

Across
THE AISLE



PCHIDAMBARAM

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In a developing country, a measure of the government's success is its capacity to build quality infrastructure and create quality jobs. While the quantity of infrastructure built in the last decade has been large (and the amounts spent colossal), the quality has been appalling — obsolete design and technology, falling bridges, collapsing buildings, and new highways that are washed away after the first rain. On quality jobs, the less said the better

inside
TRACK

COOMI KAPOOR



ZENANA POLITICS

The MEA disowns responsibility for the retrogressive step of barring women journalists from attending the press conference by Afghanistan's foreign minister, Amir Khan Muttaqi, at the Afghan embassy in Delhi on October 10. The ministry's position is that it cannot interfere in the decision of a sovereign state within its embassy. But the argument is not that simple. Until India officially recognises the Taliban government, its representatives cannot claim possession of the Afghan embassy. And while the Vienna convention mandates for the host nation to ensure the security of the inmates of a foreign embassy, the embassy in turn is expected to adhere to the country's laws. In India, gender discrimination is an offence. Within two days, the Taliban tried to make amends for its much criticised exclusion of women by inviting them to Muttaqi's second press conference. The women journalists made no concessions to the Taliban dress code. In fact, one spunky scribe wore a short dress with a low neckline. There were two exceptions — one woman wore a hijab, the other a burkha. They explained apologetically to colleagues that their beat included covering Afghanistan and they could not afford to offend the government there.

A retired Indian diplomat recalls that even in Pakistan there are occasions when the "men only" rule persists. In the 1980s, an official delegation from New Delhi's foreign office visited Pakistan and then President Zia-ul-Haq invited all the visiting Indians to tea, except the sole woman. When Ambassador S K Singh pointed out the omission, an invitation was sent. But when the woman under secretary arrived, she was politely ushered to the zenana section. Since her specific responsibility was to take notes of the meeting, the interaction went unrecorded!

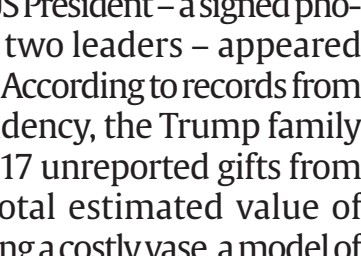
GIFT DEDUCTION

Considering the vast sums India spent on the Trump family in his first term, US Ambassador Sergio Gor's gift for Narendra Modi from the US President — a signed photograph of the two leaders — appeared rather modest. (According to records from the Biden Presidency, the Trump family was bestowed 17 unreported gifts from India with a total estimated value of \$47,000, including a costly vase, a model of the Taj Mahal, cufflinks, a designer charm bracelet for Melania and a silk rug and silver Chaminar sculpture for Ivanka.) More than the cost of the offering, eyebrows were

On the
LOOSE

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LIKE OVER the previous few years, the New Delhi Municipal Corporation will plant around 50,000 indigenous tulips in Delhi this winter. A portion of these were painstakingly developed at the Tulip Growth-cum-Storage Chamber at Lodi Gardens, set up in 2022. For a brief fortnight in March, commuters were treated to the visual spectacle of this famous Dutch import all along Shanti Path; alas, it didn't last. This wondrous bulb is native to mountainous regions, so it fades quickly in the Capital's semi-arid climes. The question begging to be asked is this: when most parks languish in a state of weedy neglect presumably for a lack of funds, why invest in this exotic and terribly ex-

MANY PERSPECTIVES, ONE CONCLUSION

[AUTHOR'S NOTE: I have written this column since 2014. Earlier, I had written the column during 1999-2004. Writing a column every week is a punishing schedule but I have enjoyed it thoroughly. After consulting the editors, I have decided to continue to write the column but with breaks. Thank you for reading the column because that is my greatest reward.]

At age 93 (bless him), Dr C Rangarajan is an indefatigable campaigner for an open economy and prudent fiscal management. He was a central banker for many years and the 19th governor of the Reserve Bank of India (1992-97). On October 14, 2025, he co-authored with Mr D K Srivastava an op-ed on the estimate of India's *potential* growth rate and came to the conclusion that it was 6.5 per cent a year. He was charitable to say the growth rate was "in the present world environment, a reasonably high level" but quickly added "although for creating a higher growth of employment, we do need to push our potential growth further."

I think an average growth rate of 6.5 years over several years is *dismal*. That rate keeps India in the group of countries with a 'lower-middle income' defined as Gross National Income *per capita* of between USD 1,146 and USD 4,515 (in 2024-25). India's GNI of USD 2,650 (in 2024) places it in the group that includes Egypt, Pakistan, Philippines, Vietnam and Nigeria. The GNI *per capita* needs to *double* to get India out of the lower-middle income group. If India's current rate of growth is sustained, it will take *nine* years to achieve that goal, and the unemployment situation may worsen.

CONSENSUS ON ESTIMATES

RBI has increased its estimate of growth for 2025-26 from 6.5 per cent to 6.8 per cent, but it had very little to say on unemployment (*RBI Bulletin, September 2025, State of the Economy*): "Various indicators of employment conditions depicted a mixed picture in August. The all-India unemployment rate declined to 5.1 per cent..." The scant attention to unemployment is because the RBI Act mandates the RBI to securing monetary and price stability with no reference to employment. The **Ministry of Finance**, in its August issue of *Monthly Economic Review*, stayed within the earlier predicted range of 6.3-6.8 per cent. On unemployment, the Review did not express any view.

The **World Bank** estimated India to grow at 6.5 per cent in 2025-26 but trimmed it to 6.3 per cent in 2026-27. The **International Monetary Fund** increased its projection of India's growth rate to 6.6 per cent for 2025 while predicting a decline to 6.2 per cent for 2026. The **Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)** projected India to grow at 6.7 per cent in 2025-26 and 6.2 per cent in 2026-27.

GFCE, THE SPOILER

The consensus is India's growth rate will be 6.5 per cent in the current year and lower by 20 basis points in the next year. These estimates broadly confirm Dr Rangarajan's conclusion. Dr Rangarajan has identified the reasons for the modest growth rate: the *gross fixed capital formation* (GFCF) rate that has been *stationary* for the last few years and the *causes* for the stationary GFCF rate. GFCF has fallen from 35.8 per cent of GDP in 2007-08 to 30.1 per cent of GDP in 2024-25. It has been more or less stationary in the last 10 years at between 28 and 30 per cent.

Private fixed capital formation (PFCF) — part of the total GFCF — has fallen from 27.5 per cent of GDP in 2007-08 to 23.8 per cent in 2022-23 (last available official data). Dr Rangarajan also mentioned the incremental credit output ratio (ICOR), but I have left that out because it is a derived number. As Dr Rangarajan concluded, unless GFCF/PFCF improves or the ICOR declines, India is stuck with a 6.5 per cent growth rate.

Why is private capital shying away from investment in India? The foremost reason is the trust deficit between the government of India and the industry. Finance Minister Ms Nirmala Sitharaman has used every arrow in her quiver, but Indian investors are not impressed by her entreaties or admonitions or threats. They prefer to hoard cash, wait and watch, acquire insolvent companies or invest abroad.

DR SINGH-LIKE COURAGE

In a developing country, a measure of the government's success is its capacity to build *quality infrastructure* and create *quality jobs*. While the quantity of infrastructure built in the last decade has been large (and the amounts spent colossal), the quality has been appalling — obsolete design and technology, falling bridges, collapsing buildings, and new highways that are washed away after the first rain. On quality jobs, the less said the better. There are no jobs for the 'educated unemployed', and the unemployment rate for this group is 29.1 per cent. 'Youth unemployment' rate is 45.4 per cent. School-educated and school-dropouts do odd and irregular jobs or migrate. The official unemployment rate of 5.2 per cent in September is a joke in the same way as the official retail inflation rate of 1.54 per cent is.

A GDP growth rate of 6.5 per cent is not a moment of celebration. It means India is stuck in the lower-middle income trap without the ideas or the intrepidity to break out. It is a time for summoning Manmohan Singh-like courage.

Next: November 2, 2025

raised at the choice of the photograph. Instead of the several bear hugs and hand-shake shots available, the framed photograph is of the two men standing stiffly on separate rostrums addressing a joint press conference in Washington this February. Trump has scribbled with a marker pen the cordial message "Mr PM, you are Great", but it is well known that while Trump revels in speaking extempore, Modi is known to prefer one-on-one interactions rather than press conferences.

TWEETING SHEEP

It is customary for the BJP's media managers to ask others to re-tweet messages. The practice is to help the BJP frame the narrative, but in reality, it makes party leaders and those dependent on the government's goodwill, even national sports persons, look like a flock of sheep, repeating near identical messages on X. Former Delhi MP Meenakshi Lekhi recently let the cat out of the bag by not just re-tweeting the message on Happy Air Force Day sent to her from a senior minister's media team, but the accompanying instructions as well. "I have switched to Zoho Mail. Kindly note the changed address, etc...", she tweeted using her actual email address!

CEASEFIRE OFF

The unspoken peace pact between West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee and Prime Minister Narendra Modi was finally broken this month following the brutal attack on BJP MP Khagen Murmu in Jalpaiguri. Modi took to X to blast Banerjee's government for its apathy. Banerjee retorted that the TMC could not be blamed without evidence, but she hastily visited the injured MP. Until now Banerjee had trained her guns solely on Amit Shah, whom she often refers to sarcastically as number 2. Between Modi and Banerjee there was a fairly cozy relationship with neither criticising the other directly. Even the RSS in West Bengal largely keeps its distance from political issues, since it has little in common with BJP chief Suvendu Adhikari, who is originally from the TMC. State governor C V Ananda Bose maintained a low profile, unlike his combative and very vocal predecessor Jagdeep Dhankar. Bose has been on the back foot ever since allegations of misconduct against him surfaced. But after the Jalpaiguri incident, with blood oozing from Murmu's head, Shah has made clear that with Assembly elections due next year it is not acceptable for Sangh Parivar members to sit on the fence. That Banerjee will now face the heat from the extended saffron family was evident after the recent gang rape of a medical student in Durgapur. Governor Bose was quick to go on the offensive against the Mamata government. A section of the ruling party even advocates imposing President's rule before the Assembly poll.

History
HEADLINE

VIKAS PATHAK



WHEN CONGRESS general secretary Jairam Ramesh, in a social media post Tuesday, highlighted the anniversary of B R Ambedkar's initiation into Buddhism, it was a rare acknowledgment of the event by a senior Congress leader, given that even then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru had remained "silent" over it.

Ramesh's statement reflected the Congress's bid to come full circle on the issue. In his lifetime, Ambedkar was critical of the Congress and Mahatma Gandhi, viewing Gandhi's Harijan movement as a "Hindu reform" meant to keep Dalits tied to Hinduism, and which he sought to "break free" from through his conversion to Buddhism.

Ambedkar embraced Buddhism on October 14, 1956, with his followers at a public rally at Deekshabhoomi in Nagpur on Vijayadashami, barely two months before his death.

A *Times of India* report from Nagpur that day said 3 lakh people attended the event as 83-year-old Mahasthaver Chandramani from Myanmar administered the oath of Dhamma to Ambedkar and his wife Savita. Ambedkar, in turn, administered 22 vows to the gathering, recited Pali mantras, and translated them in Marathi for them.

The report quoted Ambedkar as telling the people that he was renouncing the Hindu religion "as it looked down upon men of his caste and treated them with discrimination". He said he would henceforth follow the principles of Buddhism, not venerate Hindu gods or perform any pujas, and not drink.

A PTI report said the gathering observed silence for a minute before bursting into slogans of "Babasaheb Ambedkar ki jai" and "Bhagwan Buddha ki jai". Ambedkar told his supporters that by discarding Hinduism, he was reborn. He also denounced the belief that Buddha was an incarnation of Lord Vishnu.

Thirteen days later, Ambedkar explained why he chose Nagpur as the venue for his conversion. "Some people say that because the great battalion of the RSS was here in Nagpur, we took the meeting to this city in order to lay them flat. This is completely untrue," Ambedkar said, as reported in his Marathi periodical *Prabuddha Bharat*.

Ambedkar then said: "Those who read Buddhist history will come to know that in India, if anyone spread Buddhism, it was the Nag people". He claimed that "the Nag people were fierce enemies of the Aryans", adding that there was much ha-

In 1956, when Ambedkar converted to Buddhism



Ambedkar, wife Savita at the event in Nagpur on October 14, 1956. Wikimedia Commons

rassment of the Nag people, and Agastya Muni helped only one Nag person "escape". "We spring from that man," he said, weaving an alternative narrative of a purported ancient struggle. He underlined that the Nag people lived "chiefly in Nagpur and the surrounding country".

While the BJP is among the parties that hails Ambedkar now, Hindu Mahasabha leader and Hindutva ideologue V D Savarkar had castigated his conversion move. He wrote a lengthy piece about it in May 1956 in the *Marathi Kesari*, admitting it was a matter of concern but adding that it didn't mean any disaster for Hinduism, says historian Prabodhan Pol, who teaches at the Manipal Centre for Humanities.

"Despite Dr Ambedkar loudly proclaiming his intent to uproot Hinduism and establish Buddhism as supreme among all religions in India, there is no reason to give more importance to his shoutings than to the enraged mobs. Lord Buddha himself preached uninterruptedly for 40 years after establishing his religion but could not overthrow the eternal Sanatan religion anywhere, even with the royal power of Emperor Ashoka, after which he too got tired and gave up," Savarkar wrote. "How can the story of Dr Ambedkar be different?"

Savarkar charged that some people, including Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, and Buddhists from abroad had given support including funds to Ambedkar's Buddhism campaign, claiming that within 2-3 years, 10 million people in India would accept Buddhism.

Savarkar said that while Ambedkar "repeatedly declares... that Buddhism is the supreme religion of the world", he had

said the same about Islam and had also declared that he would embrace Christianity or Sikhism. He said that Ambedkar knew that for centuries before him, untouchables were "forcibly or voluntarily converted to Christianity and Islam... But those converted untouchables remained socially untouchable within Christian and Muslim communities".

Ambedkar wrote in *Prabuddha Bharat* in June 1956 that Savarkar could continue to "spew hell" against him, but it would not deter him from pursuing the path of Buddhism, notes Pol. "Regardless of how insensitive Savarkar's statements may be, I do not care, because I walk the path of truth and compassion," Ambedkar said.

While Savarkar apparently referred to Buddha's 2500th birth anniversary celebrations, held in 1956, to accuse Nehru of backing Ambedkar's Buddhism push, Dalit sites like Navayana.org and velivada.com reject it. They cite evidence to state that a month before his conversion, Ambedkar wrote to Nehru to request him that the government should buy 500 copies of his then forthcoming book, *The Buddha and His Dhamma*, as he was Rs 20,000 short of the required funds. Nehru replied the next day that the government had exceeded the funds set aside for the Buddha anniversary celebrations, and that Ambedkar should look at selling the book during the event.

The PM advised him to contact S Radhakrishnan, who also expressed his inability to do anything about his request. The book was finally published after Ambedkar's death.

