 countries fell in this category. Also, countries with 41 per cent of the Annex 1 population recorded per capita emissions above 10 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>, compared with only 2 per cent of the population in Non-Annex 1 countries.

The case for CBDR still exists. It cannot focus just on the original difference of demands on Annex 1 and Non-Annex 1 countries, because the latter group now includes 20 countries that are in the World Bank’s high-income group. The differentiation should be based on differences between countries in per capita emissions. The case for this focus on per capita emissions rests on the strategy needed to limit future emissions so as to keep the rise in average global temperature down to 1.5–2.0°C.

The IPCC in its sixth assessment report in 2021, gave an estimate of the volume of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from 2020 to 2050 that would be consistent with the targets for limiting temperature change. Dividing this by the sum of the population in each year, the required average emissions over the years from 2020 to 2050 work out to 1.1 tCO<sub>2</sub>/per capita for the 1.5°C target and 3.3 tCO<sub>2</sub>/per capita for the 2°C target. On



NITIN DESAI

# The unending saga of India’s GDP data

In most countries, gross domestic product (GDP) data releases are routine. In India, they spark controversy. A decade after the new GDP series was introduced, questions about its credibility remain, leaving both analysts and policymakers unsure about the economy’s true health.

According to the latest data release, the economy grew at a staggering 7.8 per cent rate in the April-June quarter of 2025-26, far above forecasts made by economists based on all the other available data. Unsurprisingly, the release has reignited a wave of scepticism and debate.

There are several issues with the GDP series. The first problem concerns nominal GDP. For organised manufacturing and services, the National Statistical Office (NSO) relies heavily on firms’ financial filings with the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA), collating data from firms that file regularly, and scaling up those numbers to take account of the firms that haven’t filed. However, many non-filing firms are defunct, loss-making, or mere shell companies that do not produce anything on a regular basis, but serve as conduits to hide profits or circumvent regulations. In such cases, inflating the data from filing firms to cover non-filers risks overstating GDP.

A National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) survey of these MCA firms, conducted in 2016–17, found that nearly a quarter of the 35,000 firms surveyed either refused to share data, had shut down, or were untraceable. Its 2019 report confirmed major gaps in the pool of non-filing firms. Yet these firms continue to be included in GDP estimation. This implies that India’s nominal GDP suffers from measurement issues that can worsen depending on which firms are sampled in a given quarter.

Measuring the unorganised sector is another weak spot. With no fresh data, the NSO extrapolates this sector’s growth from a 2011–12 survey, assuming that it tracks the growth of the private corporate sector. At one point, this assumption seemed reasonable. But the correlation between the unorganised and organised sectors broke down after 2016, when demonetisation, goods and services tax, and Covid hit the unorganised sector firms disproportionately harder. This has led to a further upward bias in GDP growth.

Finally, there are serious issues with the GDP deflator. Once the NSO has calculated nominal GDP, it has to convert these figures into real GDP. To do

this, it needs to use price indices, so that it can deflate away any increases in nominal GDP that were caused by inflation. This task is simple in concept, but complicated in practice. That’s because the NSO needs to choose an appropriate price index for each of the sectors that go into GDP. Then, it needs to deflate the inputs that go into the production of all these items, separately from the outputs.

Why is all this work necessary? Essentially, because prices do not move together. Take air travel: Deflating airline revenues (a nominal figure) by the economy-wide price index does not tell us anything about the real increase in air travel in a quarter. What’s needed instead is a proper measure of ticket prices to capture the real growth in the sector.

Unfortunately, many of the sectoral deflators in India are not appropriate. The most problematic case is the services sector, the largest sector of the economy, where the wholesale price index (WPI) is used, even though it barely tracks service prices. If instead, in the April-June quarter, this sector had been deflated using the service component of the consumer price



MACRO PULSE  
RAJESWARI SENGUPTA

### DISTRIBUTION OF COUNTRIES BY PER CAPITA CO<sub>2</sub> EMISSIONS IN 2023

Level of CO <sub>2</sub> tonnes per capita	ANNEX 1 COUNTRIES		NON-ANNEX 1 COUNTRIES	
	No of countries	Share of countries in population of the group	No of countries	Share of countries in population of the group
Above 10	5	41.1	12	2.0
7.5 to 10	3	10.0	6	23.4
5 to 7.5	18	20.7	8	1.2
3 to 5	16	28.2	27	8.4
1 to 3	0	0	45	37.6
Below 1	0	0	55	27.4

Source: Our World in Data\_CO<sub>2</sub>\_Emissions 2023  
Annex 1 are developed countries and Non-Annex 1 are mostly developing countries

this basis, one can set the annual emissions target of all states at an average of 3 tCO<sub>2</sub>/per capita over the years up to each country’s announced net-zero target year. This will not be sufficient for the 1.5°C target, which at the moment looks unrealisable. However, if the global per capita average till 2050 is accepted and effectively implemented immediately, then there is a possibility of reviving the 1.5°C target and progressively lowering the agreed global per capita target.

The nationally determined contributions (NDCs) required by the Paris Agreement should include a plan for reaching the stated net-zero target year with measures that will lead to an average emission over the decades that amounts to 3 tCO<sub>2</sub>/per capita. One reason for emphasising this is that few countries have specified their time path to the net-zero target.

The United States at present is not supportive of global cooperation on climate change and has withdrawn from the Paris Agreement. In view of this, the agreement on the goals should be pursued as part of the commitment to implementing the Paris Agreement, which would shield the negotiations from interference by the US. In summary, the goals should be:

- The principle of CBDR should be strongly affirmed to assert the greater immediate responsibility for climate mitigation action by countries with high emission rates.
- The distinction between the two groups, analogous to the earlier distinction between Annex 1 and Non-Annex 1 countries, should be based on annual per capita emissions.
- The standard for the division of countries into two groups should be 3 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> per capita per year.
- All countries must formulate a target year for reaching net-zero emissions and specify a time-profile policy structure that aims for an average annual per capita emission of 3 tCO<sub>2</sub> in the years leading up to the net-zero target.

My hope is that India, with a current per capita CO<sub>2</sub> emission of 2.1 tonnes, and Brazil, with 2.3 tonnes, will join hands to push this agenda.

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# The Supreme Court’s fault lines



SHREEKANT SAMBRANI

The Indian Constitution has turned 75 this year. Political leaders of any consequence, editorial writers, legal scholars, and public intellectuals, renowned or otherwise, have had much to say about this momentous occasion. But the main interpreter and guardian of that “holy book of our Republic,” as Prime Minister Narendra Modi has repeatedly called it, the Supreme Court of India, which is also of the same vintage, has not received such attention. Its various judgments and arguments have been frequently commented upon, but the institution as a whole, its

dramatis personae and its overall approach have not been comprehensively analysed. Hence the volume under review is a welcome addition to the literature, however limited its coverage (by design) and partial its approach (by default) may be.

Justice S Muralidhar, a former chief justice of Odisha with a 17-year career as a member of the higher judiciary is the editor of the volume. The 25 contributors constitute a galaxy of legal luminaries: Retired judges A P Shah, Madan Lokur, and K Chandru; practising advocates Indira Jaisingh, Arvind Datar, Raju Ramachandran, and Gopal Subramaniam; legal scholars Gautam Bhatia and Faizan Mustafa; and even a noted journalist, P Sainath. Some of them often grace the media opinion spaces.

But that list is not representative of the entire judicial ecosystem. Prominent by their absence are legal eagles such as the former Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud, Harish Salve, former Attorney General Mukul Rohatgi,

Mahesh Jethmalani and Pinky Anand, to mention just a few. The Indian legal community is as polarised as the rest of society, as was evident from the debate on the vice-presidential nominees. Contributors to the volume appear to belong to the camp that does not espouse establishmentarian views.

Justice Muralidhar begins with some interesting and pertinent facts: The Supreme Court with its sanctioned strength of 34 (against the original eight), is the largest such body in the world, as is its administrative staff of 3,770. On an average, it has seen 37,000 cases instituted annually and 35,000 disposed of; its pending case load has increased from about 700 in 1950 to 82,000 now. Unlike the United States Supreme Court, our highest court never sits as one Bench. Most cases are dealt with by smaller Benches of one, two or three judges; the largest ever comprised 13 judges hearing the 1973 *Kesavananda Bharati* case. Views of a larger Bench prevail over those of smaller ones. These numbers may

appear gargantuan, but the Court has in its ambit the longest Constitution and the largest population in the world. On the whole, Indians appear more prone to litigation than others, with central and state governments being the largest litigants. Against this backdrop, the higher judiciary seems disproportionately small.

The volume omits by choice subjects such as human and property rights, inter-state water disputes, family law, intellectual property rights, insolvency, competition, among others. But what it does cover is still a vast panorama: Higher judiciary appointments, judges’ misconduct, delays in legal systems, public interest litigation, equality and substantive laws including labour, among others.

Most of the essays point out deficiencies and inadequacies of the system, including the Collegium for legal appointments, arbitrary behaviour

of several chief justices of India, equivocation on judicial misconduct, including at the highest level, unpardonable delays, at times stretching into years after the first reference, serious dilution of procedural safeguards, eroding the rights of the accused in criminal cases (quite likely unintended), are among the main pronouncements.

Justice Muralidhar poses the key concern: “How has the SCI responded to the demand of interpreting the Constitution *per se* and specific laws...in light of the overarching...constitutional values of liberty, equality, fraternity and dignity?” The answer is not flattering, as evidenced by the editor’s own “what-if” scenarios for cases that include Indira Gandhi’s election in 1971 leading up to the Emergency, the Bhopal gas tragedy arbitration award, the Babri Masjid *kar sevak* activities and the final verdict on the Ram Jannabhoomi dispute (not attributed to any judge). His preference for what *did not* happen in these

situations is quite clear.

Legal opinions and briefs (an oxymoron for sure!) are not known for their brevity; they are also subject to diverse interpretations. Fortunately, contributions in this volume do not display these traits. The editor and most contributors deserve the reader’s thanks for their clearly enunciated prose.


In the current discourse on the basic law of the country, the Constitution, leaders of both the ruling and the Opposition blocs are engaged in its competitive veneration, pronouncing it sacrosanct. But detailed parsing of the Constitution by scholars such as Gautam Bhatia and Faizan Mustafa have highlighted its inherent pro-establishment and pro-majority biases. And as the volume shows, the court itself is not infallible. Our quest for the Rule of Law must be circumscribed by the fact that the Constitution framers and the higher judiciary members share the same gene pool as the rest of us argumentative Indians, with our own sense of right and wrong, which is neither divine nor beyond reproach.

The reviewer is a Baroda-based economist









A thought for today

*A mechanical handshake is a poor thing, but a kind word and a handshake with the heart in it is a means of grace*

THE CHRISTIAN ADVOCATE, 1898

# Well Tweaked

SC's limited intervention in the waqf case is a good example of smart judicial thinking

SC's limited intervention in the waqf case is welcome as it stays two contentious points that appeared at odds with the Constitution and personal rights, and places a safeguard for the control of waqf boards. At the same time, by not staying the larger Waqf (Amendment) Act 2025, it has avoided accusations of “judicial overreach”. Acknowledging Parliament’s supremacy in legislative matters, it has said that laws should be presumed to be constitutionally sound, and intervention must occur only in “rarest of rare cases”.

The new law, enacted in April, was meant to increase “transparency and accountability” in the administration of waqf properties. Data shows this is a genuine need because roughly five out of every eight such properties are disputed and encroached, or their legal status is unclear. However, giving district collectors the last word on waqf property disputes was not the best way to go about this. SC stayed this provision, saying it violates the separation of judicial and executive powers: “Collector cannot be permitted to adjudicate the rights of personal citizens.”

The law also lays down that a person making a waqf donation should have been a practising Muslim for at least five years. This was strongly opposed by Muslim organisations and opposition parties on various grounds, including personal property rights. SC stayed it because, “Without any mechanism, it will lead to an exercise of arbitrary power.” It will remain in abeyance until states frame rules to determine compliance. Whether SC will deal with the larger point – is such a precondition legally sound – is an interesting question.

The third concern that SC addressed in its order pertained to the space for non-Muslims in waqf bodies. The new law has opened the door for non-Muslim members, but SC has now capped their numbers at 4 out of 22 in the central council, and 3 out of 11 on state boards. This should allay fears of interference or a “takeover” of these boards by non-Muslims while petitions about the constitutionality of the waqf law itself are decided. That will take time, but for now, all sides – govt, opposition and Muslim groups – seem satisfied with the SC order.

# Not Shaken, But Stirred

Sports & politics can never be separated, as India-Pak no-handshake showed

The high decibel chatter over whether India should play cricket with Pakistan was hard to top, but the no-handshake drama did it. Even what happened in the neighbours' Asia Cup faceoff on Sunday has taken a backseat to what did not happen before and after it. This no-handshake powwow didn't need any coals to make it hotter, still Pakistan Cricket Board has added some, by protesting that Indian players were 'unsportsmanlike'. Meanwhile, Indian skipper Suryakumar Yadav has explained on behalf of his teammates that a few things in life are above sportsman spirit: their no-handshake stand was the Indian team honouring those killed in the Pahalgam terror attack and also the armed forces who undertook

Op Sindoor. Critics say this is politics entering sports, but hasn't it always already been inside?

And yes, this sports-politics relationship often looks a bit of a muddle but how can it not when politics never has pristine purity? That India cannot play Pakistan bilaterally but can do so in a multilateral tournament can be seen as hypocrisy but it's also about India's Olympic ambitions,

which will be shot if we don't keep our multinational sport bargains. On the flip side, an Asia Cup without any India-Pak play makes little sense. And it's hardly our neighbourhood alone that's at sixes and sevens like this. Consider how the Paris Olympics saw Russian athletes unable to compete under their own flags while Israelis merrily did. IOC treats the invasion of Ukraine and the razing of Gaza as incomparable actions. This is a very subjective call and quite par for the course in geopolitics. Expecting sports diplomacy to have more consistency than governmental diplomacy is pie in the sky.

If this were a movie like *Bajrangi Bhaijaan* the Indians could have done a namaste and the Pakistanis responded with an aadaab while AR Rahman played in the background. It's real life so sports won't always have poetry. It's also possible that politics' intrusion into sports is not something objectionable. Perhaps it reflects a broader conversation about identity and values – a debate worth having.

# Shirt off my back

In solidarity with Nepali protesters and Sourav Ganguly

Anil Abraham

Kamala glared at me as she entered the house. 'How can you watch the match – as a token of protest we must at least boycott cricket telecasts.' I was in my customary pose, slouched on the sofa dressed in the national costume of the Indian uncle – a dishevelled lungi and a shapeless banian. This added to her ire. 'Look at you – shirtless and shameless!'

I was determined not to lose my shirt over this exaggeration, so I stood up to do a lungi dance to demonstrate that I was decently dressed, but Kamala was the opposite of convinced. 'Why do men keep taking their shirt off at the slightest provocation – whether it's climbing on top of buildings during protests in Nepal or celebrating winning a cricket match.'

I think she was referencing Sourav Ganguly's iconic topless T-shirt twirling moment at Lord's in 2002, which was justifiable revenge for a similar act by Andrew Flintoff. But Kamala was not in the mood for cricket trivia. 'There should be a dress code for men in public places!' I didn't know if she was talking about creepy pervs outside women's colleges or fitness influencers making thirst trap reels in the gym.

'What's good for the goose should be good for the gander – imagine if women started doing the same thing as men,' she said. Before my imagination ran riot, I retorted I was not in a public place but my home, where I should be allowed to dress as I wish. *Yeh andar ki baat hai*. There cannot be a dress code at home. I patted my patriarchal paunch to prove my point, a little dreading how would Kamala stomach this naked display of domestic defiance.

I also tried reverse psychology, saying just like no one should comment on a lady's freedom to wear sleeveless blouses or short skirts, a man should be allowed to make his choices for comfort in his castle. Even the Father of the Nation was disparagingly called a half-naked fakir by Winston Churchill when he fought for our independence. In fact, shirts are a vestige of our colonial past. Kamala moved in for checkmate with a satisfied smirk on her face: 'Cricket is colonial too! Even if FM has reduced our *Lagaan*.' I refused to shake hands with her to register my protest. Selective outrage is a game that I can never win.

# An Uncommon Assassination

Early information suggests Charlie Kirk's assassin had much in common with him. They were both embedded in the most toxic parts of social media and in exporting its logic to the real world

Dan Cassino

The assassination of right-wing provocateur Charlie Kirk in Utah has led to anger and panic in US political circles. While conservatives are vowing to crack down on political opponents, liberals are afraid that the killing will be used to justify repression.

This shooting was not political violence in the way it's traditionally been experienced in US, but rather part of a larger trend of the most toxic parts of social media and the internet seeping into the real world. Political violence of this sort is unacceptable, but it's also an inevitable consequence of the political environment Kirk helped to create.

Kirk matters much more in death than he ever did in life. Unlike in the case of Robert F Kennedy or Martin Luther King Jr, most Americans simply hadn't heard of him before he was shot.

He was what's known as 'internet famous', well-known to the relatively small group of people who spend a lot of time watching right-wing videos online, showing up occasionally on TV, and unknown outside of that.

Political leaders on both the left and right in US are eulogising him as a champion of free speech. But while Kirk is being celebrated for being willing to put forward unpopular ideas, few of those writing about him are discussing the content of those ideas.

Much of the worldview he expressed comes from a cramped reading of the Bible: women should submit to their husbands in all things, trans people are an abomination, raped women should be forced to carry their rapist's babies to term.

The rest is little more than being explicit about right-wing beliefs that most political figures aren't willing to express, even if they do believe them: extending civil rights to Black people was a mistake, climate change isn't real, Jews are plotting to take over America by replacing white people with immigrants.

Kirk was a champion of free speech, but only so long as he happened to agree with the speech. He believed

# India's ACs Cool Homes And Are A Hot Problem

World Ozone Day is a good reminder of what refrigerants used in millions of air-conditioners do to environment. Hydrofluorocarbons heat up earth even more than CO2

Chandra Bhushan

The ozone hole is healing. The layer that shields us from the sun's deadly UV rays was severely damaged by chemicals like chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) and hydrochlorofluorocarbons (HCFCs), once widely used as refrigerants in air-conditioners and refrigerators. Thanks to the Montreal Protocol, these chemicals will be phased out globally by 2030. Scientists now predict that the ozone layer will fully recover by 2066, saving millions of lives from skin cancer.

Yet, as one crisis recedes, another is fast unfolding – this time caused by the new refrigerants that replaced CFCs and HCFCs. The coolants we use today – hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs) – are hundreds of times more potent than carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) in heating the climate. And in India, we are leaking them recklessly from our room air-conditioners (RACs).

The sale of RACs has been growing at 15-20% annually since 2020. Urbanisation, rising incomes, and intensifying heatwaves have turned ACs from a middle-class luxury into a household necessity. India currently has about 70mn RACs. Even with modest annual sales growth of 10%, this number will triple to 245mn by 2035.

But how responsibly are we using and maintaining our ACs? How conscious are we about energy efficiency? How frequently are we refilling refrigerants? And how aware are we of their harmful impacts?

A recent first-of-its-kind national household survey covering more than 3,100 families from all income groups across seven major cities – Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, Ahmedabad, Pune, and Jaipur – threw up both fascinating and deeply worrying results.

The survey busted some long-held myths. For instance, the perception that most AC-owning households have multiple RACs is incorrect. Nearly 87% of such households own just one AC; only 13% have two or more. This shows that ACs are no longer limited to the wealthy. A large share is now in middle- and lower-income households.

Another myth is that Indians operate their ACs at

that he had a right to speak his mind but didn't believe that those who disagreed had a right to protest, or a right to not invite him to speak in the first place.

His most significant contribution to American politics is a watchlist maintained by his group, Turning Point USA, which seeks to catalog college professors who are too liberal for his tastes or teach ideas that he didn't support, and try to get them fired.

When he was killed, Kirk was engaging in exactly the sort of behaviour he was known for: espousing his political views before a potentially hostile audience at a college campus. It was a pattern he repeated dozens of times. He would be invited by conservative student groups to give a talk on a college campus, only to face protests from other groups – especially those representing Black, Hispanic or LGBT students – asking for his invitation to be rescinded. Kirk would then take advantage of the criticism, claim that his voice was being silenced, and fundraise off the controversy.

