



Editor's TAKE

GST rejig: A big step to boost economy and simplify tax regime

GST will undergo a major restructuring since its roll-out in 2017; it will give a boost to consumption and production, though it comes with a price tag of ₹50,000 crore

The Indian economy is as resilient as ever, but it has come under severe attack from none other than the US President Donald Trump, who mocked it as a "dead economy." It is true that of late the economy is facing issues, and many of its sectors, including the automobile industry, FMCG, and mining and quarrying, are facing challenges. The Government is now taking major steps to correct the dips. A major GST reform is on the cards. To overhaul India's indirect taxation framework, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is set to present the Centre's case for sweeping reforms to the Goods and Services Tax (GST) structure at a key meeting with a Group of Ministers (GoM) on August 20-21, 2025. The proposed changes promise a significant simplification of the GST system, a reduction in consumer prices, and a much-needed stimulus to consumption and economic growth.

At the heart of the Centre's proposal is a rationalisation of GST tax slabs from the current four (5 per cent, 12 per cent, 18 per cent, and 28 per cent) to just two major slabs – 5 per cent and 18 per cent – alongside a special 40 per cent "sin tax" for select demerit goods. After its approval, 5 per cent GST would cover essential goods, aimed at easing the burden on the middle class and rural population, while 18 per cent GST would be applicable to most of the items currently in the 12 per cent and 28 per cent categories. The 40 per cent GST would be applicable to high-tax items such as pan masala, tobacco, and online gaming-products deemed non-essential or harmful. This overhaul, if approved by the GoM and later ratified by the GST Council, will eliminate the 12 per cent and 28 per cent slabs altogether. The rejig is expected to reduce the cost of a wide range of daily-use and mid-range items, including toothpaste, pressure cookers, hair oil, utensils, readymade garments, shoes, mobile phones, and computers. Cars and two-wheelers, which are currently taxed at 28 per cent plus cess, could shift to the 18 per cent slab, potentially reducing prices by 10-15 per cent and giving a much-needed boost to the automobile sector.

However, this economic booster would cost the exchequer a whopping sum of ₹50,000 crore, but the economic impact is expected to be positive. It is likely to increase consumer spending on commonly used items. Vehicle sales would rise across different segments. Besides, GST simplification would also be a big support to MSMEs and the agriculture sector. With essential goods seeing reduced GST, small businesses and farmers may benefit from lower input costs and increased demand.

Not to forget, it would be easier for entrepreneurs to file simpler returns and face reduced disputes, benefiting businesses and tax authorities alike. With better margins and demand, labour-intensive sectors such as garments, electronics, and consumer goods could see growth and the creation of job opportunities. The structural simplification of GST could enhance India's appeal as an investment destination. The 2025 GST rejig will determine not just what becomes cheaper, but how India grows.

PERUMIN 37: Gateway to Minerals and Rare Earths

India and Peru have always had friendly relations. PERUMIN 37 Mining Convention, one of the world's most important platforms for dialogue, innovation, and collaboration in the mining sector, is an opportunity Indian investors cannot afford to miss



JAVIER PAULINICH

This September, the Peruvian city of Arequipa will welcome thousands of industry leaders, policymakers, and investors to PERUMIN 37 Mining Convention, one of the world's most important platforms for dialogue, innovation, and collaboration in the mining sector. Scheduled from 22 to 26 September 2025, this global event presents an extraordinary opportunity for India to deepen its engagement with Peru in a sector that is critical for energy security, technological progress, and long-term industrial growth.

For decades, mining has been the backbone of Peru's economy, shaping its identity as a reliable and globally competitive supplier of natural resources. Today, as the world shifts towards clean energy, green technologies, and digital transformation, Peru's role has only become more significant. At the same time, India's rapid economic growth and ambitious energy transition require secure access to key minerals and rare earths. It is here – at the intersection of Peru's abundant resources and India's rising demand – that PERUMIN 37 emerges as a natural platform for partnership.

Peru: A Mining Powerhouse

Peru is consistently ranked among the top global producers of several strategic minerals. The country is the second-largest producer of copper worldwide, accounting for around 12 per cent of global output. It is also a leading producer of silver, zinc, tin, and gold. These resources are not only vital for traditional industries but also for emerging sectors such as renewable energy, electric mobility, and digital infrastructure.

For India, copper represents a crucial input for electrification, from power grids to electric vehicles. With demand projected to rise sharply in the coming decades, securing reliable and long-term supply chains is a pressing priority. Peru, with its stable production base and commitment to sustainable mining, offers precisely that. Moreover, Peru is home to emerging reserves of rare earth elements (REEs) – the minerals essential for semiconductors, defence technologies, wind turbines, and advanced electronics. As global powers seek to diversify REE supply chains away from a handful of dominant sources, Peru's deposits present India with a strategic alternative. For Indian companies, engaging with Peru today could mean gaining an early-mover advantage in a sector that will define the industries of tomorrow.

PERUMIN 37: Innovation Meets Opportunity

What makes PERUMIN unique is that it is not just an intellectual showcase but also an intellectual



forum that brings together every stakeholder in the mining ecosystem. This year's edition will feature the Mining Summit and TIS Forum, where global experts and policymakers will discuss the latest industry trends, from decarbonisation and digital mining to sustainable practices. The Exhibition will host more than 1,170 stands displaying cutting-edge mining equipment, services, and environmental innovations, while the International Pavilions will create space for direct dialogue between foreign delegations, investors, and Peruvian leaders.

In addition, specialised forums on water management, logistics, energy transition, and inclusion will highlight how mining can align with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. With more than 65,000 participants expected and delegations from at least nine countries, PERUMIN 37 will serve as a global hub for governments, mining companies, financiers, suppliers, and academic institutions alike.

Why Indian Investors Should Engage?

India is projected to become one of the largest mineral importers globally over the next two decades. Its industrial future will depend on reliable access to copper, zinc, lithium, and rare earths. PERUMIN 37 offers Indian investors the chance to position themselves strategically in this evolving landscape. By participating in the convention, Indian companies will have the opportunity to explore joint ventures with Peruvian and international mining firms, secure supply contracts for critical minerals vital to India's clean energy and defence sectors, and introduce homegrown technologies in areas such as digital mining, environmental solutions, and renewable integration-fields where Peru is actively seeking innovation. Beyond commercial gains, such engagement will also help strengthen bilateral trade ties, building on the growing cooperation between India and Peru in minerals, fertilisers, and other emerging industries. Importantly, Peru welcomes Indian companies not merely as investors but as long-term partners in sustainable growth. With a government committed to modernising mining governance, promoting transparency, and ensuring

that local communities benefit from resource wealth, Peru positions itself not just as a supplier of minerals but as a reliable and responsible partner for investment.

A Shared Future of Growth

The relationship between India and Peru has always been one of friendship and mutual respect. In recent years, it has expanded into new domains – from trade in fertilisers and textiles to cooperation in science and technology. Mining and critical minerals now offer the most dynamic frontier for this partnership.

As Peru invests in greener and more technologically advanced mining practices, we see India as a natural ally in this transformation. Indian expertise in digital innovation, renewable energy, and sustainable infrastructure can complement Peru's resource base, creating a partnership that benefits not only our two countries but also contributes to global goals of sustainable development.

PERUMIN 37 is more than an industry convention; it is a bridge connecting Peru's abundant resources with India's industrial ambitions. I warmly invite Indian investors, policymakers, and entrepreneurs to join us in Arequipa this September.

By engaging in PERUMIN 37, India and Peru can transform shared opportunities into lasting partnerships, ensuring that both nations advance together towards a future of clean energy, innovation, and inclusive growth.

I should count it a deep personal satisfaction, and my government's confidence amply vindicated, were my labours to bear enduring fruit; for more than eight years I have dedicated myself in India to the strengthening of bilateral relations, the enlargement of trade and commerce, and, in more recent years, the cultivation of tourism. It is the vision of the Peruvian government that the two most ancient civilisations, India and Peru, drawn ever closer in amity and purpose, so that together they may contribute to the noble endeavour of shaping a just and enlightened new world order. The time is right for India to deepen its presence in Peru's mining sector. The gateway is open: PERUMIN 37 awaits.

The Pioneer
SINCE 1845

PERUMIN 37 IS MORE THAN AN INDUSTRY CONVENTION; IT IS A BRIDGE CONNECTING PERU'S ABUNDANT RESOURCES WITH INDIA'S INDUSTRIAL AMBITIONS

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The helium balloon that was used during the 2024 Olympic Games and the Arc de Triomphe are seen behind the Arc de Triomphe du Carrousel at sunset in Paris. PTI PHOTO

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TRAVELLERS DISAPPOINTED AS HIGHWAY LACKS EATING OPTIONS

It has been quite some time since the engineering marvel, the Nagpur-Mumbai Samruddhi Mahamarg, was opened, with the last 76-kilometre phase inaugurated recently. One major drawback of the Samruddhi is the paucity of good eating joints or cafeterias. At present, only small, temporary snack centres located within the premises of petrol pumps are being operated.

Unfortunately, the quality and variety of snacks and drinks offered at these outlets leave much to be desired. In many places, nothing more than vada pay is available; at times, one finds only tea being served as the sole option. The absence of wash basins and even basic items such as napkins and paper cups is disheartening. While the joint operators are generally

polite and soft-spoken, they appear to go about their work half-heartedly.

The Maharashtra Government should address this crucial issue. One of the main reasons for the lower-than-expected tourist flow along the Samruddhi, apart from the high tolls, is the lack of proper eating facilities. Not everyone can carry their own food during long journeys.

As reported, if the Government plans to replace these temporary snack centres with permanent cafeterias or restaurants, then the work ought to be expedited without further delay. The Samruddhi should stand as a benchmark for both engineering excellence and commuter comfort.

GANAPATHI BHAT | AKOLA

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

How the Gita explains God's will

AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

2 THE PIONEER
ND OPINION

This question should be uppermost in everyone's mind: "How does God keep the Creation going for millions of years?" There are innumerable challenges. The answer is: "By His iccha shakti (will power)." And we must remember that God does so on the basis of dharma (the highest principles). Lord Krishna states in the Bhagavad-Gita, "There is neither compulsion of any duty for Me in the three worlds nor is there anything remaining to be obtained by Me, and nor is there anything worth getting for Me, still, I am engaged in action only." (3.22)

This is exactly what we need to learn from God to be able to manage our lives well. Lord Krishna has guided, "Because if at any time I am not carefully engaged in action,

then there will be problem." (3.23) Aren't we parts of God? (15.7) I have realised this fact, and I am trying to be both active and careful. Additionally, I must always seek guidance and help from the Whole to be able to function well.

God is very keen to help us. We can experience it in our lives. For example, my Lord picks one fault/deficiency of mine and makes me realise it. He does this on alternate days. Of course it hurts, because what I am is what my 'svabhava' (nature)/faith is. To change it is difficult, but with God's help, I have been able to rectify many of my faults. I feel much better due to these reforms. I am purer, my energy level is getting better, I am inclined to follow dharma, and stay within 'maryada' (social norms).

How do I manage to feel secure? I have to be protected by an entity that can ensure. I try to stay in the shelter of God, because that is the condition He has set. Lord Krishna promises. This promise includes my body, my near and dear ones, my business, etc. I can pray for help directly to the photo of Lord Krishna, where my Lord has manifested for my convenience. It is so much easier than praying to the unmanifest. Similarly, I can thank Him directly for all His favours, which are many day in and day out. Meditation is also easy to manifest for. I just have to look at the Lord and think about how He is managing my life. He is there to guide me as only He, the Omniscent, can. I just have to pray for guidance sincerely. Help is available, because where

there is God, there is 'saubhagya' (good fortune).

Who can take care of me better than God? Who can give better attention than God, who is there for me 24x7? 'Atmabala' (inner strength) comes from God. He is the source. I am able to restrain my senses and mind better than ever before. All opulences are bestowed on me by my Lord in various degrees. I am proud to state that I don't suffer from blank looks. I may not have glowed like some sanyasis have, but I don't do badly either. Empowered, I definitely am, as a 'nimitta' (instrument) of God. Even in my advanced age, I manage to be quite useful. I am not a sanyasi, but I am pretty renounced. The following long-term blessings are mine, thanks to my Lord. Peace, which I crave, is experienced by me quite frequently.

The same is true about 'sukha' (true happiness), which is different from sense pleasures. Obviously, there is a higher percentage of goodness in me, compared to passion and darkness. Success is almost assured as God is karta (doer) in my life. I have realised how merciful God is. My varied past has been forgotten; it is all love and kindness. *Ajuna* realised how Lord Krishna loved him, and so have I. No one comes close in this regard. Therefore, if you really wish to manage your life well, take shelter of God and remain there.

The author is a spiritual teacher

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Putin meets Trump in Alaska

At the Elmendorf-Richardson Joint Military Base in Anchorage, Alaska, Russian President Vladimir Putin was welcomed with a red carpet. However, in Kyiv, Maria Dragova, a 40-year-old lawyer, remarked, "The rational world is behaving irrationally by giving him this welcome." Putin's visit marked his first face-to-face meeting with US President Donald Trump in years, aimed at seeking an end to the Ukraine war. After the summit, Trump declared, "There is no deal, until there is a deal." Putin, expressing willingness for further dialogue, added, "Next time in Moscow." Though Trump stressed that they had agreed on "many points," the three-hour summit produced no tangible results beyond symbolic camaraderie.

Russia has outlined its conditions for peace: Ukraine must remain neutral, forswearing NATO membership; NATO troops must not be stationed on Ukrainian territory; the five annexed oblasts – Crimea, Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia, and Kherson – must be recognised as Russian territory; Western sanctions must be lifted; and Ukraine must be demilitarised. These demands remain unchanged from before the war. Trump commented, "Now it's really up to President Zelenskyy to get it done." He further stated, "Look, Russia is a very big power, and they're not," a remark seen as indirect pressure on Ukraine.

HARIDASAN RAJAN | KERALA

Supreme court overrules results

There are only a handful of democratic countries still using electronic voting machines (EVMs) in elections. Among them are India, Brazil, Bulgaria, and Congo. On the other hand, many established democracies, including Britain, Germany, France, Spain, Sweden, the Philippines, Australia, Japan, and Italy, do not use them. Even India's neighbours, Bangladesh and Pakistan, have refrained from adopting EVMs.

Tesla CEO Elon Musk recently raised questions over the continued use of EVMs. Citing concerns about possible hacking vulnerabilities, the tech billionaire stated that electronic voting machines should be phased out. In India, doubts about EVMs received judicial backing, when the Supreme Court intervened in a village election in Haryana. The court ordered a recount of votes in the Sarpanch election at Buana Lakh village in Panipat by summoning EVMs and election records to its premises. The recount overturned the earlier result, making it a landmark moment in India's judicial history. This unprecedented reversal has reignited debate over the reliability of EVMs, given the risks. The Government may need to reconsider whether ballot papers, though traditional, provide greater transparency and trust in the electoral process.

JANG BAHADUR SINGH | JAMSHEDPUR

India Post restructures services

India Post has decided to discontinue its Registered Post service from 1 September 2025, according to news reports. The service, in operation for over five decades, will be merged with the existing Speed Post system as part of operational restructuring within the department.

Following the merger, Speed Post will assume the responsibilities earlier managed by Registered Post. The system already provides delivery tracking and faster processing and will now be the single option for time-sensitive postal communications. Registered Post was priced at ₹125.96, with an additional ₹5 for every 20 grams, while Speed Post begins at ₹41 for parcels up to 50 grams. This shift represents a 20-25 per cent increase in the basic cost, potentially affecting those dependent on cheaper postal services. A directive has been issued by the Secretary and Director General of Posts to courts, educational institutions, and all Government offices, instructing them to transition to Speed Post by the September deadline.

Registered Post usage has steadily declined over the years. Between 2011-12 and 2019-20, volumes fell from 244.4 million to 184.6 million articles, largely due to digital alternatives and private courier growth. Despite this, Registered Post had long been valued in legal and official processes for its proof-of-dispatch and delivery features.

BHAGWAN THADANI | MUMBAI



Himalayas: Need for Strong Monitoring, Response, and Governance

The Dharali and Kishtwar tragedies must not fade into another chapter of ignored warnings. A dedicated climate and disaster-resilience policy for the Himalayan states is an urgent necessity. Inaction will result in loss of lives in the hills, and water insecurity, energy disruptions, and ecological collapse across the plains

FIRST Column



SATENDRA SINGH

The monsoon, once a season of renewal for India's farms and forests, has become a season of dread in the Himalayas. On August 5, 2025, a catastrophic cloudburst struck Dharali village in Uttarakashi, Uttarakhand, unleashing flash floods and landslides that swept away homes, roads, and lives. Before the region could recover, Kishtwar, Jammu & Kashmir, was struck by another tragedy, as a cloudburst claimed several lives, left over 200 missing, and crippled vital bridges and highways.

These disasters were not isolated. In just one intense weekend this monsoon, Himachal Pradesh recorded 19 cloudbursts, 23 flash floods, and 16 major landslides, displacing thousands. From Kinnaur and Kullu to Chamoli and Rudrapur, the pattern is clear: intense rainfall events, cloudbursts, river overflows, and glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs) are no longer rare shocks—they are becoming seasonal certainties.

A Fragile Region Under Siege

The Himalayas have always been geologically young and fragile, prone to landslides, earthquakes, and floods. But in recent decades, the frequency, intensity, and destructiveness of these hazards have risen sharply. Warmer temperatures, shifting monsoon patterns, and rapid glacier melt are amplifying the risks.

The 2013 Kedarnath disaster was a grim warning. As Executive Director of the National Institute of Disaster Management (NIDM), I led the post-disaster field assessment that identified both natural and human-induced drivers of the tragedy.

Why Disasters in the Himalayas are becoming more deadly?

While heavy rainfall and sudden cloudbursts are natural to mountainous regions, the calamities we see today are progressively shaped by human choices. Climate change is accelerating the melting of glaciers, destabilising terrain, and raising the risk of glacial lake outburst floods. Simultaneously, spontaneous urbanisation has replaced conventional buildings with concrete on fragile slopes, often lacking sufficient geological assessments, while poor drainage systems and intrusions on riverbanks disrupt the natural water-



CLIMATE CHANGE IS ACCELERATING THE MELTING OF GLACIERS, DESTABILISING TERRAIN, AND RAISING THE RISK OF GLACIAL LAKE OUTBURST FLOODS

course. Infrastructure expansion has intensified the issue, as hydropower projects, roads, and tunnels are built in vulnerable regions, with blasting and deforestation further weakening hillsides and increasing hazards across whole river basins. Poor governance worsens these problems, as building codes, risk zoning, and environmental safeguards are inadequately enforced, and disaster risk mitigation initiatives are fragmented among different departments rather than being mainstreamed across all sectors.

Ignored Warnings, Repeated Mistakes

The outcomes of the 2013 and 2021 disasters were clear, highlighting the pressing requirement for enhanced protection in the Himalayan area. They advocated for stringent hazard zoning and enhanced regulation of high-risk regions, along with the implementation of compulsory Disaster Impact Assessments (DIA) in addition to Environmental Impact Assessments (EIA). Also significant was the advice to limit hydropower projects in ecologically sensitive areas and implement ecosystem-based planning emphasising slope stabilisation. The reports emphasised the importance of improving early warning systems and boosting community preparedness to enhance resilience in the face of future disasters.

Yet most of these recommendations remain unimplemented. Development continues to prioritise short-term economic gains over long-term safety. In many

towns, the same risky construction patterns persist, as if the disasters of the past decade never happened.