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Fifth
COLUMN

TAVLEEN SINGH

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Delusions of development

THE DAY I returned home last week after a long sojourn in one of the most developed countries in the world, I spotted a statement by our Prime Minister that worried me. It sounded ambitious and optimistic but slightly illusory and it was this that worried me. Modi was in Andhra Pradesh and as his custom when he visits temples, he was in the saffron robes of a Hindu priest and speaking not of religion but of his favourite dream for India. The 21st century, he said, would belong to 1.4 billion Indians because he could say with certainty that by 2047, India would become a fully developed country.

This is not something he has said for the first time. He has said it many times before. The reason why it had special meaning for me this time was because on the flight home, between watching the latest offerings from Hollywood, I happened to read the latest copy of *The Economist* that I bought at Zurich airport. It had the Gaza peace deal on the cover with the caption 'A New Beginning' but instead of reading this story, I searched as I always do in western newspapers for stories on India. There was one, buried deep inside in the section on finance and economics and its first line asked how rich a country needed to be to count as 'developed'.

The story intrigued me because from it I learned that there was no concept of developed and developing countries until 1949, when Harry Truman in his inaugural speech split the world into first, second and third. First being those countries aligned with America, second being those aligned with the communist world and third being us very poor countries who aligned with neither block. What intrigued me more was the information that today the World Bank considers a country developed when the national income per person reaches \$14,000. The Economist calculates that 'this would require India's GDP to quintuple in the next 22 years at a growth rate of 7.5% a year, above the average of 5.7% seen so far under Mr. Modi.'

In plain English, this means that India is still a long, long way from being a fully developed country despite our Prime Minister selling us this happy but perhaps deluded dream. Dreams are good, even deluded ones. Especially in this season when we celebrate Goddess Lakshmi and hope and pray that if we light up our homes and fill the air with the sound of firecrackers, she will be kind enough to not just visit but stay. Diwali is one of my favourite festivals and this is one of my favourite seasons, so I am not going to write a gloomy piece about how hard it is for India to become a fully developed country. Instead, what I would like to write is a realistic, optimistic piece about where we are and where we need to go from here.

Whenever I write about economic things, I am attacked virulently by 'economists' who warn me that I should stay away from the subject because I lack their learning and expertise. They forget that the most important political issues in India are economic. Our political leaders like to distract voters by creating ugly and dangerous divisions at election time between upper and lower castes, Hindus and Muslims. But when I talk to ordinary voters, I find always that what they really want are jobs that would enable them to escape the degradation in which they mostly live. The 'experts' like to say that there are more than enough jobs and that it is only government jobs that Indians want because there is guaranteed job security.

Maybe. But government jobs also come with perks like a decent house in which to live equipped with subsidised electricity, water and cooking gas. So, it should not surprise us that there were 187 million applicants for 64,197 railway jobs last year. Nor should it surprise us that young people sometimes pay with their lives while being recruited for jobs in the army and the police. This does not happen in 'developed' countries and it should not be happening in a country that seeks to become developed when we complete a century of shaking off the shackles of the British Raj.

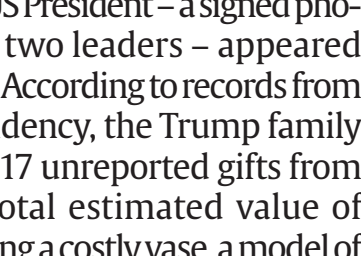
It is my sincere effort to write a column that is not seen as politically aligned and this is why I have said more than once that I have not been a 'Modi bhakt' for a while. I have said this before but continue to be trolled by Dynasty devotees for being a 'bhakt'. I have no hesitation in admitting that I became a Modi bhakt in 2013 because I believed that he would finally rid India of the Nehruvian socialism that kept most Indians mired in extreme poverty for decades.

Modi could have done this by reducing the size of our bureaucracy and eliminating government departments. And he could have reduced the burden on taxpayers of government housing. He could also have made it much easier to do business in India than he has. He could have ordered BJP chief ministers to drastically improve government schools and healthcare. Then we may have been speeding along the developed country road. Instead, we remain a country that forever remains a country with immense 'potential'. Happy Diwali to one and all.

On the
LOOSE

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LIKE OVER the previous few years, the New Delhi Municipal Corporation will plant around 50,000 indigenous tulips in Delhi this winter. A portion of these were painstakingly developed at the Tulip Growth-cum-Storage Chamber at Lodi Gardens, set up in 2022. For a brief fortnight in March, commuters were treated to the visual spectacle of this famous Dutch import all along Shanti Path; alas, it didn't last. This wondrous bulb is native to mountainous regions, so it fades quickly in the Capital's semi-arid climes. The question begging to be asked is this: when most parks languish in a state of weedy neglect presumably for a lack of funds, why invest in this exotic and terribly ex-

Delhi's tulip fever: Will it last?

pensive species that has such a fleeting bloom?

It's entirely possible that the person in charge of choosing flowers for public spaces has great nostalgia for B R Chopra's hit of the 1980s, *Silsila*, where Rekha and Amitabh Bachchan romance in Holland's Keukenhof Gardens among a million glorious tulips, their pink and red petals tightly clenched. Or perhaps, in our ambitious, technocratic, perfectionist, perpetually optimising era, some NDMC official decided the ubiquitous marigold (gairda), or the petunias and dahlias that decorate the gol chakkars of Lutyan's Delhi aren't trendy enough. It fits in with the current political dispensation's progress mindset that we're moving determinedly upwards in our attainments — never mind if the faceless, nameless government maalis tasked with getting

this European flower to bloom in dusty Delhi have to work thrice as much, for a depressingly short-lived success. If it's tulips that we want, it's tulips we shall have! Rows and rows of them!

In modern horticultural practice, there's nothing more unfashionable than a neatly hedged flowerbed — the edgiest garden designers are always striving for the delicate balance between disorder and control. It may be too much to expect the NDMC to embrace the enchantment of wilderness. And undoubtedly, flowerbeds in a multitude of colors (however duly and dully placed), are a source of rare delight, in a city with smoky air and gray skies. However, this new-found love for tulips reveals, mostly, that the human capacity for self-deception is infinite. There is a startling arrogance about trying to coax the wrong flower to bloom in the wrong

conditions. But it's entirely in keeping with a world that values virality and sensationalism over quiet growth. The tulip in Delhi vanishes in mere days amid press and much fanfare, while nobody talks about the fragrant madhumalti and champa that lasts a whole season.

The first lesson gardening imparts is that wrestling with Mother Nature is futile. Just like sun-loving plants will droop in the shade and moisture-dependent saplings will dry out in a drought, in the garden and in life, the right environment matters. Appreciating, and working with the limitations of the weather and soil, leads to the best possible outcome, not following our own whimsical desires. Gardening is a perfect metaphor for how success depends on leaning on our strengths; and even then, so much lies beyond our control. To humbly accept that

not every plant will survive, not every seed will sprout, is, in a sense, preparation for failure. On that thought, indeed, the experiment of tulip bulbs in Delhi may be deemed successful — they bloomed albeit briefly, citizens loved it — and at least somebody had the imagination to audaciously chase such ephemeral beauty.

The attempt is reminiscent of the movie *Salmon Fishing in the Yemen*, where a sheikh envisions the cold water fish spawning in a desert river. Like the tulips, it worked only tentatively. Maybe what's important is the ability to dream up a new aesthetic vision, however improbable. That too, conveys something — that our society has the money and time to throw on the cultivation of tulips, which is not strictly speaking, necessary.

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REFLECTIONS

{ THE BIG PICTURE }

Pakistan army, Pasni port, and a sell-out to America

It makes little strategic and commercial sense for Washington to invest in a project in Balochistan. For the transactional US president, the numbers just don't add up. They look even worse now as the war at the Pakistan-Afghanistan border heats up

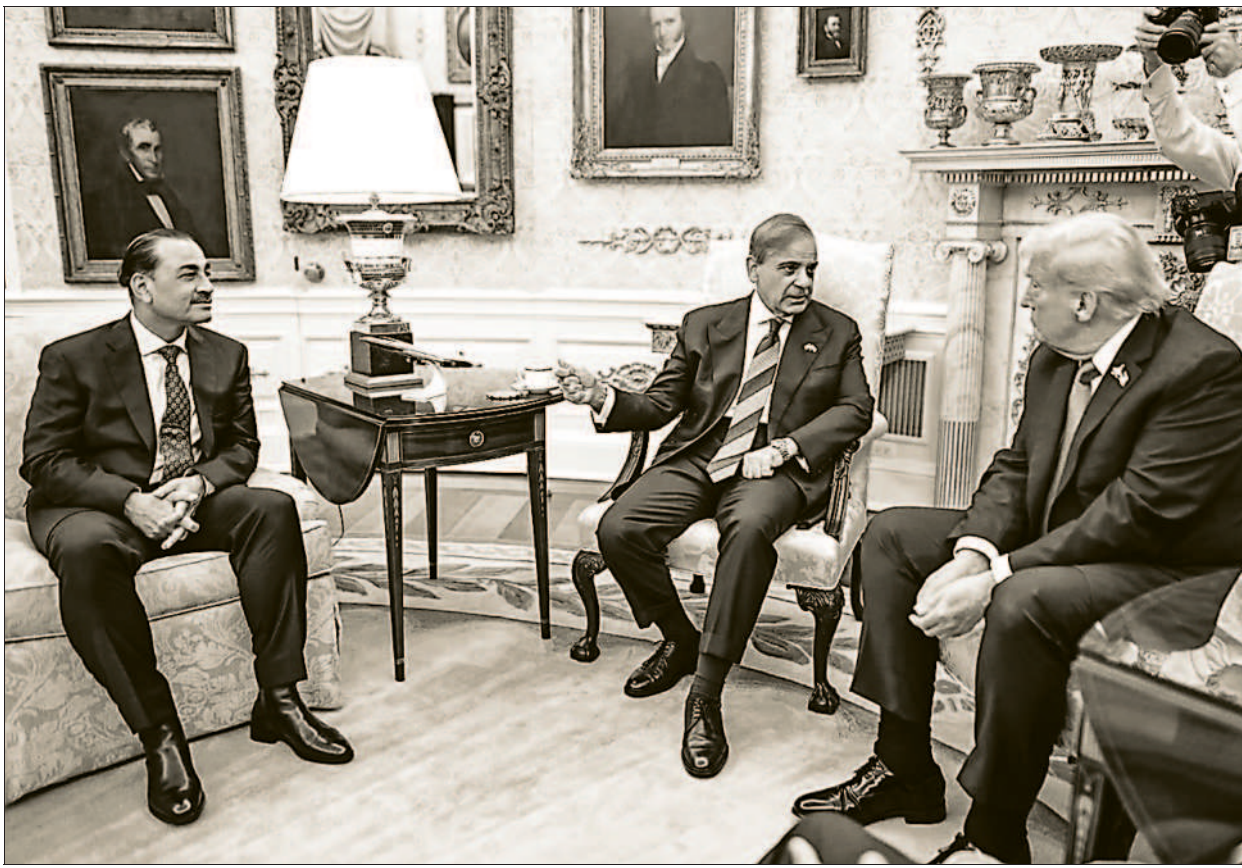
The new strategic gossip around the block, and there's plenty of it when it comes to Pakistan, is the reported offer of the port of Pasni to the US to build it up as a route to secure critical minerals. A report in *The Financial Times* does, however, say this idea is yet to be pitched officially to the White House, but is being discussed with businessmen, a route that Pakistan army chief Asim Munir has used successfully in getting US President Donald Trump's attention. All of this needs a little disaggregating to make sense of a deal that Pakistani officials are now trying to backtrack on, in an effort to appease China. As a war threatens on the Afghan border despite the current tenuous ceasefire, and the Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP), a far-right populist political party, rampages across major cities, Pakistan's desperation for a little handholding is intense. The apparent reason for offering the port and developing it at a reported cost of some \$1.2 billion through federal and US-backed funds is for shipping out critical minerals.

That deal, signed between US Strategic Metals (USSM) and Pakistan's army-run Frontier Works Organization (FWO), is worth just \$500 million, an amount that an earlier dictator, General Ziaul Haq, would have called peanuts, especially since it would entail Pakistan spending at least half of the total estimated costs of 3.8 billion Pakistani rupees. It's doubtful if Pakistan can afford to pay even half that figure. Nor presumably would a commercial enterprise want to pay up for something worth a quarter of that. But there are other aspects at work. First, the USSM director has been quoted as saying that he had heard of Pasni and spoken to port officials from Karachi and Gwadar. His company also wants to set up a refinery in Pakistan. There is a raft of research indicating that refining of rare earths constitutes a major health hazard; therefore, placing it in most countries would be difficult. Protecting the environment, however, is a non-existent priority for Pakistan, especially in Balochistan. Second, he also indicated that the port made sense since it was also close to the Reko Dik copper and gold mine, run by Barrick Gold Corporation, which holds majority shares. The mine is situated equidistant from Karachi and Gwadar harbour. Presumably, the latter was always meant for trade, even as the port languishes with fewer than seven ships docking in a year. The truth is that Pakistan has never been able to get around to building infrastructure like roads and railways to optimise the port. It is only now that there is a tentative agreement for a project to revive this that is

backed by multiple funders, in the second phase of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). In other words, even China is hanging back. And, it's not just China. Saudi Arabia quietly abandoned talk of funding the Barrik mine. Now it seems Barrick is looking for \$3.5 billion from the US and G-7 countries. So while a massive vein of gold and copper does seem to exist, foreign companies are reluctant. True, there's a persistent insurgency, but no one from these or other companies has ever been targeted. Hardly surprising, then, that the Pakistanis have turned to the US. The thing is, any US-funded rail line will certainly help the Chinese as well. The other side of the picture is this. Recently, a study by the National Institute of Maritime Affairs, the official think tank of the Pakistan Navy, has assessed that in the event of another war, the Indian Navy would target all major ports, including Pasni. Bringing the US in — only for commercial purposes, according to available information — would protect Pasni at least, and perhaps Gwadar. This assessment would be aimed at getting funds away from the super-rich army, but it has a point. Unverified reports claimed that Pakistan had shifted most of its F-16s to Pasni, fearing an Indian attack just before Operation Sindoor. The critical question is how a possible US entry would affect India's stance in a possible future war. A factor often forgotten in New Delhi's reaction to the 26/11 Mumbai attack was that US forces were present in major ports, including Karachi, in a logistics



Tara Kartha



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trail to Afghanistan, even as US military aircraft flew the skies. That proved to be a limiting factor at that time. However, the US presence in Pasni would hardly curtail Indian actions this time. For one, it's too far away from operational areas, barring naval action. As for the second possibility of a US base at Pasni, consider the extreme US hesitation in giving Delhi certain military equipment due to the presence of the Russian S-400 missile system. Washington would hardly like to expose its own fighters and air defence to eager Chinese eyes, given that about 80% of Pakistan's inventory is of Chinese origin. A certain US undercover presence is a given. But that's also something that India has

lived with for decades. The final factor is whether America will see the project as profitable, given that the Trump administration is in transactional mode. It already has around 10 bases in West Asia, far more insulated from trouble. The raging Baloch insurgency in Pakistan has notched up another attack on the Jaffar Express just recently, and any railway projects are likely to prove a tempting target, even while the Americans themselves would be exempt. The Balochs have never targeted foreigners, not even the hundreds of Chinese involved in projects in their state. The lure of gold is considerable, as are critical minerals. But Pakistan's first shipment was veiled in mystery, which brings in

the second factor — the understandable rage among politicians at this secret selling of Pakistan's resources. Add to this, electricity for the Makran area comes from Iran, a sworn enemy of the US. In sum, building up Pasni and its infrastructure makes little commercial or strategic sense. For a transactional president, the numbers just don't add up. They look even worse now, and as the Afghanistan border war heats up to reach even Balochistan, close to the reputed mines, those numbers are only likely to slip into the negative.