If the invitation wound up cancelled, it was evidence for his thesis that college campuses hate conservatives. If it went forward, he would be heckled or booed, providing evidence for his thesis that college campuses hate conservatives. If, as it did on occasion, it went forward

smoothly, he attributed it to the overwhelming force of his ideas and personality, despite the hatred of college campuses for conservatives.

Utah – a state dominated by the Mormon sect of Christianity – should have been a relatively safe space for Kirk ideologically, but that flavour of conservatism includes opposition to any form of gun control.

Utah is one of the few states to not have just open carry – people are allowed to bring guns into public places – but open campus carry, meaning that students and visitors are allowed to bring guns into classrooms, or anywhere else on campus. As such, the shooter would have been allowed to openly bring a gun to Kirk's talk.

Online, Kirk's behaviour would be called trolling or rage-baiting, and it's effective at driving views. The currency of online interactions is attention, and saying controversial things is a surefire way to get that attention, as is claiming that your views are being repressed.

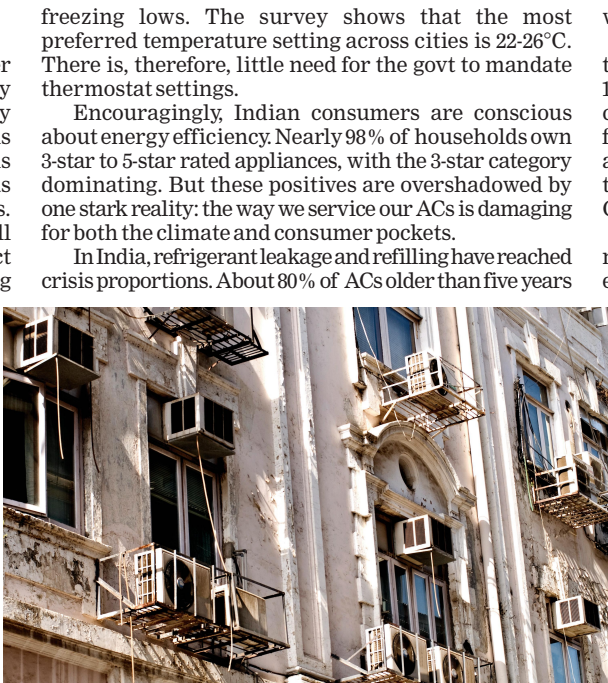
What Kirk did was to bring this sort of behaviour from social media into the real world and monetise it, creating outrage, and profiting from it, applying the logic and incentives of social media to the real world.

As best as we can tell, Kirk's alleged assassin was doing much the same thing. Early information shows someone who was deeply embedded in online culture, and the attendant desire for attention. In online circles, the more shocking the display, the more attention it receives. It doesn't matter if that attention is negative. As Kirk showed, outrage can be as valuable as approval.

Applied to the real world, the logic of outrage and attention leads directly to violence: the more shocking it is, the more views it gets, and, thus, the better it is.

Online, it's easy to demonise our opponents, for the same reason that it's easier to cut someone off in traffic than it is to cut in front of them in a queue. When we don't see other people, we can ignore them, treat them as less than human, less than worthy of respect. Kirk was far from the first to bring the logic of social media to the outside world, he wasn't the first victim of that logic, and he certainly won't be the last.

*The writer teaches at Fairleigh Dickinson University, US*



freezing lows. The survey shows that the most preferred temperature setting across cities is 22-26°C. There is, therefore, little need for the govt to mandate thermostat settings.

Encouragingly, Indian consumers are conscious about energy efficiency. Nearly 98% of households own 3-star to 5-star rated appliances, with the 3-star category dominating. But these positives are overshadowed by one stark reality: the way we service our ACs is damaging for both the climate and consumer pockets.

In India, refrigerant leakage and refilling have reached crisis proportions. About 80% of ACs older than five years

will rise to 84 MT.

When we add emissions from electricity consumption, the total GHG emissions of India's ACs in 2024 reached 156 MT – about the same as emissions from all passenger cars in the country. Put simply: the annual GHG emissions from an AC that is refilled every two years is as much as a car. By 2035, the total emissions from ACs are projected to double to 329 MT, making them the single largest GHG-emitting household appliance in India.

While India does have policies on refrigerant management, these are half-measures without strong enforcement. The India Cooling Action Plan aims to reduce refrigerant demand by 25-30% by 2037-38, but lacks regulations to back it. Similarly, the amended E-Waste (Management) Rules, 2023 include provisions for environmentally sound disposal of refrigerants from end-of-life ACs at approved facilities, but these are being poorly enforced.

Therefore, currently there are no effective systems to prevent leaks during servicing, no monitoring of refrigerant refills, and no accountability for end-of-life disposal. Refrigerants also do not fall under any meaningful Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) framework in India.

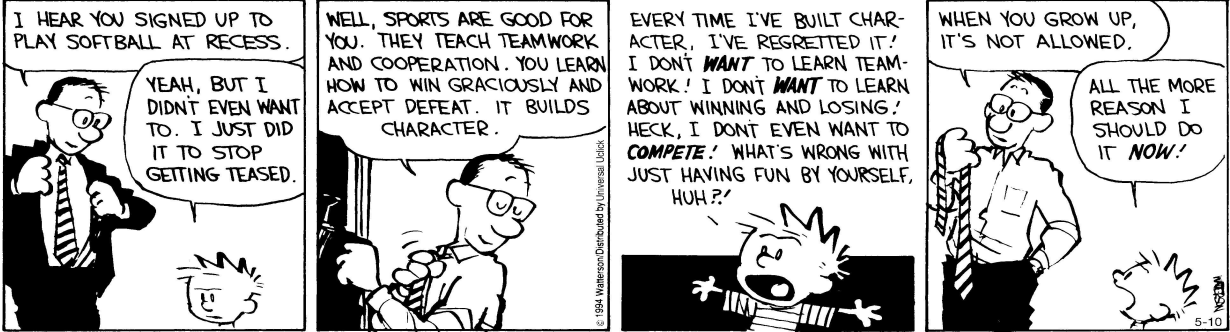
The refrigerant leakage crisis is urgent – but it's solvable. India must establish a comprehensive Lifecycle Refrigerant Management (LRM) regulation covering every stage – from refrigerant filling to servicing to disposal. AC manufacturers should be made responsible under an EPR regime to ensure recovery, recycling, and safe destruction of refrigerants. Such regulations are being implemented by many places including Canada, Australia, EU, China and Singapore.

If implemented effectively, LRM could prevent 500-650 MT of GHG emissions between 2025 and 2035 – worth \$25-33bn in carbon credits at a moderate price of \$50 per tonne. Consumers too would benefit, saving over \$10bn in unnecessary refill costs. This is a win-win solution.

India showed leadership in the fight to protect the ozone layer by phasing out CFCs and HCFCs well before global deadlines. We can lead once again, this time in protecting the climate.

*The writer is an environmentalist*

## Calvin & Hobbes



# The Sacred Embrace Of Pitru Paksh

Ullhas Pagey

Pitru Paksh, beginning with the full moon of Bhadrapada and ending at the new moon of Ashwin, calls families to pause, reflect, and offer gratitude to their ancestors. As autumn's breeze carries whispers of the past, people gather by rivers or in homes, presenting pindis, simple balls of rice and sesame to soothe their ancestors' souls, fulfilling a timeless duty that binds generations in love and respect.

The roots of Pitru Paksh stretch deep into the *Mahabharat*, an epic that tells of Karn, who, after his death, found himself in a heavenly realm, his soul hungry despite his earthly charity. He had given gold to the living but neglected his ancestors. Yam, the guardian of the afterlife, granted Karn a brief return to earth, a fortnight to perform shraddh, a

ritual of offerings to nourish his forebears' spirits. From this divine act, Pitru Paksh was born, a reminder that our lives are woven with those of our ancestors. By honouring them, we receive their blessings for our own journey towards inner freedom.

Pitru Paksh is more than a ritual; it is a heartfelt act of connection, a way to repay the debt we owe our ancestors for the gift of life. This duty, called *pitru rin*, is a cornerstone of our tradition, alongside obligations to the Divine. Families offer tarpan; water poured with prayers to send love and energy to their pitrs, helping them rest in higher realms. The waning moon during this period symbolises letting go of selfishness, inviting us to reflect deeply, much like a seeker striving for inner peace. People

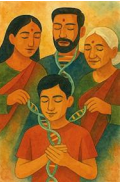
avoid starting new ventures to focus on these quiet acts of remembrance, often reciting verses from sacred texts such as the *Garud Puran* that warn of struggles ancestors face if their souls are not honoured. Pitru Paksh reminds us that our ancestors are an integral part of us, and by caring for them, we heal ourselves, finding clarity and purpose in our lives.

This reverence for ancestors is not unique to India; other cultures, too, hold space for the departed, showing a shared human need to stay connected across time. In Christianity, families pray for deceased loved ones in purgatory on All Souls' Day. In China, people honour their ancestors during the Qingming Festival with food and incense, in a way that echoes Pitru Paksh's spirit of gratitude. Japanese

light lanterns during the Obon festival to guide spirits home, blending Buddhist and Shinto beliefs to help ancestors find peace.

These traditions reveal a universal truth: honouring the past strengthens our path forward, uniting us with those who shaped our lives. Pitru Paksh philosophy is simple yet profound. Feeding crows, seen as messengers of Yam, is a humble act of giving, symbolising purity and goodwill. It reminds us that our actions ripple beyond the present, touching lives of those who were there before and those yet to come. Rituals offering food, water, and prayers are acts of love that clear obstacles, not just for ancestors but for us, bringing harmony to our homes and hearts.

As the Bhagwad Gita beautifully affirms: "Whatever you do, whatever you eat, whatever you offer or give away, do that as an offering to Me."



**Sacred space**

No self is of itself alone. It has a long chain of intellectual ancestors.

The T is chained to ancestry by many factors... This is not mere allegory, but an eternal memory.

Erwin Schrödinger



THE SPEAKING TREE



## TEST HURDLE

After four rounds of admissions, a large number of seats in colleges affiliated to Delhi University, even the best of them, remain vacant. This never used to be the case before the Common University Entrance Test was begun in 2022; students were admitted on the basis of their Class XII marks. There was a long queue for the best-known colleges, such as Miranda House or St Stephen's, but they too have vacant seats now. Other colleges have vacancies ranging from 295 to 709 seats: after 50 days of allocation of seats by the Common Seat Allocation System, 9,000 of the 71,000 seats remained unoccupied. In a so-called 'mop-up' operation — the situation seems desperate — Delhi University has allowed colleges to admit students who had not sat for the CUET, which many feel to be a hurdle, or registered on the CSAS, on the basis of their Class XII marks. This would mean that students are being admitted on two different principles; also, the students admitted later would have missed weeks of class. Teachers blame the opacity of the process of admission through CUET and CSAS, by which colleges have no idea of seat allocation and cut-off marks. The method hijacks the autonomy of colleges and obviously frightens some students off higher education altogether. The system being opaque, candidates may not always be satisfied either.

It is, however, not just the Delhi colleges that are suffering from a dearth of students. There has been a reduction in undergraduate student numbers in many places in the country, and not just because of competitiveness. Apart from the problems of CUET, the four-year undergraduate course advocated by the National Education Policy, 2020 does not suit many. The multiple exit points may not be as inviting as expected in a country short of employment, where a certificate or a diploma — one year and two years, respectively — would not take a candidate far. Which employer would take in a three-year Bachelor of Arts degree-holder when a four-year BA plus research candidate also applies? Higher education in the country has become a confusing system for many, especially problematic for those who cannot afford private colleges. It seems that a first step would be to rethink the CUET and CSAS, at least for the sake of transparency. Other reforms may then fall into place.

## DOUBLE BURDEN

Malnutrition, in the lay perception, is associated with deficiency of food. But a recent UNICEF report has added a worrying layer to the public understanding of malnutrition by revealing that there are now more obese than underweight children in the world for the first time ever. Obesity has been skyrocketing among children: around 188 million children and teenagers aged between five and 19 are now considered obese. The incessant consumption of addictive but unhealthy ultra-processed foods — high on sugar, salt, fat and additives — in combination with a sedentary lifestyle, has led to a spike in the obesity rate that has more than tripled — from 3% to 9.4% — in the past 25 years, leading to acute malnutrition, according to the UNICEF report, which collated data from more than 190 countries. The population of underweight children, not insignificant in India, fell from 13% to 9.2% in the same period. This means that children these days are eating more but are consuming less healthy food, leading to malnutrition that can be attributed to not deficiencies in consumption but, ironically, excess food that is low in nutrients. Little wonder then that the UPFs market is estimated to grow by \$856.6 billion five years from now. Consequently, obese and underweight children coexist in the same community, often in the same household. High-income countries as well as their low- and middle-income counterparts have registered a steep rise in the number of overweight children. India, which is projected to have more than 27 million children and adolescents by 2030, UNICEF has warned, may have the highest burden of overweight and obese citizens within the next decade.

Obese children run the risk of developing Type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and some cancers. Unsurprisingly, the global economic cost of obesity is expected to exceed \$4 trillion annually by 2035. Addressing the obesity challenge requires urgent changes in lifestyle: junking junk food and embracing mobility and exercise hold the key. Institutional interventions like labelling of, marketing restrictions on, and taxing UPFs are important. Curbing advertisements — 75% of teenagers are targeted by commercials for unhealthy snacks — and the sale of such food near educational centres can be explored along with subsidising healthy food items like fruits and vegetables so that they become affordable. It is thus not enough to have food on the table; the kind of food on it may spell the difference between survival and suffering.

## SCRIPSI

‘Temporal goods originate and perish independently of man, who is tied to them by his desire.’

HANNAH ARENDT

## Nepal's unrest revealed social media's constructive possibilities

# Platform for change

SEVANTI NINAN

Nepal's change of leadership after an uprising last week set an extraordinary precedent. It was the outcome of a selection process that used a video-gaming platform called Discord to simulate what was described as a mini election. When the military imposed a curfew across Kathmandu and restricted large gatherings, members of a civic organisation called Hami Nepal set up a channel on this platform to initiate a combination of voice, video, and text chats that would become the digital version of a national convention. Discord is a communication platform used by over two hundred million people to hang out and play games with their friends. *The New York Times* quoted a 23-year-old content creator as saying, "The Parliament of Nepal right now is Discord."

When Nepalis quickly took to this channel, in just four days, the server acquired more than 1,45,000 members. So much so that when the prime minister resigned and power passed on to the country's military, the army's chiefs who would decide who led the country next are reported to have met with the channel's organisers and asked them to create a process to come up with a potential nominee for an interim leader.

The chaotic conversation which ensued inside this wide-ranging chat room that anyone could join was reaching the army headquarters, the moderators said. And it threw up, in a very short time, the names which led to the current prime minister's selection.

Across the world, social media platforms have helped foment revolution over the last couple of decades and have become arbiters of political change. But using an internet platform to generate a popular consensus for a country's leadership transition is definitely a first. It may well be a transient gain. As an analyst at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace told *NYT* about the role of technology in social movements; creating a stable political structure in the long term is not something that these platforms have had much success with. Bangladesh, where the youth led the movement to effect a leadership change, being the most recent example.

The social media ban in Nepal

Sevanti Ninan is a media commentator. She also publishes the labour newsletter, *Worker Web*. <https://workerweb.curated.co/issues>



which triggered the violent uprising led by the youth cohort being described as Gen Z was partly the government's response to video expressions of resentment at the lifestyle of the children of the ruling class flaunting their wealth. Videos emerged on TikTok showing children of Nepalese politicians flaunting luxury in a country where the *per capita* income is \$1,300 a year.

Internet-enabled media platforms have become a source of livelihood for many young Nepalis. Nepal has the same problem as India — no jobs for the youth. Some said that they ran businesses on Facebook. And the BBC reported that popular platforms such as Instagram have millions of users in Nepal who rely on them for entertainment, news and business.

Banning social media hit livelihoods and also remittances to families from some seven million Nepalis living abroad. One report said that some 25% of the country's gross domestic product comes from external remittances. Being connected to the world seemed essential for a very young country with one of the lowest median ages in South Asia. The ban, there-

fore, triggered visceral anger, especially when initial protests were met by police violence.

Social media impacts societal transformation because it has political potential. It enables students to organise, share information, and mobilise. First, it becomes an important amplifier of dissent. And then when a new political Opposition emerges, it uses these platforms to mobilise people. The mayor of Kathmandu, Balendra Shah, a former rapper and engineer turned politician, was one such face that emerged out of the protests and then became a contender when a new political leadership was being considered. He used Facebook to incite, "Parliament had to be disrupted," said one message.

From the Arab Spring onwards, social media's impact on political mobilisation has seen reams of academic research being published. A survey of participants in Egypt's Tahrir Square protests found that people learn about protests being organised not from broadcast media but through interpersonal communication on social media. Social media use greatly increased the odds that a respondent attended the protest on the first day. While satel-

lite TV use decreased these odds.

In Bangladesh, too, a study found that social media quickly became the movement's cornerstone, bypassing government-controlled traditional media to enable students to organise, share information, and mobilise.

But going beyond its impact on catalysing movements, other research has studied the political effects of social media platforms on different regime types, looking at how American social media platforms can affect the political systems of different states in varying ways. This is potentially more valuable in terms of insights offered. The study says that the effect varies both between and within democratic and authoritarian States and depends on how three political actors — domestic Opposition, external forces, and the governing regime — use social media.

Nepal's September Revolution has taken platform-enabled political mobilisation a small step forward in terms of demonstrating its constructive possibilities. The world will be watching to see what comes next from the country's Gen Z and the leadership it helped anoint.

that, the public sphere will shrink further, and the democratic promise of America will diminish.

N. Mahadevan, Chennai

### Important role

■ Sir — The vice-president of India holds an office that is often undervalued ("Bridge of reflection", Sept 14). It is not merely a waiting room for the presidency but a constitutional trust in its own right. The role of presiding over the Rajya Sabha demands fairness, restraint, and respect for democratic procedure. When impartiality is visible and consistent, it strengthens the institution itself. Personal ambition may be natural but the office requires a different ambition: to leave behind a tradition of credibility and calm authority for others to follow.

Manoj Parashar, Mumbai

■ Sir — The new vice-president of India inherits both a privilege and a burden. The privilege is the constitutional mandate to preside over the upper House with dignity. The burden is the expectation that this authority be exercised without favour or fear. Members of Parliament will test impartiality, especially in times of division.

A.K. Sen, Calcutta

Letters should be sent to: The Telegraph, 6 Prafulla Sarkar Street, Calcutta 700001 [ttedit@abp.in](mailto:ttedit@abp.in)

### Stay united

■ Sir — The assassination of Charlie Kirk is both a personal tragedy and a political warning. A society that tolerates political violence undermines democracy itself. Leaders who instantly blame their rivals without evidence risk inflaming tensions further. The loss of a father, activist, and public figure should be a moment for reflection, not an excuse for partisan score-settling. Political disagreements must be addressed through speech and debate, never through force. The United States of America needs restraint from its leaders and respect for democratic norms from all sides.

P. Victor Selvaraj, Tirunelveli, Tamil Nadu

■ Sir — The killing of Charlie Kirk exposes a deeper crisis in America: ordinary citizens in that country are increasingly willing to see violence as a political tool. That is a dangerous development in a country awash with firearms. When influential figures speak recklessly about vengeance, they normalise the unthinkable. Leadership in such moments requires cooling tempers, not stoking them. History shows that republics collapse when violence becomes routine. If the US cannot restore faith in dialogue, then democracy itself will be in jeopardy.

Arun Kumar Baksi, Calcutta

■ Sir — The problem with the assassination of Charlie Kirk lies not only in polit-



## Too tempting

■ Sir — Talk about having one's cake and eating it too. A protester at a far-Right march in London was filmed buying onion *bhaji* while proudly draped in the St George's Cross. The scene was striking, considering the day's rallying cry of "We want our country back." Evidently, the Briton's idea of 'his country' includes onion fritters with chickpea flour and cumin. He is not so different then from the Indians who attend political rallies in India only to eat *aloo'r chop* and *muri* afterwards. At least, the palate of those on the far-Right appears to be more open-minded than their politics.