Human, Economic, and Ecological

Every season of inaction carries a devastating cost. Entire families are buried in landslides, children orphaned, livelihoods lost. Economic damages—destroyed roads, bridges, power projects, and farmland—run into thousands of crores annually. Recovery is slow, especially in remote villages, where losses are often permanent. Ecologically, the damage is silent but profound. Forests are lost to landslides and debris flows. River courses are altered, glacial retreat accelerates, and biodiversity is threatened.

Why the Existing Framework Falls Short?

India's national disaster management framework, although strong in many aspects, is not specifically tailored for the unique hazards of the Himalayas. The region's terrain, weather unpredictability, and logistical challenges require a specialised approach.

Response times are often too slow due to difficult terrain and broken transport routes, which hinder rescue efforts during the critical "golden hour." Moreover, institutional responsibilities are fragmented. Scientific research exists in isolation, often disconnected from operational planning. Local governments lack resources, and community engagement in preparedness remains limited.

Development in the Himalayas

A focused framework for the Himalayas will only thrive if there is a significant change in planning and governance. This means development in hilly terrains must be planned with risks in mind—by enforcing eco-friendly zoning, incorporating rainwater harvesting, and guaranteeing slope stabilisation in all hilly regions. Infrastructure growth needs to be resistant to disasters, requiring mandatory Disaster Impact Assessments, banning construction in landslide-prone zones, and implementing resilient building designs as a standard. Equally important is viewing nature as the primary defence by rejuvenating degraded slopes through the planting of native species, restoring historic water management systems, and protecting wetlands as natural barriers.

Technology should also be utilised for readiness by enhancing satellite surveillance, implementing AI-driven risk assessment, and guaranteeing that last-mile mobile notifications reach at-risk populations.

Ultimately, strategies focused on the community must stay central, incorporating local insights into risk management and enabling villages to act as the primary and most efficient line of defence.

Need for a Dedicated Himalayan Disaster Resilience Framework

To genuinely transform the planning and governance of the fragile Himalayan region—and to break the endless cycle of devastation and reconstruction—India

needs to establish a Himalayan Climate and Disaster Monitoring and Response Centre (HCDMRC). This apex authority would function as the nerve centre for strengthening disaster preparedness and climate resilience across all Himalayan states. Importantly, it cannot remain confined to research functions alone; it must be endowed with clear operational authority to ensure preparedness, coordinate timely response, and oversee effective recovery. Its mission can have a focused seven-point action plan:

- 1. Safeguarding the Himalayas:** Implement eco-friendly regulations and thoroughly oversee the surroundings to prevent reckless development.
- 2. Safer Development:** Synchronise infrastructure initiatives with ecological realities, avoiding areas of high risk.
- 3. Identifying the Risks:** Utilise scientific research to pinpoint regions most susceptible to cloud bursts, floods, landslides, earthquakes, and glacial lake floods.
- 4. Smart Solutions:** Integrate engineering techniques with nature-inspired methods like slope reinforcement, flood management, and ecosystem restoration.
- 5. Empower Communities:** Prepare and supply local authorities, panchayats, and volunteers to ensure neighbourhoods serve as the initial line of defence.
- 6. Rapid Response:** Create specialised, highly-trained high-altitude rescue and recovery units to respond quickly during emergencies.
- 7. Science in Action:** Collaborate with leading research organisations—such as the Wadia Institute, GB Pant Institute, IIT Roorkee, National Institute of Hydrology, ICFRE, and the Forest Survey of India—to guarantee that policies are based on the highest scientific expertise.

The Last Chance to Act

The Himalayas are not just mountains—they are the water towers of India, the birthplace of its great rivers, and the custodians of its biodiversity. The Dharali and Kishtwar tragedies must not fade into another chapter of ignored warnings.

A dedicated climate and disaster resilience policy for the Himalayan states is no longer a matter of debate—it is an urgent necessity. We have the science. We have the lessons from past disasters. What remains is the political will to act. The time to protect the Himalayas is slipping away—if we wait any longer, we will be left with mountains of regret where once stood mountains of hope.

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If We Don't Reinvent the Chip, AI Will Break the Planet



NISHANT SAHDEV

Recently, I was in conversation with some fellows from Silicon Valley and Shenzhen—two of the world's tech powerhouses—swapping stories about our latest AI projects. One of them pulled up a live feed from their lab: A warehouse-sized hall lined with racks of AI servers, each glowing and humming like a beehive in overdrive. In the corner, an engineer pointed to a monitor showing the facility's power draw—more than an entire city block. For a moment, the conversation went quiet. We all knew what that number meant: In a world already straining its energy grids, AI's appetite is not just impressive—it is a warning. That night, I could not shake a question: If this is just the beginning, how will we keep the lights on for the AI future? We talk about artificial intelligence as if it were a purely digital revolution—a clean leap from matter into mind. But AI is a physical machine, and physical machines run on energy.

A single large AI model can consume as much electricity as hundreds of homes do in a year. Multiply that across the dozens of tech companies in an arms race to build ever-bigger models, and we are creating a new kind of energy hunger.

This is not just a climate issue. It is a geopolitical one. Energy efficiency in AI will decide who controls the technology, how widely it is shared, and whether we can use it without accelerating global warming. And right now, we are on track to lose that control. We have a narrow window to change course—and it begins with radically rethinking the chips at the heart of AI.

Learning from the brain: Your brain runs on about 20 watts—the same as a dim light bulb—yet it can do things no supercomputer can, like recognise a face in a crowd instantly. Engineers are trying to capture that efficiency with "neuromorphic" chips, which mimic the brain's ability to fire only when needed.

Intel's Loihi chip has used up to 100 times less power for certain AI tasks. IBM's TrueNorth has matched the accuracy of standard systems with 200 to 300 times less energy. In medicine, neuromorphic designs have shrunk power demands so much that a heart monitor could run for a year on a single battery.

This is the kind of leap we need—but at an industrial scale. Most computers push electrons through metal. Optical processors use light



instead. Photons move faster, produce less heat, and can handle massive amounts of data in parallel. Researchers at Tsinghua University have built an optical AI chip over 4,000 times more energy-efficient than a leading Nvidia graphics chip for certain tasks.

Some designs can perform a calculation using less energy than a single photon—a feat that sounds like science fiction but is real today. The catch: Most still require electronic components for parts of the job. But a hybrid optical-electronic future is possible—and it would cut the energy bill for AI data centres by orders of magnitude.

Quantum shortcuts: Quantum computers operate on qubits—quantum bits—which can exist in multiple states at once. This means they can explore many possible solutions in parallel, rather than checking them one by one like classical computers. For certain problems, such as optimising complex systems or simulating molecules, they could solve in seconds what would take a conventional supercomputer thousands of years.

That is not just about speed. Every wasted second on a conventional chip burns more electricity. A quantum machine that finishes in seconds uses dramatically less total energy, even if it draws more power while running. Early results are promising. Researchers at Cornell University are pairing quantum processors with classical systems in hybrid setups, sending only the most complex parts of a problem to the quantum side. In initial tests, these hybrid systems have cut AI energy use by 10 to 12 per cent. That may sound small, but scaled across the global data centre network, it is the energy equivalent of taking millions of cars off the road.

The real prize is further ahead. If quantum accelerators mature, they could allow AI models to handle massive computations—like simulating climate systems or designing new materials—without requiring supercomput-

er-scale energy. That is the kind of shift that could turn AI from an energy liability into a climate asset.

Why does this matter now? The International Energy Agency warns that global data centre electricity demand could double by 2026—and AI is a major driver. Small efficiency tweaks will not keep up. We need breakthroughs that slash power use by factors of ten, a hundred, even a thousand. Think of what that would mean:

1. AI models that run on a smartphone without draining its battery.
2. Data centres that do not rival coal plants in emissions.
3. An AI revolution that strengthens, not undermines, our fight against climate change.

The obstacles are not technical alone: Building ultra-efficient chips requires new factories, new materials, and new software written from scratch. Companies are heavily invested in current GPU technology.

Market inertia is a powerful enemy of change. That is why this cannot be left to market forces. It requires a Manhattan Project for efficient computing—a coordinated push from Governments, industry, and academia, with the urgency we brought to putting a man on the moon. The choice ahead: We can keep chasing bigger AI models and let our energy systems strain under the load. Or we can build an AI future where power is not the bottleneck, but the enabler. The nation—or the company—that cracks ultra-efficient AI computing will not just lead in technology. It will own the next industrial revolution. But "can" is not "will." If we wait for efficiency to happen by accident, it will not. The race for smarter chips must become a race to the top—before AI becomes the coal plant of the digital age.

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Fast-tracking India's mobility through the MOTION CoE



ARVIND KUMAR

India's mobility sector is evolving at an unprecedented pace. As the global automotive industry pivots toward smarter, cleaner, and more connected transport systems, India is positioning itself not only as a manufacturing leader but also as a global innovation hub. Driving this transformation is the rise of Autonomous, Connected, Electric, and Shared (ACES) mobility—an area that is witnessing robust support from both industry and Government. One of the initiatives in this space is the MOTION Centre of Entrepreneurship (CoE) in Pune. A flagship initiative launched by the Software Technology Parks of India (STPI) under the Ministry of Electronics and IT (MeitY) and supported by the Government of Maharashtra, MOTION CoE serves as a sector-focused innovation and incubation hub dedicated to ACES start-ups. Located at Electronic Sadaan III, MIDC Bhorani, Pune, this 10,000 sq. ft. facility is equipped with cutting-edge labs, a 75-seater co-working space, and advanced prototyping infrastructure. It is backed by a powerful consortium including Tata Motors, Kinetic Group, Intel, MathWorks, Vision, ARAI, SAE India, TIF Pune, and the College of Engineering Pune.

The Centre offers more than just infrastructure. It delivers a full-stack support system, combining expert mentorship, physical and virtual incubation, funding opportunities through the Start-up India Seed Fund Scheme (SIFS), assistance with Intellectual Property Rights (IPR), legal and financial services, and connections with investors and industry stakeholders. As a result, MOTION CoE has emerged as a key enabler of India's next-gen mobility vision. To date, the CoE has incubated 55 start-ups, surpassing its initial goal of 51. These ventures have collectively achieved a valuation of over ₹465 crore, generated over ₹34 crore in revenue, attracted over ₹23 crore in external funding, created more than 500 jobs, and launched 82 prototypes. They have also filed 62 IP applications, of which 40 have already been granted. Among these, five standout start-ups exemplify the CoE's transformative potential. Attron Automotive is creating high-efficiency electric propulsion systems for two and three-wheelers. Their product portfolio includes integrated IPM PMSM motors and advanced controllers built on the proprietary EAT framework, designed to deliver superior performance and energy efficiency. Recognised by Inc42 as a top mobility start-up to watch, Attron's focus on R&D has resulted in one technology patent and two design registrations. With customisation, modularity, and

performance at its core, Attron is poised to play a critical role in India's electric mobility transition. Combat Robotics is leveraging autonomous mobility to develop rugged unmanned ground vehicles (UGVs) specifically designed for defence, disaster response, and public safety. These vehicles feature adaptive motion technology, night vision capabilities, and remote operation features, making them invaluable in high-risk environments. Combat Robotics has secured a project from Nagpur Metro for railway track monitoring and has been selected in the first phase of the Indian Railways Innovation Challenge. As India scales up its electric vehicle ecosystem, energy storage becomes a critical enabler. Coulomb Tech addresses this with its in-house development of lithium-ion batteries, battery management systems (BMS), electric vehicle (EV) chargers, and a cloud-based analytics platform. Its comprehensive tech stack supports diverse mobility and storage applications, making Coulomb a key contributor to India's energy resilience and EV adoption goals. Kairus Energies is innovating at the intersection of mobility, defence, and aerospace. Its advanced lithium-ion battery modules are engineered for extreme conditions, featuring a proprietary HITECH™ thermal management system that ensures rapid charging, fire suppression, and performance optimisation.

Kairus has filed one technology patent, secured two design patents, and deployed 100+ kWh of storage systems. As electric vehicles gain traction, scalable charging infrastructure is crucial. Eidikos Business Enterprises is meeting this need with its Level 2 AC charging kiosks, specifically designed for e-bikes, e-rickshaws, and electric cars. Their hybrid model includes both Captive Charging and Charging-as-a-Service (CAAS). Their composite charging stations have been granted design registration, and their 2024 model, which aims to position India as a global leader in sustainable, tech-driven mobility. As these ventures continue to scale, they are not only addressing India's transportation needs but also building solutions that are globally relevant. In doing so, MOTION CoE is proving that the future of mobility in India is about vision, innovation, and impact.

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Opinion

TUESDAY, AUGUST 19, 2025

A bold initiative

GST reforms are welcome but a structurally superior tax will require a far broader base

IT IS IMPRESSIVE that the Centre has taken the difficult task of resetting the over-eight-year-old goods and services tax (GST) head-on. The structure, administration, and revenue-sharing mechanism of GST has turned unnecessarily complex over the years. To be sure, even from the very beginning of India's GST, much was left wanting. A clutch of product categories and thereby a fairly large section of the economy, was kept outside the tax's purview. With petroleum products, electricity, and real estate (transactions of completed properties) having been kept out, the principal purpose of GST, which is to reduce cascading of taxes to the extent possible, hasn't been met satisfactorily.

As a result, the long-standing issue of redundant tax costs to businesses largely persisted. Units burdened with accumulated, unusable input tax credit (ITC) had little incentive to pass on the "benefits" of tax rate reductions to the consumers, and the tendency to evade the tax lingered. The structural infirmity has harmed smaller firms more, because unlike the larger diversified ones their ability to use input taxes for meeting output tax liability is limited. Paradoxically, the tax treatment of larger and smaller firms has turned more disparate in the GST regime than in the previous one. Moreover, the opaqueness in and the delays over how the integrated GST proceeds are apportioned and distributed has generated heartburn among several states.

As a fallout of all this, the GST's promised economic and revenue benefits have remained a mirage. Revenues from this tax have risen but just about reached pre-GST level of nearly 7% of the GDP, and appear to plateau already. The prime minister's announcement to reform the GST and reduce the taxes on everyday use items may appear to pre-empt the GST Council, where the Centre and states are equal partners. But unless such a bold initiative is taken, a major redesign of GST, which is inevitable for its structural improvement, would have been delayed inordinately. Also, the PM has set the direction of the reforms right by promising to reduce the tax incidence. Some circles, betting on the "revenue neutrality" principle, were expecting the weighted average rate (WER) to rise after a rate/slab recast.

The question is whether the essentially two-tier structure (5% and 18%), coupled with a great deal of deliberate resolution of "inverted duty structure", would indeed be capable of addressing the tax's structural shortcomings. Though the details are yet to be worked out, what can be deduced from the information made available is that tax incidence on several daily use items, common inputs for micro, small, and medium enterprises, and agriculture, cars and two-wheelers except the truly high-end ones, several consumer durables, and even a clutch of fast-moving consumer goods items, would reduce—quite substantially in many cases.

Former finance secretary Vijay Kelkar has long called for a single-rate (12%) GST with full ITC. Late economist Bibek Debroy also advocated single-rate though he wanted the WER to rise, and help raise the tax-GDP ratio. Given the traits of the economy, a single-rate indirect tax may be too much to ask for. That said, a truly beneficial reform of GST will restrict the universe of exemptions (both in terms of the size of units and products), and let smaller businesses join the formal economic value chain. It will also democratise the administration with an empowered, neutral secretariat, and move further on the path of federalism, by assigning a portion of the revenues to the local bodies, the third tier of government.

The AI clones are coming! But it's not all bad

MARK SEWARDS, A British Member of Parliament in the northern city of Leeds, recently launched what he called the country's first artificial intelligence (AI) prototype of an MP. Cue the backlash. X users were the most vitriolic, calling Seward "lazy" and branding the project "appalling". The press sneered at his "weird" and "dithering" chatbot, claiming it couldn't follow a Leeds accent.

Then again, most politicians dodge questions with robotic answers, and many wouldn't make out the heavy weight of Northern England. "Me neighbour's lad's blocked 't ginnel at 't back wi' an old settee and he won't do owt about it," a *Guardian* journalist asked Seward's bot at one point. The AI suggested they call the police to report an abandoned vehicle, which was a better answer than I would have given.

The 35-year-old Labour MP is a pioneer in using AI to squeeze more out of their job. More people are using AI to create digital replicas of themselves and conduct their work at a greater scale. Right-wing influencer Dave Rubin even has an AI clone presenting his YouTube show while he's on vacation this month. There are obvious costs to this, from the erosion of authenticity to lower quality services. But don't also forget the benefits to those with limited resources where chatbots offer a new way of engaging with others, however dystopian that feels to us humans.

For people who make money off their expertise, clones offer a route to scaling up their business. Brodie Sharpe is a physiotherapist in Melbourne, Australia, with an entrepreneurial streak. Having fallen prey to a chronic running injury himself, he not only started treating people with the same problem but recorded 157 episodes of the "Overcoming Proximal Hamstring Tendinopathy" podcast to talk about it at length and bring in new clients.

About a year ago, he paid a developer \$2,000 (about \$1,300) to train a chatbot on some of those episodes and academic research on the injury, then announced that listeners to his podcast could access "tailored advice" from a new AI assistant for \$58.99 a month.

Over the past year, around 50 people have signed up for the assistant, asking it about everything from the benefits of foam rolling to how to train for a half-marathon with the PHT injury. It's making Sharpe an extra \$450 in monthly, passive income, he tells me, and the set-up costs, he's paid just \$20 in the last year on data usage to keep it going. The revenue is no fortune, but the side hustle could yet grow.

Eventually, he'll train the chatbot on the advice he gives to clients on Zoom calls. What if it tells clients something he disagrees with? "I'm okay with that," he says, adding that the bot is designed to replicate premium research more than Sharpe himself. "Whatever it comes up with should be good quality."

There is of course, a thin line between rugged entrepreneurialism and excess. Deepak Chopra launched a "digital twin" last year that costs a few dollars to use, and after 95 books, a global brand, and vast wealth already in his name, that feels less like innovation and more like an exercise in scaling himself ever further. Then there's Snapchat influencer Caryn Marjorie, who became a millionaire at 24 after launching a bot that charged \$1 a minute. Over time, maybe it'll be the wealthiest among us who have the privilege of speaking to human experts while the rest consort with AI clones.

Still, there's no denying the world is fast getting hooked on chatbots. More than 700 million people use ChatGPT once a week, and the total number is likely over a billion when factoring in those who use AI assistants from Alphabet Inc's Google and Meta Platforms Inc. As people become more accustomed to talking to machines, it won't be a stretch for some to use them as a bridge to their expertise. That could widen all that know-how and ease workloads—let's use wisely. Used badly, and they'll turn more of our encounters into mostly cheap imitations.



PARMY OLSON
Bloomberg



RAHUL RENAVIKAR
Managing director, Acuris Advisors Pvt. Ltd.

IN INDEPENDENCE DAY last week, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced that there will be a bonanza for consumers this Diwali as he intends to unleash long-awaited Goods and Services Tax (GST) 2.0 reforms. While this announcement was expected to be made by the finance minister, who is the chairperson of the all-powerful GST Council, it surprised many that the PM chose to do so even before a formal approval from the council had been obtained. No doubt, the next GST Council meeting scheduled in September would take up the issue. In the mean time, it will be interesting to see the political reactions to the PM's announcement as every political party will pounce on the opportunity to take credit.

According to the announcement and subsequent reports in the press, the complex multi-rate GST structure that prevails currently is proposed to be replaced by a simple two-rate structure (with an additional special rate of 40%). The GST rate slabs proposed to be retained are 5% and 18%, while the 12% and 28% rates would be done away with completely. The stock markets have already given the thumbs up to these announcements, notwithstanding the adversities on account of the additional tariffs imposed by the US.