Tara Kartha is a former director, National Security Council Secretariat. The views expressed are personal

{ SUNDAY SENTIMENTS }

Karan Thapar



The ugly Indian and other stories of racism

I was asked an interesting question last week: Are Indians racist? It was prompted by a news report which reads: "A 27-year-old flight attendant from Meghalaya has alleged that she was recently subjected to verbal racial abuse twice within an hour in Delhi — once in north Delhi's Kamala Nagar, then on the Metro." Her video on Instagram was reposted by the Union minister for minority affairs, Kiren Rijiju, who condemned the incident. Let me start by answering the question. I'd say not all of us and not all the time but, sadly, this is true of many of us and it can be for much of the time. The facts are stark and probably incontestable. We call Africans *habshis*. We treat them with disdain. We're reluctant to have them as tenants and very few know them as friends. In the 1980s, when I lived in Nigeria, the local Indian community was considered more racist than the expatriate white

residents. For a very simple reason. We are less adept at hiding it. That's probably also true of Indians in South Africa, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Kenya and Uganda. But it's not just Africans we treat badly. North Indians call Tamils *madrasis* and people from the North East *ch******. We think it is funny to do so, forgetting it is rude and hurtful. On the other hand, we're fascinated by white skin. There was a time when our marriage advertisements and our face creams betrayed our colour consciousness. Remember Fair and Lovely? Bollywood stars had no compunction personally advertising such products. In 2008, when he was president of the Board of Control for Cricket in India, I interviewed Sharad Pawar about the accusation that Harbhajan Singh had been alleged to call Australia's all-rounder Andrew Symonds a monkey. He dismissed the controversy on the grounds Indians can never be racist. I suppose it's difficult for politicians to

publicly accept this truth. But it's also a fact that very few people I know accepted Pawar's answer. Could he have been hiding what he actually thought? Yet it's not the case that we are unable to recognise racism or are unconscious of it. We're very prickly when we're the victims. We can sense it in people's looks, tone, manner and not just their speech and behaviour. But that's also precisely what we're guilty of ourselves. Often it's our attitude that suggests colour consciousness and racism. But it can also be our spoken words and deliberate actions. Watch the difference in the behaviour of a Delhi shopkeeper to an African and an Englishman. He will treat the former with disdain while fawning over the latter. The only reason it doesn't shock the rest of us is because we're probably guilty of the same discrimination. Our own behaviour would be pretty much the same. The sad truth is we can be a very prejudiced people and don't know how to hide or handle our prejudice. Our fellow citizens are often at the receiving end of this majoritarian hatefulness. The flight attendant from Meghalaya is by no means alone. We often treat Muslims, Dalits, Adivasis like aliens. We keep them at arm's distance, rarely invite them home and, often, are not even polite to them. The lady from Meghalaya has understood this only too well. "My only mistake is that I am born in India and I look like

YET IT'S NOT THE CASE THAT WE ARE UNABLE TO RECOGNISE RACISM OR ARE UNCONSCIOUS OF IT. WE'RE VERY PRICKLY WHEN WE'RE THE VICTIMS. WE CAN SENSE IT IN PEOPLE'S LOOKS, TONE, MANNER AND NOT JUST THEIR SPEECH AND BEHAVIOUR

this, and I don't look like the rest of the Indians," she said. Perhaps the saddest part is there's little to correct, leave aside admonish us. No doubt it's a crime to mistreat Dalits but does anyone care when we do that to Muslims or Africans, Mizos or Tamils, Jarawas or Musahars? Even our media rarely reacts. Holding up the mirror to the ugly Indian is not its style. Yet there are occasions when the reflection would horrify us. The truth is we need to see ourselves the way others perceive us. When that happens we could change. But till then it's unlikely we will acknowledge our glaring faults.

Karan Thapar is the author of *Devil's Advocate: The Untold Story*. The views expressed are personal

{ ANOTHER DAY }

Namita Bhandare



Rape and victim-blaming cues from leaders, judges

West Bengal chief minister (CM) Mamata Banerjee had some advice for the medical student in Durgapur who was raped by a junior inside the restroom of her own college. Now what? Don't go to college? Lock up girls and women except, wait, one in three is subject to violence from a family member, according to the National Family Health Survey. Now what? In no other crime is this much scrutiny placed on the victim. Nobody asks if the victim of chain-snatching "asked for it". Yet, when it comes to rape and sexual crimes, we have endless questions: Why was she out late at night? Why was she drinking? What was she wearing? Was she friends with the perpetrator? The answer to all of the above is: It doesn't matter. When we ask these questions we are reinforcing the message that a woman belongs inside her house. Worse, we are making excuses for men who rape. Patriarchy functions by placing the burden of not being raped on women themselves. It is not just politicians. Rape adjudication is littered with instances of how judges are influenced by how they believe a rape victim ought to behave. This is not justice, advice or concern. This is moral policing by a state that has failed to keep women safe. Rape happens because men rape. It is really that simple. It is the job of governments, administration, and workplaces to provide safe environments. Instead of looking for failed love affairs and political conspiracies, Banerjee might want to address school curriculums that do not teach consent. She may want to strengthen non-profits to tackle toxic ideas of masculinity. She could ensure swift trials and early justice. At the very least, she could keep her opinions to herself. Earlier this week, the BJP MLA from Beed, Maharashtra, Gopichand Padalkar

advised women to do yoga at home instead of joining gyms "where you don't know who the trainer is". But as I write this, news is coming in of an engineering student raped by a junior inside the restroom of her own college. Now what? Don't go to college? Lock up girls and women except, wait, one in three is subject to violence from a family member, according to the National Family Health Survey. Now what? In no other crime is this much scrutiny placed on the victim. Nobody asks if the victim of chain-snatching "asked for it". Yet, when it comes to rape and sexual crimes, we have endless questions: Why was she out late at night? Why was she drinking? What was she wearing? Was she friends with the perpetrator? The answer to all of the above is: It doesn't matter. When we ask these questions we are reinforcing the message that a woman belongs inside her house. Worse, we are making excuses for men who rape. Patriarchy functions by placing the burden of not being raped on women themselves. It is not just politicians. Rape adjudication is littered with instances of how judges are influenced by how they believe a rape victim ought to behave. This is not justice, advice or concern. This is moral policing by a state that has failed to keep women safe. Rape happens because men rape. It is really that simple. It is the job of governments, administration, and workplaces to provide safe environments. Instead of looking for failed love affairs and political conspiracies, Banerjee might want to address school curriculums that do not teach consent. She may want to strengthen non-profits to tackle toxic ideas of masculinity. She could ensure swift trials and early justice. At the very least, she could keep her opinions to herself. Earlier this week, the BJP MLA from Beed, Maharashtra, Gopichand Padalkar

Namita Bhandare writes on gender. The views expressed are personal

The Bihar narrative, between the decades

I spent the first 13 years of my life in Bihar during the 1980s and 1990s, and never faced any crime. Zero instances. My parents were never worried about an Omni van pulling over, two well-fed gentlemen plucking me off their arms, and speeding off. Nor were they ever worried of someone robbing their car at gun point. The simple reason — we were poor. And it was no secret. My father didn't own a *saree* showroom at Motiheel, a prominent shopping street, in Muzaffarpur. Nor was he a doctor, treating the scores of people who couldn't afford a trip to Delhi. There was no car to carjack, no gold chain to snatch. The only villains the poor faced were mosquitoes. Being scared of the criminal ecosystem was a status symbol. The rich would send their kids to far-flung boarding schools, out of the reach of the vans, while people like us would be packed in school buses like sardines without much fear. At school, in your tin roof class, when the attendance was taken, you would realise there are some 16 Kumars in your section. There were no last names to be found — 30 kids, 60 first-names. I discovered that last names revealed caste only 13 years later, when I moved out of the state. You had to hide your wealth and your last name to live with peace. Corruption wasn't seen as evil. If an officer demands bribes from you to issue a death

certificate to your father, you don't detest him, instead feel envious. You want to be in his shoes so that you can extract more. Corruption was always aspirational. Bright students would burn the midnight oil and take a stab at an entrance exam multiple times to become a constable. People would pay bribes to not get promoted lest they get transferred to a dry department. Such people were spoken of very highly at family weddings. "Upri income bahut hai unki" (earns a lot from graft) people would stretch their eyebrows, visibly impressed. And due to such officers, there was barely any new infrastructure. We did the best job in the country of preserving the British Raj. The schools, bridges, town halls — all infra that was still erect was from the colonial times. We tried our hands a bit, but such bridges would kiss the ground by the next monsoons, and the executive engineer in charge would have 150 dishes at his son's wedding and would invite Kumar Sanu to sing. We didn't know if there was a world where such rules did not apply, with a semblance of law and order to prevent this. Our slang, too, was borrowed from the Raj. My *nana* (maternal grandfather) would entice me by saying, "Diwali me tumko hum ek naya bushirt kin denge" (I will buy you a new bush-shirt this Diwali). Bush-shirt, of course, originates from its



We did the best job in the country of preserving the British Raj.

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use as a practical garment worn in the "bush", or the undeveloped, rugged country, often for activities like hunting or safari — a favoured pastime of India's colonial overlords. These tolerably loose, durable shirts were designed for comfort in warm climates and to carry supplies with their multiple pockets. But for Bihar — and other parts of India — it was the garment of the *saahib*, something that the natives wore on special occasions. *Sadar bazaar*, Circuit house, *Dak banga*, Company *bagh* — all such terms were Raj vocabulary. We were in a time warp, not rich enough to be bothered by criminals, too ignorant to demand a better quality of life, just waiting for our turn to extract more. Imagine PhDs applying for the job of a peon. A peon could charge an amount equivalent to a professor's salary just to place your file on the officer's desk. But there was another way out. In those days, the biggest advertising hoardings in the bazaar were about escaping the place: coaching institutes proudly

displaying passport size pictures of students they exported to the world of prosperity. They only needed you to break your provident fund to pay the fees. An investment with unlimited, life-long returns. Wading through knee deep water with floating sewage, many would look at the hoardings and dream. Bihar has developed since. People who had moved out long ago still carry the same impression of Bihar, including this author. Like how NRIs still remember India as the socialist hellhole that had great food, and keep sharing articles confirming their nostalgic yet poor view of the country. "Long way to go," they would say, like how non-resident Biharis talk of Bihar — a *gutka* stain at a newly built Metro station in Mumbai confirming their biases, even if the guy responsible for the stain wasn't from Bihar. Abhishek Asthana is a tech and media entrepreneur, and tweets as @gabbbarsingh. The views expressed are personal



Abhishek Asthana

{ SUNDAY LETTERS }

How India lost MF Husain

This is with reference to "MF Husain: Man and myth, art and artist" by Karan Thapar (October 12). Husain, India's most celebrated modern artist, was a visionary whose creativity transcended boundaries. Yet, we, who should have cherished him, drove him into exile. The museum in Doha is a reminder of India's loss.

Sanjay Chopra

Need to protect elderly women

This is with reference to "Elderly women need focussed interventions" by Lalita Panicker (October 12). We can't leave elderly women to fend for themselves when we know that they live longer and are not as financially and digitally literate as men. A liveable pension and access to food, shelter, and health care must be ensured for them.

Bal Govind

The government devising effective solutions to address the nutritional and financial needs of elderly women in India is the need of the hour. This will enable them to live with dignity and respect in society.

Anuradha Bisaria

Write to us at: letters@hindustantimes.com

The most ancient Indian wolf is set to be a new species

Divya Gandhi

A discreet, charismatic denizen of scrubland and grasslands, the Indian wolf (*Canis lupus pallipes*), whose population has dwindled to just around 3,000 individuals in India and Pakistan, is likely to be classified as a new species by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

The Indian wolf was first placed within the umbrella genus of the grey wolf that

roamed swathes of Asia. However, it has the oldest living lineage of the world's wolves.

The canine has also been listed as “vulnerable”, bringing it much-needed attention as well as incentives to protect it and conserve its rapidly shrinking habitat.

This animal faces many threats, Y.V. Jhala, former dean of the Wildlife Institute of India and now a senior scientist of the Indian National Science Academy,

explained. They are poisoned for preying on livestock, their natural prey base is vastly depleted in its fragile habitat, and the semi-arid areas they inhabit are destroyed by highways and renewable energy projects, Dr. Jhala told *The Hindu*.

“A den site I studied in Kutch is now engulfed by the Adani Solar Farm.”

The wolf's persecution is curious, as they aren't known to attack humans. “There have been two re-

cent spates of wolf-human conflict, one in 1996 and the other last year in Bahraich district [in Uttar Pradesh],” Dr. Jhala said.

According to reports, since September, six people, including four children, were killed and 30 others were injured in wolf attacks in Bahraich. Meanwhile, almost the entire pack was shot to death.

“There has been a call for over two decades to have it be declared a distinct species,” Abi Vanak,

director of the Centre for Policy Design at the Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology, Bengaluru, told *The Hindu*.

‘Best models’

“The Indian wolf is already under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife Protection Act. The wolf, like the bustards and other denizens of the open natural ecosystems, do not need strict protected areas. Rather they serve as the best models for co-existence, and this is what

SNAPSHOTS



Did lead offer humans a survival advantage?

A study has reported that exposure to lead among hominids dates back over 2 million years. Researchers found traces of lead in fossil teeth from *Australopithecus africanus*, *Paranthropus robustus*, *Homo neanderthalensis*, and others. Tests revealed lead disrupted neural development when a now-extinct version of the *NOVA1* gene was absent. The findings suggest lead exposure may have shaped neurological and social traits, with the modern human variant of *NOVA1* possibly providing more protection.

Microbial link between arsenic in soil, lower rice yield uncovered

New research reveals that rice paddy microbes, and not soil arsenic levels alone, dictate arsenic toxicity and crop losses; managing microbial balance may thus be key to protecting the yield and its safety

Ashmita Gupta

Research published in *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* recently has warned that the type of microbes in rice paddies can determine whether arsenic, a notorious carcinogen and plant toxin, builds up in rice grains and triggers drastic crop losses.

The study has identified an important balance between arsenic-methylating bacteria, which convert inorganic arsenic into the toxic organic forms, versus demethylating archaea, which can undo this process. Where the methylating bacteria dominate, rice plants absorb the compound dimethylarsinic acid (DMA) and its more toxic derivative, dimethylated monothioarsenate (DMMTA). These compounds pose health risks to humans as well as induce straighthead disease. “Straighthead needs to be considered as a physiological disorder rather than a disease in the absence of any infectious agent,” rice pathologist Sridhar Ranganathan, who wasn't involved in the study, said.