Kamal Laddha, Bengaluru

ical violence but also in how leaders respond to it. Immediate blame of "radical left" or "radical right" is both inaccurate and inflammatory. Victims across the political spectrum deserve acknowledgement without selective omission. By excusing violence when it suits their side, politicians corrode the standards that protect everyone. Responsible leadership would condemn attacks unequivocally, offer comfort to families, and call for unity.

Ajay Tyagi, Mumbai

■ Sir — Charlie Kirk's death has become a prism for America's divisions. Some now cast him as a martyr, while others highlight his history of offensive remarks. Both impulses distract from the essential issue: political murder must never be legitimised. When violence dictates which voices are heard, public life becomes narrower, harsher, and more fearful. A democracy cannot function if its citizens hesitate to speak or organise.

Vinay Asawa, Howrah

■ Sir — Political violence in the US is rising against a backdrop of misinformation, polarised rhetoric, and an endless supply of guns. This creates a volatile environment where extremists feel emboldened. Social media accelerates the cycle, amplifying outrage before facts are known. In such a climate, measured responses are easily drowned out by fury. Leaders must insist that differences be contested peacefully. Without that, the erosion of trust in democratic institutions will only accelerate, leaving citizens more fearful and divided.

Kirti Wadhawan, Kanpur

■ Sir — The assassination of Charlie Kirk is not an isolated tragedy. It sits within a pattern of growing threats to politicians, activists, and journalists. Each act of violence silences not just one person but intimidates many others who might speak or serve. That chilling effect benefits only the most extreme voices. This is the moment for leaders across divides to demonstrate maturity, call for tolerance, and recommit to non-violence. Failing



Disunity deepens?

RIDDHI DATTA

### FIFTH COLUMN

## DUBIOUS POWER

Dire wolves roamed this planet around 12,500 years ago but were long lost in the ashes of extinction. Now, scientists have brought them back to life through biotechnological tools. Colossal Biosciences, an American biotechnological company, has claimed that it has revived the species using genome editing technology. This revolutionary innovation opens up a new paradigm in conservation biology and species revival through technological interventions.

What is the science behind this groundbreaking de-extinction? Science now has the ability to extract traces of genetic material preserved in the fossils. These ancient DNA are often fragmented and sparse, making it challenging to work with. But ancient DNA research has made tremendous progress when it comes to understanding how species evolved, adapted and became extinct. From mammoths to dire wolves, ancient DNA is shaping the future of science.

Colossal Biosciences explored the remnants of the dire wolf in caves and river beds across America, recovering some usable DNA from two promising skeletal specimens in the La Brea Tar Pits. But the real challenge was to sequence and reconstruct it. A team of over 50 scientists collaborating in this project were able to recover 0.1% of the dire wolf genome.

But Colossal Biosciences didn't stop just here. It exploited this lead to insert specific 'edits' into the gray wolf genome through advanced multiplex genome editing technology, which allows scientists to introduce precise alterations in the genome. The result was three litters of 'de-extincted' dire wolves. One of the genes edited in this project is *LCORL* that accounts for the wide range of size variations in different breeds of dogs. A precise editing in this gene brought back the enormous size of the dire wolves. Other edits resulted in a more ro-



bust build, stronger jaws, and enhanced olfactory senses. In essence, the scientists have created a version of the dire wolf that resembles the extinct species in appearance but it's still a gray wolf with modified genes.

De-extinction is revolutionising the field of biotechnology. But it also raises questions from the ecological perspective. Consider the following argument. Plants trap solar energy through photosynthesis. Herbivores consume these plants, transferring energy up the chain. Carnivores and omnivores then prey on herbivores, becoming secondary and tertiary consumers. These, in turn, are preyed upon by apex consumers at the top of the food chain. Dire wolves were apex consumers in the palaeoecological context. If they are re-introduced into the present ecosystem, they will possibly compete with existing apex predators like the gray wolf, mountain lion or coyote for resource and habitat. This competition could lead to shifts in the distribution, behaviour, and population dynamics of these species. In fact, reintroducing any extinct species will create interference with the ecological niche of extant species and destabilise the entire ecosystem. Another factor to consider is that our present climate differs from the palaeoclimate. The revived species might find it difficult to adapt to the modern environment increasing their dependence on human care. Critics also argue that such a techno-scientific approach to reverse the extinction process might send the message that extinction is reversible and that habitat destruction is acceptable. It is, therefore, important to remember that any major intervention in nature holds risks of unforeseen consequences.



## India, US and a maze of mixed signals

President Donald Trump is blowing hot and cold and sending conflicting signals about the US' relations with India. The post-tariffs tension between the two countries seemed to have eased with leaders in the US taking conciliatory positions. Trump, who initially issued aggressive statements and imposed punitive actions against India over oil imports from Russia, had started striking less confrontational postures. It was taken as a sign of his realisation that India was not going to kowtow to the US and that it had other options. Within a few days after saying in public that it “looks like we’ve lost India and Russia to deepest, darkest China,” Trump said he would “always be friends with Modi” and there was nothing to worry about. The President was also looking forward to speaking with Modi, a “very good friend.”

Similar signals were sent out by others. Sergio Gor, Trump’s nominee for ambassador to India, said Washington and New Delhi are on track to resolve the differences that have strained their relations. It was also announced that talks are still on for the proposed bilateral trade deal, and a Quad summit would be held this year. Union Minister of Commerce and Industry Piyush Goyal has said that the first tranche of the trade agreement would be finalised by November. However, there was dissonance in the remarks of US Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick, who said India has “got to stop” buying Russian oil. Gor commented on similar lines. The US has also sought from the European Union and G-7 the imposition of stiff additional tariffs on India and China for importing Russian oil.

India has done well to respond positively to the statements from the US. Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that he reciprocated Trump’s expressions of goodwill and hoped for a “comprehensive and global strategic partnership”. By not attending the virtual summit of BRICS leaders last week, Modi may also have sent a signal that India did not want a confrontation with the US. Trump may have wanted to take the bilateral ties back from the brink. Or he may be bargaining with contradictory positions. It is too early to see his public postures, one way or the other, as genuine. The president is known for quick U-turns and mercurial responses. India, while being positive, must also be sceptical about the fresh round of US overtures. Irrespective of the headwinds and the unpredictability of the primary player of this plot, India must stand its ground and remain steadfast in protecting its national interests and strategic autonomy.

## Metro jam: Between fares and funding

Starting February 2026, Namma Metro fares will automatically rise by up to 5% each year, based on the Fare Fixation Committee’s (FFC) recommendation. This aims to prevent the kind of steep and sudden hike that commuters endured in February 2025, when fares were raised by up to 71% – the first revision since 2017. That increase made Bengaluru’s metro India’s costliest and provoked widespread public anger. The new formula offers predictability and financial stability for the Bangalore Metro Rail Corporation Limited (BMRL). With heavy loan repayments and limited cash reserves, the corporation cannot sustain operations without assured revenues. For commuters, smaller, regular hikes are less painful than infrequent, sharp jumps.

Knowing that fares will rise by a fixed percentage annually makes planning easier and avoids sudden shocks. However, accounting principles should not be mistaken for sound public policy. The metro is not just a business venture. Public transport must remain affordable, accessible, and inclusive. By offering a safe, fast, and sustainable alternative to private vehicles, it helps cut congestion and pollution in a city gasping for clean air. Rising fares may prompt daily riders, particularly low-income groups, to switch back to two-wheelers, undermining the very purpose of building the metro. The state government must therefore strike a balance between BMRL’s financial viability and commuters’ affordability. Subsidies, rather than ever-rising fares, should form the bedrock of this balance. Karnataka is already spending heavily on the Shakti scheme, which has cost more than Rs 12,600 crore since its launch in 2023 to provide free bus rides for women, irrespective of their income. While empowering women’s mobility is vital, the state must also consider redirecting or rationalising part of this expenditure to support metro fares, ensuring the system does not become exclusionary.

Targeted discounts can further cushion the blow for vulnerable groups and make fares more equitable. Special incentives, such as integrated passes across buses and metro, would also make multimodal transport seamless and cheaper, nudging more commuters towards public transit. Financial stability of the metro corporation is important, but it cannot be the sole guiding principle. Public transport is an investment in the city’s future, in cleaner air, shorter commutes, and more equitable growth. Bengaluru cannot afford a metro that runs on time but runs out of reach for the very people it was meant to serve. If urban mobility is to be sustainable, the state must treat the metro not merely as a profit-driven enterprise, but as a lifeline for a city already choking on traffic and pollution.

Trump is being predictably unpredictable. India cannot be distracted from its strategic priorities

Fixed, annual fare hikes ease commuter stress, but profits alone must not drive urban mobility

# COMMENT

### ARC OF UNREST

## Can India weather the neighbourhood storm?

The turbulence around us calls for vision, strategic precision, and political unity on matters of national interest

GURUCHARAN GOLLERKERI

India finds itself facing what can only be described as an arc of instability. From the deserts of Afghanistan to the waters of the Maldives, our immediate neighbourhood is a theatre of violence, unrest, and shifting allegiances. The turbulence that surrounds us is not episodic – it is structural, deeply embedded in the political fragility, ethnic fissures, and economic uncertainties of South Asia.

The fall of Kabul to the Taliban and the reassertion of extremist forces in Afghanistan opened a new chapter of uncertainty. Pakistan continues to be a cauldron of internal strife, military dominance, and a faltering economy, even as it nurtures networks inimical to Indian security. Bangladesh, though economically vibrant, faces growing polarisation and religious radicalism, and questions about democratic legitimacy. Nepal remains politically unstable, with China’s shadow looming large over its fragile coalition politics. Sri Lanka has barely emerged from an economic freefall that shook its very state structure, while the Maldives has oscillated between “India First” rhetoric and an assertive “India Out” campaign.

This neighbourhood volatility is not a distant problem – it is India’s first line of challenge. Instability at our borders translates into security vulnerabilities, refugee flows, radicalisation, and new theatres of great-power competition. India’s ability to rise as a responsible global power is inseparably linked to its capacity to manage this volatile ring of fire.

If South Asia presents the immediate arc of instability, the global order compounds it with disorder. The tariff wars unleashed by former US President Donald Trump were more than a bilateral trade skirmish; they were an early signal of deglobalisation. Supply chains have since splintered, technology flows are weaponised, and the multilateral trade system lies weakened. The world is now realigning itself into fragmented blocs, where national security and economics are inseparable. China has emerged as both India’s greatest trading partner and its principal strategic adversary. The US seeks India as a critical partner in the Indo-Pacific, but it is also a difficult negotiator on trade and market

access. Russia, once our all-weather ally, is now a diminished yet indispensable partner, especially in defence. The Gulf remains vital to our energy security and diaspora remittances, even as it hedges between Washington, Beijing, and Moscow. Europe, struggling with its own crises, seeks India as a market and geopolitical partner, but hesitates in confronting China directly.

In this fragmented landscape, India faces the classic problem of middle powers: how to preserve strategic autonomy while engaging with competing blocs. India’s current policy framework has served well in maintaining a fine balance, but it is clear that the turbulence of



both our neighbourhood and the world order calls for recalibration. Three pillars – foreign policy, national security, and trade – must be revisited in tandem, for they are increasingly inseparable.

In the neighbourhood, this means moving beyond episodic assistance or reactive diplomacy. India must design a coherent regional strategy that leverages the country’s economic size, developmental experience, and cultural linkages. We cannot cede the neighbourhood to Beijing’s cheque-book diplomacy or to the extremist forces that thrive in governance vacuums. Proactive investment in connectivity, cross-border infrastructure, energy cooperation, and people-to-people linkages will strengthen India’s role as the natural anchor of stability. Equally, New Delhi must anchor multilateral mechanisms in South Asia that serve as confidence-building platforms, even if their outcomes are modest. Globally, India must leverage forums such as the Quad, BRICS, and the G20 not as ends in themselves, but as theatres to project a principled voice: one that advocates open trade, respect for sovereignty, and inclusive development.

**Strengths and fissures within**  
On national security, traditional security frameworks – focused on the Line

of Control or the Line of Actual Control – are necessary but insufficient. It must encompass cyber resilience, supply chain security, and the safeguarding of critical technologies. Disinformation wars and weaponisation of data will define future conflicts as much as tanks and missiles. India must invest in intelligence reform, integrated defence structures, and a sharper maritime focus in the Indian Ocean. The Andaman and Nicobar Islands must be transformed into the fulcrum of India’s Indo-Pacific strategy. We must also recognise that internal cohesion – managing communal harmony, economic inequalities, and democratic vitality – is the bedrock of external security.

India’s economic rise is its strongest geopolitical card. Yet, protectionist instincts and bureaucratic inertia often blunt our competitiveness. The recent tariff wars have shown that trade is no longer about comparative advantage alone; it is about resilience, redundancy, and national interest. India must craft a trade policy that simultaneously secures access to markets, attracts supply chains relocating out of China, and strengthens domestic manufacturing. Rejoining or creating new trade pacts with like-minded economies will reduce overdependence on any single bloc. At the same time, food, energy, and digital sovereignty must be treated as national security imperatives.

The turbulence of our times demands something that has often eluded us: a bipartisan approach between the government and the opposition and a broad agreement amongst contesting political parties on matters of national interest. Foreign policy and national security cannot be arenas for partisan one-upmanship. When governments change, the world does not reset its calculus. Continuity of purpose, even amidst political contestation, is essential. India’s democracy will be stronger if the political class can converge on the broad contours of foreign, security, and trade policy, even as they contest its details.

The arc of instability around us is real, but India is not without agency. If we approach our neighbourhood with confidence rather than insecurity, if our global engagement is fair, and we treat trade as strategy rather than transaction, we can secure our rightful place as a shaper of the 21st-century order. We must demonstrate the sagacity to navigate the storm with vision, resilience, and unity. Is the political class listening?

(The writer is Director, School of Social Sciences, Ramaiah University of Applied Sciences)

### RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE

## Lighting up the dots and lines

The rangoli contest was a lesson in seeing beyond the surface

SRIPRIYA SATISH

‘You see, but you do not observe.’ This famous quote by Sherlock Holmes in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s *A Scandal in Bohemia* takes me back several decades to my school days.

A rangoli competition was announced just after the Diwali holidays. My cousin, a few years older than me and in the same school, was quite excited about it. Although we were both novices in drawing rangolis, her enthusiasm and excitement surprised me. After all, it was certain that many other students – experts in rangoli – had already enrolled. Our chances of even securing the last place seemed slim. When I shared my doubts with her, she chided me gently and encouraged me to be positive and give my name.

My aunt, a rangoli expert, offered

to help me. She gave me a book filled with rangoli designs and asked me to choose and practise one of them. She also shared a tip: the more complex a rangoli – with several dots and connecting lines – the more beautiful it would appear. I showed the design book to my cousin, but she brushed it aside, saying she had other ideas in mind.

Her confidence intrigued me, but I had no clue what she was planning. I chose a design and decided to work on it. My aunt guided me patiently, teaching me step by step how to draw the rangoli.

As I’d mentioned earlier, I was a novice, so it took time to get the dots and lines in place – it was quite confusing. As the event drew near, I managed to somewhat master the design. What amazed me was that my cousin showed no signs of practising, yet her enthusiasm for the competition never faded.

On the D-day, though nervous, I mustered the courage to draw the rangoli. I had practised, carefully placing the dots and lines. I used different colours to make the design more attractive. While

I wasn’t sure how it compared to others, I was content that I had at least made an honest attempt. When the time was up, we were asked to step aside. Curious to see what my cousin had drawn, I turned towards her space – and lo and behold! Her rangoli was stunning. She had created a simple design, drawn with precision, and had thoughtfully placed several diyas at key points. The lamps beautifully illuminated her artwork, making it stand out. Needless to say, she won a prize.

I was genuinely happy for her and asked how she came up with the idea of using diyas. She simply smiled and said, “I observed the magic the diyas created during our Diwali celebration and decided to bring that charm into my rangoli!”

That event taught me a valuable lesson – the power of observation beyond ordinary sight. Many have seen apples fall from trees, but it was only Sir Isaac Newton who truly observed it and uncovered the law of gravitation. Isn’t that the difference between merely seeing and truly observing?

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## No reconciliation possible without democratic dialogue

Apropos ‘PM delivers too little, too late in Manipur’ (Sep 15), Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s long-overdue visit to Manipur has done little to ease the deep divisions and mistrust plaguing the state. While he spoke of building a bridge of trust and announced development projects worth thousands of crores, these gestures fall short of addressing the core issues. The conflict is not rooted in a lack of infrastructure but in ethnic tensions, historical injustices, and political failures. His 864-day silence,

despite over 250 deaths and 60,000 displacements, has only widened the credibility gap. The government’s peace efforts, such as reviving the SoA agreement, collapsed due to a lack of broad-based consensus. No real reconciliation can occur unless all stakeholders are brought into a transparent, democratic dialogue. If the Centre is truly committed to peace, it must abandon tokenism and take decisive, impartial steps towards lasting harmony.

K Chidanand Kumar, Bengaluru

deliberately does little to pursue the findings and prosecute the guilty. This is why it is called ‘adjustment politics’ at the expense of the innocent general public who voted for better governance.

TV Pandarinath Naidu, Kudige

### A neglected sector

It is unfortunate that while scaling down the GST slabs to just two, the finance ministry has overlooked the special needs of the disabled,

as the accessories they require have been placed in the highest slab of 18% (GST reforms bring no relief to differently abled, Sep 15). The FM should focus on this sector, and if the GST cannot be entirely waived off, the implements used by the disabled could be brought under the 5% slab.

CV Aravind, Bengaluru

Our readers are welcome to email letters to: [letters@deccanherald.co.in](mailto:letters@deccanherald.co.in) (only letters emailed – not handwritten – will be accepted). All letters must carry the sender’s postal address and phone number.

### SPEAK OUT

After our government came to power, we have made efforts for the progress of the state... Today we have done our fourth ground breaking ceremony in Bhubaneswar, which confirmed commitments of over Rs 2 lakh

crore, and we have ensured employment for more than 1.5 lakh people... This is a significant achievement...

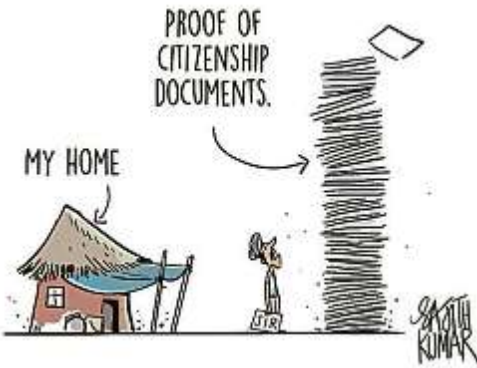
Mohan Charan Majhi, Odisha CM



An ounce of performance is worth pounds of promises.

Mae West

### TO BE PRECISE



### IN PERSPECTIVE

## Fertility through a capitalist lens

Attributing the falling rates to women’s empowerment risks skewed, problematic interpretations of feminism

SHILPI ROY CHOWDHURY

Among the widely accepted reasons for the drop in fertility rates are empowerment of women, better bodily autonomy, increased literacy rates, increased access to contraception, and emigration. However, tracing low fertility rates exclusively to empowered women and their bodily autonomy is problematic. While most educated women today may not face traditional barriers to reproductive autonomy (like family), they grapple with a very modern problem: capitalism and workplace compulsions.

There is an urgent need to raise greater awareness about population-related issues. Over the past few years, fertility rates in many countries have been declining. The alarm bells have been sounded on the rate in India as well. A recent UN report estimates the fertility rate as 1.9 births per woman; 2.1 is considered the population replacement rate.

Traditionally, families control the fertility choices of a woman, from deciding when she gets married and starts bearing children, to when she should stop having children, which, in many cases, is at the birth of a boy child.