Right from the inception of the GST in 2017, policymakers, tax experts, etc. were all of the firm view that its rate structure (running into double digits along with the compensation cess) then adopted was full of flaws, creating confusion among taxpayers. India is perhaps the only large country in the world

where the rate of consumption tax is not determined on the product consumed but on the kind of packaging it comes in. A case in point is *namkeen*, where unbranded ones attract a 5% GST whereas branded and nicely packaged ones attract 12% GST. This and many other such strange classification ideas need a burial which the upcoming GST rate rejig will hopefully do.

However, the proposed two-rate structure of 5% and 18% can turn out to be a perfect recipe for disaster if it is not implemented in the right manner. The difference of 13 percentage points between the two rates itself is an invitation for scammers to evade taxes. This large gap between the rates might also result in an inverted duty structure (output GST rate lower than the input GST rate) for almost all the supplies, attracting a 5% GST rate, assuming that input tax credit is allowed for this slab. If at all the two-rate structure has to be implemented then a robust, almost automatic, refund mechanism also needs to be in place so that businesses do not fall in the locking-of-working-

Re-hauling the GST will go a long way in making India-made goods and services competitive in local as well as international markets

capital trap. Given the Indian GST's tryst with false input tax credit claims in the last eight years, running into lakhs of crores of rupees, introducing an automatic GST refund mechanism for businesses might turn out to be setting the cat amongst the pigeons. Ideally, a single-rate consumption tax structure ought to be implemented (as done by more than 125 countries) to keep the India's GST simple and free from any classification disputes, including avoiding the inverted duty structure. It should not be the case that the medicine turns out to be more painful than the disease!

Along with the GST rate rejig, the government should also re-haul the current input tax credit mechanism. The crux of any value-added tax system (India's GST is a value-added tax system where supplies of goods and/or services are taxed) is the ability of the taxpayers to claim full input tax credit on almost all the goods and services procured while supplying taxable goods and/or services without any exceptions or hindrances. The input

tax credit mechanism in India's GST is anything but simple and needs to be rectified to a very large extent. A simple solution lies in allowing input tax credits of almost everything (with a small negative list) to the businesses procure to run their operations. This will totally eliminate the cascading of taxes, making the supplies of goods and services less expensive which ultimately will benefit the end consumer.

If the GST 2.0 reforms have to truly bear the expected fruits, the government should seriously include petroleum, electricity, alcohol, and real estate in the tax ambit. Keeping them outside the GST umbrella makes little economic sense. It is high time that these were included in the GST so that the cascading of taxes in these sectors is done away with once and for all. If it has taken eight long years to bring in the GST 2.0 reforms, it is anybody's guess as to how much longer will it take to have these in the GST fold. Unless this is done, we as a nation will not be able to realise the true GDP growth potential that a flawless GST has to offer. The Centre and the states should come together and display the true behaviour of co-operative federalism, as enshrined in our Constitution, to make this a reality sooner than later.

Thus, an overall approach of rectifying/re-hauling the GST will go a long way in making India-made goods and services competitive in not only the local markets but also the international markets, paving the way for turning the country into an economic superpower that can compete with the likes of US and China.

Views are personal

IBC revisit needed, in law and practice



ABIZER DIWANJI
Founder, NeoStrat Advisors

THE PROPOSED AMENDMENTS to the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) are welcome as they deal with delays in resolution by National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT), government agencies, and promoters. The changes also plan to augment implementation and improve the creditors' voices in the liquidation process. All of these are welcome as the IBC's track record glaringly tells we need change.

Without doubt, IBC is one of the best legislations in India's recent history. The law was drafted maturely to cover every aspect, but the rules in certain instances went contrary. The behaviour of its various pillars, the courts, creditors, resolution professionals, and corporate debtors also leaves a lot to be desired. The regulators, which paid attention to only one of the pillars, was left with no choice but to harden on the regulated and was unable to regulate the other pillars, all of which together drive the success of this legislation. A glance at some statistics confirms this.

IBC has admitted a total of around 8,150 companies, of which 2,000-odd are pending. 2,700 were liquidated, 1,100 had successful resolution plans, 1,250 were appealed and settled, and 1,250 were withdrawn under Section 12A. On performance, whilst most measure recoveries as a percentage of claims, one needs to measure IBC performance on recoveries as a percentage of liquidation value (as rules do not allow anyone to resurrect a company during a Corporate Insolvency Resolution Process (CIRP), though the law implies that. As a percentage of liquidation value, CIRP's recovered 16.3% and liquidation recovered 89% of value. This is quite strong, given that no other means

in the past has offered this return. The Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act is near it, given that statistic is based on hard assets as collateral. On average, a CIRP has taken 701 days, but today it takes around 820 days. Liquidation has taken another 310 days on average, and today it takes around 650. We have 4,520 insolvency professionals and 5,750 valuers, but only 60 judges when we need 360. Non-judicial members are mainly bureaucrats and not commercially-minded turnaround professionals. Given the optimism of Indian promoters, admission of stress takes five years, admission to CIRP takes two years, CIRP itself takes two years, and liquidation takes another two years, making a total of nine-11 years after stress identification. This destroys the corporate debtor's enterprise value and available collateral, leading to credit losses across the board.

Moving to the proposed IBC amendments, courts have been asked to ascertain default and admit within 14 days. This was part of the original law, but the courts thought they could decide on the commercial wisdom of an admission, the onus of which lies with the creditors. However, courts have been granted the ability to go beyond the timelines if written requests are given, leaving a judge and a bureaucrat to decide on commercial wisdom. Courts need to be commercially-minded and admit or resolve based on creditor judgment. The issues around not allowing agen-

Apart from fixing procedural and mindset issues, new legislation is required around pre-pack laws for all companies

cies and other non-contractual claims to slow the process is welcome. This would avoid situations like the JSW/BPSL delays. Agencies can give any other asset of the corporate debtor not within CIRP or guarantees. The defined timelines on 12A, supervision of creditors in liquidation, and ability to alienate plans from distribution are welcome moves that would hasten resolution.

However, what we really need to address is institutional maturity to manage a law as sophisticated as IBC. The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (IBBI) should become a mature regulator which facilitates the spirit of the law. For this, it may need oversight of all pillars of the law under various degrees. Today, there is over-supervision of the insolvency professional. The amendments do talk about not considering disciplinary actions when appointing, which seems an acknowledgment of debt. Data tells that it takes five years for a promoter or creditor to acknowledge the need to restructure. Making the resolution process more appropriate, a promoter should be given a chance to resurrect themselves. Though there is a Section 10 provision for self-filing, debtors are unwilling as CIRP mandates an auction. Pre-packs, if all creditors are paid, albeit delayed, should not involve an auction. This can only come through oversight, and we now have the legal framework to offer these without the risk of delayed recognition, as in the past. Further, the regulator needs to ask financial institutions about strategies for special mention accounts. Transfer of these exposures to specialists (special situations funds or asset reconstruction companies) should be encouraged with due supervision.

Legal provisions backed by structural changes are the need of the hour.

needs to make itself more credible. We have far too many of them too, which was required when the need existed. Now, early detection and resolution would be the norm. Turnaround and crisis management skills rather than just the knowledge of law is a pre-requisite. IBBI may consider a re-qualification of insolvency professionals.

Apart from fixing procedural and mindset issues, new legislation is required around pre-pack laws for all companies, along with cross-border and group insolvency being introduced to encourage voluntary filings under IBC proactively. The aim should be to resolve, rather than disrupt, ownership. A big concern is timely identification of debts. Data tells that it takes five years for a promoter or creditor to acknowledge the need to restructure. Making the resolution process more appropriate, a promoter should be given a chance to resurrect themselves. Though there is a Section 10 provision for self-filing, debtors are unwilling as CIRP mandates an auction. Pre-packs, if all creditors are paid, albeit delayed, should not involve an auction. This can only come through oversight, and we now have the legal framework to offer these without the risk of delayed recognition, as in the past. Further, the regulator needs to ask financial institutions about strategies for special mention accounts. Transfer of these exposures to specialists (special situations funds or asset reconstruction companies) should be encouraged with due supervision.

Legal provisions backed by structural changes are the need of the hour.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Relief for Ukraine?

Apropos of "No deal in Alaska" (FE, August 18), a highly anticipated summit between US President Donald Trump and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin concluded without a deal on ending the Ukraine invasion, even if the US president termed the talks a great progress. Observers say the meeting gave the Russian president a diplomatic win after being shunned by the West following

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. This marked Putin stepping on Western soil for the first time since then. Now, the attention turns to the leader who was excluded from the discussions. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy can hope for a warmer reception than February's Oval Office shouting match. The fact that a big group of European leaders will also be present means that everyone wants to grab the light at the end of the tunnel. We can hope for

the best in the interests of the world in general and millions of people of the two war-torn nations in particular. —Sanjay Chopra, Mohali

Protecting democracy

It is ironic that the Election Commission (EC), which must be politically neutral in its duties, has been at the centre of a political storm after the Opposition raised doubts over its independence, impartiality, and integrity in the preparation of

voters' lists and conducting elections. The EC's issue is that it lacks transparency and strength of will to ensure a level playing field for all political parties. It must ask itself why it is necessary for the apex court to issue orders for protecting the sanctity of elections. The body must redeem itself. Failing that, we must redeem it for the sake of Indian democracy. —G David Milton, Maruthancode

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Mountains in Peril

The tragedy in Kishtwar last week is a grim reminder that the Himalayan landscape, for all its beauty, is an increasingly fragile theatre for human life. In a matter of minutes, what began as an ordinary day on a sacred pilgrimage route to the Machail Mata shrine turned into an unrelenting wave of water, mud, and debris that tore through lives and livelihoods.

At least 60 people are gone, many more remain missing, and countless families are left with the unbearable weight of not knowing. Cloudbursts are not new to the region, but their frequency and destructiveness are intensifying. What sets this disaster apart is its setting - along a congested pilgrim route where thousands pass each season, many stopping at Chositi before making the steep climb to the shrine.

Here, geography conspires with faith: narrow valleys, fragile slopes, and rudimentary infrastructure stand alongside large gatherings of people whose focus is spiritual, not situational awareness. When the sudden fury came, there was neither time nor space to escape. Survivor accounts capture the shock: a loud blast-like sound, a surge of sludge in the drains, and the sickening realisation that the ground itself was turning lethal. Some were rescued by security personnel posted for the shrine, others by sheer luck.

But for too many, there was simply no path out. The official rescue effort, brave as it is, has been hampered by a lack of resources. Reports from the site speak of a single earth mover working through the debris while the clock ticks on survivors' chances. This is not a reflection of the courage of the responders - it is a reflection of systemic under-preparedness for disasters in our mountainous districts.

We have known for years that cloudbursts and flash floods will become more frequent as climate patterns shift and the monsoon grows more erratic. Yet, preparedness remains piecemeal. Remote areas often lack basic early-warning systems, resilient shelters, and rapid deployment equipment. Pilgrimage routes, in particular, are rarely designed with disaster mitigation in mind, though they attract large, temporary populations in some of the most hazard-prone terrain in the country. There is an urgent need to rethink how we plan for such events. Early-warning infrastructure should be standard along all high-density Himalayan routes.

Local communities must be trained in rapid evacuation and first response, for they are the true first responders when disaster strikes. Rescue teams should be pre-positioned with adequate equipment during peak pilgrimage or tourist seasons. The human loss in Kishtwar is devastating, but its lesson should not be lost in mourning alone.

We cannot control when and where the next cloudburst will strike, but we can control how prepared we are when it does. If the mountains are to remain places of faith and livelihood, they must also become places of safety. Anything less will be a betrayal of those who call them home, and those who journey there seeking something higher.

Rare reckoning

When China abruptly tightened exports of rare-earth elements earlier this year, the reverberations were immediate. Automakers announced curtailed production, electronics manufacturers scrambled for supplies, and policymakers denounced what they saw as coercive economic tactics.

With more than 90 per cent of the world's rare-earth refining capacity located in China, the initial panic was understandable. Rare earths are embedded in almost every facet of modern technology - from the high-powered magnets in electric vehicles and wind turbines to the sophisticated systems inside missiles and fighter jets.

Yet what looks like overwhelming leverage at first glance is also a trap. Every time Beijing broadens its grip on rare earths, it sends shock waves that accelerate efforts to diversify supply chains. The last time China restricted shipments in 2010, Japan and several other countries poured resources into alternative mining, recycling, and substitution technologies. That moment planted the seeds of today's diversification drive.

The current squeeze is likely to push the world even further down that path. India, in particular, has a rare chance to step forward. With large monazite reserves along its eastern coast and a state-owned firm already engaged in extraction, the country has the geological base to matter. What it has lacked is downstream muscle. That is now changing: New Delhi is courting Japanese and South Korean partners for advanced processing and exploring policy incentives for magnet manufacturing.

For India's own defence sector, which needs reliable supplies for missiles, radar and electronic warfare systems, reduced reliance on Chinese goods is a strategic imperative. If these moves align, India could emerge not only as a supplier for global markets but also as a more self-reliant security power.

The short-term costs of this transition will be real. Rare-earth separation facilities are complex, capital-intensive, and environmentally fraught. Heavy elements such as dysprosium and terbium remain difficult to source outside China, and prices are likely to remain volatile for some time.

For defence contractors and electric vehicle manufacturers, the adjustment will mean higher costs and supply litters in the next two to three years. But the long-term trajectory is clear: China's dominance is strongest when the rest of the world remains complacent.

By weaponising its advantage, it forces others to invest, innovate, and collaborate. What was once taken for granted is now a strategic priority from Washington to Brussels to New Delhi. Recycling initiatives are scaling up, stockpiling strategies are being refined, and substitution research is accelerating. China may still enjoy an edge in geology, infrastructure, and industrial know-how.

But its own actions risk eroding that edge. Instead of binding the world to its supply chains, Beijing has given competitors a compelling reason to decouple.

As new projects come online and technological dependence diminishes, the grip of coercion will inevitably weaken. The lesson is as old as geopolitics: a weapon that is brandished too often eventually loses its power. By turning rare earths into a tool of economic pressure, China may be hastening the day when they cease to be a tool at all.

Trump vs BRICS

Why is Trump targeting BRICS? Trump believes BRICS is challenging the existing world order which made America the hegemon. No one now believes that BRICS is merely a bigger talk shop or a meaningless acronym. Its vision of the new world order has rattled the West. Many Western analysts now argue that BRICS is visualising a world without the West

US President Donald Trump's mercurial behaviour reminds one of a boy named Calvin in a classic comic strip. Calvin and Hobbes, by Bill Watterson, when Calvin looks at a tiger called Hobbes, the boy sees a real tiger while everyone else sees Hobbes as a toy. Calvin forms a club called 'Get Rid of Slimy Girls', and his main purpose is to exclude his neighbour Susie. And from the red line. However, when he is forced to let others in, Calvin chooses to move the treeshouse.

Trump too keeps shifting the goal-post when it comes to using tariffs as his trump card. BRICS is a special target for the whimsical president. Two BRICS members, Brazil and India, have been targeted with 50 per cent tariff. The Trump administration has now threatened to impose additional tariffs on India if the Trump-Putin peace talks fail. Former US National security adviser John Bolton has described Trump's tariffs against India as "unforced error."

While India's response is sober and somewhat restrained, Brazilian president Lula has described unreasonable tariffs as "unacceptable blackmail." He has called upon India, China and other BRICS members to unite against Trump's tariffs. The unreasonable tariffs are another form of sanctions.

Trump is not known for doing his homework before opening his mouth. He wrongly claimed the US runs a trade deficit with Brazil. The fact is that Washington has a \$74 billion trade surplus with Brazil.

Another BRICS member, South Africa, faces 30 per cent tariffs. Trump has cut off aid to this country accusing the government of discriminating against



its white minority without any proof. He has already announced that he will not attend the Johannesburg Summit of G20 in November this year. China and Russia are targets of a different kind. Even before assuming the presidency, Trump had said that BRICS countries trying to create a new currency to replace the US dollar "will face 100 per cent tariffs and should expect to say goodbye to selling into the wonderful US economy."

In his attempt to isolate China, Trump has ended up isolating and antagonising India, supposedly Washington's strategic ally in countering China, Brazil and South Africa. Now that Putin has refused to play ball on Ukraine, Trump may see him as a villain for not allowing him to "end the Ukraine war" and thereafter claim the Nobel.

Trump's trashing of BRICS is not really about India, Brazil and BRICS. It is about distraction and perception, and a chance to reconnect and refocus his base. To Trump, tariff is the art of the deal.

In fact, Trump's deputy chief of staff Stephen Miller, boasted recently before the media, "You have been watching the greatest economic master strategy from an American President in history."

Why is Trump targeting BRICS? Trump believes BRICS is challenging the existing world order which made America the

hegemon. No one now believes that BRICS is merely a bigger talk shop or a meaningless acronym. Its vision of the new world order has rattled the West.

Many Western analysts now argue that BRICS is visualising a world without the West. Way back in 2007, American bi-monthly National Interest published an essay by Naazneen Barmah, Ely Ratner and Steven Weber under the title "The World without the West."

It argued that the world without the West "is becoming preferentially and densely interconnected." It further said that "the traditional tools of leverage that Europe and the United States have been able to deploy...are losing some of their effectiveness."

Trump's shilly-shallying behaviour and irrational tariffs regime have forced BRICS and other members of the Global South to make what former foreign secretary Nirupama Rao calls "very pragmatic strategic recalibrations."

How do you deal with a leader whose presidency has become a "grift machine." British journalist Anooosh Chakelani says that we are in the "age of grift." If one is "not spotting it," she maintains, one is "probably on the end of it."

De-dollarisation myths are being spread by Trump. There is no consensus among BRICS on de-dollarisation. What they are attempting is to make national currency

viable where possible.

A few options are being explored to facilitate intra-BRICS trade. There are few takers for schemes like a gold-backed common currency, dubbed the 'Unit'.

While most members are wary of China's yuan, Beijing itself doesn't want the yuan to be pushed as a reserved currency. No serious discussion on de-dollarisation has taken place. Member states are aware of the long and tedious process.

It took Europe about 40 years to adopt Euro from the first talks to actual coins in pockets - and that was with countries that shared borders and similar systems. The BRICS currency is a fairy tale. Trump is fearful of losing the dollar's paramount status. History tells us that regimes, kings, kingdoms and countries that had the reserve currency status suffered immense economic hardships once they lost that dominance.

Obviously, Trump doesn't believe in any new world order. He wants only a free-for-all where the strongest strive to prevail and the weaker must accommodate. He refuses to believe that the monetary system established 50 years ago is crumbling. But Trump knows BRICS has begun to erode the dollar's global domination which may pave the way for Bretton Woods 3.0.

Trump has created a new divide in the West. What Robert Kagan wrote in his famous book 'Of Paradise and Power' in 2003 describing the United States and Europe as being from different planets has proved to be true.

There are also fears in Europe of a "Yalta II" scenario, echoing the 1945 conference in which the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Soviet Union carved up the future of post-World War II Eastern Europe. In any case, the war in Ukraine marks the end of an exceptional period in human history - 70 years of peace between the world's Great Powers.

All said, the vision of BRICS worries the West, no matter what they say. The West's Holy Empire is crumbling. The magnitude of the crunching and grinding of geopolitical plates that we see today has no precedent.

Trump may be helping his policy would bring BRICS members to their knees. It may end up as BRICS' new building blocks.