“The symptoms are erect panicles with unfilled grains, often remaining green. Due to empty grains affecting the weight of the panicles, the ear-bearing tillers don't droop down and remain green and upright, as can be seen with unaffected healthy plants bearing normally filled matured grains in which the plants droop down showing symptoms of initiation of senescence

Arsenic whisperers

Scientists identify 17 key microbes whose abundance can accurately predict rice arsenic risk

- A study has found that microbe composition in rice paddies affects whether toxic arsenic compounds accumulate in rice grains
- Arsenic-methylating bacteria increase levels of DMA and its derivative DMMTA, causing straighthead disease
- When the ratio of methylating to demethylating microbes exceeds 1.5, straighthead disease risk was found to rise
- Newly cultivated paddies in the US, southern Europe, and northeast China were found to face heightened arsenic vulnerability
- The study's authors urge monitoring of arsenic speciation and microbial balance alongside interventions like midseason drainage
- A new study has found soils younger than 700 years have more methylating microbes while older soils host protective demethylating archaea

of the leaves and the grains.”

While long dismissed as a local agronomic issue, straighthead disease is now recognised as a global threat. In parts of the US and China, farmers have reported significant outbreaks, often in newly established or rotated paddies. West Bengal in India and Bangladesh have also previously reported straighthead disease.

The condition can result in up to 70% yield losses in severely affected areas. It occurs even when the total arsenic level in the soil is relatively low because the real problem is arsenic speciation, i.e. the chemical form arsenic takes in the soil and plant. The new study has found that the microbial communities that dominate in the paddies determine this specia-

tion. The research team, led by Peng Wang at Nanjing Agricultural University in China, analysed rice paddies of different ages in China, unearthing a surprising pattern. Soils younger than 700 years were dominated by arsenic-methylating bacteria, so the rice grown there accumulated more DMA and DMMTA and the fields were more prone to straighthead disease outbreaks. Soils older than 700 years had more demethylating archaea, which broke down DMA and reduced the compounds' buildup.

The researchers combined these field data with controlled soil incubation tests, genetic analyses, and a global survey of 801 paddy soil microbiomes. Eventually, they identified 11 methylating microbes and

six demethylating archaea whose abundance could accurately predict arsenic risk.

In the paper, the team also reported that newly cultivated paddy regions like the U.S., southern Europe, and northeast China showed high ratios of methylating to demethylating microbes, rendering them particularly vulnerable to straighthead outbreaks. Ancient rice-growing regions had stronger demethylating communities instead. When the ratio of methylating to demethylating microbes exceeded 1.5, the risk of straighthead disease was found to rise sharply.

India is the world's second-largest producer and consumer of rice. While much of the farming occurs in old, legacy paddies with relatively balanced

microbial communities, several States have had new or reclaimed paddy fields established in the last few decades. These fields may be at greater risk, per the new study.

Experts said the research also intersects with climate change. Higher temperatures and altered flooding regimes are expected to increase the soils' arsenic content (whether from natural sources or anthropogenic), and could tip the microbial balance towards the more harmful varieties. For a country where rice contributes nearly 40% of the population's caloric intake, the crop's safety and productivity are crucial.

Dr. Ranganathan said that even if the crop can't be saved in a single cropping season, agronomic interventions can mitigate risks. According to the research paper, draining the rice fields midseason can 'suppress' the methylating microbes by reintroducing oxygen into the soils. Silicon fertilisation has also been known to reduce rice plants' arsenic uptake. He also said crop rotation strategies can be adjusted to avoid destabilising microbial communities.

At the policy level, the findings highlight the need to monitor arsenic speciation, and not just total arsenic levels, as part of food safety regulations. Current standards, including those of the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation's 'Codex Alimentarius', focus on inorganic arsenic, leaving gaps around methylated species like DMMTA.

Ashmita Gupta is a science writer



Study recreates mean sea level over 4.5M years

Researchers have reconstructed the global mean sea level over the last 4.5 million years using oxygen isotope data from marine sediments. They reported that the levels 4.5-3 million years ago were around 20 m higher than today. Some 3-2.5 million years ago they dropped as the ice ages intensified. The study concluded that the familiar 100,000-year ice age cycles developed not from changes in the earth's orbit but from internal climate feedbacks.



Ants' defence against disease includes the nest

Black garden ants (*Lasius niger*) change their nest structure to limit the spread of disease, a behaviour its discoverers have called “architectural immunity”. When ants were exposed to a fungal pathogen, they built nests with entrances farther apart and tunnels arranged in ways that reduced contact. The ants also placed chambers holding the brood in less connected areas, further reducing risk. The study suggests ants use their built environment as part of a collective immune system.

Many insects are moving from taboo to the table



SPEAKING OF SCIENCE
D. Balasubramanian

We depend on insects in many ways for producing food for the world's population. They pollinate our crop plants, break down decaying plant and animal matter, and are natural pest controllers. We also consume honey from honeybees.

Insects are all around us. However, many of us would be reluctant to indulge in entomophagy, to eat insects or their larvae. One reason for this is probably neophobia, the fear of trying out anything new.

At the same time, humans are currently worried about the overexploitation of the planet. There is a need for foods that pro-

vide high-quality calories without consuming large amounts of natural resources. Insects fit the bill. Their protein content is typically 40% by dry weight, the fat content 20-30%, and they also have minerals like potassium and iron.

Nearly a fourth of the world's population already eats edible insects. Some insects are regarded as delicacies. Mexican escamole, known as the “caviar of the desert”, tastes like richly buttered baby corn but is the fried pupae and larvae of the velvety tree ant. The chef Sheril Kirshenbaum discussed tasteful insect menus in a 2023 episode of ‘Serving Up Science’ on PBS.

In India, edible insects are consumed among indigenous communities in the Northeast States, Odisha, and in the Western Ghats. The practice is rooted in



nutritional needs, cultural habits, and folk medicine. Tribal and rural populations in the Northeast reputedly consume more than 100 edible insect species for their protein, and they are also sold in local markets. Fried, roasted, or cooked, certain beetles, moths, hornets, and water bugs are preferred – although flies are not.

Collecting insects from

nature may not be sustainable, as insect populations may be depleted. Some groups have thus taken up semi-domestication, where insects and their larvae are nurtured and harvested by humans.

Ethnobiologists at the Nagaland University in Lumami have been studying traditional methods of insect farming and how they can be adapted to cultivat-

ing new species.

The Chakhesang and Angami tribes of Nagaland and Manipur consider the Asian giant hornet a delicacy, including roasted adults and fried larvae. This hornet is now semi-domesticated. Its cultivation begins by locating a nest, which is transported to a 1-metre-deep rearing pit that is loosely filled with soil. The empty nest is anchored to a pole just above the pit and covered with loose soil. A queen soon arrives with worker hornets, which begin enlarging the nest below the ground. The result is a large multi-layered structure resembling an inverted pyramid. For the harvest, adult hornets are smoked out and the larvae are extracted.

Tribal groups around the Annamalai Hills in Tamil Nadu use weaver ants as a culinary and medicinal resource. Leaf nests con-



Question Corner

Undulating field

Why does the earth's magnetic field have 'weak spots'?

Researchers analysed data from the European Space Agency's 'Swarm' mission and recently reported that the South Atlantic Anomaly, the region of weakest intensity in the earth's magnetic field, has expanded since 2014. Today, according to the data, it covers about 0.9% more of the earth's surface than it did in 2014.

The field has weak spots because the molten iron and nickel circulating in the earth's outer core don't move uniformly. Their motion generates the field in a process called the geodynamo. Since the flow

is uneven, there are regions where the magnetic flux is concentrated and others where it spreads out. The earth's field is reorganised as the fluid core moves, and the weak regions can expand, shrink or migrate over decades without threatening the planet's overall magnetic shield or indicating a magnetic reversal. Indeed, the study's authors have stressed that despite the Anomaly's apparent expansion, there is no reason for alarm since such changes are part of the natural variation of the geomagnetic field.

Readers may send their questions / answers to science@thehindu.co.in

What are the new PF withdrawal guidelines?

How are India-Taliban relations changing?

Can a Taliban led-Afghanistan go from being India's enemy's enemy and become a friend?

India has much to gain from a friendly government in Kabul, with influence based on its historic friendship with the Afghan people during the 2001-2021 period. India was Afghanistan's first strategic partner; built an air corridor to increase bilateral trade; and worked on a number of development and infrastructure projects there. While the Taliban's current conflict with Pakistan will only enhance New Delhi's role, it must be remembered that the Taliban in power now have had very close ties with Pakistan's military in the past. In addition, the Taliban leadership in Kabul and Kandahar have differences, and as Afghanistan's economy continues to suffer, they may face challenges to the regime's control. For India, building a tactical relationship with Kabul is vital, but a friendship based on shared values and common worldviews seem impossible at present.

Why do elephants face a jumbo challenge?

CMYK        A TY-TY

From backroom to ballot

The former political strategist, whose Jan Suraj Party is contesting the coming Assembly elections in Bihar, seeks to disrupt the existing bipolar equations of the State and emerge as a new force

ILLUSTRATION: R. RAJESH

A child of a physician and a homemaker, Prashant Kishor, hailing from Bihar's Rohtas, did his early

It was after the 2021 polls in West Bengal and Tamil Nadu, where Mr. Kishor aided the Trinamool and the DMK to victory, that he made the decision to make the leap from backroom political strategy to forming his own party. In an interview to *The Hindu* recently, he explained his thinking at that time. “The trigger point was the COVID pandemic. At that time, I was involved in elections in [West] Bengal and Tamil Nadu, and I

felt helpless that despite all the network, power, resources that I had, I felt that I could not be of any help to anybody. It also made me realise that a lot of the talk of good governance in Bihar is hollow. That almost 5 million people got into trouble, had to walk back to Bihar. That's the time I thought I should go back to Bihar. And the proof of this is that the day the Trinamool won Bengal, May 2, 2021, I announced that I'm quitting what I was doing," he said.

His *modus operandi* thereafter was one of exploring the political field. He undertook a two-year tour across Bihar, and reached out to the Congress. His first idea, he said, was to work with the Congress, to devise a plan for six States of North India where the Congress was diminishing, and revive the pre-independence role of the Congress as an outlet for anyone who wants to contribute to public affairs. "Just as during the freedom movement, anyone, from those who

For someone who has disrupted the backroom of political campaigning in India, entering the electoral fray without a political legacy to bank upon, Prashant Kishor continues to be a fascinating chapter of India's democracy.

After the 2021 polls in West Bengal and Tamil Nadu, where Mr. Kishor aided the Trinamool and the DMK to victory, he made the decision to make the leap from backroom strategy to forming his own political party

Mr. Muttaqi was part of the U.S.-Taliban negotiation and was present at the signing of the deal in Doha on February 29, 2020, when the Taliban delegation was led by Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar. Though

Opinion

SUNDAY, OCTOBER 19, 2025



India's Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma

FILE PHOTO: REUTERS

ODI series vs Australia vital for Rohit and Virat

RINGSIDE VIEW

Tushar Bhaduri

THE THREE-MATCH ODI series in Australia, beginning in Perth today, is more significant for India than for the hosts. While the reigning world champions in the 50-over format have bragging rights to protect against the team they beat so memorably on its home turf, against the odds, to win their sixth crown, it's obvious that the Aussies have more than one eye on the Ashes commencing in a month's time.

It's evident in the squad assembled for the games, made up basically of whoever was available. Even the Sheffield Shield matches have been prioritised over the ODIs, as they help their key players prepare for the clash with the Old Enemy for the urn the Aussies haven't surrendered for a long time.

Skipper Pat Cummins is racing against time to be fit for the England series, ODI linchpins like Steve Smith and Glenn Maxwell have retired from the format since the ICC Champions Trophy earlier this year, wicketkeeper Josh Inglis will miss at least the first

Both the Indian stalwarts have an enviable ODI record in Australia, but it's been a long time since they last played a 50-over game there

two games of the ODI series as he recovers from a calf strain, leg-spinner Adam Zampa will miss the Perth game to be at home with his expecting wife, as will Alex Carey as he prepares for a Shield game in the build-up to the Ashes. Cameron Green has also been a late withdrawal due to injury concerns. Lest we forget, David Warner is not part of the scene either and Australia have struggled to find a suitable successor.

Stand-in skipper Mitchell Marsh is an experienced hand, but consider some of the names in the Australian squad for the ODI series against India — Mitchell Owen, Josh Philippe, Matthew Short, Matt Renshaw, Cooper Connolly, Xavier Bartlett, Ben Dwarshuis, Nathan Ellis and Matthew Kuhnemann. The Australian domestic structure is considered one of the most competitive in the world, and most of the players mentioned above have had some international experience, but these are not the sort of names expected to keep any opposition captain or coach awake at night. The aura and intimidation associated with sides of years gone by is missing.

With the next major ICC event being the T20 World Cup in India in February-March next year, it's understandable that the five-match series in the shorter format, following the ODI rubber, will be more significant in terms of form, combinations, and preparation for the big event. The next global 50-over competition is two years away.

Stalwarts return

But for India, the three-match ODI series assumes significance due to the return to national colours of two stalwarts who have retired from international cricket in the other two formats. Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma last played for India in the successful Champions Trophy campaign, more than seven months ago. The latter has since been relieved of captaincy in the format also, and their place in the plans for the 2027 ODI World Cup in southern Africa is anything but certain.

Neither of them has played a com-

petitive game since the Indian Premier League season ended four and a half months ago, and their age and the stage of their careers would suggest that it takes longer to get into the groove, regardless of how much work one puts into training and net sessions. Mahendra Singh Dhoni is a prime example. He has played every match for Chennai Super Kings over the last couple of years, but his primary contribution seems to be bringing fans through the turnstiles.

In that context, it would be interesting to see how Rohit and Virat do in the three matches Down Under. The Australian team may not look the strongest on paper, but the bowling attack still includes Mitchell Starc and Josh Hazlewood. Both the Indian stalwarts have an enviable ODI record in Australia, averaging more than 50, but it's been a long time since they last played a 50-over game there.

Pitches for the limited-overs games are generally more batting-friendly than the types they encountered in the Tests at the turn of the year, which hastened their Test retirement. That, and the nature of the format itself — their best — should give Rohit and Virat a fair chance of success. Shubman Gill's elevation to ODI captaincy means Rohit is no longer an automatic selection. He and Virat will have to prove their mettle

with runs or any series — even this one — could be their last.

Clock is ticking

Chief selector Ajit Agarkar has said that the 2027 World Cup is a long time away, but India, or any other top side, doesn't play too many ODIs these days. Playing a handful of matches a year is not the best way to stay in the groove.

The two veterans may be asked to play the Vijay Hazare Trophy — the domestic 50-over competition — but that can be useful only for staying in batting rhythm. If they have the appetite, Virat and Rohit are likely to feast on bowling attacks that may be a notch or two below international standard.

Then again, directions to India players to turn out for their respective state teams have been given in the past too, but not always followed. In Indian cricket, stars reign supreme and the biggest ones don't play domestic cricket unless there's no way out. There are no consequences, according to the colonial-era dictum "Show me the man and I'll show you the law."