This control is today being replaced, or compounded, by workplaces that systematically create situations that make it very difficult for women to have children. Some workplaces do not pay maternity benefits to completion, some others encourage women to quit. Also, some of the workplaces are decidedly misogynistic in their hiring. Women are chosen, not based on merit, but on irrelevant and intrusive questions about marriage and family planning.

As per the law, there is no bar to the number of children a woman can have. However, the Maternity Benefit Act 1961 provides 26 weeks of maternity leave to a woman for the first two children. If she has two or more surviving children, then she will only receive twelve weeks of maternity leave. This acts as a disincentive for women to have more than two children. Further, the legislature has not provided for compulsory paternity leave. Companies have started recognising short paternity leaves based on their discretion. This can range from five days to a month. Since a lot of men choose not to avail the leave, the burden of childcare falls again on the woman, which in turn

hurts her employability. Without the support of the spouse, 26 weeks of maternity leave become inadequate, forcing couples to delay having children.

The stress of urban life adversely impacts reproductive systems. This has been documented in medical journals. The healthcare industry is allowed to rampantly commercialise this urban tragedy in pursuit of profit. The brunt of this is invariably borne by women. Fertility treatments are available at prohibitive costs, thus making motherhood a choice only for the upper classes. There have been reports of hospitals pushing for C-section deliveries so that they can control how quickly a bed can be vacated and made available to the next pregnant woman. Such forced treatments and procedures can impact a woman’s reproductive health in the future, further affecting fertility rates.

### The opportunity bias

Empowerment of women can only play a role in more autonomous decision-making when it is realised across social and economic classes, and across institutions. Recognising maternity benefits without factoring in paternal involvement leads to reinforcing patriarchal norms rather than asserting women’s empowerment. Mothers, while away on maternity leave, are out of sight and thus, out of mind. They end up missing out on opportunities at work, which eventually may have an impact on their career path.

Fathers face no such disadvantage. They are back at their workplaces a few days after the child’s birth, and they move ahead in their careers. Fathers should be brought under the ambit of compulsory leave, so that they may play a more active role in their child’s life, rather than just being a weekend presence. They may also be more empathetic to the involuntary nature of missed opportunities women face during maternity leave. More couples, then, might opt to have children since they cumulatively have more time for child rearing. Making fertility treatment more accessible and equitable is also important to support a stable fertility rate.

Spinning a narrative that decidedly identifies women’s empowerment as a reason for falling fertility rates is dangerous. There is a need to see these numbers also in the context of capitalism and restrictive work structures. It is time we recognised that feminism can foster more equitable societies, and ill-informed analyses on its impact could further erode the idea of equal opportunity.

(The writer is an assistant professor at the School of Law, Christ [Deemed to be University], Bengaluru)



# Hazratbal shrine: A sacred space repeatedly hijacked by politics

ZULFIKAR MAJID

From the disappearance of Prophet Mohammad's holy relic in 1963 to the siege of 1993, the burning of Chrare-Sharif in 1995, and the emblem row of 2025, Kashmir's most revered shrines have repeatedly been drawn into the vortex of politics and conflict. Each controversy has chipped away at their sanctity, turning places of prayer into stages for propaganda, power struggles, and identity wars.

The Hazratbal shrine on the banks of Dal Lake, the spiritual heart of Kashmir's Sufi Islam, has particularly borne this burden. For devotees, Hazratbal is a place of tears, humility and connection with the last Prophet of Islam through the *Moi-e-Muqaddas* (the holy relic). For terrorists, separatists, and mainstream politicians, it has too often become a convenient tool.

■ The relic agitation of 1963: The first storm came in December 1963, when the relic of the Prophet went missing. The

Valley erupted in unprecedented protests, paralysing the state until the relic was mysteriously recovered 15 days later. Faith had been shaken, but politics reaped the dividends. The agitation toppled Bakshi Ghulam Mohammad and brought G M Sadiq to power. Ordinary people mourned the sacrilege, yet the real beneficiary was political change. Even today, questions linger over whose house the relic was found in and whether its disappearance was accidental or a calculated ploy to reshape Kashmir's politics.

■ Hazratbal under siege in 1993: The most prolonged and tense episode in Hazratbal's modern history unfolded in October 1993, when armed terrorists took refuge inside the shrine, forcing security forces into a weeks-long standoff. For the state, storming Hazratbal was unthinkable—it housed the Prophet's relic, and any damage could have set the Valley ablaze. For the terrorists, this was precisely the point: by hiding in Hazratbal, they sought to provoke sac-

rilege and convert religious fervour into political capital.

The siege drew international attention. Global media portrayed Hazratbal as a sacred shrine under siege, while separatist groups cast the terrorists as “defenders of faith.” Within Kashmir, rumours spread that the relic itself was endangered, triggering mass protests. For the faithful, the sight of their holiest shrine ringed with bunkers and barbed wire was a wound. For separatists, it became propaganda gold. For the state, it was a grim lesson in how faith could be weaponised at the height of insurgency.

■ The flames of Chrare-Sharif, 1995: Just two years later, another Sufi shrine was dragged into violence. In 1995, Pakistani terrorist commander Mast Gul and his men occupied the 600-year-old shrine of Sheikh Noor-ud-din Noorani at Chrare-Sharif. The ensuing battle reduced the shrine to ashes. Together, Hazratbal and Chrare revealed how terrorists and separatists exploited Kashmir's spiritual heritage.

■ The emblem row of 2025: The latest storm arose not from a relic or a siege, but from a plaque. Earlier this month, the Jammu and Kashmir Waqf Board installed a marble slab bearing the Ashoka emblem inside Hazratbal. To many devotees, it seemed unnecessary. To politicians, it was an opportunity.

National Conference leader and Chief Minister Omar Abdullah called it insensitive. PDP Chief Mehbooba Mufti went further, demanding blasphemy charges against Waqf Chairperson Darakshan Andrabi. Andrabi, in turn, defended the emblem as a symbol of national honour. When some angry devotees vandalised the plaque, it should have been treated as a simple case of vandalism. Instead, it was blown up online and in political speeches as another “Kashmir vs India” flashpoint. Lost in the din was a basic truth: the Ashoka emblem is not an idol but a national identity marker. The outrage was less about faith and more about politics.

The emblem row also revived scrutiny of the Waqf Board, which administers Hazratbal and other shrines. For decades, successive governments treated it as a patronage machine. Appointments, contracts, land leases and loans went to party loyalists. Prime orchards and real estate were handed to influential families at throwaway prices. Revenues that should have supported education and welfare often vanished into political networks. Hazratbal, the jewel in the Waqf crown, was left vulnerable.

To its credit, the present Waqf administration has tried to chart a different course. Hundreds of acres of encroached land have been reclaimed. Revenue collections are being streamlined. These are modest but important steps – far more than previous governments ever attempted.

The repeated controversies underline a larger tension: the battle between faith and politics. Hazratbal is the embodiment of Kashmir's Sufi ethos—an ethos that preaches love, humility, and inclusiveness.

Yet every time politics intrudes, that ethos is weakened.

The relic agitation of 1963, the siege of 1993, the flames of Chrare in 1995 and the emblem row of 2025 all show the same pattern: ordinary devotees sidelined, their faith reduced to fuel for someone else's agenda. In a Valley already scarred by alienation, such politicisation only strengthens extremist narratives.

Hazratbal does not belong to ruling parties, opposition leaders or separatist groups. It belongs to the faithful. Its sanctity is not negotiable. If Kashmir's leaders—political, religious and administrative—are serious about protecting the Valley's Sufi tradition, they must leave Hazratbal to devotees.

The shrine must not be framed as either a nationalist symbol or a separatist bastion. It must remain what it was meant to be: a sanctuary of prayer and peace. Only then can it reclaim its rightful role as the heart of Kashmir's spiritual life, a space of healing in a land too often torn by conflict. **DHNS**

## Most governments are trying to fight vaccine hesitancy with science and investment, while the United States heads in the opposite direction

DAMIEN CAVE

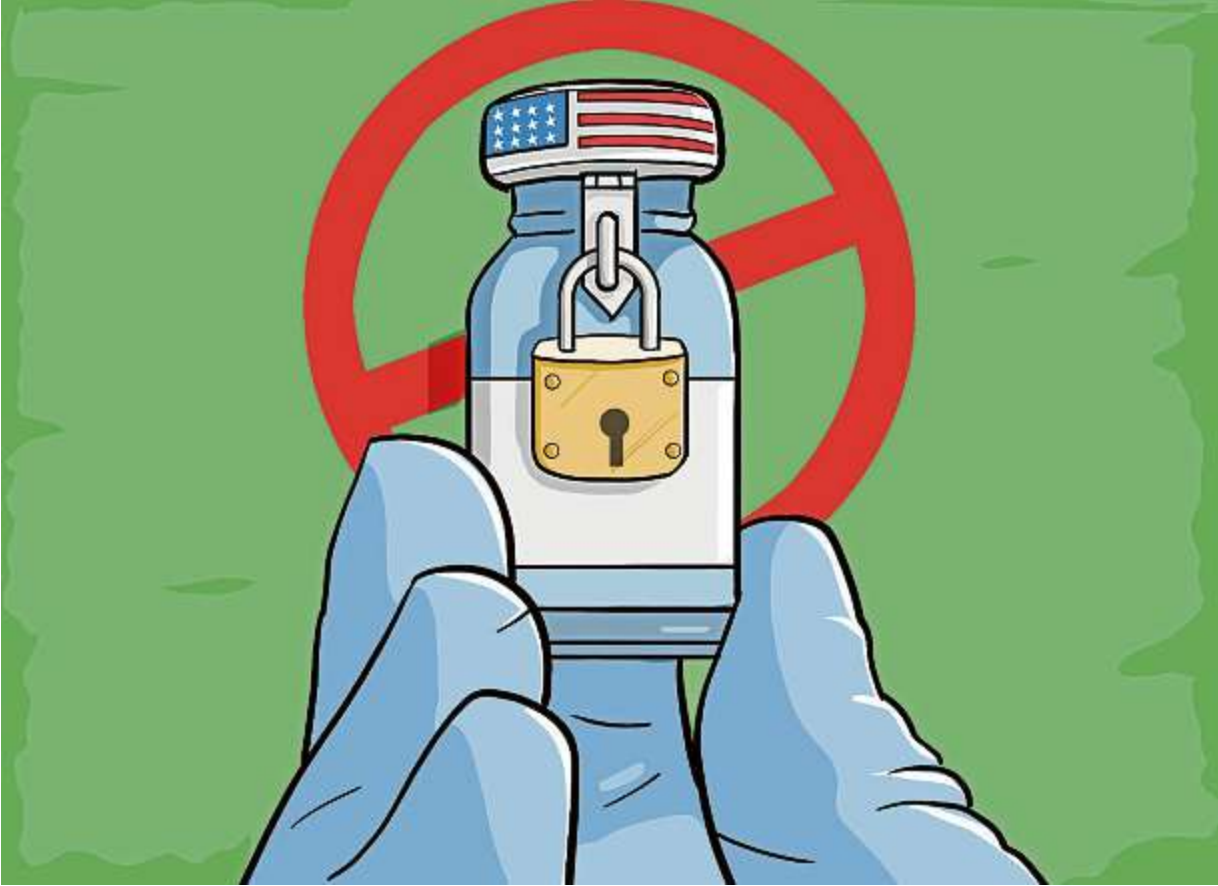
When Vietnam considered making Covid-19 vaccines mandatory for children deep into the pandemic, many parents resisted, fearing side effects and rumours of expired doses.

Their scepticism helped shape policy—the Covid vaccine mandate never happened. And it led to greater caution. More parents started scrutinising packaging to ensure that every vaccine jabbed into an arm came from a reputable company.

What Vietnam's Covid concerns did not do was metastasise into a broader anti-vaccine movement like what the world is now watching in the United States. Instead, Covid revived gratitude for routine vaccination. Coverage for the first dose of the measles vaccine in Vietnam reached 98% in 2024, and the vaccine for polio reached 99%.

“There was a scare, and that's why there was an almost global commitment to say, ‘We will now work toward making a more robust system,’” said Basil Rodrigues, UNICEF's Regional Health Adviser for East Asia and the Pacific. “Countries are trying to ensure that they strengthen their vaccine systems.” Brazil, Nigeria, Hungary and Samoa are just a few of the nations investing more in vaccination to try to catch up after Covid, during a global rise in outbreaks of measles and yellow fever.

That makes the US an obvious outlier, though not because of public opinion, which still favours vaccination. Rather, experts say, it is because of the government. Health Secretary Robert F Kennedy Jr and other vaccine critics are now in charge of public health and they are stripping away support for vaccine development, promotion and distribution.



DH ILLUSTRATION: DEEPAK HARICHANDAN

# US anti-vaccine policies ripple across the world

seen as tools of colonisation. They were rumoured to be used for sterilising women and girls, fears that also arose elsewhere, including in parts of Africa and among Indigenous groups in Canada.

Decades later, the CIA's deployment of a fake hepatitis B vaccination programme to locate Osama bin Laden in Pakistan significantly damaged trust. In China, many still resist vaccination after one of the country's main vaccine manufacturers falsified inspection and production reports in 2018.

Governments have typically responded to concerns, both valid and unfounded, with outreach and science. Over decades, they have added clinics in remote areas, collaborated with international partners on public service campaigns and relied on doctors to recruit families. Mandates, usually focused on entry to school, have also been common for decades.

In a recent study of 194 countries by international academics, 106 nations had policies requiring vaccination for at least one disease. Vaccines against diphtheria, measles, and tetanus were the most mandated, while Covid vaccines were among the least. Governments often harden childhood mandates when threats intensify. For example, Italy and France added measles to their mandatory schedules after outbreaks in 2017 and 2018. Within two years, vaccination rates had risen nearly six percentage points in Italy, and around four in France.

That is usually how it goes, though less so with Americans. After a measles outbreak in 2015 led California to stop letting parents

opt out of vaccines for nonmedical reasons, such as “personal belief,” fewer kindergartners showed up at school without their shots. But studies later found that medical exemptions had quadrupled. The medical exemption rate at private schools was 10 times higher than the median nationwide. America did not start out determined to avoid vaccines. In 1806, President Thomas Jefferson wrote a letter to Edward Jenner, an English scientist, thanking him for developing the world's first vaccine, against smallpox.

In 1855, after a rash of smallpox deaths, Massachusetts became the first state to require that children be vaccinated for school. In 1905, the Supreme Court upheld the right to mandate vaccination for public safety.

None of that history earned a mention when Joseph Ladapo, the Florida surgeon general, announced last week that Florida would end vaccine mandates.

“Who am I to tell you what to put in your body?” he said to loud applause, at an event near Tampa. “Your body is a gift from God.”

Ladapo and others—including Kennedy—have celebrated a “your research, your choice” approach that, according to various studies, bolsters false claims of vaccine danger. Worldwide, the US is a major exporter of vaccine misinformation. But infectious diseases move along vectors of logic. And Americans are not immune.

Between 2018 and 2023, the Americas, including the US, reported nearly 50,000 confirmed cases of measles in 18 countries, according to the World Health Organisation.

Between December 2024 and April 2025, there were 212 confirmed cases of yellow fever in the region, including 85 deaths, triple the number of cases from 2024.

Many of the outbreaks had been imported from other countries, with cases coming from as far away as Thailand.

That global exchange of vaccine-preventable diseases will become more common, experts argue, because worldwide vaccination levels are still below those from before Covid—the pandemic disrupted the supply chain for many vaccines and kept people from scheduled vaccination. It is also, many add, because the US is backing away from its role as a champion of immunisation.

“It's a cliché that infectious diseases know no borders, but it is true that our global preparedness and response to infectious diseases relies on a strong US presence and US commitment to vaccination, from research to development to deployment,” said Jason L. Schwartz, a public health professor at Yale. “So the steady weakening of US government support for all aspects of vaccination will invariably weaken our response to vaccine preventable diseases around the world.”

Maybe Vietnam and a few others with vaccination rates above 95% will have enough immunity to avoid the fallout. But in many countries, a small dip in vaccination could create huge vulnerabilities. Vaccine veterans worry about countries like Papua New Guinea, where the reemergence of polio a few years ago required six rounds of vaccination and many millions of dollars to control. **NYT**

## The missing sense of rationalism

S K ARUN MURTHI

To what extent do the rationalists in India engage with rationalism in a deeper sense? What prompts me to raise this question—much to the chagrin of some who claim to be rationalists—are recent events that highlight how shallow the discourse often is.

On one side are statements made by Bharatiya Janata Party leaders Anurag Thakur and Shivraj Singh Chouhan. Thakur claimed Lord Hanuman was the first to travel in space, while Chouhan claimed that Pushpak Viman predated the Wright brothers. Chouhan made this remark at a science institute of national importance, seemingly oblivious to the incongruity between science and mythology, reason and faith. Such claims typify traditional revivalism—the attempt to legitimise aspects of the past by linking them to modern science.

On the other side stands the CPI(M) government of Kerala, which, along with the Travancore Devaswom Board, plans to host a Global Ayyappa Conclave. The DMK government in Tamil Nadu has accepted the invitation to participate in this state-sponsored religious event. Political observers see the move as a strategy to stem the drift of the Hindu voters towards the BJP.

Here, the Communist and DMK governments expose their own hypocrisy. Rationality, which they claim as a core belief, is in divergence with the practice of promoting religious conclaves. This makes them pseudo-rationalists, eroding the very significance of rationalism.

However, political parties are not alone in trivialising rationalism. Another group—self-styled, card-carrying rationalists—narrows it down to little more than miracle-busting. Their activities are mostly limited to:

a) Public shows where they debunk “godmen” like Sai Baba, explaining that the ash, rings, or necklaces produced in rituals are simple sleights of hand. These are indeed cheap tricks, but exposing them hardly exhausts the scope of rationalism.

b) Sermonising on Article 51A(h) of the Constitution, which urges citizens to cultivate scientific temper, humanism and a spirit of enquiry and reform. While this Article is vital, invoking it without deeper engagement reduces rationalism to a ritualistic citation.

What they fail to address is the philosophical dimension of rationalism. A serious dis-

cussion, for example, must begin with questions like, ‘What is rationalism?’ ‘Who were the rationalists in classical Indian philosophical literature?’ Schools such as the *Sankhyas*, the *Mimamsakas* and the *Lokayatas* openly questioned the existence of god and the very idea of godhood, offering rational arguments. Yet neither the revivalists nor the rationalists bring these traditions into conversation.

Equally absent are attempts to clarify concepts like magic, miracle, supernatural, god, or causation. Without addressing these concepts, the public's understanding of rationality remains unclear and incomplete.

Consider the notion of scientific temper. Rationalists could trace its origins and meaning. Bertrand Russell, in his 1922 Conway Memorial Lecture, described science as requiring a “critical undogmatic receptiveness”—an openness to revision in light of new evidence. That essentially is critical thinking. Jawaharlal Nehru later popularised the expression and gave his explanation in *The Discovery of India*, emphasising the role of evidence in the pursuit of truth. A discussion along these lines can bring out the difference between science and superstition. Their miracle-exposing activities can then be related to such discussions.

Lacking this depth, most rationalists in India end up, at best, as activists against blind belief in the supernatural and miracle mongering. Their work in combating superstition rooted in ignorance cannot be dismissed. But when they label believers of the irrational as un-thinkers lacking discrimination and thus portray them as objects of ridicule, their discourse collapses into empty showmanship. With no substance to back their views, they end up being sassy in the forums they have created. This sort of superficial engagement makes the Indian rationalist intellectually worn out.

Even when substantive discussions do occur, they are few and far between. It is mostly the card-carrying rationalists who seem to represent rationalism, often for visibility rather than to enrich public understanding. It is this lack of substance that makes it easy for forging a convergence of science and mythology and enabling the divergence of principle and practice.

(The writer formerly taught philosophy in the Department of Humanities and Social Science, IISER, Mohali)

### OUR PAGES OF HISTORY

50 YEARS AGO: SEPTEMBER 1975

#### Directive on MISA arrests

New Delhi, Sept. 15  
The Centre has directed all State Governments and Union Territories to ensure that detention orders made by them “actually related to the requirements of emergency.” If a detenu's activities are now within the purview of Sub-Section (I) of Section 3 of the Maintenance of Internal Security Act, the authorities concerned have been advised to take corrective action. The activities in this section relate to the maintenance of public order and supplies and services essential to the community.