History may not be back. We are witnessing what former German Chancellor Olaf Scholz called 'Zeitenwende', a turn of the times.



ASH NARAIN ROY

The writer
comments on
global affairs

Philippine Daily Enquirer

Ramon S. Angas Metro's savior?

In his trademark straightforward and bombastic manner, San Miguel Corp. president and CEO Ramon S. Ang volunteered last week to help Metro Manila finally solve its long-standing and complex flooding problem "at no cost to the people and no cost to the government."

Ang, ranked the fourth richest person in the Philippines by Forbes Magazine, made the bold and unprecedented offer after his group's infrastructure projects were cited among the reasons for the massive flooding that paralyzed parts of the metropolis last month following days of heavy rain.

"Now I, Ramon Ang of San Miguel, am volunteering. I will help [solve] the flooding in Metro Manila at no cost to the people, no cost to the government," he said in a meeting with the Metro Manila Development Authority (MMDA) and the Metro Manila mayors last week.

Putting an end to the perennial flooding in Metro Manila does not require a "nuclear solution," said the billionaire. "We just need to clean the rivers... we will do the cleaning," Ang said, even offering to relocate schools and homes lining vital waterways that obstruct waterways.

Ang certainly took the public aback by his grand plan, but his track record

in infrastructure development, from tollways to airports and power generation on top of food and beverage manufacturing and distribution certainly make the local officials, legislators, and even President Marcos seriously consider taking him up on his tantalizing offer.

"Ramon Ang's proposal is certainly very welcome because, you know, we've seen his projects. The results are quite good," Mr. Marcos said during the launch of the government website for the controversial flood control projects. But as Mr. Marcos correctly pointed out, Ang's proposal is not exactly new as the private sector had long been channeling resources - part of which can be deducted from their annual taxes - to key sectors where government resources are lacking.

"Imagine if the country's richest families will pool their CSR (corporate social responsibility) resources together and do what government spends hundreds of billions on in tax money every fiscal year, but seems to fail to deliver. It may be a little out of the box, but why not?" said Sen. Panfilo Lacson in a statement.

Engineered for high-output pursuits in unforgiving conditions. A selection of technical apparel that merges advanced materials with alpine-grade design - so you can move fast, stay dry, and push further, wherever the line takes you.

Through their individual foundations and organizations such as the Philippine Business for Social Progress, Association of Foundations, Philippine Business for Education, and the League of Corporate Foundations, billions of pesos are already being funneled to crucial sectors such as education, public health, livelihood development, disaster response and mitigation, and environmental projects and have yielded varying levels of success. Private money has likewise been mobilized in infrastructure through public-private partnership (PPP) projects and outright privatization projects including the rehabilitation and operation of the Ninoy Aquino International Airport, MRT-7 project, and Metro Manila Skyway that are now under concession agreements with SMC. Article continues after this advertisement.

To continue to outsource public infrastructure projects with no clear economic returns such as flood control, however, has raised valid concerns over the strings that will inevitably be attached to such a big-ticket project.

For economist Sonny Arana, executive director of IBON Foundation, "public

infrastructure for the common good should never be relinquished to private profit-seeking billionaires - and the argument that government will 'save' in its General Appropriations Act is stunningly wrong." Today any repudiation over what SMC will ultimately want in return for its generosity, the Marcos administration should therefore carefully look into the finer details of the broad promise of Ang to "solve" the debilitating problem with flooding in Metro Manila, so that any conditions will be laid out in the open for the public to appreciate and scrutinize. In the meantime, local government executives need not wait for a savior such as Ang before they get out of their comfort zones and work on solving the flooding issue themselves.

They can immediately deploy people and resources to clear clogged waterways and drainage systems across cities while implementing solid waste management programs with the MMDA calling the shots given its mandate that crosses individual city or town jurisdictions.

At the same time, the Metro Manila mayors can consider more long-term solutions in cooperation with the national government such as the establishment of waste-to-energy power plants so that trash will not pile up and overwhelm canals and rivers.

Yours, etc., D S Kang, Hoshiarpur, 16 August.

Reset needed
Sir, Apropos 'Banished without even being heard?' (15 August), the Supreme Court has long been showing a predilection for delivering judgments as one possessing all knowledge and all power.

This trend will jeopardise the future of the country. If the judiciary tends to interfere in every action of the legislature or directs the executive now and then to take steps as it deems fit, the country cannot be run smoothly.

Yours, etc., Kalyan Majumdar, Uttarpara, 15 August.

Letters To The Editor

✉ editor@thestatesman.com

Collaborative approach

Sir, This is a reference to the article "Banished without even being heard?" (15 August) by Anjali Mehta.

The Supreme Court's directive to relocate stray dogs from the Delhi-NCR region to permanent animal shelters within eight days has triggered an unsavoury public debate across the country.

The court intervention, necessitated by rising rabies cases and dog bite incidents, holds the state government constitutionally responsible for ensuring public safety.

Animal rights' activists and welfare groups call the apex court decision irrational



and impractical. They blame the civic bodies for the thriving canine population, lack of proper infrastructure and weak enforcement of laws. The state should help balance human safety with animal welfare, regulate disposal of garbage, keep streets and public places clean and free from traffic nuisance, and contain the

order as a stepping stone for reforms.

The ugly confrontation between dog-lovers and their opponents reflecting utter lack of shared common interests calls for a viable solution.

If the SC does not review its order despite public and political outrage over judicial overreach, the civic municipal bodies are duty-bound to create and maintain adequate and hygienic shelters, and initiate anti-rabies vaccination and sterilisation programmes. This needs proper funding, training staff, vaccination and adoption drives.

A collaborative approach involving the government, dog lovers, NGOs, civil society and local communities would help balance human safety with animal welfare, regulate disposal of garbage, keep streets and public places clean and free from traffic nuisance, and contain the

stray dog menace.

Yours, etc., D S Kang, Hoshiarpur, 16 August.

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Washington sees threat in India's strategic autonomy

HARSHA KAKAR

The US has suddenly woken up to the fact that India is unwilling to bend and grovel before it as most other nations. The Americans also believe that India's growing power will ultimately be a threat and the way India tilts in its alliances can alter global power balances. Hence, they have begun taking steps to keep India under check by controlling its rise. This approach is the opposite of earlier US governments which let India maintain its strategic autonomy while ensuring it remains an ally, which was far more logical.

For previous US administrations, India was a Major Defence Partner and was granted Strategic Trade Authorization-I status, benefitting defence procurements and enhancing interoperability. The belief was that collaboration in defence and trade would ensure Indo-US ties are close and New Delhi remains a partner in managing global challenges, especially a growing China, which was a threat to both. The US also banked on India to contain Chinese influence in South and East Asia as also within the Global South, as both are competitors.

The Trump administration appears to have adopted an anti-India stance. They believe India can be the key in containing Russia, which has emboldened the US in Ukraine. This became evident when President Trump announced additional sanctions of 25 per cent on India for procuring Russian oil, coinciding with the visit of Steve Witkoff, his special envoy, to Moscow. The intent was to send a message to President Vladimir Putin

that in case he does not accept Trump's call for a ceasefire, its ally India would be impacted.

This became further clear when US Treasury Secretary, Scott Bessent stated in an interview to Bloomberg TV. "We've put secondary tariffs on Indians for buying Russian oil. And I could see, if things don't go well (in Trump-Putin talks), then sanctions or secondary tariffs could go up." He was hoping India would exert pressure on Russia. On the contrary, there was no response from India. New Delhi was willing to stand its ground.

To increase pressure, Bessent directed European nations to follow suit. He mentioned on imposition of additional tariffs on India. "We need some coordination here. If we want to have a unified front, which will give President Trump maximum leverage, then I think our European counterparts need to do their part (impose sanctions on India)."

There was no response from Europe. The reality is that India is a major supplier of refined fuel to Europe, stoppage of which would impact their economy.

At the same time, Trump and his allies claim that fear of additional tariffs is pushing India to reduce oil imports from Russia. Trump stated in a Fox News Radio show that additional tariffs "essentially took them out of buying oil from Russia."

The truth is that there is no change in Indian companies' procuring Russian oil. The chairman of IOC mentioned, "We have not received any instruction or indication (from the government). We are continuing with our crude procurement strategy based on economics. It was and continues to



be a commercial exercise."

There is also a belief within the US, including Trump, that Putin agreed to the meeting in Alaska based on additional tariffs imposed on India. This is Trump's figment of imagination. Indo-Russia ties go back decades and are far more reliable and deeper than Indo-US ties, which vacillate between close and distant.

To continue displaying its displeasure, Washington has begun co-opting up to Pakistan. It hopes that this would compel India to bend and re-seek favour. However, this is another gamble which failed.

To display its intent to distance itself from the US and deny Trump the opportunity of continuing his claim of stopping Operation Sindoor, India must not conduct the QUAD summit this year, nor should PM Modi visit Washington as part of his itinerary if he addresses the UN General Assembly next month.

India, while backing calls for dialogue and peace in the Russo-Ukraine conflict, refused to become involved

in Washington's attempts to pressurize Russia. India only termed the sanctions as 'unjust'. PM Modi avoided calling Trump or rushing to the US while publicly refuting Trump's claim of having brokered the ceasefire. Neither did India send any delegation to Washington.

On the contrary, timed with the US imposing additional tariffs, PM Modi and Putin had a tele-conversation. The MEA statement mentioned that the conversation dwelt on peaceful resolution of the conflict, progress in bilateral ties and further deepening the Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership between the two nations.

A further firm message from India flowed from the ramparts of the Red Fort on Independence Day. PM Modi, without mentioning the US and tariffs said, "We should not waste our energy trying to shorten someone else's line. We must extend our own line with full energy. The world will respect our strength." Defying American demands on opening the agricultural and dairy sector, he added, "I am

standing like a wall for our farmers." India-US trade talks are currently stalled.

The US believes that it can compel Putin to adhere to Trump's request for peace, thereby pushing Trump closer towards the Nobel peace award, by pressurizing India. It ignores China solely on geopolitical and economic considerations as China can hit back by blocking crucial imports. The US appears to place India and China at the same level in terms of threat to its power.

This is happening because India is a rising economy with the ability to influence large parts of the world. Trump's transactional leadership approach, which believes it can compel nations to adhere to its demands, will backfire. The recreation of the RIC (Russia-India-China grouping) and growing proximity between BRICS nations to counter the tariffs are likely to be major challenges to the US. PM Modi's visit to China, meeting both Presidents Putin and Xi Jinping can bounce back on the US.

India has also realized that bending once to the US would imply being considered a secondary ally, one that can be pushed around at will, as is happening with Europe. Standing ground will give it respect even if it takes time. The US, on the other hand, will lose an ally and a staunch partner. Trump's desperation for personal and short-term gains will damage Indo-US ties for a long time.

While currently additional tariffs are on hold, no one knows when and if they would be re-imposed.

(The writer is a retired Major General of the Indian Army.)

100 Years Ago



Front page of The Statesman on 19 August 1925

OCCASIONAL NOTE

THE career of Chittagong as a port has been a chequered one. When Bengal was partitioned it was hoisted into the limelight as the port of the new province of Assam and East Bengal. Everything possible was done to foster it, and rainbow visions of a second Calcutta arose to dazzle the eyes of its sponsors. When the "settled fact" of partition was reversed, by an even more arbitrary procedure than that involved in the partition, Chittagong fell once more upon evil days. It shrank to the status of a third rate port, and its ambition to out rival Calcutta became something to laugh at. But by that time the best part of half a crore had been spent upon it; and since the capital was removed to Delhi it has been a cardinal feature of Indian policy that the expenditure of a large sum upon any project constitutes an urgent reason for spending at least as much more. Apart from this Chittagong has many advantages as a port. Its trade has steadily expanded of recent years and is approaching a point at which it will be entitled to be regarded as a major port. The Government therefore will have good grounds for accepting the proposal passed by the Bengal Legislative Council on Monday to lend 50 lakhs to the Port Trust for purposes of development. It is gratifying to note that the resolution was passed by Swarajist votes. Such support must have been at least as much a surprise as a pleasure to the Government.

News Items

GERMAN FRONTIER

AGREEMENT WITH FRANCE SIGNED

Paris, Aug.

The agreement regarding the delimitation of the Franco-German frontier, particularly the question of the Rhine bridges, was formally signed to-day by the French and German representatives.—Reuter.

AMRITSAR CRIME

HEAD AND LIMBS OF VICTIM RECOVERED

Amritsar, Aug.

The police have found the head and arms of the man whose trunk was recovered the other day from a street in the city. The head was found in the Civil Lines and is that of a Sikh. On one of the arms is tattooed a peacock. His identity remains a mystery. The police think the crime was committed somewhere in the outskirts of the city.

MARILLIER MEMORIAL

UNVEILED BY ASSAM GOVERNOR

Shillong, Aug.

During his Sylhet tour Sir William Reid, K.O.L.E., Acting Governor of Assam, unveiled a memorial. The ceremony took place at Lungla in the presence of a large number of European residents of that area. The memorial was to the memory of Mr. Marillier. Sir William explained that he and two or three others remembered Mr. Marillier as a great landmark of the district. A man of very strong personality who was a great inspiration to others for the good of the community. The memorial was on the site of the first bungalow he built for himself in 1875 and close to his brother's grave. After the ceremony Sir William dined at Rajnaray and left for Shillong that night.

KING FEISUL'S DENIAL

"NO DISCUSSION OF POLITICS"

London, Aug.

IN connexion with the French news-paper assertions that King Feisal has come to England to urge Britain to con-tinue her military support to Iraq and save Mosul, King Feisal has informed Reuter that it is quite untrue that he has any intention of discussing politics with anyone. His journey was made purely for medical reasons and was in no way connected with politics.

He will remain in bed and his future movements will entirely depend on the result of medical consultations in London.—Reuter.

Options when in the eye of the storm

ANDREW SHENG

As Typhoon Trump sweeps over trading partners and foes alike and even as US stock markets are breaking record highs, there is an eerie feeling that one is trapped inside the eye of the hurricane, with no guidance on what to do and where to go. There is misinformation and disinformation everywhere, since we have no objective and independent verification on the real casualties and devastation in the Ukraine and Gaza wars, nor whether Trump can deliver a truce with Putin, or rein in the Israel-Iran conflict before it becomes nuclear.

Reality is today stranger than even the most speculative science fiction. Who would have predicted a month ago that Trump would impose 50 per cent tariffs on India or unlisted start-up Perplexity with an estimated valuation of \$18 billion would bid \$34.5 billion for the app Chrome from Google? Alphabet, which has a market cap valuation of \$2.4 trillion or 130 times larger than Perplexity? Lions are trying to swallow elephants, such as the United States taking on China and now India, the next superpower with a population (1.4 billion) 42 times that of the United States, but GDP at \$39 trillion or only 13.3 per cent of the USA. Nevertheless, India's real GDP is growing at 6.2 per cent in 2025, more than doubled the 27 per cent growth for the United States. India has the second largest pool of STEM graduates at 2.55 million

in 2020, compared with 3.57 million in China and only 820,000 in the United States.

From the financial markets' point of view, the United States seems to be on a roll. The latest data shows that 5489 companies listed in the US have a market valuation of \$81.25 trillion or 278 per cent of 2024 GDP, with rising revenue of \$2996 trillion, about 100 per cent of GDP. The magnificent Seven alone have a market cap of \$20 trillion (just under one-quarter of total market capitalization), but revenue of \$2.1 trillion or 7 per cent of total US listed corporate revenue.

The US economy is more resilient than expected, despite real US interest rates (Treasury real index inflation) at 1.7 per cent for 10-year Treasuries, even though it was 2 per cent as late as February this year. Small wonder that US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent has called for a 175 basis points cut in interest rates, since the US gross debt at \$37 trillion is already paying \$1 trillion a year in interest rate charges.

With an expected three further cuts in Fed interest rates for the rest of the year, small wonder that investors in the US markets are cheering.

Mainstream economists who thought that global tariff shocks would have serious impact on the global economy are still puzzled why inflation so far has remained muted, whilst the anticipated trade and economic slowdown have not surfaced in the economic data. Amazingly, the latest



July 2025 IMF Global Economic Outlook report, whilst warning that the tariff shocks added to policy uncertainties, the front-loading of exports to avoid tariffs led to a strong surge in exports to the US in the first quarter of the year, which supported growth in Europe and Asia. Due to the easing of monetary policy as global inflation recedes and aided by depreciation of the dollar, the IMF upped their projections from the April 2025 forecast modestly from 2.8 to 3.0 per cent for 2025 and from 3.0 to 3.1 per cent next year.

In short, despite the tariff uncertainties, things don't look so bad, which is why we seem to be bipolar in expectations—the best of times in financial markets, and worst of times in terms of potential escalating conflicts from Ukraine to the South China Sea. What are the options for corporates, investors and policy makers in this whirlwind of uncertainties?

Several patterns are emerging from the confusions. First, the Trump Administration is using tariffs to raise fiscal revenue to some extent to restore fiscal credibility. When there is pushback, like that from China, Canada and India, there can be some moderation, especially if Trump sees benefits to the US, such as relaxation of semiconductor chip sales from Nvidia and AMD to China, subject to 15 per cent equivalent of an export tax.

Second, most policymakers see that with the AI and robotics disruption, there is no alternative but to double down on using AI tools to improve domestic productivity, upgrade labour force skills, and in essence use industrial policy to help domestic businesses transform through better digital public infrastructure.

Third, decoupling of global supply chains is tougher than expected, as every company and country within these supply chains are looking into

how to make them more resilient, agile and flexible to adjust to major trade and tariff policy changes.

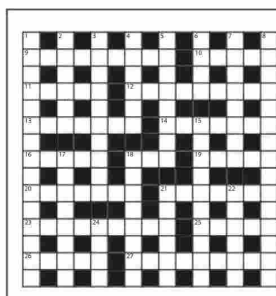
Because the US is moving towards a bilateral negotiation stance, each country and company is going below the radar screen not to provoke any sanction or tariff/non-tariff action. They are surely but silently working towards trade and payments diversification so as to minimize future disruptions and shocks. In short, whilst the US noisily creating shock and awe policy announcements, the rest of the world is quietly preparing for alternative arrangements that involve more local currency, netting of payments, and more South-South (N2N or node to node) trade to ensure that trade continues to sustain growth and development.

Former Singapore Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong warned that the "best framework is the world temporarily minus one." If America is going one way, whilst the rest want to retain the multilateral system, we may end up with a "minus one" order.

All storms subside just like political fevers. But living in the eye of the storm, working together to isolate American exceptionalism may be one road out of chaos. The other, as Austrian philosopher Hayek said, is the Road to Serfdom, but he was referring to socialism.

(The writer is Distinguished Fellow of Asia Global Institute, University of Hong Kong, and Chairman of George Town Institute of Open and Advanced Studies, Wawasan Open University in Penang, Malaysia.) Special to ANN.