But that's a debate for another day. Rohit and Virat probably have to treat every series (or maybe, every match) as an audition if they have ambitions of playing the 2027 World Cup, even though Agarkar has said that the duo is not on trial. It's no secret that falling short in the 2023 final on home soil after rolling through the tournament like a juggernaut was a bitter pill to swallow. Australia, in any case, have provided the biggest challenge throughout their careers, but now the task confronting both of them is to prolong them. They would dearly love another crack at the biggest trophy in the sport, if they earn it.

As far as the series in Australia goes, their presence could only help Gill, who is taking over the ODI reins after a stellar start to his Test captaincy. Having the two preceding all-format captains to bounce ideas off can only be beneficial for the 26-year-old. With most of the spotlight on Rohit and Virat, Gill can slip seamlessly into his new role.

ACROSS THE AISLE

P Chidambaram



In a developing country, a measure of the government's success is its capacity to build quality infrastructure and create quality jobs. While the quantity of infrastructure built in the last decade has been large (and the amounts spent colossal), the quality has been appalling — obsolete design and technology, falling bridges, collapsing buildings, and new highways that are washed away after the first rain. On quality jobs, the less said the better

(Author's note: I have written this column since 2014. Earlier, I had written the column during 1999-2004. Writing a column every week is a punishing schedule but I have enjoyed it thoroughly. After consulting the editors, I have decided to continue to write the column but with breaks. Thank you for reading the column because that is my greatest reward.)

AT AGE 93 (bless him), Dr C Rangarajan is an indefatigable campaigner for an open economy and prudent fiscal management. He was a central banker for many years and the 19th governor of the Reserve Bank of India (1992-97). On October 14, 2025, he co-authored with Mr DK Srivastava an op-ed on the estimate of India's *potential* growth rate and came to the conclusion that it was 6.5% a year.

He was charitable to say the growth rate was "in the present world environment, a reasonably high level" but quickly added "although for creating a higher growth of employment, we do need to push our potential growth further."

I think an average growth rate of 6.5 years over several years is *dismal*. That rate keeps India in the group of countries with a 'lower-middle income' defined as Gross National Income *per capita* of between \$1,146 and \$4,515 (in 2024-25). India's GNI of \$2,650 (in 2024) places it in the group that includes Egypt, Pakistan, Philippines, Vietnam and Nigeria.

The GNI *per capita* needs to *double* to get India out of the lower-middle income group. If India's current rate of growth is sustained, it will take *nine* years to achieve that goal, and the unemployment situation may worsen.

INSIDE TRACK

COOMI KAPOOR



Zenana politics

The MEA disowns responsibility for the retrogressive step of barring women journalists from attending the press conference by Afghanistan's foreign minister, Amir Khan Muttaqi, at the Afghan embassy in Delhi on October 10. The ministry's position is that it cannot interfere in the decision of a sovereign state within its embassy. But the argument is not that simple. Until India officially recognises the Taliban government, its representatives cannot claim possession of the Afghan embassy. And while the Vienna convention mandates for the host nation to ensure the security of the inmates of a foreign embassy, the embassy in turn is expected to adhere to the country's laws. In India, gender discrimination is an offence. Within two days, the Taliban tried to make amends for its much criticised exclusion of women by inviting them to Muttaqi's second press conference. The women journalists made no concessions to the Taliban dress code. In fact, one spunky scribe wore a short dress with a low neckline. There were two exceptions

— one woman wore a hijab, the other a burkha. They explained apologetically to colleagues that their beat included covering Afghanistan and they could not afford to offend the government there.

A retired Indian diplomat recalls that even in Pakistan there are occasions when the "men only" rule persists. In the 1980s, an official delegation from New Delhi's foreign office visited Pakistan and then President Zia-ul-Haq invited all the visiting Indians to tea, except the sole woman. When Ambassador S K Singh pointed out the omission, an invitation was sent. But when the woman under secretary arrived, she was politely ushered to the zenana section. Since her specific responsibility was to take notes of the meeting, the interaction went unrecorded!

Gift deduction

Considering the vast sums India spent on the Trump family in his first term, US Ambassador Sergio Gor's gift for Narendra Modi from the US President — a signed photograph of the two leaders — appeared rather modest. (According to records from the Biden Presidency, the Trump family was bestowed 17 unreported gifts from India with a total estimated value of \$47,000, including a costly vase, a model of the Taj Mahal, cufflinks, a designer charm bracelet for Melania and a silk rug and silver Charminar sculpture for Ivanka.) More than the cost of the

offering, eyebrows were raised at the choice of the photograph. Instead of the several bear hugs and handshake shots available, the framed photograph is of the two men standing stiffly on separate rostrums addressing a joint press conference in Washington this February. Trump has scribbled with a marker pen the cordial message "Mr PM, you are Great", but it is well known that while Trump revels in speaking extempore, Modi is known to prefer one-on-one interactions rather than press conferences.

Tweeting sheep

It is customary for the BJP's media managers to ask others to re-tweet messages. The practice is to help the BJP frame the narrative, but in reality, it makes party leaders and those dependent on the government's goodwill, even national sportspersons, look like a flock of sheep, repeating near identical messages on X. Former Delhi MP Meenakshi Lekhi recently let the cat out of the bag by not just re-tweeting the message on Happy Air Force Day sent to her from a senior minister's media team, but the accompanying instructions as well. "I have switched to Zoho Mail. Kindly note the changed address, etc...", she tweeted using her actual email address!

Ceasefire off

The unspoken peace pact between West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata

Banerjee and Prime Minister Narendra Modi was finally broken this month following the brutal attack on BJP MP Khagen Murmu in Jalpaiguri. Modi took to X to blast Banerjee's government for its apathy. Banerjee retorted that the TMC could not be blamed without evidence, but she hastily visited the injured MP. Until now Banerjee had trained her guns solely on Amit Shah, whom she often refers to sarcastically as number 2.

Between Modi and Banerjee there was a fairly cozy relationship with neither criticising the other directly. Even the RSS in West Bengal largely keeps its distance from political issues, since it has little in common with BJP chief Suwendhu Adhikari, who is originally from the TMC. State governor CV Ananda Bose maintained a low profile, unlike his combative and very vocal predecessor Jagdeep Dhankar. Bose has been on the back foot ever since allegations of misconduct against him surfaced. But after the Jalpaiguri incident, with blood oozing from Murmu's head, Shah has made clear that with Assembly elections due next year it is not acceptable for Sangh Parivar members to sit on the fence. That Banerjee will now face the heat from the extended saffron family was evident after the recent gang rape of a medical student in Durgapur. Governor Bose was quick to go on the offensive against the Mamata government. A section of the ruling party even advocates imposing President's rule before the Assembly poll.



File photo of Congress workers protesting against the government

EXPRESS PHOTO

Many perspectives, one conclusion

Consensus on estimates

RBI has increased its estimate of growth for 2025-26 from 6.5% to 6.8%, but it had very little to say on unemployment (*RBI Bulletin, September 2025, State of the Economy*): "Various indicators of employment conditions depicted a mixed picture in August. The all-India unemployment rate declined to 5.1%..." The scant attention to unemployment is because the RBI Act mandates the RBI to securing monetary and price stability with no reference to employment. The **Ministry of Finance**, in its August issue of Monthly Economic Review, stayed within the earlier predicted range of 6.3-6.8%. On unemployment, the Review did not express any view.

The **World Bank** estimated India to grow at 6.5% in 2025-26 but trimmed it to 6.3% in 2026-27. The **International Monetary Fund** increased its projection of India's growth rate to 6.6% for 2025 while predicting a decline to 6.2% for 2026. The **Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)** projected India to grow at 6.7% in 2025-26 and 6.2% in 2026-27.

GFCF, the spoiler

The consensus is India's growth rate will be 6.5% in the current year and lower by 20 basis points in the next

year. These estimates broadly confirm Dr Rangarajan's conclusion. Dr Rangarajan has identified the reasons for the modest growth rate: the *gross fixed capital formation* (GFCF) rate that has been *stationary* for the last few years and the *causes* for the stationary GFCF rate. GFCF has fallen from 35.8% of GDP in 2007-08 to 30.1% of GDP in 2024-25. It has been more or less stationary in the last 10 years at between 28 and 30%.

Private fixed capital formation (PFCF) — part of the total GFCF — has fallen from 27.5% of GDP in 2007-08 to 23.8% in 2022-23 (last available official data). Dr Rangarajan also mentioned the incremental credit output ratio (ICOR), but I have left that out because it is a derived number. As Dr Rangarajan concluded, unless GFCF/PFCF improves or the ICOR declines, India is stuck with a 6.5% growth rate.

Why is private capital shying away from investment in India? The foremost reason is the trust deficit between the government of India and the industry. Finance Minister Ms Nirmala Sitaraman has used every arrow in her quiver, but Indian investors are not impressed by her entreaties or admonitions or threats. They prefer to hoard cash, wait and watch, acquire insolvent companies or invest abroad.

Dr Singh-like courage

In a developing country, a measure of the government's success is its capacity to build *quality infrastructure* and create *quality jobs*. While the quantity of infrastructure built in the last decade has been large (and the amounts spent colossal), the quality has been appalling — obsolete design and technology, falling bridges, collapsing buildings, and new highways that are washed away after the first rain. On quality jobs, the less said the better. There are no jobs for the 'educated unemployed', and the unemployment rate for this group is 29.1%. 'Youth unemployment' rate is 45.4%. School-educated and school-droppers do odd and irregular jobs or migrate. The official unemployment rate of 5.2% in September is a joke in the same way as the official retail inflation rate of 1.54% is.

A GDP growth rate of 6.5% is not a moment of celebration. It means India is stuck in the lower-middle income trap without the ideas or the intrepidity to break out. It is a time for summoning Manmohan Singh-like courage.

Next: November 2, 2025



Website: pchidambaram.in
Twitter: @Pchidambaram_IN

From screen to soul: Festivals via film

CHAITANYA K. PRASAD

In Indian cinema, a festival is never just a celebration, it is a heartbeat. A plot twist. A pause before the storm. A grand, glittering breath.

From the swirling gulal of Holi to the solemn shimmer of Diwali diyas, from Eid celebrations bursting with rhythm to Lohri bonfires under a starlit sky, Indian films have long used festivals as more than just backdrops. They are portals. Cinematic rituals. Emotional punctuation marks in the stories being told and remembered. As Diwali approaches, it is worth reflecting on just how powerfully cinema in India has preserved, performed, and reinvented the art of celebration, for all communities, all faiths, and all seasons of the soul.

Some of the most iconic scenes in Indian cinema unfold beneath the glow of festivity.

Consider "Rang Barse" from *Silsila*, a Holi song that speaks not just of colour, but of layered emotions, unspoken tensions, and the cathartic joy of release, a moment where the personal and the festive converge on screen. Then there is the effervescent "Balam Pichkari" from *Yeh Jawaani Hai Deewani*, where Holi becomes a cinematic turning point, playful, energetic, and unfiltered. It marks a moment of transformation for Naina, as friendships deepen and laughter becomes liberation.

In *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham*, the grand Diwali homecoming sequence, with its glittering chandeliers, perfectly coordinated attire, and overwhelming emotional payoff, has become a cultural shorthand for familial warmth and aspiration. Not just a dramatic beat, but a memory etched in visual opulence.

And in *Veer-Zaara*, Lohri finds celebration through the infectiously joyful "Lodi" song, a scene brimming with dance, colour, and shared delight, transcending religious boundaries and becoming a cinematic anthem of cultural harmony.

Few nations celebrate everything with the kind of inclusive exuberance that India does, and cinema has mirrored this truth with rare beauty.

Navratri's Garba pulses vividly through *Hum Dil De Chuke Sanam*, where dandiya transforms into emotional crescendo. Durga Puja, in *Kahaani*, becomes more than religious observance; it is layered with symbolism, as a woman's quiet revenge is mirrored in the goddess's power. Eid's vibrant energy is captured in the filmi spectacle of *Tees Maar Khan*'s "Wallah Re Wallah", where rhythm, pageantry, and celebration flood the frame with colour and camaraderie.

These depictions are not mere tokens of cultural representation, they are cinematic declarations. Indian films have never flattened festivals into stereotype. Instead, they allow each one to unfold in its own distinct rhythm; sometimes grand, sometimes intimate, always resonant. This is cinema as soft power: presenting an India where a temple bell, a Sufi chorus, and a church choir can share narrative space without contradiction.

Among all festivals, Holi appears most frequently in Indian cinema, and for good reason. Its visuals, spirit, and metaphorical richness make it a director's dream and a viewer's delight. Few sequences capture emotional turning points better than *Sholay*'s "Holi Ke Din". Amidst clouds of red and green, the entire village pulses with life and unity. The song feels like a suspended moment in time: joyful, defiant, prophetic.



In *Baghban*, "Holi Khela Raghuvendra" features Amitabh Bachchan and Hema Malini dancing with abandon in their later years, proving that the spirit of Holi knows no age. The scene is steeped in earthiness, mischief, and music, evoking the very feel of desi homes and hearts. Across decades, Holi has symbolised everything from reunion and release to transformation. On screen, it is never just a festival, it is a cinematic signature of celebration at its rawest and most human.

Music in festival scenes has a way of escaping the screen and settling into real life.

The "Soni Soni" Holi sequence in *Mohabbatein* isn't just romantic, it is disruptive in the best way, using colour to challenge rigid tradition with uncontrollable joy.

"Happy Diwali" from *Home Delivery*, regardless of the film's

fate, finds itself playing in homes, shops, and playlists every festive season.

These songs no longer belong solely to their films. They have found their way into weddings, markets, and memories. They are not just melodies, but markers of time and tradition.

For many, these cinematic sounds are now part of how festivals are felt, heard not just in speakers, but in hearts. What makes these scenes endure is not choreography or costume, but the underlying emotion.

They evoke home. Nostalgia. Belonging. Moments of standing on a terrace as fireworks crackle across the sky. Of dancing shoulder to shoulder in a Holi gathering. Of watching a quiet prayer scene in a darkened theatre and feeling suddenly, deeply understood.

They remind viewers that celebration itself can be a form of resistance. That joy is not naïve, it is powerful. That identity can be braided from many faiths, many sounds, many songs and still hold true to the spirit of joy. In an era often marked by division, cinematic festivals continue to stitch people together. They remind the world that India's soul does not rest in headlines, but in the way it celebrates: loudly, lovingly, and across difference. So this Diwali, as lights flicker across rooftops and screens glow with re-runs of beloved films, one truth remains unchanged: Indian cinema does not just capture festivals. It elevates them into stories. And turns stories into celebrations.

(The writer is a former civil servant, who writes on cinema and strategic communication. With inputs from Zoya Ahmad and Vaishnavi Srinivasan. The views are personal.)

Time for a reset in ties with Canada

MANAS MUKUL BANDYOPADHYAY

The relationship between India and Canada has been marked by periods of highs and lows, influenced by factors such as the Cold War, nuclear non-proliferation issues, and trade disputes. Despite these challenges, both countries have consistently sought to strengthen their ties, recognizing the potential for mutual benefit in areas such as trade, education, and strategic cooperation.