25 YEARS AGO: SEPTEMBER 2000

#### The greatest show on earth begins

Sydney, Sept 15  
Underlining their desire to return to their roots and rediscover their populace, Australia today ushered in the games of the new millennium in a spectacular show of vigour and vitality at the Olympic Stadium. Fire and water, earth and sky, it was about the elements and the island continent's closeness to nature. It was also about their history and a new look at the past. The four-hour spectacle was the perfect presentation of what Australia stood for.

### OASIS | ANUPAMA K MALAGI

## The art of letting go

Letting go doesn't mean that you don't care for someone anymore. It is just realising that the only person you really have control over is yourself.' Deborah Reber

In the hustle and bustle of our life, we often believe that remembering the past, the moments that give us joy, leads to happiness. No doubt memories play a significant role in shaping our lives, but a counter-intuitive perception is that the ability to forget certain experiences can surely contribute to a state of happiness.

Being quick to forget is actually the happiest, because letting go of the

past can unlock new-found contentment. Being able to let go allows the individuals to get rid of the burden of negative memories, to live in the present, and to let go of regrets, thereby leading to emotional stability.

The art of letting go is not about forgetting or dismissing the unpleasant experience that life throws at us, but about accepting reality with grace and freeing ourselves from the burden of what we cannot change. It is an inner strength that allows us to release control,

embrace uncertainty, and trust the unfolding of life.

Embracing the art of letting go helps the individuals to create opportunities for personal growth, resilience, emotional wellbeing and new-found contentment in life.

Resilience grows out of this practice. By letting go, we make space for renewal, adaptability, and self-discovery. Resilience is not the absence of struggle, but the ability to rise each time we stumble—stronger, wiser, and more grounded.



Together, letting go and resilience form a powerful synergy: one teaches us to loosen our grip on what holds us back, while the other equips us to rebuild, realign, and move forward with courage.

Mastering this balance transforms challenges into stepping stones and endings into beginnings, allowing us to live with clarity, peace, and purpose.

So, in letting go of the past lies the key to happiness and growth. To quote Daphne Rose Kingma, “Holding on is believing that there is only a past; letting go is knowing that there is a future.”





INDIAN EXPRESS IS NOT AN INDUSTRY. IT IS A MISSION.

— Ramnath Goenka

## CRICKET FEELS CHILL OF INDIA-PAK FREEZE, OTHER SPORTS HANG IN BALANCE

CRICKET is a unique diplomacy tool when it comes to India and Pakistan that has been used for peace as well as war. Even before the teams took the field in Dubai on Sunday, there was a subplot brewing in India, with some people questioning why India were playing Pakistan after what happened in Pahalgam earlier this year. Yet, the match went ahead and ended in high drama as India won the one-sided contest—captain Suryakumar Yadav and Shivam Dube exited the ground without exchanging handshakes and greetings with the fielding team. What stunned the audience was that the India team shut the pavilion door and refused to come out to shake hands with their Pakistani counterparts. Pakistan captain Salman Agha declined to be a part of the post-match presentation. Shaking hands is not a rule in sports, nor is not doing it something new. In recent times, Ukrainian sports stars have refused to shake hands with Russians after their countries engaged in a bloody war. Political overtures do spill onto the ground. Suryakumar later said they were aligned with the government, but it would have been prudent if the government had come out with some kind of a statement. This is not the only cricketing arena where India are facing Pakistan—the women's teams will be playing each other next month in Colombo at the World Cup. The relationship is definitely not going to mend that soon.

Though in the days following the April terror attack, the atmosphere was clearly not conducive for India-Pakistan matches in any sport, things seemed to have eased a bit over the months. India, keen on hosting the Commonwealth Games in 2030 and making a strong pitch for Olympics 2036, can ill afford to disallow teams from playing in India or refuse to face a team for political reasons. For the first time, the sports ministry has made it clear that India can indeed play Pakistan in multi-nation events and Pakistan teams will be allowed to participate in multilateral events in India. Pakistan refused to play Asia Cup hockey at Rajgir in Bihar citing security reasons; they are yet to confirm participation for the Junior World Cup hockey in Chennai and Madurai later this year. After Sunday, it's not clear if things can be 'normal' soon.

## MUST PUNISH FREQUENT TRAFFIC OFFENDERS

THE Odisha government last week cleared a proposal to allow traffic law violators a window of six months to settle their penalties issued via e-challans. The one-time settlement scheme, to be rolled out shortly, intends to encourage traffic offenders to not just pay up, but also respect road safety norms. Prompting the decision to offer the settlement was the bulge of pending e-challans. By the end of July, the state had issued 77 lakh penalty notices, of which only 23 lakh had been settled; the rest had elicited no response. E-challans are issued by the transport department as well as the police, besides the Intelligent Enforcement Management System.

If a notice is not settled within 180 days, the agencies are supposed to submit a prosecution report before a court. This adds to the pendency. About 1.8 lakh e-challans are issued monthly and the resources required to prepare prosecution reports for them is huge. What is worrying is that most violators seem not to care about challans. If the penalty system is designed to act as a deterrent against traffic offences that lead to the loss of numerous lives and property, it is not clearly working. Most owners know challans just pile up and non-payment is a problem only when the vehicle is being sold.

This is a matter of national concern. The latest ministry of road transport and highways data shows at least 34.35 crore challans have been issued across India, though only 13.09 crore stand disposed. In financial terms, they translate to a staggering ₹51,161-crore claim, of which ₹31,913 crore is waiting to be collected. Such a massive sum can fund a large infrastructure project. More than the money, what's at stake is life and property. Annually, India reports more than 1.68 lakh road fatalities, while 4.4 lakh people suffer injuries. The socio-economic cost of road accidents translates to 3 percent of the GDP, according to a study. This means the government has to look for fresh options. Apart from raising awareness, suspension and cancellation of registrations and driving licences must become the norm, not an aberration, for frequent violators. Mandatory community service should also be introduced. Regular, definitive action—not leniency and administrative sloth—has to be the way forward.

### QUICK TAKE

#### BACK TO BARTER

NOT for the first time in history, when the going got tough, the wizened went back to bartering. Facing sanctions that disconnected Russian banks from dollar and euro transactions, some Russian and Chinese firms have taken to bartering goods. Last month, a Chinese company sought to trade steel and aluminium alloys in exchange for marine engines; this month traders are swapping wheat for Chinese cars. This is not coming about suddenly: last year, Russia's economy ministry issued a 14-page 'Guide to Foreign Barter Transactions'. Business-to-business bartering has gained popularity in other parts of the world, too. Only goes to show that 'punitive' measures like cutting off access to banking systems and imposing tall tariffs have limited potency.

**P**RIME Minister Narendra Modi, during his short Manipur visit on September 13 that came after more than two-and-a-half years of confounding silence since a violent conflict had broken out between the Meiteis and Kuki-Zo group of tribes, announced nothing to appease either side in the conflict.

At the two public meetings he addressed—one at the Peace Ground in Churachandpur and the other at Kangla in Imphal—there were no hints that the demand of the Kuki-Zos for a separate administration of Union territory status would be considered, nor was there a mention of dismantling of the buffer zones created after the trouble broke out, or to ensure free movement for all along the highways, which the Meiteis want.

He did meet children from relief camps at both the venues. Although in his speech he made no mention of internally displaced persons (IDPs), Governor Ajay Kumar Bhalla, who accompanied him to both the places, did say in his address that a three-phase plan for having the IDPs return to their original homes is being worked out.

The expectations of the parties in conflict were dashed, but equally disappointed are the legions of commentators standing on presumed moral high grounds who have been pronouncing their verdicts on what is and what should be in all that has been happening in Manipur.

However, to be fair, what the PM ended up doing was somewhat inevitable. Unlike what many presume, this is not a bilateral matter between the warring groups. The Meiteis and the Kuki-Zos. Manipur is a multi-ethnic state, with 33 recognised Scheduled Tribes and several non-tribal communities that include the Meities, who form a thin majority.

Continual adjustments of the frictions and tensions among these communities have been the fabric of Manipur's long history. Quite tragically, a sinew of sanity snapped in this process between Meiteis and Kuki-Zos on May 3, 2023, and a lot of the blame for this would have to go to populists who dangerously stoked and amplified the insecurities of either side.

If not for this catastrophic turn of events, all of the immediate causes of the nightmare the state is in could have been settled without resorting to violence. Eviction of encroachers from forest lands, the demand for Scheduled

The PM's belated visit to the strife-torn state couldn't be expected to solve all ills. Lasting peace can't be achieved without addressing friction along the state's many faultlines

## THE MANY MALADIES OF MANIPUR CAN'T BE HEALED IN A DAY

PRADIP PHANJOUBAM

Editor, Imphal Review of Arts and Politics



SOURAV ROY

Tribe status among a section of the Meiteis, the fight against the spread of poppy plantations, illegal immigration from across the border—all of this could have been handled legally and consensually in ways where nobody ended up demonised or dehumanised.

Given this multiplicity of interests among Manipur's many communities, even now, any plan for a lasting resolution to the present depressing crisis can only be after bringing all stakeholders on board, in particular the Nagas, who are the second largest ethnic group after the Meiteis.

This is especially so if the deemed settlement is territorial. Nagas and Kukis share virtually the same living space in the hills—with the Nagas claiming that most of the land Kukis are now settled on were and are theirs.

Unless such matters are first put to rest, bigger trouble can be expected if non-consensual settlements are pushed.

If the PM's avoidance of matters directly related to the present conflict can be understood as inhibited by this constraint, what remains unforgivable is his two-and-a-half-year delay in coming here. Had it been otherwise, and had his government ensured the law remained strictly and solely in the hands of the administration, even if it meant dismissing the then BJP state government that was obviously not up to the challenge, the wounds suffered by so many ordinary people would not have been as deep, making reconciliation far easier. But better late than never.

One message was, however, clear from the proceedings. There will be no rewards for violence and all dispute

## FISCAL ROADMAP TO GREEN GROWTH

**W**HEN India pledged net-zero emissions by 2070 at COP26, it was a blueprint for a new development model where growth and sustainability rise together. Four years later, the 56th GST Council meeting provided a powerful new instrument to advance that vision. The introduction of GST 2.0—which included a rationalisation of tax rates on renewable energy devices, green technologies and sustainable transport—has embedded climate action into the heart of fiscal policy. This is not merely about making green products cheaper. It is about re-engineering economics so that clean power and sustainable choices become the most viable pathway for citizens and industries.

The decision to reduce GST on solar panels, photovoltaic cells and wind turbines directly cuts the capital costs of renewable energy projects. This translates into more affordable tariffs for households and industries, accelerating adoption. For farmers, lower taxes on solar pumps mean reduced irrigation costs. For manufacturers, the reform strengthens the domestic supply chain under the government's production-linked incentive scheme. By enhancing competitiveness, India can position itself as a global hub for renewable energy manufacturing. For consumers, this will mean tangible savings on power costs and easier access to clean energy options. In essence, GST 2.0 ensures that renewable power is no longer an aspirational option but an accessible reality for all sections of society.

The impact of this reform goes beyond the domestic arena. As the world prepares for COP30 in Brazil, there is unprecedented scrutiny on whether nations can align fiscal, industrial and climate policies in ways that are credible and durable. Europe is moving ahead with its carbon border adjustment mechanism, which taxes carbon-intensive imports. The US is leveraging its Inflation Reduction Act to back clean manufacturing and ensure strategic leadership in the green economy.

India's rationalisation of GST on green technologies is a uniquely indigenous response to these global shifts. It creates affordability for domestic consumers while aligning India's trade and industrial ecosystem with the realities of an emerging low-carbon global economy. By making renewable technologies cheaper

and scaling domestic production, India is future-proofing its exports against carbon tariffs and ensuring that its manufacturing sector remains competitive in a world where sustainability standards are increasingly non-negotiable.

Equally significant are the reforms in waste management and green transport. The decision to reduce GST on effluent treatment services from 12 percent to 5 percent provides a clear incentive for industries and municipalities to adopt cleaner waste management solutions. This will cut pollution and simultaneously create green jobs in plant operations and maintenance.



By reducing GST rates on renewable energy technologies, effluent treatment services, biodegradable bags and buses, India is putting its fiscal priorities where its international commitment towards net-zero emissions is. This model of balancing growth and sustainability can be widely replicated

Lowering GST on biodegradable bags from 18 percent to 5 percent accelerates India's transition away from single-use plastics, a shift that directly aligns with international commitments under the UN Environment Assembly's Global Plastics Treaty. With these steps, India positions itself among countries taking systemic measures to combat plastic pollution and moves closer to building a circular economy.

The transport sector, responsible for nearly 12 percent of India's emissions, has also received a major green push. Passenger buses and minibuses—now

taxed at 18 percent, instead of 28 percent—will encourage the modernisation of fleets, expand public transport and reduce congestion and emissions. Trucks and goods carriers, which move nearly 70 percent of India's freight, will become more affordable. This will help phase out ageing, polluting fleets and reduce emissions across the logistics chain. Importantly, it also aligns with global supply chain decarbonisation efforts that multinational corporations increasingly expect from their partners and suppliers.

GST 2.0 sends a powerful signal to international investors and policymakers that India is aligning its fiscal architecture with its climate commitments under the Paris Agreement and its nationally determined contributions. It reassures trade partners that India's manufacturing ecosystem is moving towards lower emissions and greater sustainability.

This reform also strengthens India's role in the Global South. Many developing countries are grappling with the same challenge that India faces—of balancing growth with sustainability at a time when green technologies remain costly. Each nation is at a different stage of development, but all need low-cost, scalable and sustainable solutions. By showing how fiscal policy can make renewables affordable, India has created a replicable model that can inspire climate-positive taxation across the developing world. It is a model India can proudly champion at COP30 and beyond.

These reforms will be remembered as the moment when India gave fresh depth and direction to the idea of green growth. It marks the stage where fiscal and climate policy were woven into a single framework, and when India's green transition derived strength from the vitality of its own economy. With GST 2.0, India has shown that a nation can aspire to grow, compete and lead while advancing decisively along the path of sustainability. This reflects not only the essence of genuine climate leadership but also the vision of an India whose future will be defined by its unwavering commitment to green development.

(Views are personal)

### MAILBAG

WRITE TO: letters@newindianexpress.com

#### Manipur's aspirations

Ref: *Well begun, stay on long journey to healing in Manipur* (Sep 15). Prime Minister Modi's visit should herald an era where constructive engagement supersedes destructive confrontation, shared aspirations triumph over historical animosities. Manipur's resilient people deserve genuine peace, restored brotherhood and a prosperous future.

Altat Hussain, Imphal

#### Fundamental right

Ref: *Dying without care* (Sep 15). How can we attribute this whopping number of deaths to medical negligence? The most fundamental right of a citizen is the right to live, and if it is denied in the most delicate circumstances, it is an abject failure of any moral society.

Sanath Kumar T S, Thrissur

#### Nepal mediation

Ref: *Nepal's search for ideological identity* (Sep 14). The recent turmoil in Nepal amply shows that tech-savvy generation is the force to reckon with, and we can safely assume that no further dispensation would mishandle the country's resources under watchful eyes. India's statesmanship is called for to mediate for peace and stability.

Sayed Zakaullah, Cuttack

#### Rabies vigilance

Ref: *TN man dies of rabies* (Sep 15). Human rabies immunoglobulin or HRIG must be administered on and around the bite wound to provide immediate, passive immune protection until the patient produces antibodies through other vaccines. In this case, it was not given. It is the best option, and the drug's cost completely dwarfs the cost of avoidable deaths.

Dr S Shanmugam, Tirunelveli

#### Southern comfort

Ref: *Higher learning, brighter future* (Sep 15). The southern states have done well in growth and human development, but to move further, we need to focus on higher education. Academically-enriched universities and colleges can create skilled youth, better jobs, and higher productivity.

Thameem Yoosaf, Kozhikode

#### Anger wildfire

Ref: *Explaining karmic repercussions* (Sep 15). Anger, in ways, resembles fire. Like fire, if you keep feeding it, it will get stronger and eventually cause destruction. Anger sprouts delusion, from delusion to confusion of memory, then to the loss of reason, and finally, the mind is completely ruined.

R Pichumani, Thanjavur



# Blue economy can blend economic development and sustainability

Kerala will host a two-day Blue Economy Conclave at Thiruvananthapuram from September 18. It will see the convergence of leading experts and stakeholders from India and Europe, who will spotlight on sustainable development of ocean-based economic growth and partnerships. Ready-made explainers available over cyberspace define it as: The blue economy represents a transformative paradigm shift in managing ocean resources, moving decisively beyond traditional exploitation towards an integrated model that harmonises sustainable economic growth with environmental stewardship and social equity. It stands in sharp contrast to conventional maritime activities by demanding a deliberate balance between economic development, ecosystem health and inclusive livelihoods across sectors. The country's

blue economy is rapidly ascending as a vital engine for national development, strategically leveraging the nation's extensive 11,098 km-coastline and a vast 2.4 million square km Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). The Ministry of Earth Sciences, as the nodal agency, defines it as "a subset of the national economy comprising the entire system of ocean resources and man-made economic infrastructure in marine, maritime, and onshore coastal zones within India's legal jurisdiction, aiding the production of goods and services, with clear linkages to economic growth, environmental sustainability and national security". It is also recognized as a key focus pillar within India's Viksit Bharat vision for 2047. The vision of New India by 2030 lists the blue economy as one of 10 core growth areas, with a targeted \$100 billion blue economy, supported

through the Deep Ocean Mission and enhanced ocean resource utilisation. The Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) Agreement, adopted in June 2023, is a landmark international treaty aimed at protecting marine biodiversity in areas beyond national borders through conservation, sustainable use, and equitable benefit-sharing of marine genetic resources. In addition to the Ministry of Earth Sciences, 24 ministries form an integral part of the blue economy, including the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways; Ministry of Fisheries; and Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change. These ministries are undertaking various initiatives such as the Blue Revolution (2020) for sustainable fisheries, the Deep Ocean Mission (2021) and various programs under the Maritime India Vision 2030. Multiple state level initiatives

are also being undertaken by nine coastal states and four coastal union territories. During India's G20 Presidency in 2023, several world leaders committed to conserving, protecting, restoring and sustainably using the world's ocean and marine ecosystems, thereby mainstreaming the need to build a sustainable and resilient blue economy. The Chennai High Level Principles for blue/ocean-based economy were adopted at the G20 Environment and Climate Ministers meeting to promote sustainable growth of the blue economy. This aligns with India's commitments under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) to promote sustainable ocean governance and marine conservation. The high seas treaty builds upon the Convention on the Law of the Sea, 1982, and the Convention on

Biological Diversity, 1992, ratified by India on June 29, 1995 and February 18, 1994, respectively. This holistic approach encompasses established industries, such as fisheries and shipping, alongside emerging fields such as marine renewable energy, biotechnology and coastal tourism—all fundamentally anchored in sustainable practices. While a single, universally codified definition remains elusive, a strong consensus exists around the blue economy's core principles. The World Bank defines it as a "sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods and jobs while preserving the health of the ocean ecosystem". However, at present, fragmented governance, poor coordination, lack of data sharing, low private investment, and technology gaps—especially in offshore wind and deep-sea exploration—limit progress.

## LETTERS

### Engineers must emulate Sir MV

On this auspicious September 15, let us recall the glorious services and contributions of Bharat Ratna M Visvesvaraya (September 15, 1861-April 14, 1962. Regarded as one of the foremost civil engineers ever, he was one of the chief engineers to put in place a scientifically woven flood protection system for Hyderabad. He suggested sustainable flood relief measures for Hyderabad, which was under constant threat by Musi River. He was also instrumental in developing a system to protect Visakhapatnam Port from sea erosion. Sir Visweswaraya is hailed for exemplary role as regards the KSR Dam at Mysore. On this occasion, I call upon all chief engineers in the country to implement permanent flood relief measures as suggested by Visveswaraya and Padma Bhushan Dr K L Rao. Let us not suffer any more from natural calamities.