Crossword | No. 293221



Yesterday's Solution

ACROSS
9/6 Batteries not included in the provision of this food? (4,5,4)
10 Board in grand public school (3,2)
11/7 Wild anoraks in town to see amusing actor
12 Mutant terrapins come to light (9)
13 Written verses regularly seen in Spectator (7)
14 Layer one's rolled back in storehouse (7)

16 Bulging content that wobbles in kitchin (5)
18 Oriental sauce from Dungeness oysters (3)
19 Old rawbroker sheds pound in weight (5)
20 Catching rook, cat—the only one in Doney—makes start (7)
21 Completely self-obsessed Romeo breaks fast (7)
23 Almost stagger over Scotsman resembling legendary warrior

(9) Pull in this region nothing to smile about (5)
26 Male beach crab seen occasionally in spiritual centre (5)
27 Nervous Shakespeare wife dismissed with some banter? (3,2,4)
DOWN
1 Novel in which Mostar destroyed with a distant Surrey town? (1,8,2,4)

2 Bird, small, in mid-den, upside-down (6)
3 Minor royal and pop star loiter—Queen not appearing (8)
4 Tune is reworked and comes together (6)
5 Lyre hard to play—their business with the arms? (8)
6 See 9 Across
7 See 11 Across
8 Hidden from public scrutiny with summer over? (5,5,7)

15 Dissolute academic losing it in dispute (10)
17 Bother some type is lurking in shade (8)
18 Island has endless fish, excellent seen from below (8)
21 Right to stop an angel old poet (6)
22 Miss transporting large old bishop everywhere (10)
24 Square here almost round? (4)

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

8

THE INDIAN EXPRESS, TUESDAY, AUGUST 19, 2025



THE EDITORIAL PAGE

WORDLY WISE

FOR LAST YEAR'S WORDS BELONG TO LAST YEAR'S
LANGUAGE, AND NEXT YEAR'S WORDS AWAIT
ANOTHER VOICE. — T S ELIOT

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

The Red Fort Charter

From energy security to employment, PM Modi laid out a blueprint for wide-ranging reform



HARDEEP S PURI

QUESTIONS & QUESTIONS

The EC faces many, it undermines itself in the shrill and adversarial way it responds to them

THIS IS A fraught moment for the Election Commission. The poll monitor, which has consistently ranked high on the list of India's most trusted institutions, has been at the centre of a storm, or two. One, the accusations of "vote chori" levelled at it by the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, earlier in Maharashtra, and more recently in Karnataka. Those allegations evidently stem from a political call taken by the Congress leader to make the "stolen election" the centrepiece of his party's campaign — its first test will be in the upcoming election in Bihar, where he has just begun a 16-day, 1,300-km "Vote Adhikar Yatra". And two, the controversy over the EC's Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls, also in Bihar, which has sparked genuine fears of widespread disenfranchisement because of the way it is being conducted. In a break from the past, the SIR shifts the burden of proof onto the voters and it seems to be more an exercise of exclusion than inclusion. It is against this backdrop that the Commission held a press conference on Sunday, in a bid to answer questions and clear the air. It addressed some questions, ducked and stonewalled others. By assuming a politically adversarial tone and giving the impression of being thin-skinned — the EC has a lesson or two to learn on dealing with criticism from the Supreme Court — it also notched some own goals.

Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar pointed, rightly, to the established due process for making complaints about fraudulent voters and lists, and the fact that the poll monitor must necessarily take into account considerations such as voter privacy as it moves towards greater transparency. It is also evident that Congress's allegations of "vote chori", by a grand conspiracy involving collusion between the poll monitor and the ruling BJP that cuts through a layered electoral process's several checks and balances, depends on a political suspension of disbelief. At the same time, however, as an ongoing series of reports in this paper has shown, the SIR in Bihar has raised legitimate questions about timing and design that must be addressed urgently. The Supreme Court has also intervened on the SIR, upholding the EC's power to carry out the exercise while nudging it to display more transparency. That the EC has published the list of 65 lakh names deleted from the draft rolls in the first phase of the SIR, giving reasons for the deletions, is a step in the right direction. That electoral officers in all of Bihar's 38 districts have reportedly been asked to consider the family tree as an informal 12th document — amid a scramble by voters for the relatively hard-to-get 11 documents on the EC's list — is heartening.

Questions and controversies about who is a voter and who isn't are set to become more salient amid an inward-looking politics, a waning of common ground and when distrust of mediating institutions is rising. In times such as these, the EC must recognise what is at stake, and why it is crucial for it to be fair and independent and be seen to be so. The press conference was a beginning. The EC must take the process forward, with a sense of responsibility and, more importantly, with humility. And a conviction that it is a constitutional authority that needs to address every question, not have its members sound like the government officials they once were.

SIMPLER IS BETTER

Steps to rationalise tax slabs under GST are welcome. Revenue implications need to be examined, consensus with states forged

SINCE THE SHIFT to GST, the indirect tax regime in India has been plagued by many problems, stemming from the multiplicity of rates, compliance and classification issues, and inverted duty structure. Over the years, while the GST Council has taken steps to ease the taxpayer's burden, on the issue of rate rationalisation, there has been little progress. The Group of Ministers (GoM) on rate rationalisation was originally set up in the 45th meeting of the GST Council in 2021. There now appears to be a renewed push to rationalise the tax slabs. In his Independence Day speech, Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced the ushering in of the next-generation GST reforms by Diwali this year. "The government will bring next-generation GST reforms, which will bring down tax burden on the common man. It will be a Diwali gift for you," he said. Considering the sheer complexity of the current system, and the space for discretion it creates, steps to rationalise the tax slabs are welcome.

The proposal involves replacing the current system of multiple slabs — with main rates of 5 per cent, 12 per cent, 18 per cent and 28 per cent, along with cesses — with a two-slab structure of 5 per cent and 18 per cent, and a 40 per cent rate for a few items under the current 12 per cent slab to 5 per cent — the 12 per cent slab accounted for just 5-6 per cent of GST collections in 2023-24 — and moving 90 per cent of items taxed at 28 per cent to the 18 per cent slab. This proposal has been sent to the GoM, which is expected to meet this week to discuss the issue.

The GST rate (weighted average) had fallen from 14.4 per cent in 2017 to 11.6 per cent by September 2019. This is lower than the 15.3 per cent recommended by the Subramanian Committee. While any move to bring down the tax burden on the consumer will have revenue implications, there are expectations that lower rates and a simplified structure will lead to higher consumption and better compliance. It is possible that the proposal will force some resistance from states owing to a likely loss in revenues. Thus, any rate rationalisation exercise will have to build consensus in the GST Council, while taking into consideration the revenue implications of such a move for both the Centre and the states.

A LITTLE DELULU

Formalising slang coined by Gen Z and Gen Alpha by adding it to the dictionary could end ensuring its obsolescence

ENGLISH, AS THE kids might say, is not English. Or so it seems, given the baffling rate at which new words are being coined on TikTok, Discord and other online platforms crowded with Gen Z and Gen Alpha users. The effort of keeping up with these neologisms, akin to employing a river one teaspoon at a time, may defeat many in the millennial generation and older, which is why the attempts of venerable institutions like dictionaries seem especially valiant.

The most recent example is the Cambridge Dictionary's inclusion of words like "skibidi" (cool or bad, or used as a joke, no meaning at all), "delulu" (delusional) and "tradwife" (married woman who proudly stays home, cooks, cleans and posts about this life on social media). The dictionary's editorial team has defended the new inclusions against critics who may dismiss them as slang, arguing that they're not just a passing linguistic fad and that they only add words with "staying power".

Online cultures are changing the language faster than ever — not only because at least two generations today have no idea what a world without the internet might look like, but also because the reach of the World Wide Web has made the mainstream more thoroughly global. This, ultimately, may be precisely what will stymie efforts to formalise neologisms today: If a word is quick to catch on, especially with older generations, it is also quick to be dropped by those who coined it, thus ensuring its obsolescence. If words like "YOLO" ("you only live once", added to the Oxford English Dictionary in 2016) and "fleeek" ("perfectly done or exactly right", added to the Merriam Webster dictionary in 2021) now seem like fossils preserved in amber, they only underscore the suspicion that the Cambridge Dictionary may be more than a little delulu about the staying power of its new words.

I HAVE BEEN privileged to listen to August 15 speeches since I was a schoolboy, but Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 12th Independence Day speech on Friday was unprecedented. It unleashed a Brahmaputra — Arjun's legendary weapon with no counter — aimed at accelerating India's path to Viksit Bharat. At a time of extraordinary turbulence in the global economy, India continues to surge ahead as the fastest-growing large economy. The speech was remarkable not merely for its sweep but for its scope — next-generation reforms that are bold, and capable of reshaping the destiny of 1.4 billion people — with a clarity of vision that the nation has never witnessed before.

Take the Digital India stack, UPI accounting for half of the world's real-time transactions, and the roll-out of the first Made-in-India chip by year-end. These show India's lead position in the global digital economy. At a time when semiconductor decisions decide the destiny of nations, this is nothing less than digital Swaraj — India's assertion of sovereignty over critical technologies.

Energy security had long been the Achilles' heel of India's growth. For decades, hesitation and "no-go" classifications stymied exploration and deepened import dependence. Under PM Modi, India has reduced "no-go" areas for Exclusive Economic Zones by almost 99 per cent, freeing 10 lakh sq km for exploration and production (E&P). Coupled with Open Acreage Licensing Policy (OALP), this has opened a vast canvas to Indian champions and global majors alike — our hydrocarbon basins will no longer lie dormant but be harnessed for national progress. The National Deepwater Exploration Mission, announced from the ramparts of the Red Fort, sets an ambitious frontier agenda in the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea. It aims to unlock 600-1,200 million metric tonnes of oil and gas reserves through the drilling of nearly 40 wildcat wells. For the first time, India will systematically open up its complex offshore frontiers — from the Bay of Bengal to the Arabian Sea — with a framework that de-risks investment by allowing recovery of up to 80 per cent of costs in the case of dry wells, and 40 per cent upon commercial discovery. This initiative is part of a broader blueprint that could triple domestic oil and gas output to 85 million tonnes by 2032 and double national reserves to between one

It is telling that the Income Tax Act of 1961, a relic of that era, is now being replaced. The new Income Tax Bill is reducing complexity, abolishing 280 redundant sections, and offering relief up to Rs 12 lakh. The introduction of faceless assessment has made the system transparent, efficient, and incorruptible. GST 2.0, to be launched by Diwali, will further rationalise rates and boost compliance. Alongside the abolition of over 40,000 unnecessary compliances, repealing more than 1,500 outdated laws, and the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, this represents the dismantling of Nehru's economic cage.

and two billion tonnes. Offshore common infrastructure will be created on a plug-and-play basis to unlock an additional 100-120 billion cubic metres of gas in place, equivalent to nearly 8 million tonnes of production. Together, these measures will not only monetise previously stranded discoveries but also build an Atmanirbhar E&P ecosystem where the share of local supply chains rises from today's 25-30 per cent to over 70 per cent. This is India's most comprehensive upsurge overhaul since Independence.

At the same time, India has emerged as a global leader in energy transition. India has reached the 50 per cent clean-power mark in 2025 — five years ahead of the 2030 target. Biofuels and green hydrogen are moving from pilots to production; ethanol blending and CBG scale-up are building a new rural-industrial backbone. IFC infrastructure continues to expand. The civilian nuclear sector has been opened to private participation. Currently, 10 new nuclear reactors are operational, and India aims to increase its nuclear energy capacity tenfold by the 100th year of its independence.

The PM's announcement of the National Critical Minerals Mission marks a watershed in our industrial strategy. As the world recognises the strategic value of lithium, rare earths, nickel and cobalt, India has launched exploration at 1,200+ sites and is structuring partnerships, processing and recycling so that renewable power, semiconductors, EVs and advanced defence are never hostage to external choke-points.

National security was the other pillar of the Red Fort charter. Operation Sindoor displayed India's military prowess in real time, ending the era of nuclear blackmail and sending a message that aggression will be met with swiftness and sophistication. The reversal of the Indus Waters Treaty is a bold assertion of sovereignty. The unveiling of Mission Sudarshan Chakra, inspired by Lord Krishna shielding Arjun on the battlefield, is emblematic of Modi's style — civilisational symbolism married to cutting-edge technology. A multi-layered indigenous security shield will protect India's critical institutions from cyber, physical and hybrid threats.

The PM also did not shy away from hard truths. He urged industry and farmers to embrace self-reliance and make balanced use

of fertilisers. While India is the pharmacy of the world, producing 60 per cent of global vaccines, this must now translate into leadership in new medicines, vaccines, and devices. This sits alongside a push in biopharma under the BioE3 policy, where our ambition is to patent and produce medicines that are affordable and world-class.

Equally bold are the announced tax and legal reforms. It is telling that the Income Tax Act of 1961, a relic of that era, is now being replaced. The new Income Tax Bill is reducing complexity, abolishing 280 redundant sections, and offering relief up to Rs 12 lakh. The introduction of faceless assessment has made the system transparent, efficient, and incorruptible. GST 2.0, to be launched by Diwali, will further rationalise rates and boost compliance. Alongside the abolition of over 40,000 unnecessary compliances, repealing more than 1,500 outdated laws, and the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code, this represents the dismantling of Nehru's economic cage. Direct Benefit Transfers — touching over 25 crore beneficiaries — have embedded accountability into welfare, and more than 250 million Indians have been lifted out of poverty.

The focus on employment has been brought to the centre stage. The PM Viksit Bharat Rozgar Yojana launches with an outlay of Rs 1 lakh crore; newly employed youth will receive Rs 15,000 per month, companies that generate fresh jobs will be incentivised, and the programme aims to reach about 3.5 crore young Indians. To translate ambition into reality, the PM has unveiled a Task Force for Next-Generation Reforms — a body designed to re-engineer the ecosystem of economic activity. Its mandate is to slash compliance costs that weigh down our startups and MSMEs, to liberate enterprise from the shadow of arbitrary action, and to streamline a thicket of laws into a framework that is simple and predictable.

The reforms announced on August 15 are not about tomorrow's headlines but about the India of 2047. As the PM reminded us, the world is watching an ancient civilisation transform into a modern power — not by abandoning its roots but by drawing strength from them.

The writer is the Union Minister for Petroleum & Natural Gas



AMRITA NARLIKAR AND GULSHAN SACHDEVA

A HOME FOR A FRIEND

SC order on indie dogs is impractical and unjust

IN THE MAHABHARAT, Yudhishtir rejects the prospect of heaven rather than leave a stray dog behind. Some read the story as an allegory. But at its simplest, it is a tale of the bond between humans and dogs. It shows the "argumentative Indian" at his best as he debates with Indra, the king of the gods, insisting that there can be no worse sin than abandoning one who is defenceless and has sought refuge. Yudhishtir makes no distinction between the dignity that should be accorded to humans and more-than-humans. For his compassion, he is welcomed with fanfare and driven to heaven in Indra's chariot.

Yudhishtir's willingness to reject heaven in order to protect a stray dog is in contrast to the events last week: The Supreme Court's ruling, which will dispatch lakhs of stray dogs to a living hell. Another bench of the SC has reserved its order on the issue. The order reverses the spirit of peaceful coexistence between humans and animals, which was sought to be established by a 2023 ruling. It requires local authorities to round up stray dogs, and warns of the "strictest of actions" against anyone who resists. The reason given is "larger public interest" — the protection, especially of children, and the aged, against rabies.

The dogs are to be taken to shelters, with

no prospect of being returned to their home territories. A brief spark of hope is raised by the mention of CCTV only to be swiftly extinguished — security cameras are to be placed not to ensure the welfare of the dogs, but "to ensure that no dogs are released".

Rabies is a fatal disease for humans, but it is also terrible for the afflicted dogs. But this situation could have been avoided had the authorities done their due diligence on the ABC and vaccination programmes, as prescribed by previous court rulings.

The state does not have the capacity to implement the ruling — there are just not enough shelters to house the large number of dogs to be incarcerated, let alone shelters that would allow them to lead healthy and happy lives. Dogs are territorial; dumping them together in crowded spaces will result in injury, disease and death. Dogs have lived with humans for millennia as protectors and playmates. If hazardous health and safety conditions in the shelters do not kill them, their grief will.

The world's fourth-largest economy, with a hugely sophisticated Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI), can surely find the resources and technical solutions to care for the *bezbaban* (voiceless) denizens of Delhi and beyond. The first step towards finding a solution

may be a proper counting and tagging of dogs in Delhi NCR, and the administration of vaccines and medical treatment. The *poshu aadhar* technology, currently used in many parts of the country for livestock, can be suitably modified for stray dogs. If successful in Delhi, it can be implemented nationwide and perhaps in many countries in the Global South.

PM Narendra Modi has reminded us of the pride that we should feel for our "desi" Indie breeds. Each of us can do our part in recognising our guardians. Let us adopt, not shop (for foreign breeds, often bred under cruel conditions), whenever possible. When the state fails, we can still — as communities — work together for the health and safety of our best friends.

India's theme for its G20 presidency was *vasudhaiva kutumbakam* — the entire Earth is one family. Through its attention to planetary rights and the concept of *LIFE* (lifestyle for the environment), India has garnered global influence. The SC ruling on street dogs could undermine India's credibility.

Narlikar is distinguished fellow at the Observer Research Foundation and honorary fellow of Darwin College, University of Cambridge. Sachdeva is professor at Jawaharlar Nehru University



AUGUST 19, 1985, FORTY YEARS AGO

BORDER TENSION

TENSION PREVAILED ON the border following unprovoked intermittent firing by Pakistani troops at two places in the Poonch sector since August 15. According to official reports received here, the firing by Pakistani troops continued intermittently at Lajporthills and the Bagayaidar area, the border township of Poonch. The reports said the trouble erupted when Indian security forces objected to Pakistan's encroachment into the "no man's land" where they were constructing trenches.

CLASH IN MUNIRKA

THE POLICE FIRED 21 teargas shells, resorted to a lathi charge and fired five

rounds in the air to disperse a brickbattering mob protesting against the demolition of unauthorised structures in Munirka village and Budh Vihar in South Delhi. Several people, including policemen, DDA employees and shopkeepers, were injured in the lathi charge and brickbattering. Twelve persons have been arrested.

THIMPHU TALKS

THE THIMPHU TALKS between the Sri Lankan government and Tamil groups, which were seriously threatened on August 17 following the alleged massacre of 200 Tamils in Sri Lanka, are expected to resume on August 19. According to information received from the Bhutanese capital, the talks

were salvaged through India's efforts. The Tamil groups, which had threatened to return to Colombo, have reportedly decided now to stay in Thimphu.

PUNJAB POLLS

THE TANTALISING SUSPENSE is over. But the decision to hold an election in Punjab on September 22 for the 117 assembly and 13 Lok Sabha seats could not have been an easy one. Only a few days earlier, Akali Dal (L) president Harchand Singh Longowal, one of the principal architects of the momentous July 24 accord, had declared that he favoured an election in February or March 1986. His statement must have caused ripples of tension at the Centre.

Ahmedabad

THE INDIAN EXPRESS, TUESDAY, AUGUST 19, 2025

THE IDEAS PAGE

Special Intensive Exclusion

We have a problem with voters' lists. But SIR is not the solution.
It is worse than the disease



DESHKAAL
BY YOGENDRA YADAV

IN THE INFAMOUS press conference held this Sunday, the Chief Election Commissioner reiterated a well-known claim that a Special Intensive Revision was the solution to the ills afflicting our voters' list. This claim has been pressed vigorously after Rahul Gandhi's exposé on voter list fraud in Mahadevapura. BJP trolls thought that they had the Opposition leader in a trap: How can he complain about inaccuracies in the voters' lists and not support the clean-up exercise called SIR? The CEC followed this reasoning, exuding a triumphant tone.