The recent agreement between India and Canada to work closely on a new roadmap for bilateral ties has generated significant interest and optimism about the future trajectory of their relationship. This development comes at a crucial juncture, when both countries are seeking to diversify their diplomatic and economic engagements. A critical analysis of this emerging partnership reveals both opportunities and challenges that will shape the contours of India-Canada relations in the years to come.

One of the key areas of cooperation is trade and investment. Canada is looking to diversify its trade and investment portfolio, and India, with its rapidly growing economy, presents an attractive opportunity. The new roadmap could focus on reducing tariffs, improving market access, and promoting investments in sectors such as agriculture, energy, and technology. Both countries aim to boost bilateral trade to USD 20 billion by 2027. Canada's strengths in agriculture, such as canola and pulses,

could complement India's growing demand for these products. India, on the other hand, offers opportunities for Canadian companies in sectors like IT, renewable energy, and infrastructure.

Another area of potential cooperation is clean technology and renewable energy. Both countries have emphasized the importance of clean technology and renewable energy in their economic strategies. Collaboration in these areas could facilitate the transfer of technology, expertise, and investment, contributing to sustainable development and climate change mitigation. They plan to invest in green hydrogen, lithium exploration, and clean mobility. Canada's expertise in clean-tech and sustainability could be beneficial for India's ambitious renewable energy targets.

Education and research are also key areas of cooperation. The new roadmap aims to enhance academic collaborations, research partnerships, and skill development initiatives. Canada will work with India on joint university exchange programmes in AI, agriculture, and public health, and introduce a Single Window Visa System for Indian students. This will not only promote people-to-people ties but also provide opportunities for students and researchers from both countries to collaborate and learn from each other.

Strategic cooperation is another area where India and Canada can leverage their shared values and interests to strengthen their partnership. The changing global security landscape has underscored the need for like-minded countries to cooperate on issues such

as counter-terrorism, non-proliferation, and maritime security. India and Canada can work together to address these challenges and promote regional stability.

However, there are also challenges that need to be addressed. Trade disputes have been a major irritant in the relationship. India and Canada have had trade disputes in the past, particularly related to agricultural products and intellectual property rights. These issues need to be resolved through dialogue and negotiation to ensure a smooth progression of their trade relationship.

The nuclear deal between Canada and India has faced hurdles in the past, and its revival is crucial for deepening their energy cooperation. Both countries need to work towards finding a mutually acceptable solution to this issue. India's concerns about Khalistani separatism are another challenge that need to be addressed. Canada's handling of Khalistani separatist groups has been a point of contention in the relationship. India expects Canada to take concrete actions against these groups, which are perceived as a threat to India's national security.

To achieve a comprehensive and strategic partnership, both countries need to build trust and confidence. Regular high-level visits, dialogue, and communication can help build trust and confidence between the two nations. They should focus on areas of common interest and address outstanding issues such as trade disputes and nuclear cooperation.

The new roadmap for India-Canada bilateral ties holds promise for both



countries. With a focus on building trust, identifying common interests, and addressing outstanding issues, India and Canada can strengthen their partnership and create a more prosperous and secure future for their citizens.

The relationship between India and Canada has come a long way since the Cold War era. While there are challenges that need to be addressed, the potential for cooperation in areas such as trade, education, and strategic cooperation is significant. With a renewed commitment to strengthening their ties, India and Canada can create a more prosperous and secure future for their citizens.

The way forward for India-Canada relations involves a multi-pronged approach. Both countries need to

work together to address their differences and explore new areas of cooperation. This can be achieved through regular dialogue, high-level visits, and cooperation in international organizations. By working together, India and Canada can strengthen their partnership and promote regional stability and security.

Ultimately, the success of India-Canada relations will depend on the ability of both countries to work together, build trust, and address their differences. With a focus on shared values and interests, India and Canada can strengthen their relationship and create a more prosperous and secure future for their citizens.

(The writer is Associate Professor and Head, Political Science (Retd. WBES), Chandernagore Govt. College.)

NOW AND AGAIN

CHECK LIST

AVINASH GODBOLEY

I have been 'launching' my wife for a good part of more than two decades. I must proudly hasten to add that each 'launch' has been successful.

The countdown to this 'launch' begins at fifteen minutes to ten in the morning, when it is time for Madam to set course for her office on her rickety old two-wheeler. I begin by wiping and dusting it, peering into its tank to see if it has enough fuel, checking its brakes and placing the vehicle at a fixed spot, nose facing the road, inches away from my garden gate.

As the clock ticks away, out comes Madam, and places her water bottle in the small rack in front of the driver's seat, hangs her purse on the hook provided for the purpose and straddles her good old two-wheeler. This is a signal for me to open the gate, which I dutifully do.

As she makes herself comfortable on the seat, I mumble the 'pre-launch' checklist. It goes as follows - flask, mask, mobile, purse, chappal (to ensure that she has put on office chappals), any other document, curry leaves (to remind her if she has taken curry leaves from our garden for her colleagues), stand (I have to ensure that she has not forgotten to lift the vehicle's stand), bindi (to remind myself to check if she has her 'bindi' on her forehead) and specs (to remind her if she has kept her reading glasses in her purse).

I have to be loud enough for Madam to hear it, but not too loud for inquisitive neighbours or passers-by who might prick their ears to hear what I am mumbling, after all. After umpteen 'launches', the 'checklist' has been committed to memory and is quickly and accurately recited prior to 'launching' my wife for her 10 to 5 routine at the office.

After all the boxes in my launch list have been ticked, out goes Madam from our gate with my 'parting shot' - go slow and do not forget to indicate when you turn. She acknowledges with a slight nod of her head and dashes off to her office.

After over two decades of being successfully 'launched', Madam has now decided that the 31st of December this year will be her last working day. Much like a pilot's checklist prior to take-off, my check list has stood her in good stead. She has always reported to her office punctually and confidently, never a thing forgotten at home, never a regret for having left something essential behind.

I hope that my role in successfully 'launching' her will get more than a passing mention as she delivers her farewell speech on the last day of this year.

News Items

CIVIL WAR FARCE OPPOSING CHINESE TROOPS “FRATERNIZE ”

London, Oct.

The latest irruption of civil war in China is indicated by a message from Reuter's Shanghai correspondent, who reports the acceleration of warlike preparations in Chekiang Province. There was a hurried withdrawal by train of Chang Tso Lin's troops towards the north from Shanghai, in the direction of Nanking, whereupon 1,000 Cheking troops under Sun Chaun Fang, who is an ally of Chang Tso Lin's old enemy, Wu Pei Fu, arrived at Shanghai station and cut off 50 of the departing troops, who fraternized with the new-comers. Meanwhile, Chang Tso Lin has summoned a conference of military leaders at Mukden.—Reuter.

SWARAJ PARTY

PROPOSED MEETING AT NAGPUR CANCELLED

Madras, Oct.

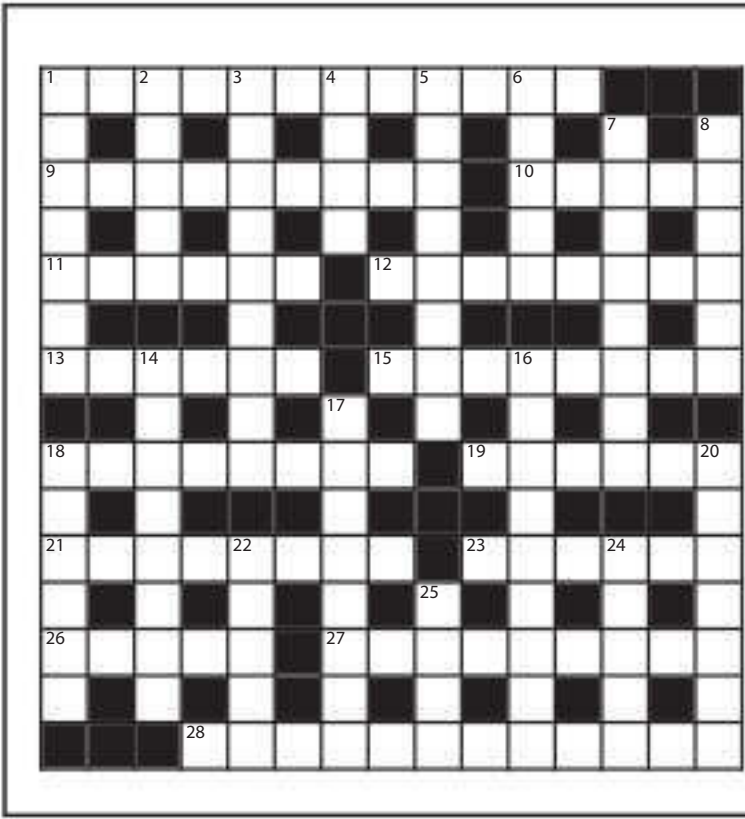
The secretary of the All-India Swaraj Party intimates that the meeting of the General Council of the All-India Swaraj Party which was announced to be held at Nagpur on November 1, stands cancelled. The only meetings that will take place at Nagpur are the meeting of the Executive Council of the Swaraj Party and the joint meeting of the Swaraj Party of the C. P., Hindi C. P., Marathi and Berar Provinces. No meeting of the General Council will take place.

DACCA MAIL DISASTER

INJURED CLERK DIES IN HOSPITAL

Pranballav Karmaker, one of the injured in the Dacca mail disaster, died in the Campbell Hospital, Calcutta, shortly after admission. This brings the total number of dead to eleven. Karmaker, who was a clerk at Tatanagar, was on his way back from his village home in the Dacca district when he was involved in the disaster. Of the other injured men detained in hospital Brojogopal Saha has had his right hand and left leg amputated. His condition is said to be precarious. The rest are reported to be making favourable progress.

Crossword | No. 293267



Last Sunday's Solution

OVER THE MOON
P X Y L N U H O
T T E U P A M E R I C A N O
I C E P A S S V M
M E R G A N S T E R A D E L E
T A S S E T T E R N E D
S H I T T I C K S H A C K
M E O E I U
S N A P D U S T M A N
S S T R A L P B
H I N D I E X T E N U A T E
T I N V A T I A
S A V O U R I E S T A R O T
H E E E E E E E
A W L E D O W N T R O D D E N

ACROSS

12 Discredit official before cup tie? Only occasionally (6)

15 Briefly pass around gossip, enthusiastically at first, to canvass opinion (3,1,4)

18 Minute area covered by minute juvenile cow? (8)

19 Dreams of Delia's cooking (6)

21 Quietly returned cigarettes and beer of old Greeks (8)

23 Georgia possibly claiming Union is bust? (6)

26 Modify a flat over time (5)

27 Behind or up-to-date? Behind, stopping behind mostly (2,7)

28 Retiring salesman's short trip in car helping to produce sweat (12)

DOWN

1 Icons strip naked: start to request top of bottom is covered (7)

2 Yorkshire city's scam? Quite the opposite (5)

3 Decayed flesh concealed by dodgy owner (4-5)

4 Coat left next to court (4)

5 Extremely lazy attempt by the French to conserve unity (4,4)

6 Caught breaking convoluted rule for money (5)

7 One is entertained by member running around rubbing glasses (8)

8 Stroke German weapon (6)

14 Absolutely nothing on main road and train back is routine (8)

16 Song embracing nakedness – having

17 Suspect seen smuggling monkey bodies (8)

18 It cuts, it stings, and it rubs, primarily, when the wrong way round (6)

20 Dance-pop band playing for new partner's child (7)

22 Composer runs out of parody (5)

24 Meal ultimately consumed by Asian? (5)

25 Imagine cuddling old priests (4)

no clothes, nothing – may be heard here (9)

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



ANIL
RAJPUT

Between peaks and plates: The story of Uttarakhand’s culinary heritage

Nestled in the lap of the majestic snow peaked Himalayas, Uttarakhand is a land where natural splendor, ancient history, and vibrant culture blend seamlessly. Known as Devbhumi, the Land of the Gods, it is home to sacred shrines in Badrinath and Kedarnath, and is where the holy Ganga and Yamuna rivers originate, whose picturesque routes converge at the revered towns of Haridwar and Rishikesh. From the snow-clad peaks of Nanda Devi to the misty slopes of Mussoorie, from the serene lakes of Nainital to the lush valleys of Kumaon and Garhwal, its geography offers breathtaking views that have long drawn travelers and pilgrims alike. The state’s rich heritage is reflected in its traditional wooden architecture, folk music, and festivals that celebrate harmony with nature. Completing the sensory experience is Uttarakhand’s simple yet intricate and flavorful cuisine—marked by unique dishes like kufali (made from leafy greens) bhatt ki churkani (made with black soybean), and bal mithai (made with roasted khoya and poppy seeds) — that embodies the simplicity and warmth of its mountain life.

The high ridges, deep green valleys, and glacier — born rivers of Uttarakhand make a landscape fit for picture postcards and dictates a way of life; here the contrasts of its landscape and climate constrains crops, fuel, and mobility, making its cuisine an instrument of survival as well as celebration. The terraces line the mountainside in stepped rows, each season determining what may be sown and what must be stored. In the kitchens of the hills there is an economy of heat and time: slow fires, measured additions of water, roasted grains for longevity, and dairy preserved as ghee and khoya. Such adaptations refine local technique — roasting to deepen aroma and deter pests, coarse grinding to speed cooking, and tempering with local seeds to lift simple textures. From these constraints rise the state’s characteristic tastes — bitter greens are transformed into silky stews, dal (lentils) into smoky pastes, millets pressed into dense rotis, sweets that celebrate surplus—tastes that define the region’s exotic and unique palette.

The story of the region begins long before Uttarakhand was carved out from Uttar Pradesh and became the 27th State of the Indian Union on 9 November, 2000. In the early centuries, the hills were dotted by tribal polities and small chiefdoms linked across passes by seasonal trade in salt, wool, and metal. Monetary and inscriptional evidence shows that the Kuninda, also known as Kulinda, was an early Himalayan kingdom that existed from the 2nd century CE to the 3rd century CE. The kingdom finds mention in the Mahabharata and its people were known for their hardness and warrior skills. Its coins show Indo-Greek influence and were the earliest that featured symbols of goddess Lakshmi and Buddhist stupas. By the early medieval period, a powerful regional polity arose under the Katyuri house, which by many accounts exercised sway from roughly the 7th or 8th century until the 11th or early 12th century; the Katyuri capitals at Joshimath and later Baijnath became focal points for temple patronage and valley integration. After the Katyuri decline, the polity fragmented into numerous smaller principalities and fortified settlements, a process that over the 12th to 14th centuries produced the political patchwork that would become Garhwal and Kumaon. In Garhwal, Kanak Pal, a prince from Malwa, is credited in chronicles with establishing what became the Panwar dynasty. Born of the ancient Parmar clan, the Panwar (that belonged to the Rajput clan) carried forward a legacy of courage and statecraft that spanned almost a thousand years. Their sovereignty stood firm until 1803, when the Gorkha conquest brought a new



chapter only to subsequently come under British influence. The Chand dynasty, on the other hand, first established its capital in Champawat and later moved to Almora, building administrative and cultural institutions that connected the hill trade routes with markets beyond the mountains. These dynastic formations structured agrarian patronage, temple building, and the seasonal flows of pilgrims and traders—and the pattern of conflict and commerce through medieval centuries established methods of production and preservation that were carried into the modern age.