G Murali Mohan Rao, Secunderabad-11

### Waqf verdict: Blow to Centre

The Supreme Court has declined to stay the entire Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025 as it did not think it fell in the 'rarest of rare category', but stayed its key provisions, frustrating the government's intention to gain control over waqf properties by some means or the other. The top court did not foreclose the option of challenging the entire law. The worst of this piece of legislation, described as a thinly veiled attempt to seize Muslim-owned and controlled properties, has been stayed, much to the relief of right-thinking people, who cherish India's religious pluralism. The government's claim that the verdict was a moral victory was obviously made to save its face from embarrassment. Broadly speaking, the verdict is a blow to the Modi government's 'majoritarian agenda'. The gloomy countenance of the otherwise animated pro-BJP TV anchors was a giveaway of the verdict's impact. The very fact that the top court deemed it necessary to stay key provisions of a law enacted by the Parliament brings no great credit to the government. The verdict nullified the whole object of the law - 'creeping acquisition of Muslim properties', as the petitioners in the case put it. The government must keep in mind the likely scrutiny by the apex court when it brings in new laws unilaterally.

G. David Milton, Maruthancode (TN)

### India silences Pakistan

It is an accepted fact that Pakistan is a terrorist state, which never believed in peace, and wished to bleed India without any remorse. While the massacre is unforgivable, it is astonishing that Indians were divided on the need to play against Pakistan in the ongoing Asia Cup championship. Despite an overwhelming call to boycott the match, BCCI was given a silent nod from Prime Minister Narendra Modi to go ahead. This has come as a major shock to the nation. However, by not playing against Pakistan at a neutral venue would have invited criticism from ICC while Pakistan could play the victim card to telling effect. This certainly is not in the larger interest of the nation and sport. Meanwhile, the demolition of Pakistan must come as a strong reminder to Pakistan that India can win on the battlefield and on the sports field. At the same time, it is a message to the ICC to ban the terror state from all future international tournaments.

K R Srinivasan, Secunderabad-3

### Rains expose poor planning by Hyd civic body

The recent torrential rains in Hyderabad exposed once again the alarming inadequacies in our civic planning and readiness. I was distressed to find that many areas were brought to a standstill due to water logging. The disruption created chaos that impacted education, emergencies, and work; ambulances and halting emergency vehicles clashed against blockages of vehicles. Rain can be seen as a natural path of life, though frequently disrupting our lives shows an ill-conceived drainage system, urban planning, and dismal emergency and disaster management systems. The authorities need to swing into action and clear drains, dewater and regulate traffic on a priority basis.

Jaskeerath Kaur, St Francis College for Women

thehansreader@gmail.com

## BENGALURU ONLINE

### HC dismisses PIL against Banu Mushtaq inaugurating Dasara

BENGALURU: The Karnataka High Court on Monday dismissed a public interest litigation (PIL) filed by BJP leader and former MP Pratap Simha and others, who had opposed the selection of Booker Prize-winning writer Banu Mushtaq to inaugurate this year's Mysuru Dasara.

The division bench comprising Chief Justice Vibhu Bakhru and Justice C.M. Joshi held that there was no violation of any constitutional right in the matter. "We do not find any infringement of rights in this case. Hence, the petition is dismissed," the bench ruled.

Pratap Simha's counsel, Sudarshan, argued that inviting Banu Mushtaq was "inappropriate" as she had allegedly made remarks against Hindu traditions and the Kannada language. "She has given objectionable statements about Goddess Bhuvaneshwari and the Kannada flag. Such a person should not be chosen to inaugurate Dasara," the counsel submitted, producing English translations of her remarks before the bench.

The petition also contended that the inauguration of Dasara, which begins with a floral offering to Goddess Chamundeshwari, should not be entrusted to someone "opposed to the tradition." The Chief Justice, however, questioned the very basis of the petition. "In this country, it is not wrong for someone to express their opinion. Which of your rights have been violated here?" he asked.

He further pointed out, "If a priest's right to perform rituals is taken away, you may question it. If someone's property is seized, you may challenge it. But in this case, what right of yours has been violated?"

Read more at <https://epaper.thehansindia.com>

# Salwa Judum and the Republic's dilemma-Security at the cost of rights



PROF M SRIDHAR ACHARYULU

When Justice Sudarshan Reddy fought for the position of the Vice President of India, his landmark judgement on the conflict between the Rule of Law and governance of the Executive was discussed widely. In July 2011, the Supreme Court delivered one of its most powerful constitutional pronouncements in Nandini Sundar & Others vs. State of Chhattisgarh, popularly known as the Salwa Judum case. At the heart of the decision was a simple but profound question: Can the State, in the name of combating insurgency, arm untrained civilians and outsource the monopoly of violence that belongs solely to lawful state institutions?

The Court's emphatic answer was no. The practice of creating and arming Special Police Officers (SPOs) from among tribal youth to fight Maoist insurgents was declared unconstitutional, illegal, and in violation of Articles 14 and 21 of the Constitution. As someone who has studied, taught and written extensively about constitutional law, many experts, including this writer, saw this judgment not just as a prohibition against a particular policy but as a moral compass for governance. More than a decade later, its echoes are deeply relevant to India's contemporary crises.

### The Supreme Court's ruling: Why it stood out:

The Supreme Court, led by Justices B. Sudershan Reddy

and S.S. Nijjar did not limit itself to procedural questions. Instead, it dug into the essence of constitutional governance.

### The apex court made four crucial points:

Monopoly of violence belongs only to the State-The State cannot delegate coercive powers to untrained and unregulated civilian groups. Any attempt to do so undermines the rule of law.

Fundamental rights cannot be suspended by governance shortcuts-Arming civilians and placing them in direct conflict with insurgents violated the rights to equality and life under Articles 14 and 21.

Administrative convenience is not an excuse-The Court rejected the argument that economic hardship or manpower shortage justified outsourcing policing functions. Constitutional duties cannot be abandoned for expediency.

The State must remain a protector, not a predator-In trying to fight Maoists by unconstitutional means, the State risked becoming indistinguishable from the forces of violence it claimed to oppose.

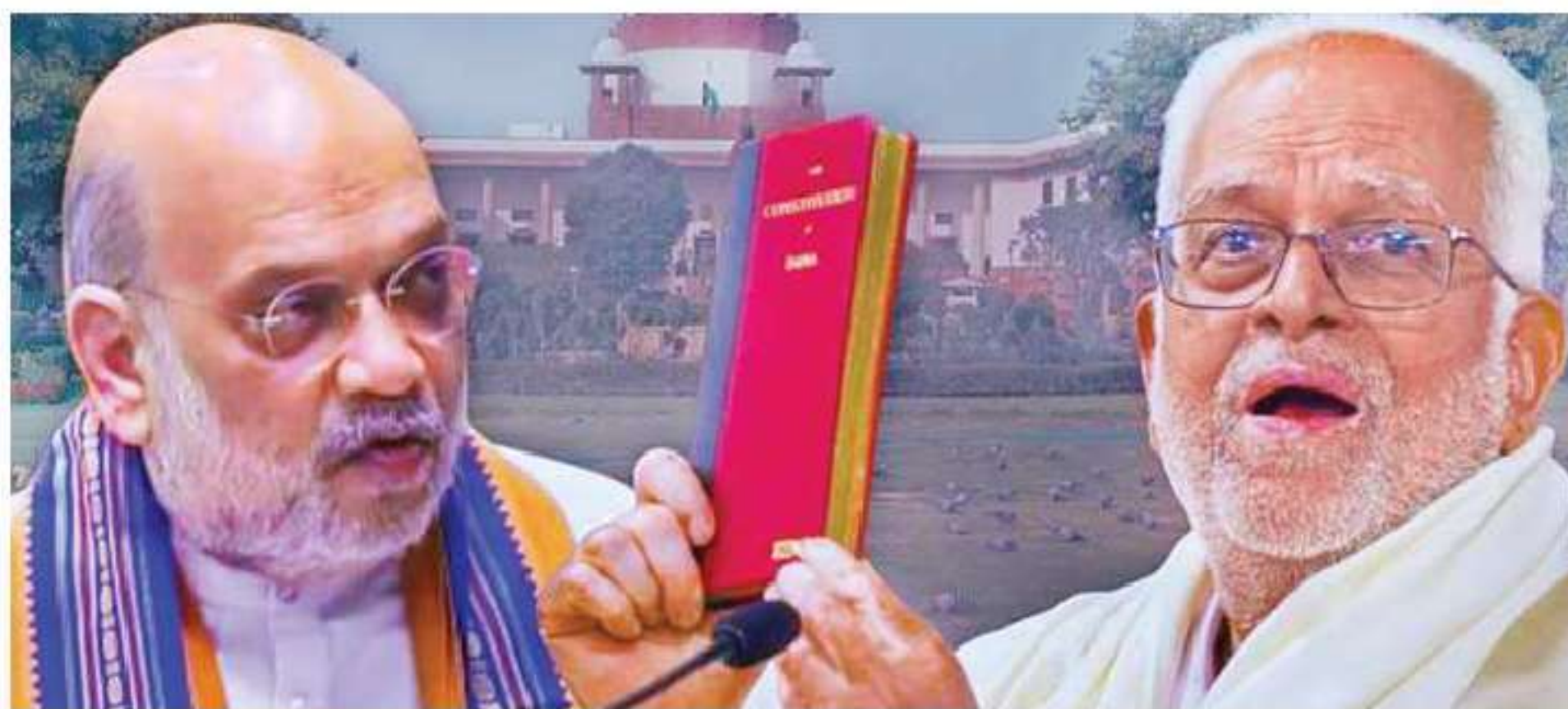
In its essence, the judgment was a reminder that the ends do not justify the means when those means tear at the fabric of constitutional morality.

Connecting the judgment to today's India: The beauty of landmark constitutional pronouncements is that they travel beyond their immediate contexts.

The Salwa Judum judgment was about Chhattisgarh and Maoist insurgency. But today, it speaks of multiple ongoing crises in India.

1. **Manipur's Ethnic Violence (2023-2025):** The prolonged conflict in Manipur has seen allegations of civilians being armed and local militias operating unchecked. Houses have been set ablaze; communities displaced, and the authority of the State fractured.

This situation is a chilling reminder of what the Supreme Court warned against in



The judgment also underscores another critical idea: human dignity as the core of constitutional morality. By placing untrained tribal youth in direct conflict with heavily armed insurgents, the State was treating them as expendable instruments, not as citizens with dignity. The Court rightly called out this violation

Salwa Judum. When governments allow or encourage parallel forces to act as enforcers, they invite lawlessness. The judgment is a constitutional mirror to Manipur: the State must disarm militias, restore the monopoly of lawful policing, and rebuild trust in constitutional institutions.

2. **Rise of vigilantism across India:** Whether it is cow-protection groups, anti-conversion squads, or local committees taking justice into their own hands, India has seen a surge of non-state actors exercising coercive authority.

The Salwa Judum judgment makes it clear that even tacit state encouragement of such groups is unconstitutional. If law enforcement looks the other way—or worse, legitimises vigilantes—it is abdicating its constitutional role. The Court's words echo strongly: law cannot be upheld by illegality.

3. **Outsourcing of security and surveillance:** In recent years, there has been a growing trend of outsourcing security functions—whether through private contractors, neighborhood

watch committees, or even technology companies engaged in surveillance.

The judgment's principle applies here as well. Efficiency, cost-saving, or administrative ease cannot override the constitutional requirement that coercive power must remain within accountable, legally regulated state institutions. Otherwise, citizens are left vulnerable to abuse with little recourse.

### The larger constitutional philosophy:

The Salwa Judum case was more than a policy review. It was a constitutional reaffirmation of the social contract. Citizens surrender some freedoms to the State in return for protection, justice and equality under the law. If the State outsources its role or weaponizes civilians, it betrays that contract.

Experts have emphasised that the Constitution is not a set of flexible rules to be bent in moments of crisis. It is the very foundation of governance. When crises test us most, fidelity to the Constitution becomes even more important.

The judgment also underscores another critical idea:

human dignity as the core of constitutional morality. By placing untrained tribal youth in direct conflict with heavily armed insurgents, the State was treating them as expendable instruments, not as citizens with dignity. The Court rightly called out this violation.

### Why this judgment matters more than ever before:

As India moves forward, the temptation to find "shortcuts" in governance will always remain. Political leaders may argue that extraordinary times require extraordinary measures. But the Salwa Judum verdict warns us: when the State fights illegality with illegality, it ceases to be a constitutional republic.

### The ongoing debates:

Should technology companies with private algorithms be allowed to determine surveillance and policing?

Should local vigilante groups be tolerated because they serve "community protection"?

Should economic constraints justify privatising essential state functions like law enforcement?

In all these debates, the an-

# National anxieties and personal fear reveal one's comfort levels in flags

CALLUM BLADES

The recent proliferation of English flags, from lamp-posts to roundabouts, can be viewed as more than a simple act of patriotism. It could be argued that it is an expression of deep-seated national anxieties.

Hanging these flags may function as a public psychological defence against a world perceived as increasingly complicated. Against this uncertainty, a flag is a simple, bold symbol. It provides a stark distinction between "us" and "them", potentially allowing for a sense of order and belonging.

Flags may help us manage what psychoanalyst Melanie Klein called "persecutory anxiety"—the fear that we are being pursued or attacked. When we feel overwhelmed by forces such as economic instability,

social change or a health crisis, we do what we can to cope. We may, for example, resort to a primary psychological defence known as "splitting".

This is a process in which we divide the world into two camps: the "good" and the "bad". The flags, in this sense, can become a public object onto which we project our anxieties. Those who choose to put up the flag in public spaces may feel a part of the "good", authentic, local group and feel the need to differentiate themselves from external "bad" forces, such as unseen globalist elites, the "woke" mob, or anyone who is offended by their flag. These forces are perceived as being linked to the person's problems.

Psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott developed a concept called a "transitional object" to describe the crutches we use in



times of anxiety. When a child is moving from a state of total dependence on their primary caregiver as a baby to a state of recognising themselves as a separate person, they often become intensely attached to a teddy or other toy. The teddy is an object they keep with them that reminds them of their infancy as they move into a new, unknown state, and becomes an omnipotent extension of one's inner psychic world. In the same way, a flag is a physical item that people can hold on to,

It provides a feeling of stability and continuity – and a reminder of a more stable past – as we move into an uncertain future. People might even find a sense of control and empowerment in the offence caused to some others with their flag. They stop perceiving themselves as passive victims of uncertain political or economic circumstances and start seeing themselves as an actor. The flag is a way of saying: "I am here, and I am on the side of good".

An appeal to our emotions: Flags are not the only recent example of our tendency to gravitate towards symbolic objectives to channel stress. During the pandemic, for example, simple physical objects and the associated ideology could be seen as a way for people to identify with a like-minded community. People displayed

NHS rainbow flags in their windows. And baking banana bread or sourdough or banging pots and pans became objects of solidarity during lockdowns. Those who opposed masks and lockdowns pasted stickers around the urban environment inviting people to join conspiratorial groups in another form of group action. These objects may have helped us convert the anxiety of lockdown and social change into shared symbols.

National flags could be seen to function in a similar way, acting as an invitation to join a community built around a shared symbolic meaning.

It's possible that what makes these actions so effective is that they bypass rational debate and appeal directly to our emotions. You don't need a complex understanding of economics or immigration policy to under-

stand a flag. It is an immediate, emotive symbol that allows for a powerful sense of unity and shared purpose. This may be the reason why such movements can spread so quickly and seemingly without a leader. The flag itself comes to the fore as the call to action, drawing people into a mutually reinforcing social system.

Recognising these underlying psychological dynamics helps us understand the enduring appeal of these movements. They may show us that to understand the world, we could first look at how we, as individuals and as a society, manage our deepest fears.

The flags on our streets may not just be a political statement, but potentially a sign of a society grappling with its anxieties.

(The writer is associated with Bournemouth University)



DECCAN  
Chronicle

16 SEPTEMBER 2025

SC strikes a fair balance  
in Waqf Act case verdict

The Supreme Court’s interim order staying some of the contentious provisions of the Waqf (Amendment) Act, 2025, while refusing to put the Act in its entirety on hold appears to do justice to the law in that it allows some timely modifications and disallows those that would create more problems than it could possibly solve.

The court has offered relief to the petitioners in three important areas in which they sought its intervention. Among them, the stay on the provision allowing the district collector to derecognise a disputed waqf land is most welcome. The court has found that allowing a government officer to decide such a dispute is against the principle of separation of powers and also held that disputed waqf properties will not be affected till the question is decided by the tribunal or the court. The court has, in fact, taken off the immediate threat of government takeover of waqf properties under dispute now.

The court has also upended the government’s attempt to fill the waqf boards and councils with non-Muslims and ruled that there will be no more than four non-Muslim members in the 20-member Central Waqf Council and a maximum of three non-Muslims in the State Waqf Boards.

The law, in its original form, had envisaged a situation where non-Muslims could be in majority in a mechanism that is authorised to manage properties dedicated to an Islamic cause. It was an attempt to undermine Article 26 of the Constitution which allows every religious denomination to own and acquire movable and immovable property and to administer them. The court, in its final order, ought to explain why it would allow a non-Muslim to be the chief executive officer of the State Waqf Boards.

The court has stayed the condition that a person should be a practitioner of Islam for at least five years for dedicating a property as waqf, holding that it could lead to arbitrariness unless there is a proper mechanism to decide who is a practising Muslim. The court has flagged the fear that some smart people would convert to Islam and dedicate their property as waqf only to avoid legal confiscation. This is welcome, but the court, while making the final order, will have to explain as to how the dedication of property to a religious institution or cause can be limited to the practitioners of Islamic faith and not others.

The court has chosen not to intervene in the condition that all waqf properties must be registered, saying that the provision has been there since the 1923 Act; it has also allowed the scrapping of the provision for ‘waqf-by-user’ and the bar on creating waqfs over Scheduled Areas and protected monuments. The court has pointed out that there is no retrospective effect for these provisions.

The provision for ‘waqf by use’ may have been misused in certain cases but there are waqf properties which have remained so for centuries but without registration or documents. There has to be a mechanism to protect such bona fide claims. The court may probably suggest one in its final verdict.

Reforms are a continuous process in a democracy which help various arms of society move with the times. In that sense, the waqf amendment law was a laudable exercise but was coloured by the political agenda of the ruling party. The judiciary has stepped in to correct the imbalance, and it will hopefully come up with a more balanced and fair system when it pronounces its final verdict.

‘No handshakes’ is not cricket

Sport is war minus the shooting”, George Orwell wrote because he believed sporting contests evoked hypernationalism and would only help increase the ill-will between nations. Proof of Orwellian perspicacity may have been seen in the way the India-Pakistan cricket match in the Asia Cup in Dubai unfolded with Team India players refusing to observe the sporting code of conduct in shaking hands with their opponents after soundly beating them in a neutral arena in Dubai, UAE.

Coming so soon on the heels of the Pakistan-sponsored terror attack in Pahalgam in April and the consequent military conflict in May, the fact that India was playing against Pakistan at cricket had raised the hackles of the people. It was in fear of the adverse reaction of much of India which bristled against any contact with Pakistan that the team may have thought up this bizarre way of showing its contempt for the opponent.

A reason for their playing Pakistan was not purely commercial as the two nations have always kept their commitments to play in multilateral events since 1984 when they first met in the Asia Cup in Sharjah. But, once they had chosen to play in conformity with the principle that participation in such events is the norm and boycotts are the exception, they should have observed all the courtesies associated with the gentleman’s game of cricket, particularly that of the captains shaking hands before the toss and the players and the support staff after the game.

If sport, especially a non-contact game like cricket, does not follow the spirit in which it is to be played, regardless of the outcome which may depend on which team played well on a given day, it may lose its very purpose. Not without reason has the phrase ‘It’s not cricket’ become such a telling metaphor for fair play. The BCCI, which controls the game with its financial clout, may have seen its purpose served in participating in the Asia Cup which it is hosting in the UAE, but it is guilty of running with the hare and hunting with the hounds.