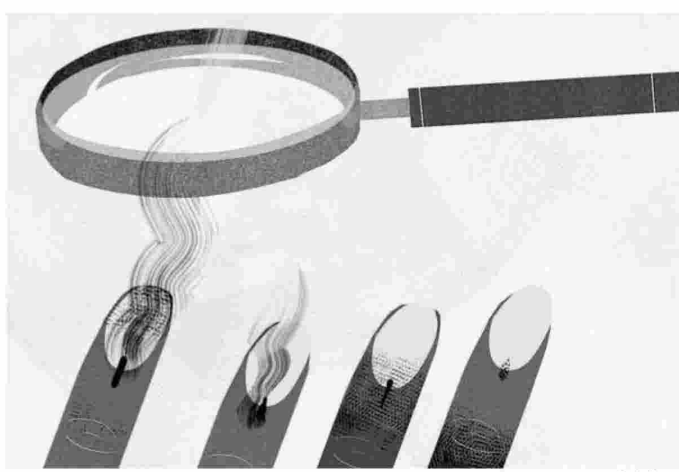
He has perhaps not watched *Yes Minister*. The comic depiction of this spurious reasoning in the BBC series has earned this reasoning a name — "politician's syllogism". Here is how it goes: "One, we must do something. Two, this is something. Three, therefore, we must do this." The logical fallacy here is not asking a basic question: Is the "something" that we need to do the same as the "something" that is being presented to us? This is exactly the question those trolling Rahul Gandhi on the voters' list do not ask: Is the "something" called SIR the "something" that needs to be done to cure the faults and frauds in the voters' list? The answer cannot be assumed. It must be shown that SIR is the right medicine — necessary as well as sufficient — for the disease afflicting our electoral rolls.

The CEC did not do that. But let us examine this argument at its logical best, not constrained by the reasoning and rhetoric deployed by the CEC.

Let us begin by admitting that our voters' list is seriously defective. While the Indian electoral system scores very high on the "completeness" of our electoral rolls (see "The missing voter" *IE*, July 31), our record on their "accuracy" leaves a lot to be desired. This is not a new problem and has always been particularly severe in urban areas. This was never foregrounded in the absence of allegations of mass manipulation, fraudulent additions and targeted deletions. The exposés in Maharashtra and Mahadevapura have brought national attention to a deep problem.

Let us also acknowledge something the CEC was struggling to articulate in the press conference: The methods used by the CEC over the last few years have not succeeded in addressing the issue. Routine updating of the voters list is no solution as it is limited to proactive citizens who apply for inclusion, deletion, shifts or corrections. The annual Summary Revision is better, as it gives an opportunity for a complete review of bulk inclusions and deletions, with an opportunity to object. That, too, has not proved to be a satisfactory solution as the BLO is not required to visit each household during a Summary Revision. Under the present system, errors of omission and commission tend to persist and accumulate over the years.

Let us agree, therefore, that something needs to be done. Something more thorough and systematic, and, at the same time, transparent and fair. Besides routine updating and annual revisions, we need a more intensive revision, say once in five years, based on house-to-house enumeration, leading to authenticated additions, deletions and correc-



C.R. Sasikumar

tions in the electoral rolls.

Now, I can hear SIR advocates jumping in excitement: "That's exactly what SIR is. So now you support it?" That is the problem with advocacy for the SIR. It is based on broad impressions, assumptions and a lot of PR. The fact is that the SIR announced by the EC is not the intensive revision that we need, and the one envisaged by the framers of our electoral laws. This "Special Intensive Revision" is neither necessary nor sufficient to address the issues with the voters' list. It is a medicine mixed with needless steroids and dangerous substances. The SIR is not a solution to the problem we face. It can aggravate the problem. It already has.

The SIR combines the valuable and necessary process of house-to-house enumeration by the BLOs with two elements that have nothing to do with the letter of the law or the basic spirit of an intensive revision of the rolls. First, it requires all potential voters to fill out an enumeration form, failing which they would face automatic disqualification. This demand is unprecedented in the history of Indian elections and has no basis in the law. This seemingly small bureaucratic requirement is a fundamental shift in our electoral system, from state-initiated registration to self-initiated registration, a shift in the onus from electoral officials to the voter herself. Evidence from all over the globe indicates that such a shift leads to serious under-registration of the poor, the uneducated, migrants, minorities and women.

Second, the SIR requires every single potential elector to prove her eligibility by furnishing a set of documents. Without getting into the list of those documents and their coverage (see "Edge of disenfranchisement", *IE*, August 12), let us note that this requirement is also unprecedented and devoid of legal basis. It negates the presumption of citizenship that had so governed our electoral system. The cumulative impact of both these "special" and unprecedented features of the SIR cannot but be mass disenfranchisement. Once you combine this design with ill-prepared and ham-handed execution, as in Bihar, the impact on the quality of electoral rolls cannot but be disastrous.

Let us also note that the SIR should have done to improve the accuracy of electoral rolls, but has not cared to do. First, house-to-house enumeration should have paid as much attention to additions as it has to deletions. In the absence of that, we landed up in a weird and truly unprecedented outcome of the 'revision' of electoral rolls in Bihar: Between June 25 and July 25, the EC has reported 65 lakh-plus deletions and zero additions to the electoral rolls.

This is not an intensive revision but an intensive deletion exercise.

Let us also note what the SIR should have done to improve the accuracy of electoral rolls, but has not cared to do. First, house-to-house enumeration should have paid as much attention to additions as it has to deletions. In the absence of that, we landed up in a weird and truly unprecedented outcome of the 'revision' of electoral rolls in Bihar: Between June 25 and July 25, the EC has reported 65 lakh-plus deletions and zero additions to the electoral rolls.

Second, the SIR should have followed the EC's own established and detailed protocols on the precautions to be taken before recording that someone is "dead", "permanently away", "untraceable", etc. Instead of extinguishing the rights of those excluded under the guise of a *de novo* list, if the EC had extended the standard legal process (notice, hearing and appeals), it could have saved itself the embarrassment of confronting "dead" persons.

Third, the EC should have instituted an independent audit of the quality of its electoral rolls. While we have an index of, and data on, the "completeness" of our voters' list, no such thing exists for the "accuracy" of our rolls. Frankly, this is a scandal in a country like India that boasts of well-established and high-quality statistical systems. Just as there is an independent sample check of the Register of Births and Deaths, an organisation like the National Sample Survey Organisation could carry out a 0.1 per cent sample check of our electoral rolls.

Fourth, a process like SIR must be accompanied by a fair and credible investigation into any serious allegations of fraud in the voters' list. And, following the principle of conflict of interest, the inquiry cannot be conducted by those who were involved in preparing those lists in the first place. Going by the tone and the tenor of the EC's press conference, however, that looks like an impossible ask.

The writer is member, *Swaraj India*, and national convenor of *Bharat Jodo Abhiyaan*. He has filed a petition in the Supreme Court challenging the SIR

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Netanyahu does not consider the issue of the civilians and soldiers abducted on his watch as anything other than a nuisance. From his perspective, the hostages in Gaza are foiling the realisation of the 'total victory' that he has promised time and again."

— HAARETZ, ISRAEL

The umpire's pitch

That the EC sought to address questions was a good call. But it seems not to recognise the full scale of its own and the polity's predicament



VANDITA MISHRA

THE WEEK OF the 79th Independence Day ended with a press conference by the Election Commission of India that was both welcome and unsettling. On the face of it, the EC sought to address questions raised by the Special Intensive Revision exercise ahead of the election in Bihar — and even though Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar did not take Rahul Gandhi's name, on Gandhi's allegations of "vote chori".

That the EC sought to address questions swirling around it, when its conduct of the Bihar exercise has raised serious apprehensions of large-scale disenfranchisement, was reassuring. But its tone and tenor raised more questions.

Over nearly an hour and a half, the CEC's main message was: The EC stands with "the people" and does not discriminate between parties; in a multi-layered electoral process, the onus is on those who raise objections about fake voters and compromised voter lists to follow the rulebook, abide by its procedures and timelines; if they do not do so, they must either make a declaration on oath or apologise.

There was something off-key about what the EC said and its many silences. To begin with, a constitutional body was insistently proclaiming its oneness with "the people" while refusing to acknowledge the people's representative — the EC could have respectfully acknowledged the Leader of the Opposition even as it disagreed with him. Its refusal to take Rahul Gandhi's name while addressing his allegations seemed churlish.

More importantly, if it wanted to paint itself as above the political fray, and as an institution that is procedurally even-handed, it should have addressed the fact that it has also been put in the dock by the government, not just the LoP.

Rahul Gandhi cast the first stone with his allegations of manipulation of electoral rolls/turnout figures in Maharashtra and then with his charges of defective electoral rolls in Karnataka's Mahadevapura constituency. But subsequently, the ruling party, while taking aim at Rahul Gandhi, has also (unintentionally) targeted the EC.

Listen to another press conference on Wednesday, a few days before the EC's meet-the-press on Sunday, and you will hear the BJP's Ataraj Thakur essentially repeating all of Rahul Gandhi's allegations — with a communal tinge.

Like Gandhi, Thakur alleged the presence of fake voters, duplication of names, mass additions, doubtful addresses and dubious first-time voters in voter lists, and the misuse of government machinery to engineer a large-scale vote bank. The difference was that Thakur picked constituencies won by Opposition leaders to make his case — Wayanad, Diamond Harbour, Kannauj, Rae Bareilly, Mainpuri and Kolathur assembly — and that he repeatedly drew attention to the names of the so-called doubtful voters, all Muslim.

In Thakur's list: Mohammad Kaif Khan, whose name is allegedly registered in three polling booths in Rae Bareilly; Khurshid Alam, whose father's name allegedly keeps changing in Diamond Harbour; Rafiullah in Kolathur with allegedly three voter IDs, Mahmooda in Wayanad, Sabri Begum, Shah Mohammad, Mohammad Shahbaz,

Nisar Bano in Kannauj... The list went on and Thakur's chilling recitation left no one in doubt that what was remarkable was the religion of the allegedly fraudulent voter in the lists. Thakur connected the dots from the "forji vote" to the Congress/Opposition's "appeasement politics", which, he said, patronises infiltrators or the "ghuspathiya vote bank", amid "Islamic radicalisation" and other threats posed by "ek varg" (one section) to "national security".

If in Maharashtra and Karnataka, Rahul Gandhi made a political leap from pointing out purported discrepancies/inconsistencies in the electoral rolls/turnout figures to claiming that the election result was manipulated by the BJP, Thakur was making a long leap of his own — on the back of a communal dog-whistle politics.

What was common in the telling of both Thakur and Gandhi, however, was that neither mentioned the EC. After all, it is the poll monitor on whose watch the election was conducted — in Mahadevapura or Wayanad, Diamond Harbour or Rae Bareilly, whether it was the Opposition that won or the BJP.

The EC did not show any awareness in Sunday's press conference of its predicament — under attack from both Opposition and government. It did not seem to recognise that it cannot just challenge Rahul Gandhi to sign an affidavit, take an oath, and leave it at that.

More fundamentally, the EC's belligerent refrain — show me the evidence, in the paper form, by a certain date, or else shifts the onus of cleaning up the electoral rolls from itself to the people and political parties. Just as the Commission shifted the responsibility of proving their innocence, or their citizenship, onto voters in the SIR in Bihar, it is now saying that if anyone raises concerns about its conduct, it's they who must provide the evidence, not the EC.

This has disquieting implications in a grim moment for India's democracy. It is a time when wide allegations of "vote chori" by the leader of the main Opposition party threaten to drown out the genuine and specific concerns about disenfranchisement sparked by the Bihar exercise. Rahul Gandhi's barrage of accusations have also raised a somber question: Having raised the pitch so high, where does Congress, and the Opposition, go from here? How do they step back from a spiral into nihilistic politics?

And if they don't turn back from the edge of the precipice, by a certain date, or else shifts the onus of cleaning up the electoral rolls from itself to the people and political parties. Just as the Commission shifted the responsibility of proving their innocence, or their citizenship, onto voters in the SIR in Bihar, it is now saying that if anyone raises concerns about its conduct, it's they who must provide the evidence, not the EC.

What happens if the Bihar election delivers a close result, what if it has narrow margins? It is a grim moment, also, because of the Modi government's response — first its attempt to speak for the EC, instead of letting it speak for itself, adding to the doubts regarding the poll monitor's independence. And then its subsequent misfiring at Rahul that has only ended up wounding the EC.

This is a sobering moment, most of all, because the EC, the constitutional authority with a hard-won autonomy, seems not to recognise the full scale of its own and the polity's crisis. Urgent repair work is needed by a credible and impartial umpire. There must be cross-party conversations on voters' lists, a commitment to shared protocols, with a focus on voter inclusion, not exclusion, if a free fall into a political dead end is to be avoided.

For a nation that celebrated its 79th Independence Day last week, that's the challenge. So far, the EC is not stepping up to it.

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AKHIL P J

Gen Z needs Guru Dutt

Audiences need to rediscover the power of silence and pauses

AN ALMOST STILL room, its shadows longer than its silences, its characters speaking with pauses that felt heavier than their words. Watching *Guru Dutt's Sahib Bibi Aur Ghulam* (1962) felt like stepping back into that forgotten classroom of childhood. The one you only realise was serene once life outside had turned noisy and hurried.

It wasn't just a film. It was a reminder of what cinema used to be: Slow, searching, and unafraid of silence. A world where characters lived beyond the frame, where pauses revealed more than plot, and where thrill was found in the turning of a face, not the twist of a script.

Growing up watching Malayalam cinema, I thought I had already seen the many shades of patience, silence, and unburied observation. With the measured pause of Ramu Kariat in the '60s, the social ironies of Adoor Gopalakrishnan in the '70s, the human warmth of Padmaraj and Bharath in the '80s, the moral intricacies of Lohithadas in the '90s, and the emotional worlds of Blessy in the 2000s, Malayalam cinema had taught me that cinema is not about rushing to the next beat.

They taught me that pauses are not ab-

sences but presences, that silence is not emptiness but depth. Their grammar was silence, breath, gaze. And watching *Guru Dutt* for the first time healed many wounds caused by doomschooling, with a grammar of cinema that was far more human.

Today, the grammar of cinema is changing in ways both exciting and troubling. Yes, shorter attention spans demand tighter edits. Yes, social media has trained us to expect a high point every thirty seconds. A filmmaker cannot ignore this new rhythm entirely. But what happens when rhythm becomes frenzy, when scenes exist not to unfold but to explode? The cost is depth. These films do not surrender to the tyranny of the 30-second high point. They trust the audience to wait, to watch, to feel. And the audience, remarkably, has responded. These films have travelled far beyond

Vikramaditya Motwane's *Lootera*, where a leaf falling from a tree held more tension than most gunfights. Even in mainstream space, a filmmaker like Shoojit Sircar can gift us the quiet tenderness of *October* and the therapeutic *Piku*. Small salvations but loud victories.

And yet, one cannot shake off the unease. The younger audience, myself included, has been trained to consume thrill as the dominant flavour.

Even Malayalam cinema, which once trusted the slow burn, is now churning out thrillers with assembly-line efficiency. And they sell because adrenaline rushes are bankable. But that surge does not push aside the calm and tranquil territory it once valued. More business for thrillers does not mean less audience for others.

Think of *Kumbalangi Nights* with its slow-burning family reconciliations, or *Nanpaka Nerathu Mayakam*, where Mammootty slips into dreamlike stillness. These films do not surrender to the tyranny of the 30-second high point. They trust the audience to wait, to watch, to feel. And the audience, remarkably, has responded. These films have travelled far beyond

Kerala, winning not just awards but affection from viewers weary of noise.

And that is the optimism worth holding on to. Because it means the audience still hungers for cinema that values detail over distraction. A sigh, a gesture, or a hesitant glance are not outdated. They are more radical now than ever.

The promise lies in the fact that cinema is not consumed only by algorithms. A film, in 2025, can still be shared in whispers, recommended as an experience, not as a must-watch scene.

And the challenge is not whether audiences can handle silence. The challenge is whether filmmakers dare to offer it. *Guru Dutt* dared. *Padmaraj* dared. Today, a handful of filmmakers still dare, whether in Mumbai or in Kochi. They think good art is born when the artist dares to challenge the sensibilities of an audience.

As a memory machine, cinema is a keeper of glances and gestures. The question is simple: Do we want to remember only spectacle, or also silence? The grammar is shifting, yes. But grammar is not destiny.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

RED HERRING

THIS REFERS TO the editorial 'Alaska shift' (*IE*, August 18). Vladimir Putin's Sputnik ride with Donald Trump over Alaska proved another red herring. What must cut deeper is China's reminder that it can bring Trump down to earth — indeed, to earth's core. As trade frictions mount, Washington discovers that dominance cannot be decreed when supply chains lie elsewhere. Trump seeks other nations to bear the brunt of his frustration. Yet such gestures are more self-assertion than strategy.

R.Narayanan, Novi Mumbai

FEAR AND EXCLUSION

THIS REFERS TO the article 'Alet-down at Red Fort' (*IE*, August 18). By invoking the bogey of 'ghuspathiye', the Prime Minister is normalising a rhetoric of exclusion at the very moment when India needs cohesion. Demographers

have long shown that India's population dynamics are driven by fertility transition, not clandestine migration. To reduce complex socio-economic challenges to a conspiracy narrative obscures global trends where populist politics thrives on "othering".

Zainab Irshad, Pune

OVERDUE UPGRADE

THIS REFERS TO the editorial 'The upgrade' (*IE*, August 18). It took S&P Global Ratings 18 years to upgrade India's rating to BBB, despite GDP quadrupling in that time. Some experts believe the rating should have been higher — India handled the adverse financial effects of Covid better than many advanced economies. India's performance has been due to adherence to financial consolidation. The question is whether this will reduce the space for fiscal measures to offset the US tariff threat.

Y.C.Choudhary, Pune

Ahmedabad

EXPLAINED CULTURE

Tradwives, delulu: What new words in Cambridge Dictionary tell us

YASHEE

NEW DELHI, AUGUST 18

AMONG THE words now recognised by the Cambridge Dictionary are skibidi, brologarchy, delulu, and tradwife. The choices are a testimony to the growing power of Internet-speak, and to the various social and political wars raging in the world.

What do these words mean, and what does their inclusion in the dictionary say about the evolution of the English language?

Some of the new words

Many of the words act as a foil to each other, denoting the looping nature of Internet discourse. Take the portmanteaus tradwife and brologarchy.

Tradwife comes from 'traditional wife', a woman who believes that being a mother and wife are her main roles in life. They can be found on the Internet cooking or playing with small children in flowy outfits and Pinterest-perfect homes, while their husbands are presumably out earning money.

The tradwives will tell you about "leaning into their femininity", about choosing a "real man" who "protects their softness", and then probably try to sell you an online course about making money from home. On the other end of the spectrum are brologarchs, a combination of bro and oligarch, denoting the 'tech bros' who are rich and successful members of the tech world, still predominantly a boys' club, and who are also serious political players.

Delulu is short for delusional, used for people who choose to stay ignorant of reality. Skibidi, on the other hand, distorts reality. It is a nonsensical word, attached to nothing but absurdity.

The Cambridge Dictionary describes skibidi as "a word that can have different meanings such as 'cool' or 'bad', or can be used with no real meaning as a joke". It became popular in 2023, through the skibidi

toilet videos on YouTube, where human heads poked out of toilet bowls and sang. Delulu came to us from the K-pop fandom, where some fans were mocked for deluding themselves into thinking they could date the stars they so loved.

Choice of the words

According to the Cambridge Dictionary, "We have a team of lexicographers who are always on the lookout for new words... They look at the Cambridge English Corpus to check the frequency of the word, and where it is used... If the word is used in many different contexts over a period of time, the lexicographers add it to the dictionary. If they think that a new word might be ephemeral, they keep a record of it to review at a later date."

Why Internet slang, though?

Indeed, as a language evolves, the dictionary's job is to record and explain the words that people are using. The new inclusions point to a force that is shaping so much of what we consume and discuss — social media algorithms.