The later 18th and early 19th centuries brought convulsive change across the hills. Nepali forces, often referred to broadly as Gorkha armies, moved west from the Kathmandu valley and by 1791 had annexed large parts of Kumaon; by the early years of the 19th century, Garhwal too came under Nepali control in a period remembered locally for harsh rule and a focus on resource extraction. The Anglo-Nepalese conflict of 1814–1816 ended this chapter: British East India Company campaigns under generals such as David Ochterlony liberated Garhwal and Kumaon from Nepali occupation, and the subsequent Treaty of Sugauli (signed 4 March 1816) fixed new boundaries, after which the British exercised political authority in the plains and a degree of administrative oversight in the hills. In the decades that followed, colonial governance introduced new revenue regimes, opened certain roads and later rail links in the plains, and altered market access in ways that would shift the economics of hill agriculture and craft. It was during this time that Haridwar and Rishikesh began to become popular as pilgrimage and trade towns, while the British founded hill stations such as Mussoorie and Nainital, introducing tourism and elite schools and residences to the region as an extension of colonial leisure and health retreat. These changes brought both opportunity and burden: trade in certain com-

modities expanded, but colonial accounting and infrastructural priorities often constrained local autonomy and distorted a fragile ecological system, and the well established seasonal patterns of trade across passes had to adjust to the new political realities.

Trans-Himalayan routes connected the Uttarakhand valleys to Tibet and Nepal, carrying salt, borax, wool, and dried meat in one direction and grains, sugar, and metal goods in the other. A network of mule tracks and seasonal passes enabled not only ritual movement to shrines but also commercial flows that enriched towns such as Almora, Champawat, Haridwar, and Rishikesh. Markets grew along the rivers and pilgrim towns where merchants exchanged hill produce for plains goods. These market centres served as conduits for culinary exchange. Rice, sugar, and refined ingredients moved upward when conditions permitted, while millets, pulses, and medicinal herbs moved downward. Years and frequent movement and contact of traders and pilgrims, helped shape tastes and enabled the occasional refinement that produced the urban sweets and confectionery distinct to the Kumaon towns and the temple towns of the plains.

Religious life is woven into this topography. The hills are called Devbhumi for a reason: rivers that originate here are worshipped, and temple circuits move through mountain passes into a sacred geography that draws pilgrims across seasons. The Char Dham shrines and innumerable local temples create a seasonal flow: pilgrims ascend in devotional waves, traders and caterers follow, and roadside kitchens and small bakeries evolve to meet their demands. Haridwar and Rishikesh, at the foothills, form the spiritual thresholds—hosting the Kumbh Mela, Ganga Aarti, and countless festivals where food becomes an extension of faith. Temple offerings and festival foods follow prescriptions of purity in many instances. Sattvic rations without onion

and garlic are common in pilgrim kitchens, and this norm influences local culinary practice because a pilgrim’s need for easily digested, portable food creates a demand for such preparations. At the household level, ritual obligations structure the calendar. First grains are boiled and offered to deities before any seasoning is added; harvest festivals distribute both grains and sweets as devotion and thanksgiving; and the act of preserving—drying greens, making lentil powders, storing ghee—has a ceremonial as well as practical dimension. The interplay of spiritual practice and caloric necessity produces a cuisine that can be both very plain and nourishingly sustaining.

From that religious and economic terrain the region’s kitchen practices arise, and it is built around a small set of resilient crops and techniques. Mandua (finger millet) is central because it grows where wheat and rice are unable to. Its dense roti supply calcium and fibre and serve as the backbone of meals in higher altitudes. Gahat (horse gram) and Bhatt (black soybean) are pulses prized for their ability to be stored over a long period of time and concentrated protein. Jhangora (barnyard millet) augments porridge tradition and kheer. Dairy in forms of dahi (curd), mattha (whey), and ghee provide fat, flavor, and preservation. Tempering is characteristically local: jakhya seeds and mustard oil give a signature tempering and aroma while demanding little fuel. The techniques that recur across valleys are telling: roasting to extend shelf life and deepen taste, coarse grinding to reduce cooking times, slow simmering to extract maximum calories and gelatinize starches, and preservation methods such as drying and pressing that protect food through winter scarcity. These culinary protocols are not mere tradition but practical methods adapted to steep slopes and short seasons.

In Uttarakhand one most often hears of two major regional cuisines, Garhwali and Kumaoni. But beneath that duality lies an array of regional dishes tied to valleys, tribal groups and local ecologies. Garhwali cuisine tends to manifest in rugged, intensely earthy plates: greens and wild herbs dominate, pulses like gahat (horse gram) and urad (black gram) are roasted or ground, and tempering with jakhya seeds (wild mustard) is frequent. The flavor is delicate, the textures coarse yet nourishing. Kumaoni cuisine shares the same set of grains, pulses and dairy, but it leans more into sweetness, inventive use of Bhatt (black soybean), and rice-based dishes; its lentil stocks (ras or thhatwani) are lighter, and its sweets like Bal Mithai and Singori are more popular. In micro-cuisines such as Jaunsar-Bawar, Bajarwali or in the high Bhotia belts, local dishes depart further: mushrooms, stews adapted to carry long on trade routes, and foraged greens or herbs unknown elsewhere appear. These smaller cuisines may use slightly different leaves, spice blends or preservation techniques. What unites them is an economy of fuel, a minimalism in spice, and a focus on texture and nutrition; what distinguishes them is which pulses, grains or herbs each valley can sustain, and which sweets or seasonal tastes that community has developed over time.

In Garhwali kitchens you see mornings break into cuisine perfected over generations and time. Kufali is popular when winter arrives: a carefully curated dish of palak (spinach) and methue (fenugreek) mashed, simmered in iron with ghee, lessan (garlic), adrak (ginger) and a bit of rice paste so the curry holds warmth. Chainsoo is the

preferred dish at dusk: urad (black gram) dal roasted till smoky, cracked into coarse powder, then stirred into a velvety paste over low fire until its aroma lingers in the hearth. Phanu comes at lunchtime or dinner: pulses like gahat, moong (mung bean) and urad soaked overnight, ground gently and stewed with mild tempering into a hearty binding stew. Aloo ke Gutke appears in twilight kitchens: potato cubes boiled, then tossed into hot mustard oil with jeera (cumin) or jakhya and red chili until edges gently crisp. Kandali ka Saag finds its way to the table when nettle leaves are gathered: boiled, drained, tempered into a green side. Jhangora ki Kheer closes cold evenings: jhangora millet cooked in milk with cardamom and nuts for a sweet, soothing finish.

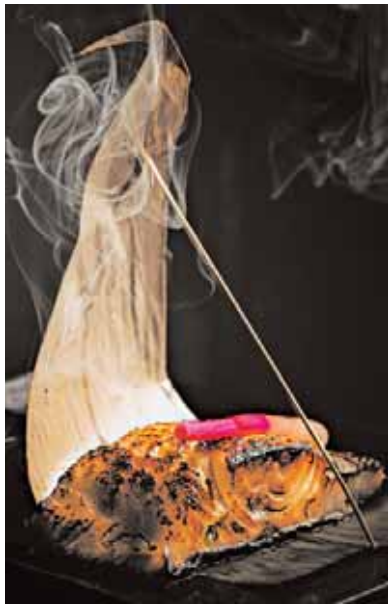
In Kumaon the rhythm is gentler but no less bold. Bhatt ki Churkani graces family dinners: Bhatt mashed with garlic and soft spice into a deeply nutty curry. Dubuk (or Dubke) is warmth in a bowl on cold nights: Bhatt and rice merged into a soft mash that comforts both body and spirit. Baadi, made from mandua flour and hot water, becomes dumplings or thick porridge eaten for lunch or dinner, carried forward with ghee or curry. Rus or Thhatwani is served early: lentil stock lightly thickened with rice paste and poured over rice, light yet sustaining. And sweetness rules its own hours: Bal Mithai’s caramel khoya cubes rolled in sugar beads appear in markets and festivals; Singori’s khoya wrapped in maalu leaf cones is a fragrant treat; Arsa and Gulgula crisp in village kitchens, their sugary crackle echoing laughter and festive air. The Garhwali palate leans toward smoky greens and earthy restraint; the Kumaoni dish reveals the pulse of sweetness, ever capable of turning scarcity into delight.

Tourism today continues to shape these exchanges. Visitors who arrive for the peace of Rishikesh’s riverbanks or the mists of Mussoorie often encounter the cuisine as both discovery and souvenir: Kufali served in homestays, Bal Mithai boxed in hill shops, and mandua biscuits reimaged by local entrepreneurs. What began as necessity has evolved into identity—an edible record of endurance and grace.

Uttarakhand’s food speaks softly but carries centuries of intelligence. It tells of a people who learned to thrive in difficult terrain, transforming modest harvests into meals of remarkable depth and nourishment. Every dish, from mandua roti to chainsoo, is shaped by patience and precision, with flavours built from necessity and perfected through care. This cuisine is not a remnant of the past. It is a living expression of balance where health, resourcefulness, and flavour coexist in harmony. To safeguard it is to honour a way of life that prized both strength and simplicity. Each seed of gahat and each spoon of ghee carries lessons that modern diets have forgotten. True sustenance depends as much on wisdom as on taste. As processed foods and quick fixes crowd our tables, Uttarakhand’s kitchens offer an antidote and a reminder that nourishment begins with respect for soil, season, and craft. The responsibility now lies with us. We must ensure that this inheritance does not fade into nostalgia but flourishes through practice. Let us teach the next generation not only how these dishes are made but why they matter, for their nutrition, their restraint, and their quiet generosity. To pass them on is to pass on a way of thinking that food is still both heritage and health, and that every meal cooked in this spirit keeps the mountain’s grace alive. In sum — a civilisation carved in stone, sustained by trade, sanctified by faith and flavoured with simplicity.

(The writer is Secretary, Cuisine India Society)

Where fire and water redefine fine dining



Naarma is easily Delhi’s most audacious new dining destination. More than a restaurant, it is an elemental experience — a fusion of art, flavour, and emotion that redefines the very idea of what dining can be

TEAM AGENDA

In a city where restaurants open weekly and trends fade just as fast, Naarma doesn’t simply join the conversation — it changes its language. Conceived as a sensory theatre where fire meets flow, this concept stands apart for its global integration, fearless artistry, and profound attention to elemental balance. Step inside, and boundaries begin to dissolve — between heat and cool, silence and sound, art and appetite.

The genesis of Naarma stems from years of reflection and innovation, shaped by its founder, Akshay Anand—a former banker turned hospitality trailblazer. Travelling abroad, Anand experienced dining spaces that combined culinary brilliance, design sophistication, and warmth, and realised Delhi deserved the same. Rather than replicating global

concepts, he reimaged them through an Indian lens, crafting spaces that are cosmopolitan in spirit yet deeply rooted in India’s timeless culture of hospitality. Each corner of Naarma feels alive with a distinct rhythm. The Den’s hand-painted abstractions shift with light, while outdoor graffiti walls rebel against convention. A giant rose installation dominates the main dining room — not as décor, but as a living metaphor for transformation. Between flickers of flame and the hush of trickling water, the space moves in perfect tension — charged yet calm, dramatic yet deliberate. Behind this harmony is an extraordinary trio of culinary masters: Executive Chef Jayson Gubat Cagaoan, blending Japanese precision with the poetry of fire; Chef Amit Singh, with luxury hotel finesse; and Chef Sardoma Dumaguig Bienvenido Jr, a 32-year Chinese cuisine veteran.

Together, they craft not just a menu, but a manifesto. The dishes mirror its philosophy: bold, balanced, and boundary-breaking. From the buttery Otoro Aburi brushed with yuzu kosho, to the vibrant Naarma Roll wrapped in shiso and truffle, every plate is a dialogue between restraint and intensity. Italian and Asian influences meet in the Spaghetti Salsa Rossa and Kamameshi, while the seafood and vegetable-led creations showcase technical brilliance and textural play.

At the bar, the artistry continues. Guided by world-class mixologists Heena Kewalramani and Pablo Guidoni, Naarma’s cocktail programme mirrors the restaurant’s elemental ethos — minimal, balanced, and ever-evolving. Signatures like Not a Picante, Mantequilla y Fresas, and the whimsical Apples & Croissant redefine mixology with textures, infusions, and unexpected pairings. As dusk deepens, minimal techno, Afro rhythms, and deep house pulse through the space, shaping an atmosphere that shifts seamlessly from day to night — sophisticated yet primal, international yet deeply grounded in emotion. For founder Akshay Anand, Naarma represents a culmination. “A decision to throw the rulebook out,” he says. The result is not just a restaurant but an act of artistic rebellion. At Naarma, Delhi tastes the future of dining, where the extraordinary is ignited.



Sweet notes of a joyful, sparkling Diwali soirée



Indulge in the creamy Saffron Shrikhand with Almonds and Rose. Take two cups of hung curd (strained overnight) and whisk it until smooth.

Add a quarter cup of powdered sugar, saffron milk made by soaking saffron strands in warm milk, and a tablespoon of rose water. Mix gently and chill for an hour or two. Before serving, garnish with chopped almonds and pistachios. This dessert is light, fragrant, and effortlessly elegant — an ideal complement to the grandeur of Diwali feasts.

ROSE PISTACHIO KESAR BARS

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 cup condensed milk
- 1/2 cup milk
- 2 tbsp ghee
- 1/4 tsp saffron strands
- 1 tsp rose water
- 1 cup gram flour (besan)
- 1/4 cup chopped pistachios

METHOD:

- Heat ghee in a pan, add gram flour, roast lightly until aromatic.
- Stir in condensed milk, milk, saffron, and rose water; cook 3-4 mins.
- Pour mixture into a greased tray, sprinkle pistachios on top.
- Let it set 2-3 hours; cut into bars. Serve and enjoy.





SAMAMVAY club and samamvay bloom club for maheshwari ladies organises 8 events i. A year of which one is a couple event .All the members loook forward to this annual meet Backstage siblings have been called from Kolkotta for an evening filled with music ans jamming session, the event was hosted at illussion club at Jubilee Hills . Mahesh Vandana was performed after which founder Poonam gave a welcome address and then Nidhi informed the gathering of the events conducted in bloom and after that president of samamvay Namrata Baldwa addressed the gathering , the comitee consisting of Navneeta mandana, Anju Baldwa, Ankita Kapooriya, and Payal sarda gave a splendid musical performance



Anju Baldwa



Ankita Kapooriya



Navneeta mandana



Payal sarda



Namrata Baldwa

PARTY

Photos by- SV Charty



The Anaesthesiologists of Hyderabad celebrated World Anaesthesia Day at Hotel Plaza, Begumpet, The event was organised jointly by the Indian Society of Anaesthesiologists (ISA), Hyderabad and Telangana Chapters, and was attended by over 200 doctors and their families.



Hyderabad Black Hawks defeated Goa Guardians 15-13, 20-18, 15-17, 15-9 in the RR Kabel Prime Volleyball League powered by Scapia at the Gachibowli Indoor Stadium, Hyderabad Yudi Yamamoto was named the Player of the Match and the Hyderabad Black Hawks climbed up to sixth place on the table with seven points.