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South Asia’s youth crisis:  
A warning bell in Nepal



Patralekha  
Chatterjee

Dev 360

There are two ways to process the turbulence around us. One is to comfort ourselves with comparisons — India is bigger, more diverse, more resilient than its neighbours, and therefore we need not worry. The other is to be quietly grateful we are not in freefall, but self-aware enough to recognise that pockets of social upheaval, deep pools of distress and youth joblessness are already derailing India’s goal of becoming the best version of itself.

That is why youth outmigration must be seen not as a statistic, but as a signal — the canary in the coal mine of South Asia’s development crisis.

Nepal provides the latest warning. Nepal has long faced political turmoil, but its Gen Z-led protests in September 2025 reveal how pent-up youth frustration can erupt in unpredictable ways. Gen Z, born between 1997 and 2012, is the first generation raised in a hyperconnected world shaped by digital fluency and economic precarity.

In September 2025, Kathmandu erupted in youth protests after the government blocked 26 major social media platforms. But as Atul Chandra and Pramesh Pokharel wrote: “Kathmandu is on edge not because of ‘apps’, but because a generation raised on the promise of democracy and mobility has collided with an economy and political order that keep shutting every door.” The ban was the spark. The fuel was structural: mass youth outmigration, elite impunity, and a broken development model.

After a week of violent and destructive protests, Nepal finally has a caretaker Prime Minister. Former Chief Justice Sushila Karki — Gen Z’s choice and Nepal’s first woman PM — will lead an interim citizens’ government.

The lessons are clear. In 2024-25, Nepal issued 839,266

labour permits. Remittances made up 33% of GDP, among the highest ratios worldwide. Chandra and Pokharel describe this migration as “the silent plebiscite”, and “a referendum on a model that exports its youth to low-wage contracts while importing basics, and that depends on patronage rather than productivity”.

The public square, online and offline, is the only space left for asserting dignity. When that square was shut down, the explosion was inevitable.

Nepal’s youth are broadly divided into two archetypes. The fighters — urban, educated, digitally fluent Gen Z protesters who demanded transparency and representation. And the leavers — rural, economically marginalised youth who board planes for low-wage jobs abroad, often exploited and invisible. They may not often seem residents of the same space, but they share the same grievance: a system that rewards inherited privilege and punishes aspiration.

Over three million Nepalese (14% of total population) are working abroad, primarily in Malaysia, the Gulf countries, and India. Migration is now a public spectacle of government failure: visible in remittance-fuelled inequality, social media posts from abroad, and stories of disillusioned returnees. There is widespread anger against corruption. The slogans during the mass protests were blunt: “No More Nepo Babies”; “Nepal belongs to us, not the corrupt”.

This dynamic is not unique to Nepal. “Remittances are often the most important source of foreign inflow for countries in South Asia, ahead of foreign direct investments and other capital inflows, and has contributed significantly to the region’s development. In fact, South Asia is the largest recipient of remittances for a sub-region in the world, with

Nepal has long faced political turmoil, but its Gen Z-led protests in September 2025 reveal how pent-up youth frustration can erupt in unpredictable ways.

the majority of them directed at India, which is the largest recipient of remittances in the world by country,” notes the “South Asia Migration Report 2024”, edited by migration expert S. Irudaya Rajan. Across Asia, in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Indonesia, youth-led uprisings have echoed similar frustrations. These uprisings are part of a regional reckoning with inequality, exclusion and flaunting of privilege.

Migration also creates social divides — between those who leave, those who stay and those who return. These divides can align with ethnic, religious, or political fault lines, turning protests violent when targeted against perceived beneficiaries of the status quo.

India’s scale and diversity buffer it from systemic collapse. But complacency is not an option. “India is not quite in the same position as Nepal, Bangladesh or Sri Lanka, where street revolts have toppled governments. It is too vast; its economy is too diverse. And critically, though India has huge inequalities and millions of young jobless citizens — and has experienced mass protests — there are safety valves. Even if flawed, we have a federal structure, Opposition-ruled states, and an active judiciary. The ruling party understands that agitations can act as safety valves, and they carefully leverage this. But disaffection has shown up in fewer votes for the ruling party, as we saw in the 2024 general election,” says Niranjan Sahoo, senior fellow at the Observer Research Foundation. Mr Sahoo, who focuses on governance, democracy, and federalism, adds: “Youth outmigration and remittances are not guaranteed, especially as the world becomes increasingly protectionist and anti-immigrant sentiments sweep across many countries. Many of those who would have left will now have to

stay back. These are warning signals we cannot afford to ignore.”

India’s urban youth (15-29) unemployment hovered around 19% in July 2025, according to the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS). Young people scramble for unstable gig work. The desperation is real, and rising. Beneath the surface of growth lie districts where migration has long been the escape valve. The valve is tightening.

Punjab is the epicentre. With over 13% of rural households having a member abroad, it has been hit hard by US deportations and visa crackdowns. Kerala, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh also have pockets where remittances mask deep joblessness and economic fragility.

What Nepal shows us is that youth outmigration is not just an economic trend; it is a political signal. It is the quiet protest that precedes the loud one. When young people leave en masse, it is not just for better wages. Nepal’s protests show what happens when inequality is ignored, when corruption is normalised, and when youth are treated as a problem rather than a constituency.

No one can predict the eventual outcome of Nepal’s street protests. The two other recent examples from South Asia point in two different directions. Sri Lanka now has a government that is at least more responsive to citizens’ aspirations than previous governments. Bangladesh remains in turmoil more than a year after the government fell. All three shows Gen Z cannot be ignored.

India’s median age is 28; it must act — not out of fear, but out of foresight. That means fixing the skilling pipeline, investing in local economies, and creating dignified employment. It means replacing remittance-complacency with an employment-first development model.

Because when the youth have nowhere to go, they can turn hostile.

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LETTERS

MANIPUR’S FUTURE

After a careful reading of the aftereffects of the PM’s much awaited visit to Manipur and the reactions of the two warring groups, one cannot but conclude that like the South and North poles they can never meet on common grounds of welfare and development. Each group is suspecting the other as its enemy and a stumbling block for progress and prosperity. The prudent course would be to divide the State into two on linguistic and ethnic basis under the direct control of the President of India. The situation is such that both ethnic groups have become like oil and water which cannot be mixed. Let us hope that two new States, if created, will carry on like Telangana and Andhra Pradesh.

Marudamalaiyan  
Coimbatore

PAKISTAN PULPED

Fielding talented all-rounders, Team India made easy meat of Pakistan by winning the Asia Cup match against an archrival. Even though the key match missed out on the fanfare and even the customary handshake and hype, India spun out Pakistan in style. Kuldeep Yadav was declared the Man of the Match. The left arm twerker was kept under the shadow of the famed spinners and now came out with flying colours in a key match. Every tournament has its own set of rules and regulations. There are tournaments where protocol demands that one needs to shake hands at the toss.

CK SUBRAMANIAM  
Chennai

Mail your letters to [chennaidesk@deccanmail.com](mailto:chennaidesk@deccanmail.com)

Aakar Patel



Where the Chinese  
State has succeeded;  
and what the Indian  
State has focused on

An American scholar has written a book in which he tries to explain China’s recent rise. Dan Wang’s thesis is that China is a society of engineers and its government is the rule of engineers, as compared to the United States, which he classifies as a society of lawyers. China is good at manufacturing and building things, he says, while the US is not. So why is this the case?

The answer is regarding the choices that the Chinese State has made, especially in 2015 when it laid out the “Made in China 2025” plan. Sometimes these choices do not work, as Wang points out. An engineering-led mindset produced China’s brutal lockdown in Shanghai or unacceptable things like the “one-child” policy. But it is also why China has succeeded in industrial policy at the highest level — high-speed rail, renewable energy, electric vehicles, ship-building, and has caught up in aviation, semiconductors, rocketry and artificial intelligence.

In all these areas, what the State has intended to achieve, it has delivered. This is an interesting theme and we

will keep returning to it in this column. Today, I wanted to ask ourselves the same question: What has the Indian State intended to achieve, and has it been successful in doing this?

On the side of the economy, jobs and, especially, foreign policy, the answer is now clear, and on both sides of the argument the debate is only about who is to blame. That does not concern us here today. Let us look at an area where the Indian State has succeeded in the choices it has made.

This month was passed the Rajasthan Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Bill 2025. It is aimed at two things — criminalising interfaith marriage between Hindus and Muslims and preventing people, particularly the marginalised communities, from becoming Christians.

Like with other laws of this type, the Rajasthan law punishes conversions, but not all of them. It says: “If any person re-converts to the original religion, i.e. ancestral religion, the same shall not be deemed to be a conversion”, and explains ancestral religion as “the religion in which the forefathers/ances-

tors of the person had faith, belief or was practised”.

Readers will not need to be told what this means because it is clear. This phrasing was introduced to us in the first law of our era on this subject. This was the Uttarakhand Freedom of Religion Act 2018. It was followed by similar laws in Himachal Pradesh (2019), Uttar Pradesh (2020), Madhya Pradesh (2021), Gujarat (2021), Haryana (2022) and Karnataka (2022).

All of these laws were passed by the BJP. The Rajasthan law adds something new. It also has criminalised all forms of propagation. It says that the dissemination of information, ideas, or beliefs through the media, social media and messaging apps is unlawful if this is interpreted as propagation of religion intended for conversion.

It also increases punishment, now being at up to 14 years in jail and 20 years, if the person changing faith is a Dalit or Adivasi. All of these BJP laws are in violation of pretty much the entire panel of fundamental rights, but they have become acceptable in our society. It will be the rare reader, even

of this column, who knew about the Rajasthan law, cleared on September 9, because this is no longer news as our TV debates understand that word.

To tie the argument up, it is important to accept that the State has succeeded in achieving what is set out to do. Politically it is difficult to reverse the laws because socially they have been made acceptable. The number of people either in favour of these laws or disinterested in them outnumber those who are in favour of their repeal.

The Karnataka law came into effect on May 17, 2022. Like the others, it requires people wanting to convert to give 30 days’ notice to the district magistrate. This bureaucrat will then put the application up on a notice board in his office and in the office of the tehsildar, calling for objections.

After it won the Assembly elections in May 2023, the Congress said it would undo this law. The following month, on June 15, news under this headline was published: “Siddaramaiah-led Karnataka government withdraws anti-conversion law”.

That did not happen. A few days ago,

on September 8, it was reported that the government “will seek legal opinion on the Karnataka Protection of Right to Freedom of Religion Act, popularly known as the anti-conversion law, and decide on further action”.

This means that the law is still intact. The state under the BJP made some choices on behalf of Indians beginning in 2014 and resulting in laws on beef that began in 2015, on freedom of religion which began in 2018, on citizenship which began in 2019, and on other things linked at ending pluralism and at the targeting of minorities.

It has achieved what it has intended to achieve here. We may not have had a “Made in China 2025” policy and whatever unserious efforts we have made on this and other fronts have flopped. But it is hard not to accept the total victory of the “Remake India 2025” policy, whose fruits we can see in the laws, the media and indeed in the society all around us.

The writer is the chair of Amnesty International India. Twitter: @aakar\_patel



The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

No handshake

Indian cricket team makes a strong statement

THE shadow of the Pahalgam terror attack loomed large over the India-Pakistan cricket clash in Dubai on Sunday, with the Indian team led by Suryakumar Yadav refusing the customary handshake with the rival side after its emphatic victory. The bitterness was palpable even before the match began as Yadav and Pakistan skipper Salman Ali Agha neither shook hands nor made eye contact during the toss. They also handed over their respective team sheets to the match referee rather than to each other. And Yadav delivered a no-holds-barred political punch after the match when he expressed solidarity with the Pahalgam victims and dedicated the win to the armed forces which took part in Operation Sindoor.

Geopolitical discord has clearly spilled over to the playing field, and the situation may only worsen as two more India-Pak encounters are a possibility in the ongoing Asia Cup. Yadav's squad found itself in a tight spot on match eve due to widespread resentment back home over India's decision to play against Pakistan despite the cross-border conflict. Opposition parties, in particular, have accused the government of adopting a "business as usual" approach months after the four-day-long hostilities between the two neighbours. The cash-rich BCCI has come under fire for prioritising money over public sentiment. Notably, Shikhar Dhawan and other Indian veterans, who were not officially representing the country in an event held on English soil in July, had pulled out of a match against Pakistan, citing "prevailing tensions".

India has avoided the extreme step of boycotting Pakistan in international tournaments hosted by neutral countries. As per the Centre's new sports policy, Indian teams and players are prohibited from travelling to Pakistan; a similarly tough stand has been taken by the Pakistani government. Pushed to the wall, the Indian cricket team has made a strong political statement. That should suffice to pacify their compatriots. The challenge for Yadav and his team-mates is to maintain their focus on winning the Asia Cup. The firm favourites should not let any distraction disrupt their dominant march.

Hard-hitting TV

Emmy for *Adolescence* a call for global rewiring

BRITISH mini-series *Adolescence*, which kick-started a global debate about the corrosive impact of social media and misogynist influencers on teenage boys, has scooped six Emmys — television's equivalent of the Oscars. At just 15, Owen Cooper, who plays a 13-year-old boy arrested for the brutal murder of a teenage girl, is the youngest-ever male Emmy winner in any acting category. The hit Netflix series shows the aftermath of the stabbing while exploring the online 'manosphere' — how time on the Internet shapes the boy next door into a radicalised, rageful teenager. *Adolescence* forces viewers to have a hard look at the unfiltered domination of social media. As boys just forming their sense of identity begin to internalise toxic ideas of what it means to be a man, the easy tools Internet provides can lead to normalisation of cultural misogyny. It's scary, but all too real.

All four of the hour-long episodes involved filming everything in one go, without interruption, making the viewing experience more immersive. The series has struck a chord the world over as parents deal with the unique challenges thanks to the smartphones their children won't let go of. It has also led to calls for strong emotional support systems that can help deal with the child's need to seek out anything that gives a temporary sense of power or belonging. *Adolescence* shines a light on the powerlessness of families, too, in the relentless battle against the ills of the screen.

The concerns are universal: phone addiction, cyberbullying, sexual violence, sexist language, mental health decline and poor academic performance. Starting difficult but essential conversations with children early is now unavoidable. The solutions also lie in the cross-cultural exchange of ideas, borrowing from experiences such as strict Internet controls and structured counselling.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

LAHORE, WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 1925

Finance of Lahore municipality

THE report of the committee appointed by the local government in January 1925 to examine the financial position of the Municipal Committee, Lahore, is an interesting document and deals exhaustively with the receipts and expenditure of the municipality as well as various expensive schemes contemplated to improve its water supply, drainage, roads and other services. The Committee of Enquiry consisted of the Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner, Lahore; Secretary, Punjab Finance Department; Examiner, Local Fund Accounts; and the president of the municipality. The terms of reference were: (1) What are the requirements of the Municipal Committee if it is to bring its essential services up to a reasonable standard of efficiency and maintain them at that standard? (2) To what extent are those requirements met or could be met from the committee's existing resources if unnecessary expenditure were cut down and to what extent do the existing resources require to be or are capable of being supplemented by: (a) Increasing the existing taxation, or (b) Introducing fresh taxation, or (c) Exploiting other sources of income, or (d) By raising a loan or loans; (3) If the requirements of the committee cannot be met by these methods, how can the existing resources be applied so as to produce the best, though limited, results? A Langley, who, as Commissioner of Lahore and president of the committee, took great pains to arrange the vast array of facts and figures, deserves credit for the completeness and lucidity of the report, which he could not sign owing to his having left the division at the time.

How India foiled Op Gibraltar in 1965

Pakistan's plan to trigger an uprising in Kashmir came to naught in the absence of local support



CAPT AMARINDER SINGH  
FORMER PUNJAB CM AND  
1965 WAR VETERAN

THE 1965 India-Pakistan war officially began on September 6, but Pakistan's covert infiltration into Kashmir commenced earlier with Operation Gibraltar, launched in early August.

This operation aimed to incite a civil uprising in Kashmir and was orchestrated under the leadership of then Pakistan Foreign Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. He presumed that Kashmiris were ready to revolt and would welcome Pakistani forces as liberators.

A high-level meeting to plan this operation took place on May 15 at the headquarters of Pakistan's 12 Division in Murree. It was attended by President Ayub Khan, Chief of Army Staff Gen Muhammad Musa Khan, Chief of the General Staff Gen Malik Sher Bahadur and others. It was decided that a specialised force, code-named Gibraltar Force, would be deployed in various sectors across the ceasefire line.

This force consisted of six main groups — Tariq, Qasim, Khalid, Salahuddin, Ghaznavi and Babur. Each group was assigned specific targets in Kashmir. The objective was to infiltrate Indian territory, sabotage communication lines and infrastructure, and trigger an uprising, creating conditions for a larger military offensive by Pakistan.

At the time of Operation Gibraltar, 12 Division's area of responsibility covered a 640-km front. The operation had three primary objectives:

- (1) Disrupt Indian military and civilian control of J&K.
- (2) Encourage, assist and direct an armed revolt by the



60 YEARS OF THE WAR: In its edition dated August 13, 1965, *The Tribune* carried a photo of two Pakistani officers — Capt Ghulam Hussain and Capt Mohammad Sajjad — who were captured by the Indian Army. FILE PHOTO

people of Kashmir against military occupation.

(3) Create conditions for an advance by the Azad Kashmir forces into the heart of 'India-occupied' Kashmir, followed by its eventual 'liberation'.

The plan of the GOC (General Officer Commanding) of 12 Division, Maj Gen Akhtar Hus-sain Malik, envisaged two phases — first, to create a shock wave by launching attacks on selected targets and thus prepare the ground for an uprising, and second, to integrate it into the guerrilla operations.

The infiltration was scheduled to begin on August 5. That day, a Gujar boy named Mohammad Din reported to the Indian police his encounter with suspicious armed men in the forest near Tangmarg. The 19 Division was alerted. Indian patrols intercepted and killed several infiltrators. They were identified as members of the Salahuddin group led by Major Mansha Khan. It was the first confirmed intrusion of the war.

Similar incidents occurred in other sectors. In the Rajouri area, Capt CN Singh of 2 Garhwal Rifles led a small patrol that attacked a stronger Pakistani unit. He was killed in action and

The Indian forces responded with aggressive counterattacks and well-coordinated reinforcements.

posthumously awarded the Maha Vir Chakra.

On August 8, two Pakistani officers — Capt Ghulam Hussain and Capt Mohammad Sajjad of 18th Azad Kashmir battalion — were captured. The documents found on them and their interrogation revealed vital information about the Pakistani plan to infiltrate the Kashmir valley.

The Gibraltar Force groups had already crossed into India and broken into smaller units, as planned. However, contrary to Pakistani expectations, the Kashmiris did not support them. Instead, locals often reported infiltrators to the Indian authorities.

Each group had distinct goals:

- Tariq: Disrupt road traffic over Zoji La, take control up to Amar-

nath and Gagangir.

- Qasim: Destroy bridges on the Bandipura-Gandarbal road; coordinate with Salahuddin in Hazratbal.
- Khalid: Attack infrastructure at Handwara and Sopore; destroy Kupwara power station.
- Salahuddin: Sever road links, destroy bridges and communications, neutralise key political figures and capture the Srinagar radio station and airfield.
- Ghaznavi: Attack targets in Rajouri-Nashera, assist Salahuddin and cut off roads to Srinagar.
- Babur: Target Udhampur HQ and disrupt communications.

Indian forces inside the Valley were limited — only four J&K militia battalions and an AT (animal transport) company. Reinforcements were rushed; 4 Sikh Light Infantry and 2/9 Gurkha Rifles were sent in immediately. Additional brigades were pulled in from Leh and Jammu.

The infiltration began unravelling quickly: the Tariq group never reached its objective due to high-altitude casualties; Qasim managed some attacks but withdrew by September 4 due to no local support; Salahuddin initially withdrew

after being detected. It re-entered but withdrew again by August 18 after failed attacks; Ghaznavi was the only group still active by the time the ceasefire was declared but it had a limited impact.

On August 8, the J&K government panicked and sought the imposition of martial law. However, Lt Gen Harbakhsh Singh, Western Army Commander, cautioned against such a move. He reasoned that it would validate Pakistani propaganda and demoralise Kashmiris, who might start cooperating with the raiders out of fear. His advice was accepted.