Words like delulu or tradwife became popular once content creators on TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, etc. realised these were being flagged as 'trending', and content creators wanted to get greater visibility. The wind behind the sails of these words' current popularity is a nameless, shapeless formula. However, if they prove their 'staying power' even after the algorithmic wheel turns, they will demonstrate that human articulation can indeed be enriched by contributions from a wide variety of sources.

Ultraprocessed food makes up 53% of Americans' diets: CDC

DATA RELEASED earlier in August from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) suggested that people in the United States were eating slightly fewer calories from ultra-processed foods compared with previous years, but nutrition experts caution that this decrease is far from a public health win.

It's still true that more than half of the daily calories Americans consume come from ultra-processed foods, defined as those made via industrial methods or with ingredients, like high-fructose corn syrup or hydrogenated oils, that one wouldn't typically find in home kitchens.

The new data showed that, on average, 53% of the calories adults consumed each day between 2021 and 2023 were from ultra-processed foods. That was down from



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from an average of 56% between 2017 and 2018. For children up to age 18, that figure was about 62% — down from about 66%.

In 2019, a landmark study from the National Institutes of Health showed that ultra-processed foods caused people to overeat. And studies have linked ultra-processed foods and health conditions like obesity, Type 2 diabetes, and heart disease.

Similar concerns have emerged in India, where consumption of ultra-processed foods has been steadily increasing in recent years. A World Health Organization India report, released in 2023, found that retail sales of ultra-processed foods increased at a compound annual growth rate of 13% from 2011 to 2021 across the country.

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SHYAMMAL YADAV
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 18

THE GOVERNMENT is considering ways to ensure "equivalence" in the application of the 'creamy layer' condition in reservation for Other Backward Classes (OBCs) across a range of jobs at central and state government organisations, public sector enterprises, universities, etc.

A proposal has been prepared after consultations among several government ministries and departments, and bodies such as NITI Aayog and the National Commission for Backward Classes (NCBC). The *Indian Express* reported last week.

The effort is to ensure fairness and uniformity among candidates who are eligible for reservation, and to remove certain anomalies that have arisen in this regard from circulars issued over the years by the Union government's Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT), which formulates policy on recruitments and service conditions.

The concept of 'creamy layer'

In its landmark verdict in *Indra Sawhney vs Union of India* (1992), the Supreme Court upheld the government's decision to implement the recommendations of the Mandal Commission, but said that affluent sections among the socially and educationally backward classes, the so-called "creamy layer", must be excluded from job quotas.

Thereafter, on September 8, 1993, DoPT issued a circular identifying the creamy layer that would be ineligible for OBC reservation. Sons and daughters of high constitutional functionaries, and government, PSU, and armed forces officers were included in the list, along with "professional class and those engaged in trade and industry", and "property owners". An "income/wealth test" was also mentioned.

Specifically, an individual either of whose parents was a direct recruit to a Group A/Class I government job, or if the parent was promoted to Group A before the age of 40, was not eligible for the OBC quota.

An individual both of whose parents were direct recruits to Group B jobs would be part of the creamy layer. Children of Lieutenant Colonel could avail of the quota.

For those outside the government sector, the income ceiling was set at Rs 1 lakh per annum. It was subsequently revised upwards, and the limit has been Rs 8 lakh since 2017. However, income from salary and agricultural income is not included.



The implementation of the Mandal Commission report by the government of Prime Minister V.P. Singh (above) was upheld by the Supreme Court in the *Indra Sawhney* case in 1993. Swadesh Talwar/Express Archive

2004 'clarification' and after

The above criteria were not comprehensive, especially with regard to jobs outside the government sector.

So, on October 14, 2004, DoPT issued detailed "Clarifications regarding creamy layer amongst OBCs" in order to determine "the creamy layer status of sons and daughters of persons employed in organisations where equivalence or comparability of posts vis-à-vis posts in Government has not been evaluated".

It was determined that: "Income of the parents from the salaries and from the other sources (other than salaries and agricultural land) is determined separately. If either the income of the parents from the salaries or the income of the parents from other sources (other than salaries and agricultural land) exceeds Rs 2.5 lakh per annum (which was the creamy layer income ceiling for private persons at the time) for a period of three consecutive years, the sons and daughters of such persons shall be treated to fall in creamy layer."

However, these "clarifications" were not widely implemented to deprive individuals of reservation benefits during the UPAs years (2004-14), as the government sought to woo OBCs in pursuit of various social justice goals.

In late 2014, DoPT started examining caste certificates issued by various authorities to determine their compliance with the 2004 "clarification".

Between the Civil Services Examinations

(CSE) of 2015 and 2023 (batches of 2016-24), DoPT rejected caste certificates of more than 100 successful candidates who would have qualified as OBC under the September 1993 criteria, but who were put in the creamy layer in accordance with the new criteria. Interestingly, many of these individuals have appeared in other competitive examinations, and have been considered OBC on the basis of the same caste certificate.

Efforts to find 'equivalence'

The unresolved case of the more than 100 candidates determined by DoPT as being in the creamy layer led to consultations among various stakeholder ministries.

While "equivalence" has been established with regard to the various central PSUs, the process remains pending for others — and the sons/daughters of a wide range of employees are put in the creamy layer based on their incomes, thanks to "clarification" issued in 2004.

In June this year, Home Minister Amit Shah and NCBC chairman Hansraj Ahir recommended to the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment that the policy under consideration should be implemented retrospectively so that these more than 100 candidates are also able to benefit.

Views of the Ministries of Social Justice, Education, Law and Labour, the Department of Public Enterprises and DoPT, as well as NITI

Aayog and NCBC were sought in the matter. According to sources in the government, some of the issues in the proposal to establish 'equivalence' are:

■ Since the salaries of university teachers from assistant professor upward typically start from Level 10, which is equivalent to entry-level Group A posts in the government, it has been proposed that children of university teachers be categorised as creamy layer.

■ For central/state autonomous and statutory bodies, it is proposed to establish 'equivalence' with central government officials, depending on their level/group pay scale, which is aligned with the corresponding pay in central and state governments.

■ Non-teaching staff of universities are proposed to be placed in the creamy layer depending on their level/group pay scale.

■ It is proposed that all executive-level positions in state PSUs be treated as creamy layer, akin to the 'equivalence' that has been in force for central PSUs since 2017. However, it has been proposed that executives whose income is within Rs 8 lakh — which is the ceiling for private persons — will not be categorised as creamy layer.

■ It is proposed that employees of government-aided institutions, which usually follow the service conditions and pay scales of the central or respective state government, be placed under appropriate categories based on the 'equivalence' of their post and service conditions and pay scales.

The likely beneficiaries

If the proposals are implemented, sons/daughters of lower-level government employees with annual salaries of more than Rs 8 lakh are likely to benefit the most. It will correct the anomaly by which children of government teachers get the benefit of OBC quota, but children of employees of similar rank at government-aided institutions are denied on the basis of income.

A similar situation exists in several state government organisations. In one of the cases before the government, the children of an individual who fills fuel in vehicles at a pump run by a state-owned oil marketing company have been declared creamy layer on the basis of income.

Not much is expected to change for children of employees in the private sector. Sources in the government said it is noted in the proposal that it is difficult to establish 'equivalence' given the vast range of positions, pay, and perquisites in private employment, and creamy layer can be determined based on the income/wealth criteria.

The income ceiling was revised in 2004, 2008, 2013, and 2017.

When can courts order a recount of votes?

VINEET BHALLA
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 18

THE SUPREME COURT last week overturned the result of the sarpanch election of Buana Lakhu village in Haryana's Panipat district. The apex court conducted a recount of votes by summoning all Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) used during the election to its premises in New Delhi.

Experts said this marked the first instance of the Supreme Court conducting a recount of EVM votes.

How can an election result be challenged?

The validity of poll results can be challenged by filing an election petition. In the case of Parliamentary, Assembly, or state council elections, the petition has to be filed before the High Court of the state in which the election was conducted. For local gov-

ernment elections, however, it has to be filed at the district-level civil courts.

The petition can only be filed by a candidate or an elector related to the election in question. This has to be done within 45 days of the date of declaration of results.

The petition must contain a concise statement of all "material facts" on which the challenge is based. If it contains allegations of "corrupt practices", the petition must provide details such as the names of individuals involved, and the date and place of the alleged act.

What are the grounds for invalidating the result?

Courts can declare an election void on several grounds. These include:

- Bribery, undue influence — such as a candidate failing to disclose their criminal antecedents — or promoting enmity among social groups;

■ If the winning candidate was not qualified or was disqualified on the date of their election;

■ Improper rejection of a nomination paper of an electoral candidate;

■ Non-compliance with the Constitution or any election laws and rules, if such non-compliance materially affected the result.

EXPLAINED LAW

When can courts order a recount of votes?

Courts can order a recount of votes, but it is not granted lightly. That is because it involves re-examination of ballots, which can compromise the secrecy of the vote — a cornerstone of free and fair elections.

Therefore, a court will only order a recount if a petitioner presents specific, material facts and provides sufficient evidence to establish a *prima facie* case that a mistake in counting is probable.

Courts usually order vote recounts to take place at the location where the election was held — unlike in the case of the Panipat sarpanch election dispute, in which the SC recounted the votes at its premises. The court did not provide any reasons for its recount order beyond the "peculiar facts and circumstances" of the case.

When do courts overturn election results?

It is rare — but not unprecedented — for a court to declare an election void and announce another candidate as the winner. This happens when the court is satisfied that the petitioner or another candidate received a majority of valid votes.

Alternatively, a petitioner must prove that they would have secured the majority of votes if not for the votes obtained by the winning candidate through corrupt practices. This requires concrete evidence to quantify the votes tainted by corruption.

Nationalists in Ireland, India: How a future Indian President was inspired

POULOMI DEB
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 18

WHILE CONDEMNING recent hate crimes against Indians in Ireland, Irish President Michael D Higgins last week said that his country and India shared "the experience of paths towards independence".

An interesting figure in this shared history is Varahagiri Venkata Giri, who served as the President of India between 1969 and 1974. While attending law school in Dublin from 1913 to 1917, Giri was "drawn irresistibly into the cross currents of the Irish struggle for self-government," he wrote in his 1976 autobiography *My Life and Times*.

His Irish experience instilled in Giri "the passion for political freedom... [and] the economic emancipation of the working class and all those exploited" which went on to guide his political activism in India.

Going to Dublin

In 1912, admission rules for Indians in English colleges were made stricter. A large number of students thus went to Ireland instead. Giri studied law at the University College Dublin and the King's Inns, Dublin. "Indian students preferred to study in Ireland in preference to England because there was neither a colour bar nor racial prejudice of any kind among the Irish, probably due to the adverse circumstances of their history," he wrote.

According to Amba Preetnam Prings, Giri's grandson, "Giri always spoke of the hospitality of the local Irish families during his stay in Dublin. He often mentioned that neither he nor the other Indian students experienced any discrimination or racial prejudice" (quoted from the foreword to Connor Mulvagh's *Irish Days, Indian Memories*, 2016).

Activism in Dublin



V.V. Giri served as the fourth President of India from 1969 to 1974. Express

The labour movement in Ireland was in full swing at the time of Giri's arrival. Just months before, thousands of workers, led by Irish Transport and General Workers' Union, had clashed with employers over the right to unionise during the Dublin Lockout.

Giri was inspired by the Irish labour movement, and absorbed arguments for collective bargaining and unionism he heard during labour meetings.

Moreover, "deeply imbued with a passion to fight for my country's freedom, I experienced a complete sense of identity with the Irish cause," Giri wrote in *My Life and Times*.

He joined a small clandestine group called the Anarchical Society which, he wrote, "professed belief in using violence and bloodshed to achieve a peaceful end," and "the techniques of incendiarism and bombing" to aid India's freedom struggle.

Later, influenced by Mahatma Gandhi's work in South Africa, the group would abandon violence and reorganise as the Indian Students' Association whose semi-secret activities included publishing a pamphlet titled "Horror in South Africa" which sought to "magnify acts of racial discrimination perpetrated on Indian citizens in South Africa..."

Some 100,000 copies of the pamphlet

were dispatched to India before being intercepted by customs for arousing anti-British sentiments. Giri was tipped off about a police raid by an Irish nationalist, and was able to destroy all incriminating evidence and escape arrest and deportation — for the time being.

"This was perhaps one of my earliest experiences of threat of prosecution for direct involvement in the cause of India's freedom," he wrote.

Story of Giri's 'deportation'

The Easter Rising of 1916 saw Irish republicans lead an armed insurrection in the heart of Dublin. While the uprising was crushed and most leaders hanged to death, the event became a watershed moment in Ireland's struggle for independence.

In *My Life and Times*, Giri recalled that "about a week before the uprising [he] met some leaders of the movement," who joked about meeting again "at Easter for some hot tea". In fact, during his time in Dublin, Giri had cultivated friendships with members of many

Irish nationalists, including trade unionist James Connolly who was executed for his role in the Easter Rising.

"Connolly's passionate desire was that the freedom of Ireland should yield economic freedom for Irish labour... More than any of the leaders of the uprising it was Connolly who inspired me," Giri wrote. "I resolved that as soon as I returned to India I would give a graphic account of these struggles to inspire our own people... [and] take up the organisation of the transport workers... [who] could become the bulwark of the national movement and thus subvert British authority."

His political leanings brought Giri to the attention of British authorities, and eventually led to him being ordered to leave by July 1, 1917. While he was unable to complete his studies, Giri came home inspired.

He wrote: "With the fervour inspired by the revolutionaries still fresh in my mind, I determined to return to India and take an active part in the political movement to secure the independence of my country."



Required reforms

Risking some revenue to boost consumption will help the economy

The central government's proposals to reform the Goods and Services Tax (GST) system are bold and timely. They stand to benefit the middle class and the business community, as the government claims. Shifting 99% of the items in the 12% slab to a 5% tax rate, and 90% of the items in the 28% slab to 18% will substantially reduce the tax burden on most consumers. Rationalising the number of slabs and shifting similar products to the same slab will also reduce ambiguity and litigation, which are the major issues businesses have with the current GST setup. Further, while most of the focus has been captured by the rate restructuring proposals, the procedural reforms regarding registration, return filing and refunds are equally important. Simplifying GST is not just about reducing the multiplicity of rates but also about making it easier and less time-consuming for tax-payers to navigate the system. Easing registration, simplifying returns and speeding up refunds, therefore, are welcome improvements the Centre is pursuing. Combined with the new Income Tax Bill and the reorg of income-tax slabs in this year's Budget, these GST reforms will highlight 2025 as a watershed year for tax reform – direct as well as indirect tax. While the government has not made an official estimate of what the revenue impact of these reductions will be, sources have said that it expects a hit. Two years ago, the Reserve Bank of India had estimated that the average GST rate was 11.6%, which is now expected to fall substantially. However, the government is confident that an increase in consumption and a widening of the tax base will offset most of the revenue loss. With a large number of items set to be taxed at just 5%, the incentives for input tax credit scams and tax evasion will also be substantially removed.

A willingness to risk some amount of revenue in order to boost domestic consumption bodes well for the economy, especially at a time when export demand is faltering due to tariff uncertainties. It remains to be seen how the State governments will react to this proposed revenue surrender. They have already been lobbying the Sixteenth Finance Commission to increase the share of States in central taxes. These tax cuts will also make it even more unlikely that petroleum products – a major source of States' revenues – will be included in the GST any time soon. Politically, it will be difficult for the States to directly oppose these rate reductions, but they might instead pressure the Centre for compensation once again. Crucially, the Centre will be reaching out to the States over the next few weeks to put forth its case. It is important that their concerns are taken on board as well.

Familiar impasse

Talks on limiting use of plastic must be built on mutual trust

Global resistance to a universal treaty on eliminating plastic pollution remains stubborn and huge. Last week, the sixth attempt since 2022 by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to get member-nations to agree upon a treaty to address plastic pollution ran into the familiar vortex of opposition. There was disagreement among the major blocs of countries on whether comprehensively addressing plastic pollution requires eliminating plastic production itself. All countries agree that the ubiquitous polythene bag, despite its immense practicability and affordability as a container, has ballooned into a civic crisis. India generates around 3.4 million tonnes (MT) of plastic waste but recycles only about 30%. Its plastic consumption rose at a compounded annual growth rate (CAGR) of 9.7% from 14 MT in 2016-17 to over 20 MT in 2019-20. India has a production ban on about 20 single-use plastic items – cups, straws, spoons. While this has, to some extent, induced a degree of behavioural change – in greater reliance of paper and cloth bags – it has had little impact on waste management and recycling. This is also reflective of the global picture. According to the UNEP, the world produces more than 430 MT of plastic annually, two-thirds of which are short-lived products that soon become waste. Overall, 46% of plastic waste is landfilled, while 22% is mismanaged and becomes litter. In 2019, plastic, which is a derivative of fossilised crude, generated 1.8 billion metric tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions or about 3.4% of the global total.

Plastic, therefore, can be seen as a waste management problem that can be solved by providing incentives for the market to do a better job of collecting waste and recycling. However, there are countries that point to the decades of attempts made on these lines, with limited gains. To add to that, more evidence has piled up that plastic, non-biodegradable as it is, is making its way into human, animal and marine food systems. Island-nations and territories are swamped by plastic waste washing up on their shores. Then there are granular forms of plastic – or micro-plastics – with potential for harm. Thus, the only real solution is to reduce at source. However, nations are not all agreed upon this aspect of toxicity. Therefore, in treaty-linked talks, they view calls to cut production as tactics to impose trade barriers and add to the general climate of tariff uncertainty. Unless countries can build greater trust before such talks and hear each other out with an open mind, having more meetings will only be futile. The halcyon days, when some countries could steer resolutions on the environment assuming that the 'common good' was incontrovertible, are long past.

Alaskan winds, India and the Trump-Putin summit

The "Alaska Moment" between United States President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin on August 15, 2025 will translate to other objectives for Ukraine as Mr. Trump engages with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and European leaders, leading up to a possible trilateral summit in a quest for the end of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. For New Delhi, however, the Alaska Summit did not yield the clear-cut outcomes many had hoped for before the meeting between the leaders of two of India's closest friends. Nor did it help the peculiar sense of vulnerability that Indian diplomacy faced, of having so much at stake in a meeting while having so little agency in its results.

Broadly, the Narendra Modi government had hoped that a U.S.-Russia rapprochement would take off some of the pressure from the U.S. India has felt over its ties with Russia. However, while there was a visible warmth in the Trump-Putin exchanges, this did not result in a less chilling tone that Mr. Trump has had towards India. He has been taking India to task on a number of issues.

More specifically, hopes rose that the Alaska meeting would result in a rollback of the U.S.'s planned 25% secondary sanctions on India for buying Russian oil; the resumption of India-U.S. trade talks that Mr. Trump has held up over the Russia oil issue; and a subsequent revision of the 25% reciprocal tariffs already in place. In a severely-worded piece in the *Financial Times* ("India's oil lobby is funding Putin's war machine – that has to stop"), Peter Navarro, who is Mr. Trump's Senior Counselor on Trade and Manufacturing, virtually dashed such hopes, making it clear that the double tariffs were a "two-pronged policy" by the U.S. to "hit India where it hurts", for both the Russian imports and for its curbs on market access.

No change in India policies

Nor was there any indicator that Mr. Trump would let up on the other pain point: his counter-narrative to the Modi government's account of Operation Sindoor (May 7-10) and how the ceasefire was achieved. Not only did Mr. Trump repeat that he has mediated the India-Pakistan ceasefire, using trade as a leverage to corral both sides, but he now adds that a nuclear conflict would have followed as both sides were "shooting down airplanes", a version at considerable odds from that of the Modi government, which has thus far conceded that it had no losses in the conflict.