Preity G zinta makes a powerful comeback as the face of swa diamonds

Swa Diamonds, one of India's leading fine jewellery brands, has reached a new milestone by welcoming renowned Indian actress Preity G Zinta as its brand ambassador. With her timeless grace and confident presence, Swa Diamonds takes a bold step forward to strengthen its footprint across India and the UAE. Abdul Cufur Anadiyan, Managing Director of Swa Diamonds, shared, "In India, jewellery has always been more than just an ornament — it's a way to express emotions and celebrate life's most meaningful moments. That's why at Swa Diamonds, we offer only IGI/GIA-certified natural diamonds of VVS clarity and EF colour—

symbols of the genuine love and trust our customers place in every piece. Our new campaign, 'As Real As You,' celebrates this authenticity — because every emotion you express deserves something just as real." Preity G Zinta, the new face of Swa Diamonds, expressed her excitement about the association, saying, "I'm truly delighted to partner with Swa Diamonds — a brand that represents authenticity, elegance, and timeless beauty. For me, jewellery has always been about celebrating life's real moments, and Swa's philosophy 'As Real As You' deeply resonates with who I am. I believe every woman deserves jewellery that reflects her real self — confident, graceful, and strong."



vivo india announces origin Os6 india roll-out timeline

Vivo India today has announced the roll-out timeline of Origin OS6 (Based on Android 16) for its product portfolio in the country.OriginOS 6, the company's most advanced operating system, is available for upgrade, in batches starting early November on the X Series (X200 Pro, X200, X200 FE & XFold 5) and V60, followed by X100 Pro, X100 & XFold 3 Pro by mid-November 2025. Devices under V Series (V60e, V50 & V50e) and Series T (T4 Ultra, T4 Pro & T4R 5G) will receive the update by mid-December 2025. Furthermore, devices across series such as X90, X90 Pro, V40, T4 5G, T3 Ultra, Y400 5G, among others, will receive the update starting first half of 2026, alongside other vivo smartphones.

1-gram gold to 1-gram silver bricks, get your precious metals on instamart this dhanteras

On the upcoming occasion of Dhanteras, the auspicious start of the five-day Diwali festival across India, Instamart, India's pioneering quick commerce platform, will deliver 1 kg silver bricks, along with a wide array of gold and silver coins across key metros. The platform has collaborated with trusted brands like Kalyan Jewellers, Malabar Gold & Diamonds, Muthoot Exim, MMTCP-PAMP, Mia by Tanishq, Voylla, and new entrants like Gullak to offer certified gold and silver coins. It will also deliver other items like silver jewelry and utensils for the occasion. Consumers can order gold in weights ranging from 0.1 g to 10 g, offering flexibility for every budget. And, for the first time in quick commerce, they can now have a 1 kg silver brick delivered right to their doorsteps. Adding to the festive cheer, Instamart is rolling out an exclusive early bird offer: the first 10,000 customers purchasing gold coins of 1 gm or above on Dhanteras will receive a Rs 100 discount. The offer will go live at 7:00 AM on October 18.

FUN

ARCHIE



CALVIN AND HOBBS



GARFIELD



NANCY



GINGER MEGGS



REALITY CHECK



SPEED BUMP



SUDOKU

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DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★☆☆☆

Yesterday's solution							
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Rules
Each row and column can contain each number (1 to 9) exactly once.
The sum of all numbers in any row or column must equal 45.

CROSSWORD

JUNIOR CROSSWORD 749																		
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ACROSS

- 1 An extinct animal
- 2 Not different
- 3 Get away from
- 4 Beneath
- 5 Depart
- 6 Footwear
- 7 Doing a job with something
- 8 Split into smaller parts
- 9 Something that helps you find the answer to a puzzle
- 10 Down
- 11 With your appearance changed so that people will not recognise you
- 12 Labelled
- 13 High playing cards

- 4 Soaring fireworks
- 5 Jump along on one foot
- 8 A tree that doesn't shed its leaves
- 10 Foes
- 14 A house made of hard snow
- 15 Restaurant's meal list
- 17 Liquid inside a pen

SOLUTION 748												
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The Pioneer AGENDA

Why does man have
reason if he can
only be influenced
by violence
— Leo Tolstoy



The world watches with growing concern as conflicts flare across multiple fronts, from the densely populated streets of Gaza to the rugged terrains of Afghanistan and Pakistan. Each region bears the scars of deep-seated political tensions, historical grievances, and humanitarian crises, leaving millions caught in the crossfire. While the causes differ, the consequences are the same — displacement, death, destruction, and misery

Oct 7 attack: A crime against humanity

In a powerful and moving tribute to lives lost, families shattered, and the enduring spirit of survival, the Embassy of Israel in India commemorated the second anniversary of the October 7, 2023, terror attacks with a heartfelt event in New Delhi. The ceremony brought together Indian dignitaries, members of the diplomatic corps, military veterans, media, and members of the Israel-Indian community to mark one of the darkest days in recent Israeli history and to reaffirm the shared values of resilience, unity, and the unrelenting fight against terrorism.

The attacks, carried out by Hamas militants who infiltrated southern Israel from the Gaza Strip, resulted in the brutal killing of over 1,200 Israeli civilians and security personnel, widespread destruction, and the abduction of hundreds — a tragedy that deeply wounded the nation and sent shockwaves across the world.

Speaking at the event, Israel's Ambassador to India, HE Mr Reuven Azar, reflected on the enduring pain of October 7 and the path Israel has walked in the two years since.

"Two years have now passed since the brutal terrorist massacre on October 7 — an attack that shook the very fabric of our nation," said Ambassador Azar. "For 18 years, since the Gaza takeover by Hamas, the terrorist organisation dreamed and planned that moment. They recruited the entire population of Gaza into their diabolical project. Their intention was not only killing but sending a message to every Israeli that there's no future for us in our homeland."

Ambassador Azar acknowledged the



ASHOKE RAJ
Associate Editor (Foreign Affairs),
The Pioneer

we received from Prime Minister Modi, the Indian government, and the Indian people. Both countries have suffered from terrorism, and we share the conviction and determination required to confront and defeat it," he added.

The event's Guest of Honour, Lieutenant General (Retd) Vinod Khandare, a renowned Indian defence strategist and former Deputy National Security Advisor, delivered a powerful speech that echoed the sentiment of brotherhood between India and Israel. Drawing a parallel between Israel's October 7 tragedy and India's own brush with terror during the 26/11 Mumbai attacks, he underscored the common existential threats both nations face. "One of the most outstanding things I always look at Israel for is the national resilience and the contribution of every citizen towards the sovereignty and welfare of the nation," said Gen. Khandare. "These kinds of attacks — they are not against armies; they are aimed at civilians. They are crimes against humanity. Yet the global response has often been muted. Where are the voices for those killed? What about their human rights?"

He further stressed that both India and Israel, nations with democratic ideals rooted in ancient civilisations,

profound support shown by the Indian government and people, emphasising the strong bond between the two nations united by shared histories of suffering from terrorism.

"We are grateful for the support

have learned from each other and continue to strengthen their strategic, military, and moral alliance.

"Existential threat is something which is common to India and Israel," he said. "And that is where we both share a common desire — not only to survive but to prosper and become stronger."

Perhaps the most emotional and harrowing moment of the evening was the presence and testimony of Mr. Avihay Brodutch, a survivor of the October 7 attacks from Kibbutz Kfar Aza in southern Israel. His story brought the raw reality of the attack to the forefront. During the assault, his wife Hagar and their three children — Ofri, Yuval, and Oriya — were abducted by Hamas and taken into Gaza.

His voice trembled as he recalled the scene: "I saw a motorized parachute flying over the Kibbutz, almost above my head. There were terrorists on them holding AK-47s, and my heart just dropped. Over 250 Hamas terrorists swarmed into our Kibbutz... I found myself alone. Some of my friends were killed — some right beside me."

The world came to know Brodutch through an image that became iconic: him standing silently outside Israel's Ministry of Defense with a sign that read, "My family is in Gaza." His quiet plea became a rallying cry for hostage families around the world. After 51 excruciating days, his family was released during a temporary ceasefire. But the physical and emotional scars remained.

"They were starved. They were full of lice. They looked really bad... kept in a closed, locked room," he said. "After all this, my message for the world is: 'You should concentrate on healing.' We wish for the healing of everybody — in Israel, in the world. Peace and quiet. Maybe one day I can go and hug and ask for peace." His words, filled with heartbreak and hope, resonated deeply with the audience, reminding everyone that behind every headline is a human story — of pain, survival, and yearning for peace. The emotional weight of the evening was softened — but not diminished — by a special cultural tribute from the Israeli music group "Trio4", who performed evocative songs that captured the spirit of national mourning and hope.

Their renditions of "Keshetavo" (When You Come), "Halev Sheli" (My Heart), and "Shir LaMa'alot" (A Song of Ascents) were more than music; they were laments, prayers, and declarations of faith in the future.

CONTINUED ON >> P11

Af-Pak clashes: A point of no return

A sudden flare-up along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, marked by cross-border firing, expulsions and diplomatic recriminations, is rarely an isolated incident. Rather, such episodes are symptomatic of deeper structural tensions that have accumulated since 2021 — when the Taliban returned to power after the abrupt withdrawal of US forces and the abandonment of vast quantities of materiel. The current skirmish therefore speaks to historical grievances, domestic politics, regional competition, and competing strategic visions for South and Central Asia.

The Afg-Pak clashes have now reached a tipping point, especially after the killing of civilians — including members of a cricket team — in strikes attributed to Pakistan. Such incidents drastically raise the likelihood of renewed bloodshed and retaliation. Kabul's government, facing intense domestic pressure and grieving popular sentiment, is unlikely to bow to Islamabad's provocations or to accept further infringements on Afghan sovereignty. Unless both capitals pursue urgent de-escalation, the cycle of reprisal and violence risks spiraling into a more prolonged and destructive confrontation.

Kabul views the strikes as a blatant violation of its sovereignty and an attempt by Islamabad to exert pressure on the Taliban-led government. However, rather than succumbing to these provocations, Afghan authorities are expected to respond with firmness, driven by mounting internal anger and nationalist sentiment. The Afghan government has already signaled that it will not tolerate further aggression and may retaliate in kind, escalating tensions along one of the most volatile frontiers in South Asia. For Pakistan, the renewed hostilities come at a time of deep internal political instability and economic distress, further complicating its regional posture. The clashes also risk undermining Pakistan's efforts to present itself as a key regional stabilizer and counterterrorism partner.

Historical and immediate drivers

Border management and sovereignty claims. The Durand Line remains a live wound: not internationally recognised



DR WAEEL AWWAD
International award winning senior
journalist and political analyst

Militancy and proxy dynamics. The post-2021 landscape saw a proliferation of armed groups, shifting loyalties, and command changes. Pakistan's security services historically cultivated relationships with Afghan Islamist actors for strategic depth; the Taliban's return altered but did not erase these ties. Militant factions (some opposed to the Taliban, others aligned) use porous border areas as sanctuaries, drawing Pakistani military responses that bleed into Afghan territory and trigger public outrage in Kabul.

Security paranoia and state fragility. Pakistan's security establishment views instability in Afghanistan as an existential threat — both because it can produce waves of militancy inside Pakistan and because it affects Islamabad's leverage in Washington and with regional partners. Conversely, the Taliban prioritises the survival of its regime and the attainment of external legitimacy, which often translates into uncompromising stances toward any alleged incursions or support for anti-regime elements, including those referred to as "anti-Khalq" or opposition groups. Such policies generate tit-for-tat dynamics, where accusations and retaliatory measures are exchanged,

heightening tensions along the borders and with neighboring states.

In a broader context, this approach poses a significant challenge to regional stability, particularly given the overlapping interests of Pakistan, Iran, and India, as well as growing concerns over the resurgence of terrorist activities in South Asia. These uncompromising stances can also limit the Afghan government's ability to engage constructively with its neighbors, complicating regional efforts to establish coordinated mechanisms for border management, security cooperation, and humanitarian response.

Great-power and regional competition

The Afghanistan-Pakistan tension cannot be viewed in isolation. Iran, sharing borders and security concerns with both countries, is wary of instability spilling over into its territory, especially amid tensions with the West. China, a key investor in Pakistan under the Belt and Road Initiative, is increasingly uneasy about the security risks to its regional projects. India, on the other hand, sees the rift as a potential opportunity to expand its outreach to Kabul and counter Pakistan's influence. This was evidence after the visit of Taliban foreign minister to India during the peak of the clashes between Taliban and Pakistani forces.

Russia and the Central Asian republics, too, are watching closely, fearing a resurgence of militancy along their southern borders. The United States, despite its withdrawal from Afghanistan, retains strategic interests in containing extremism and monitoring the shifting balance of power in South Asia.

CONTINUED ON >> P11



No intention to hold Gaza land: Reuven Azar, Israeli envoy to India

After two years of Hamas's barbaric attack on Israel, the scars of October 7, 2023, remain deeply etched in Israeli society. Speaking exclusively to *The Pioneer*, Ambassador of Israel to India Reuven Azar, opened up about the current ground realities, diplomatic efforts, reconstruction plans, and the humanitarian crisis that followed the attack.

In this in-depth conversation with **Ashoke Raj**, Ambassador Azar confirmed that 19 hostages are still missing and emphasised that Israel has no intention of holding the acquired Gaza land. He also highlighted India's role in rebuilding efforts, especially through infrastructure development and skilled workforce support. Excerpts of the interview:

The world is closely watching for developments on the ground between Israel and Hamas. Do you believe the situation is now under control?

We are at a turning point — one that we hope

will be lasting. Right now, we're giving the ceasefire a genuine opportunity to succeed.

Our goal is to ensure that diplomacy is given space to produce the results we seek: the removal of Hamas from power and guarantees that an atrocity like October 7 can never happen again. To achieve this, we need strong international support to apply pressure on Hamas and hold them to their commitments.

What is the status of the hostages? How many remain unaccounted for?

There are still 19 murdered hostages whose bodies have not yet been returned. We are working tirelessly to bring them back home and to provide closure to their families. This remains one of our highest national priorities.



Reuven Azar,
Ambassador of
Israel to India

What kind of pressure is being used to facilitate their return?

First, we continue to maintain control over 50 per cent of Gaza's territory, which provides significant leverage.

More importantly, we are relying on diplomatic pressure — both from regional players and the broader international community. The more diplomacy is allowed to work, the less need there is for unilateral military action.

On the reconstruction front, Israel has reportedly called for over 15,000 skilled Indian workers. What is the status of this initiative, and what kind of infrastructure is planned?

That's correct. Over the next 10

years, Israel will be launching infrastructure projects worth more than \$200 billion. We are inviting not only skilled Indian workers but also Indian infrastructure companies to participate in international tenders. This collaboration will be mutually beneficial — a major opportunity for Indian companies and an essential contribution to Israel's development.

Regarding Gaza, what are Israel's long-term plans for the territory it currently holds?

Let me be clear — Israel has no intention of permanently governing Gaza. Our objective is to transfer control to a responsible Palestinian authority, under international supervision, that is committed to building a peaceful and secure future. This future must be free from the destructive intentions of Hamas and instead focused on rebuilding Palestinian society and prosperity.

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