Army reinforcements arrived under challenging conditions. One aircraft carrying troops and Lt Gen Harbakhsh Singh landed in Srinagar in poor weather with no navigational aids, a feat accomplished by Wg Cdr Chandan Singh.

The Indian response was swift: On August 11, orders were issued for offensive operations; 68 Brigade (led by Brig Zoru Bakshi) and 93 Brigade (led by Brig Zora Singh) were assigned a pincer attack through the Uri-Poonch bulge; 104 Brigade targeted the Kishanganga bulge. The Sini Force was raised on August 14 under Maj Gen Umrao Singh to manage counter-infiltration inside the Valley.

On August 13, Pakistan launched renewed attacks. That morning, Maj Haq Nawaz Kiani's group attacked 8 Kumaon at Naugam. The battalion CO, Lt Col MV Gore, was killed. Indian retaliation forced the attackers to withdraw.

Brig Manmohan Singh, then commanding 162 Brigade, was moved to take over the command of 191 Brigade; he was tasked with the recapture of posts in the 191 Brigade area that had been taken by the enemy.

By mid-August, Operation Gibraltar had largely failed. Its key assumptions — especially local support from Kashmiris — proved false. The Indian forces responded with well-coordinated reinforcements and aggressive counterattacks.

“Uncalled-for aggression arouses the hatred of the civilian population. —Jean-Paul Sartre”

The maverick with a dolphin smile

RANBIR PARMAR

I met him during a meditation course at a Bengaluru ashram. Our friendship grew as we shared a room. A slender physique, an innocent, expressive face and radiant eyes — he was a likeable person full of laughter and sunshine. But his ever-present dolphin smile somehow irritated me.

Having worked as a computer professional with IBM in the US for three years, he had suddenly resigned and returned to India. "It all seemed useless somehow. I just sold my car and came back," he said while introducing himself at the inaugural session, and added with a mischievous smile, "Oh, an ordinary Toyota, not a Ferrari!" The obvious allusion was to Robin Sharma's famous book, *The Monk Who Sold His Ferrari*. Since that day, he came to be known as 'Monk' in the ashram.

Our conversations touched on a variety of topics. He told me about his mother who lived in Pune, but there was no mention of his wife or children.

The course consisted of rigorous breathing exercises and meditation routines. Sitting cross-legged for hours made my back and calf muscles ache. But I was enjoying this interlude of spiritual retreat. And the no-holds-barred discussions with Monk at bedtime were more stimulating than anything else.

Then came Shivratri and thousands of devotees converged on the ashram. The main hub of activity was the open-air auditorium where *puja* and *bhajans* continued all night. I was passing through the crowd at one of the gates when my pocket was picked and my smartphone was stolen. The next morning, Monk took me to the 'Lost and Found' section of the ashram. We reported the matter to the police, but to no avail.

I felt disconcerted at the loss of my phone and was a bit uncommunicative during my bedtime chat with Monk. He tried to console me with the thought that I might get it back as the police had nabbed a few pickpockets and some stolen articles had been recovered. In the end, he added in a comforting tone, "Moreover, you need not get yourself upset over the loss of small things!"

"Small things?" I burst out. "Do you know how much an iPhone costs? If you had lost yours, I wonder how you could have smiled so peacefully."

My voice had turned slightly acerbic, but Monk was unprovoked, his dolphin smile intact. After a while, he said, "I have lost many things in life, perhaps more important than an Apple mobile!" Then, on my repeated insistence, he told me how he had lost his family less than a year ago. His 15-year-old son had died of meningitis, and his wife had passed away about two months later. I gaped at his face, wondering how a person could smile all the time after suffering so much. We fret too much about the loss of things that are not very significant in life, I thought.

On my return, I realised that I had learned more from my maverick room-mate than all the painstaking workouts during my ashram sojourn.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

India should lead South Asia

Refer to 'India's shrinking influence in SAARC'; India must draw lessons from Sri Lanka's turmoil, Bangladesh's ongoing struggles and Nepal's recent tragedy born out of economic disparity and corruption. As the region's largest democracy with resilient institutions, India should lead in nurturing democratic values, easing trade barriers and improving regional connectivity. However, a balanced carrot and stick policy toward Pakistan is essential — firm on misadventures, open to cooperation. An association like SAARC could set examples in interfaith harmony and collaboration in strengthening regional economies.

VIJAY KUMAR KATIAL, PANCHKULA

Empower the youth

Refer to 'Why govts avoid taxing the rich to reduce inequality'; there is discontent among youth the world over and we are not preparing the younger generation for the future. Public debt is rising, services are stagnating and opportunities are shrinking leaving them disillusioned. India has the world's largest youth population, which poses a great risk and also offers great promise. The real answer is not austerity but investment, education that builds employable skills, industries that generate sustainable jobs and fair taxation that channels resources into nation-building. When politicians prioritise short-term populism over long-term reform, the demographic dividend can become a demographic burden. The need is to prioritise people over populism, fairness over privilege and opportunity over uncertainty to harness the energy of the youth.

K KUMAR, PANCHKULA

Need patience, sincerity

Refer to 'PM in Manipur'; his visit to the strife-torn northeastern state after more than two years of ethnic unrest is significant. The visuals of people, young and old, lining up with the Tricolour during his road journey are symbols of hope, but lasting peace requires sustained dialogue, confidence-building and fair administration. The removal of community checkpoints and renewed talks with the tribal

groups are positive indicators, yet the road ahead demands patience and sincerity from all stakeholders. Violence dishonours the sacrifices of the past as well as the aspirations of future generations.

SANJAY CHOPRA, MOHALI

Make expatriates in UK feel secure

Refer to 'Sikh woman raped'; it is a warning signal of the toxic consequences of racism, misogyny and far-right politics. Britain must confront these hate crimes with urgency, ensuring that justice is delivered and minorities feel secure. Every woman, regardless of her background, has the right to walk freely without fear. A society that fails to protect its women and its minorities fails itself. The time for platitudes is over — what Britain needs now is action, accountability and an unwavering commitment to equality.

GAURAV BADHWAR, ROHTAK

Modi's accusations exaggerated

Apromos of 'Congress has long backed Pak-groomed terrorists, shielded infiltrators: Modi'; the accusations levelled against Jawaharlal Nehru and the Congress are exaggerated and politically motivated. They can be considered misleading and baseless. It was the Congress party which led the nation in its fight to free India from the clutches of the British. After Independence, there was extreme poverty and India had to import foodgrains from the US. Where we stand today is because of the visionary approach of successive governments.

ROOP SINGH NEGI, SOLAN

Exhibit sportsmanship

After the Pahalgam massacre, there was a strong public sentiment in favour of India not playing against Pakistan in any international tournament. However, the Centre, in tandem with the BCCI, decided to go ahead with the marquee match in the Asia Cup due to its high economic returns. But once the decision was made to play against the aggressor country, one is required to observe the basic norms of sportsmanship. The Indian team did not shake hands with the Pakistani players after the match; this was not in good taste.

YASH KHETARPAL, PANCHKULA

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



# Steps Punjab should take to tackle floods



**SK SALUJA**  
EX-CHIEF ENGINEER, RANJIT SAGAR & SHAHPURKANDI DAM PROJECTS

THE 2025 Punjab floods are a wake-up call. Without better preparedness, real-time data sharing and flood-focussed dam management that often prioritises irrigation and power generation over flood mitigation, Punjab risks repeating the same mistakes with deadlier consequences. Floods in Punjab were rare before 1970. They have become more frequent and destructive since 2000 due to erratic monsoons, sudden dam releases and unchecked urbanisation on floodplains.

Digital misinformation emerged as a noteworthy concern during the recent floods. Unverified reports, often from non-experts, including retirees, speaking without full context, spread quickly online, fuelling panic. This trend risks skewing policymakers' decisions, privileging public sentiment over scientific data. Effective flood response and policy formulation, thus, face hurdles, with a potential for exacerbated impacts stemming from ill-informed actions.

Dams are constructed for the benefit of the public. All three dams — Bhakra, Pong dam

and Ranjit Sagar — are multi-purpose dams, with the prime objectives of irrigation, power generation and flood mitigation. Water management in a year is broadly divided into two periods:

1) Depletion period (non-monsoon): Stored water is released for irrigation, ensuring enough water for paddy.

2) Filling period (monsoon): The focus shifts to conservation of water for irrigation and power needs during the depletion period, but without compromising with the safety of the dam. Any damage to a dam would be disastrous.

Dam management during monsoon is a complex subject, requiring a balance among competing objectives. For dam regulation, the BBMB meets monthly (non-monsoon) and weekly (monsoon), but often neglects Punjab's flood vulnerability. Punjab's rivers — the Sutlej (burdened by the Swan and Buddha Nullah), the Beas (Chakki river and Kali Bein), the Ravi (Ujh river) and the Ghaggar (Siswan) — face significant inflows from tributaries and local runoff, exacerbating flood damages. Simultaneous Beas-Sutlej releases at Harike Headworks trigger severe flooding.

Effective mitigation requires Punjab-focused leadership. The BBMB's chair should ideally be a seasoned Punjab irrigation expert with broad experience and knowledge. It will enable informed, region-sensitive decisions to minimise flood risks.

The policy of filling the reservoir during the monsoon should be reviewed in light of the increase in the



**COORDINATION:** Shifts in the dam policy should be agreed upon by all beneficiary states. TRIBUNE PHOTO

frequency of floods. Shift the focus from conserving water for irrigation and power generation to flood mitigation.

The predictions issued by the IMD, though based on advanced models, often lack full accuracy due to the complex and unpredictable behaviour of nature. Sudden shifts in rainfall patterns, cloudbursts and regional variations make it difficult to forecast with precision. This uncertainty creates challenges for engineers managing reservoirs. Incorrect estimates of inflows and rainfall intensity can result in either under-preparedness or over-releases. Thus, such misjudgements sometimes lead to uncontrolled discharges from dams, aggravating the flood situation in downstream areas.

Neighbouring states Haryana and Rajasthan should appreciate any excess releases made during monsoon to save Punjab from flooding and should not later

Punjab needs technology, foresight and empowered engineers to move from relief to prevention.

use it against the decision-makers of Punjab.

Secondly, deplete the reservoir to the minimum level by the end of the depletion period, ie before the onset of monsoon. At present, the thrust is to carry forward some part of useable storage to the next season. This will help to store more water in the reservoir during the monsoon, thereby reducing floods, which will also reduce water going waste to Pakistan, resulting in dual benefit.

These policy shifts, geared towards reducing the impact of floods in Punjab, should be consented to by all three beneficiary states. It will give engineers of Punjab due power and confidence to present their points strongly in BBMB meetings. Also, the weekly monitoring by the BBMB should continue till September-end.

However, as floods are inevitable, Punjab must take the following measures to

reduce their impact.

1) Strengthening of embankments along rivers and tributaries is crucial. The works should be pinpointed right after the monsoon retreat, with earmarked funds disbursed by October every year. This allows for tender processes, work completion and inspections well ahead of the next monsoon in June. Late fund releases have typically impeded pre-monsoon preparedness.

2) Existing encroachments on floodplains and natural water channels should be mapped with respect to damages caused during the recent floods, with high-impact cases prioritised for removal, alongside rehabilitation for affected communities. Reassess cross-drainage provisions and bridges in road and other infrastructure, triggering swift corrective actions to mitigate flooding vulnerabilities.

3) While past mining activities have irreversibly altered river dynamics, future mining operations must be strictly regulated to mitigate flood risks and further disturb river ecosystems.

4) Punjab must accelerate afforestation along rivers and catchments using CAMPA funds to stabilise embankments, replenish groundwater, and reduce flood vulnerability.

5) The Meteorological Department, remote-sensing agencies, Punjab Agricultural University and Irrigation Department currently operate in isolation with antiquated data-sharing practices. A real-time data-sharing platform among these entities is needed. Forecasting systems require upgrading via real-

time monitoring, sensors, satellite data integration and AI-powered predictive tools to enable timely alerts and informed decision-making.

6) Punjab requires real-time data sharing from Himachal Pradesh, given the significant flows originating from the upper riparian state. Pre-monsoon high-level meetings between Punjab and HP officials must be held, ensuring active engagement of all stakeholders.

7) Competent retired experts should mentor younger professionals, while serving engineers must be given the authority and confidence to take swift preventive action. At present, fear of inquiries and punitive measures has paralysed decision-making in the Irrigation Department. Engineers and dam authorities need the backing of administration and political leadership, not blame afterward for excess releases or any inadvertent mismanagement.

8) To counter the spread of false information, the government should create a single authoritative platform for disseminating such critical information, and the public should be encouraged to rely solely on this verified source to ensure clarity, trust and coordinated action during emergencies.

The public must understand that reservoir releases are guided by technical and safety requirements of dam management, not by political or administrative interference. It is only via preparedness, technology and empowered professionals backed by trust that Punjab can move from reactive relief to proactive flood prevention.

# Why governments need smarter protest strategies, not bans



**SHARAD S CHAUHAN**  
DGP AND MD, PUNJAB POLICE HOUSING CORPORATION

AT the recent National Security Strategies Conference 2025, Union Home Minister Amit Shah directed the Bureau of Police Research & Development (BPR&D) to prepare a standard operating procedure (SOP) to prevent large-scale protests in future.

The BPR&D has been tasked with studying mass agitations since 1974, examining their causes, financial backing and the key actors involved. Financial agencies like the Enforcement Directorate are expected to trace the monetary flows that fuel unrest. The aim is to develop a coherent strategy to counter "mass agitations by vested interests."

States often warn of "toolkits" prepared by hostile actors or deep networks to spread discontent, violence and anarchy. Yet, they rarely acknowledge the need to create their own counter-toolkit, a structured, transparent and systematic strategy that goes beyond SOPs.

While SOPs offer procedures, a counter-toolkit provides vision: a holistic framework combining data analytics, narrative shaping, financial tracking, rapid-response communication, community engagement and partnerships with digital platforms. This is essential if states wish to contain protests and also prevent their descent into chaos exploited by opportunistic and sinister designs.

Nepal's recent experience illustrates the perils of miscalculation. What began as public frustration over corruption, nepotism and unemployment turned into a national crisis after the government abruptly banned dozens of social media platforms. Within days, protests spread across the capital, leaving many dead and hundreds injured.

The government had hoped that blocking these platforms would snuff out dissent. Instead, it achieved the opposite: a connected generation, already restless, found in the ban a unifying symbol of state overreach. The story of Nepal is a textbook example of how banning social media, far from restoring order, often becomes the spark for greater disorder.

Social media today is simultaneously a town square, a protest banner and a rumour mill. At its best, it exposes corruption, connects citizens and coordinates relief. At its worst,



it amplifies rage and accelerates mob violence.

Instant reach, emotional amplification and decentralised coordination make platforms powerful tools for mobilisation. A single viral video can summon thousands, a hashtag can turn grievances into national causes and live streams can synchronise scattered anger.

For governments, this speed is daunting. But bans are blunt instruments: history and Nepal show they often inflame rather than quell unrest.

Three dynamics explain this. First, bans create grievance. They disrupt daily life and hand citizens a new reason for anger. In Nepal, the ban itself became the rallying cry that filled the streets.

Second, bans fuel rumours. When mainstream platforms are blocked, people move to

The story of Nepal is a textbook example of how banning social media, far from restoring order, often becomes the spark for greater disorder.

VPNs and apps where fact-checking is weaker and conspiracy theories spread faster.

Third, bans blind the state. Social media is an intelligence tool; shutting it down deprives governments of visibility into crowd planning, narrative shifts and points of escalation. Nepal cut itself off from information that could have helped it manage protests better.

Though the anger of Gen Z or digital natives stems from genuine frustrations, torching institutions built with collective effort is reckless. They embody decades of work and billions in public wealth.

The Arab Spring offered an earlier caution. In 2011, Egyptian authorities shut down the Internet to halt mass protests. Instead, the blackout became proof of tyranny and strengthened international sympathy for demonstrators.

Likewise, Turkey's attempt to criminalise social media during the Gezi Park protests backfired, as citizens found alternative apps and VPNs and the ban became a badge of defiance.

For India, the lesson is clear: Law and order cannot be maintained by bans alone. The alternative to bans is intelligent, accountable engagement. Governments should work with platforms to remove posts that incite violence or spread false claims while protecting the space for legitimate dissent.

The police need specialised teams to track trends and anticipate escalation, but with safeguards and independent oversight. States should invest in counter-messaging, digital literacy and timely official communication since disinformation thrives in the vacuum left by silence.

Most crucially, as the Home Minister's initiative implies, there is a need to build a genuine counter-toolkit. It would combine financial scrutiny, operational SOPs, digital monitoring, rapid-response narratives and civic trust-building into a single framework.

Built on transparency and precision, it would not only blunt adversarial "toolkits" but also strengthen democratic resilience, protect law and order and reinforce institutional legitimacy.

The case of Nepal underlines

another sobering truth: escalation into mob violence is often triggered not by social media but by disproportionate state response. Training officers in negotiation, de-escalation and evidence-based crowd management is more effective than treating every protest as an insurgency.

When an 11-year-old girl was struck by a minister's car in Nepal and the incident treated as a hit-and-run by the police, the PM's dismissive remark that it was "just an accident" became a symbol of elite impunity, amplifying anger.

For law enforcement, the message is stark: social media is not mere entertainment but civic infrastructure. Blocking it is like shutting off electricity to stop crime — symbolic, disruptive and counterproductive. Instead, the police must integrate digital signals into operational planning, liaise with platform safety teams and prepare proportionate responses. The goal is to prevent dissent from spiralling into violence.

Ultimately, trust, not bans, underpins stability. Citizens accept restrictions only when they believe institutions are fair and legitimate. In India, where democracy — apart from a few hiccups — rests on strong institutional rules, the emphasis must be on reinforcing trust through engagement rather than disruption.

### QUICK CROSSWORD

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ACROSS

1 Attract (6)

4 Correct (6)

9 Single helping of food (7)

10 Flower (5)

11 Curb (5)

12 Continue to resist (4,3)

13 Extremely diligent person (5,6)

18 Done in imitation (7)

20 Formulate (5)

22 Banal (5)

23 Ostentatiously rich (7)

24 To last (6)

25 Dull and uninteresting (6)

DOWN

1 Significant effect (6)

2 Edge (5)

3 Sparkle (7)

5 Insurgent (5)

6 Stir up purposely (7)

7 Slight (6)

8 Precisely (2,3,6)

14 Put to practical use (7)

15 Guilty (2,5)

16 Grass-cutting and reaping implement (6)

17 Soldier on guard (6)

19 To free from blame (5)

21 To the fore (5)

Yesterday solution

Across: 1 Moneyed, 5 Darts, 8 Moment of truth, 9 Clout, 10 Smother, 11 Gutted, 12 Shinto, 15 Inertia, 17 Acrid, 19 State-of-the-art, 20 Yield, 21 Annoyed.

Down: 1 Mimic, 2 Name of the game, 3 Yangtze, 4 Drowsy, 5 Ditto, 6 Rough-and-ready, 7 Scherzo, 11 Gainsay, 13 Heathen, 14 Raffia, 16 Tread, 18 Dated.

### SU DO KU

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V. EASY

### FORECAST

SUNSET: 18:28 HRS

SUNRISE: 06:07 HRS

TUESDAY

WEDNESDAY

CITY

Chandigarh

31

26

New Delhi

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24

Amritsar

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Bathinda

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Jalandhar

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Ludhiana

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Bhiwani

35

28

Hisar

35

26

Sirsa

35

28

Dharamsala

26

19

Manali

26

20

Shimla

23

17

Srinagar

30

19

Jammu

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Kargil

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11

Leh

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09

Dehradun

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Mussoorie

24

18

CALENDAR

SEPTEMBER 16, 2025, TUESDAY

Shaka Samvat 1947

Bhadrpad Shaka 25

Aashwin Purnim 1

Hijri 1447

Krishna Paksha Tithi 10, up to 12:23 am

Variyan Yoga up to 12:34 am

Aardra Nakshatra up to 6:46 am

Moon enters Cancer sign 12:29 am