Thus, the first takeaway from the Summit must be this: while Mr. Trump's re-engagement and bonhomie with Mr. Putin may help Moscow, it does not mean a revision of his policies toward India. In any case, the rationale behind the secondary sanctions on India is dubious, and more about power games than about punishing Russia. The U.S. has itself increased its trade with Russia since Mr. Trump came to power and China imports of Russian oil have been consistently larger than India's. Hitting India with sanctions while feigning the Russian President and ignoring China's actions seems to indicate that the reasons



Suhasini Haidar

for the U.S.'s actions lie elsewhere. Many have suggested that Mr. Trump has acted out of pique – upset that Mr. Modi ignored his claims to have mediated with the Pakistanis. Reports suggested that Mr. Modi also rebuffed U.S. moves for him to sit down with the Pakistani leadership in Riyadh or in Washington, and that the Modi-Trump call on June 17 was extremely acrimonious and awkward as a result. Mr. Trump's more obvious focus appears to be recognition for his peace-making efforts, and a possible Nobel Peace Prize, and the Modi government has already missed the bus to give him the credit for the Operation Sindoor ceasefire that Mr. Trump so clearly wants.

New Delhi must decide whether it wishes to jump through hoops for Washington, or whether it would be more sensible to step back and allow the Trump administration to do its worst before assessing a response and turn its energies to other parts of the world. There may be avenues to shore up India's options on trade relationships with Mr. Modi's upcoming visits to Japan and then to China for the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation meet, a possible visit to the U.S. for the United Nations General Assembly, and then South Africa for the G-20 summit. There is also Mr. Putin's visit to India soon. The bellwether event for India-U.S. ties will be the upcoming Quad Summit (India, U.S., Japan, Australia) that India is due to host later this year. It is still unclear whether Mr. Trump will visit India, especially if no India-U.S. trade deal is done by then, and whether the Indian government will be in any mood to roll out the red carpet.

Returning to substance

The second takeaway should be a lesson in not allowing "Summitry" to overtake India's broader interests. For more than a decade, the "Modi mantra" of foreign policy has been about personal magic and chemistry, of dealing one-to-one with leaders of other countries, as his imprimatur on bilateral ties. As a result, visits abroad have been judged by the number of joint public appearances, handshakes and embraces as well as special honours and awards that are given to the Prime Minister, rather than the actual agreements and concessions between them. With China, however, the 18 one-on-one meetings between Mr. Modi and China's President Xi Jinping between 2014-19 did not generate the requisite understanding to foresee Chinese People's Liberation Army's transgressions along the Line of Actual Control and the Galwan clashes.

With the U.S., too, Mr. Modi's close engagements during the Trump 1.0 tenure (the 'Howdy Modi' rally in Texas in 2019 and the 'Namaste Trump' rally in Gujarat in 2020), as well as his early visit to Washington under the Trump 2.0 administration in February 2025 should have given the two leaders enough of an understanding of the other. Given the shocks that have followed, it may be time to turn back the focus to substance over style. But that substance becomes more difficult to seek in Trumpian times, given that most foreign policy decisions are being taken by Mr. Trump himself and a small

ring around him in the White House, with few appointments being made on the desks that deal with India in the National Security Council or the State Department. In the 'good times' Delhi and Washington have worked well, even without a U.S. Ambassador in place in India. But at present, it is clear that a senior envoy with a keen knowledge of India as well as the U.S. President's ear are necessary to navigate the turbulence in ties.

Maintain a political balance

The third lesson of the past few months is that India must reclaim bipartisanship in diplomatic relations, and build and maintain ties on both sides of the political spectrum, regardless of which party is in power. In the U.S., the Democratic party establishment was unhappy about the Trump-Modi rallies because they were held just months before the U.S. presidential election in 2020, and India had to spend some time, subsequently, repairing ties with the Joe Biden administration. Four years later, this annoyed Mr. Trump, the Republican contender, especially as he felt the contrast between the close personal bonhomie while he was in power and the fact that the Mr. Modi and his envoys did not spend time with him when he was out of power, including during the three times Mr. Modi travelled to the U.S., in 2021, 2023 and 2024, to hold talks with Mr. Biden. Closer home, this bipartisanship has been proven to trip up India's ties in the neighbouring countries as well – Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal and the Maldives.

Fourth, Mr. Trump's penalties on India's import of oil, after the U.S. allowed, even actively encouraged the purchases before, show how fickle the global power can be and how futile it is for India to forego its principles in order to please a particular regime. India's time-honoured principle of only accepting to UN-mandated sanctions was broken in 2018 when the government bowed to Mr. Trump's threats of sanctions against Iranian oil, and then Venezuelan oil, possibly emboldening him to demand the same against the use of Russian oil this time. By accepting such unreasonable orders, India does not just risk economic losses in foregoing cheaper oil. It also becomes complicit in the U.S.'s foreign policy objectives that do not necessarily align with India's national interests. Conversely, when India resists such moves, it wins the support of others in the Global South. And while they object, western powers grudgingly accept India's strategic autonomy in these matters.

Finally, New Delhi must consider measures and countermeasures to deal with U.S. actions that hurt India's interests acutely – like the reciprocal and penalty tariffs that will make Indian goods far less competitive than those of its exporting rivals, curbs on U.S. manufacturing in India, or the remittance taxes on Indians working in the U.S. Getting back India's agency will require a firmer stance – one that is not buffeted by the winds in Alaska, at a summit meeting thousands of kilometres away from India.

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The path to ending global hunger runs through India

With global chronic undernourishment now on a downward trend, the world is beginning to turn a corner in its fight against hunger. The United Nations' newly released State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2025 reports that 673 million people (8.2% of the world's population) were undernourished in 2024. This is down from 688 million in 2023. Although we have not yet returned to pre-pandemic levels (7.3% in 2018), this reversal marks a welcome shift from the sharp rise experienced during COVID-19.

India has played a decisive role in this global progress. The gains are the result of policy investments in food security and nutrition, increasingly driven by digital technology, smarter governance, and improved service delivery. Revised estimates using the latest National Sample Survey data on household consumption show that the prevalence of undernourishment in India declined from 14.3% in 2020-22 to 12% in 2022-24. In absolute terms, this means 30 million fewer people living with hunger – an impressive achievement considering the scale of the population and the depth of disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The transformation of the PDS

At the centre of this progress is India's Public Distribution System, which has undergone a profound transformation. The system has been revitalised through digitalisation, Aadhaar-enabled targeting, real-time inventory tracking, and biometric authentication. The rollout of electronic point-of-sale systems and the One Nation One Ration Card platform have made entitlements portable across the country, which is particularly crucial for internal migrants and vulnerable households.



Maximo Torero Cullen

is Chief Economist, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

India's decisive role in the world's fight against hunger is a result of its policy investments in food security and nutrition

These innovations allowed India to rapidly scale up food support during the pandemic and to continue to ensure access to subsidised staples for more than 800 million people.

Now, progress on calories must give way to progress on nutrition. The cost of a healthy diet in India remains unaffordable for over 60% of the population, driven by high prices of nutrient-dense foods, inadequate cold chains, and inefficient market linkages. That said, India has begun investing in improving the quality of calories. For example, the Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman (PM POSHAN) school-feeding scheme, launched in 2021, and the Integrated Child Development Services are now focusing on dietary diversity and nutrition sensitivity, laying the foundation for long-term improvements in child development and public health.

New data in the UN report also shows progress the country has made in making healthy diets more affordable despite food inflation.

What is happening underscores a larger structural challenge: even as hunger falls, malnutrition, obesity, and micronutrient deficiencies are rising. This is especially so among poor urban and rural populations.

The agrifood system needs transformation

India can meet this challenge by transforming its agrifood system. This means boosting the production and the affordability of nutrient-rich foods such as pulses, fruits, vegetables, and animal-source products, which are often out of reach for low-income families. It also means investing in post-harvest infrastructure such as cold storage and digital logistics systems, to reduce the estimated 13% of food lost between farm and market. These losses directly affect food

availability and affordability.

In addition, India should further strengthen support for women-led food enterprises and local cooperatives, including Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs), especially those cultivating climate-resilient crops, as these can enhance both nutrition and livelihoods.

India must continue to invest in its digital advantage to drive the transformation of its agrifood systems. Platforms such as AgriStack, e-NAM, and geospatial data tools can strengthen market access, improve agricultural planning, and enhance the delivery of nutrition-sensitive interventions.

A symbol of hope

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) notes that the progress of India in agrifood system transformation is not just national imperatives; they are global contributions. As a leader among developing countries, India is well-positioned to share its innovations in digital governance, social protection, and data-driven agriculture with others across the Global South. India's experience shows that reducing hunger is not only possible but that it can be scaled when backed by political will, smart investment, and inclusion.

With just five years left to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), including SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) on ending hunger, India's recent performance gives this writer hope. But sustaining this momentum will require a shift from delivering sustenance to delivering nutrition, resilience, and opportunity.

The hunger clock is ticking. India is no longer just feeding itself. The path to ending global hunger runs through India, and its continued leadership is essential to getting us there.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The ECI's response

The defence provided by the Election Commission of India (ECI) regarding its refusal to publish readable voters' rolls for recognised political parties and to upload the voters' list on its website is, quite frankly, terrible. The Leader of the

Opposition in the Lok Sabha has highlighted what can be called the incompetence of the ECI. The responses given by the ECI during the recent press conference to valid questions about the lack of transparency regarding the uploading of voters' rolls

and other pertinent issues were absurd. **C. Raghavan**, Chennai

As the guardian of elections in India, the ECI must take the moral high ground, ensuring that all allegations and doubts are clarified and

checked thoroughly. This is essential to maintain public trust in our elections and in democracy itself. **N.S. Girinath Paranjoti**, Erode, Tamil Nadu

The tone and the tenor adopted by the ECI convey arrogance and an

adversarial attitude. The Congress's case that the data relied upon by its leader are from the ECI's own database. The ECI was evasive on several key questions from the media. There was no explanation for conducting such a massive exercise in the

midst of the monsoon. The ECI has failed to live up to its constitutional mandate to be a neutral umpire. This is worrisome. **S.K. Choudhury**, Bengaluru

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

What true empowerment of women entails

The trial of former Janata Dal (Secular) MP Prajwal Revanna, tainted by every trick in the book that power can muster, from legal intimidation to procedural delays, could have been yet another grim entry in India's long and exhausting history of justice denied. However, this case was different because a 47-year-old domestic help, with no wealth, no political connections, and no media machinery at her disposal, refused to be worn down. She braved high-profile legal muscle, relentless attempts at discrediting her, and the quiet but crushing social pressures that compel victims to disappear into silence. She didn't disappear; instead, she stood her ground.



Apsara Reddy
AIADMK
Spokesperson

The language of empowerment India loves the language of empowerment. We put women entrepreneurs on magazine covers, we host conferences celebrating women CEOs, and we create awards to honour women leaders in politics, business, and culture. Yet, when a woman without privilege takes on the powerful in a court of law, we often treat her as a passing headline; not as a hero whose actions have fortified the very concept of justice. Our narrative of empowerment too often belongs to those who have the resources to recover from failure, the networks to cushion backlash, and the privilege to choose their battles. We rarely extend the same recognition and support to women whose fight is not for market share or boardroom representation, but for their very survival. Women like this domestic help are not just defending their rights; they are performing a form of public service. Their win strengthens the jurisprudence for every woman who will walk into a police station trembling, unsure if she will be heard.

And yet, the moment the verdict is read, the applause dies down and the state, which was happy to bask in the optics of

justice served, does little to ensure that these women can rebuild their lives. The women return to the same environment where abuse took place, facing retaliatory stigma, finding themselves jobless because it is "too much trouble" to employ someone who has been in court, or sinking under the weight of legal debts incurred during the fight. If governments, corporates, and civil society are serious about "women empowerment", they must provide these women structural support – legal, economic, and psychosocial – to ensure that victory in court does not translate into defeat in life.

The way forward

We need state-funded survivor compensation schemes. Frameworks exist to provide financial compensation to families of crime victims in categories such as terrorism or industrial accidents, so why should a woman who has stood up against entrenched power, faced character assassination, and endured court battles not receive similar recognition and financial security? The compensation should be calculated not only to cover legal expenses but to secure a minimum period of stability.

We need dedicated legal aid cells with special funding. Most women in such cases are bankrupted by the legal process. While legal aid exists in theory, it is woefully under-resourced and often inaccessible. States must create specialised survivor litigation cells with professional advocates, forensic experts, and victim support officers, funded on par with public prosecutors in high-profile cases.

We need guaranteed employment pathways. Governments, public sector undertakings, and corporates should create direct employment quotas for survivors of legal battles against abuse and harassment.

We need psychological support and trauma recovery. Survivors require structured access to

long-term counselling, peer support networks, and therapy sessions, funded by the state and supplemented by CSR initiatives. Trauma recovery must be treated as a right, not as a luxury.

Most importantly, we must institutionalise survivor expertise. Women who have navigated intimidation, isolation, and legal complexity should be trained and appointed as counsellors for victims in police stations to guide them through the first and often most critical reporting stage; as mentors in community legal education programmes to demystify the justice process for other women; and as members of Internal Complaints Committees under POSH laws, where their lived experience can lend authenticity and empathy to workplace grievance redressal. This will not only provide survivors with income, but ensure that their courage is institutionalised, not forgotten.

One might ask, why we should single out women like this? Why not simply improve the justice system for all? The answer is simple: they are fighting battles that, in the absence of systemic reform, remain exceptions. Supporting them visibly and meaningfully sends a signal to both potential victims and potential abusers that the state does not abandon those who resist, and that the cost of silencing them will only rise. Moreover, recognising these women's courage in concrete, life-changing ways reshapes our national idea of empowerment.

Applause is easy; it costs nothing. But when a woman risks everything to hold a powerful man accountable, society owes her more than praise; it owes her a future. That future must be secured through a combination of immediate economic support, long-term professional integration, and the legitimisation of survivor voices in policymaking and institutional culture. Only then can we say that empowerment has been delivered, not just declared.

Women who fight for justice deserve more than applause; they deserve a future

Eyeing the Bodoland pie

The BJP is carrying on a divisive campaign and who it will ally with is unclear

STATE OF PLAY

Rahul Karmakar
rahul.karmakar@thehindu.co.in



Peace sells in a region scarred by decades of extremism. In 2003, the Government of India, the Government of Assam, and the Bodo Liberation Tigers signed a peace accord, which led to the creation of the Bodoland Territorial Council (BTC), an autonomous body to govern the Bodoland Territorial Region (BTR). The BTC was established as a political alternative to the demand for a separate Bodoland state.

The Bodoland People's Front (BPF), a political party formed largely by members of the disbanded Bodo Liberation Tigers, ruled the BTR until December 2020. The end of its 17-year rule was partly because of another peace accord in January 2020 and partly because of the BPF's divorce from its "big brother", the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

The 2020 peace pact, catalysed by the influential All Bodo Students' Union (ABSU), was between the government and all the factions of another set of extremists – the National Democratic Front of Boroland. Pramod Boro, then the ABSU president and one of the key architects of the peace process, became the president of the United People's Party Liberal (UPPL), the BPF's long-term rival across the BTR.

The BJP, claiming to have brought peace to the north-east and paved the way for development, found in Mr. Boro's image as a peace broker an opportunity to penetrate the areas under the tribal council where mainstream parties had little or no traction after 2003.

The BPF, dumped by the BJP, became the single-largest party by winning 17 of the 40 seats in the 2020 BTC polls. The UPPL, which won 12 seats, and the BJP, with nine, formed the government in the BTC along with a regional party that won one seat.

The Congress managed to win one seat and became the BPF's short-term ally in February 2021. Over the next few years, defections from the BPF and Congress saw the UPPL and BJP's tally increase to 15 and 14 seats, respectively.

The UPPL-led government in the BTC, allegedly rendered bankrupt by the BPF, exuded inclusivity in the rebuilding process across the BTR, which had a history of conflicts between the dominant Bodos, the largest plains tribe in the north-east, and a majority of the 19 non-Bodo communities, including the Assamese and the Bengali-speaking Muslims.

Mr. Boro's outreach was underlined by the Bhutan-inspired Bodoland Happiness Mission launched in 2024 and a community-based road map for development of the smallest of communities. According to him, the post-2020 BTR was vastly different from the pre-2020 BTR, ruled by instability and division along community lines. The UPPL has been banking on the "unprecedented" peace and associated development across the five-district BTR for a second term, either on its own or in an alliance.

There is apparently no strain in the ties between the UPPL and the BJP, but the latter has often indicated it could be repaid the BPF again. The BJP, reportedly miffed by a less pliant leadership in the BTC unlike its counterparts in the two other tribal councils – Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council and North Cachar Hills Autonomous Council – under the Sixth Schedule in Assam, has decided to go it alone in the BTC polls, likely to be held by September-end. If that is not enough, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma began campaigning in the BTR extensively, claiming that the region was reaping the benefits of peace because of the BJP. He also said that the non-tribal communities would have nothing to fear in Bodoland till he was alive. "Remember that you are safe and have equal rights because the BJP is here, and there will be no second-class citizens," he said.

Bodo organisations did not react to the Chief Minister's alleged bid to polarise the BTR electorate on ethnic lines. However, the All-Assam Tribal Sangha condemned State BJP president Dilip Saikia's assurance to non-Bodos that the laws specific to the autonomous councils would be amended for them to purchase land in the tribal blocks and belts. The BJP's approach to the BTC polls indicates a design to weaken the hold of its smaller allies in specific areas. This is evident from its oblique advice to another regional ally, the Asom Gana Parishad, to stay away from the BTC polls.

The Congress and other non-National Democratic Alliance parties have slammed the BJP's "divisive" campaign as a show of desperation to win the BTC polls.

China's Ejiao boom kills six million donkeys a year

With its own donkey population depleting, China turns to Africa for hides, hitting vulnerable communities there

DATA POINT

Sambavi Parthasarathy

According to a report published in June by a U.K.-based charity, nearly 6 million donkeys are killed every year globally to produce a traditional Chinese medicine called Ejiao. This problem of animal cruelty, according to data and reports, is fuelled by a gap between demand and supply in China. It has also led to many other issues spanning multiple countries across continents.

The demand for Ejiao in China, a medicine derived from the gelatin in donkey hides, has surged in recent decades. It is believed to have many health benefits, such as improving the immune system and curing anaemia though these benefits are not scientifically proven. In 2013, about 3,200 tonnes of Ejiao were produced, which required more than 1 million donkey hides. The amount of Ejiao produced increased by 390% to 15,700 tonnes in 2021, which required close to 6 million donkey hides. The Donkey Sanctuary, a U.K.-based NGO, estimates in a report, "Stolen Donkeys, Stolen Future", that this will increase to 18,000 tonnes by 2027. In other words, China will require 6.8 million donkey hides then (Chart 1).

Data shows that meeting this surging demand for Ejiao, a booming industry in China, has come at an unsustainable cost. The donkey population in China has declined considerably in recent decades, as rising demand for donkey hides has outstripped domestic supply. The donkey population plummeted from 11 million in 1990 to just 1.5 million in 2023 – that is, by 87% over in over three decades (Chart 2). As a result of this supply gap, China has had to import donkey hides from countries in South America, such as Colombia and Brazil; and in Africa, such as Ethiopia, and Kenya. Data shows that

African countries accounted for 51% of all equine hides imported by China in the last decade (2015-2025), followed by South America and Asia (Chart 3).

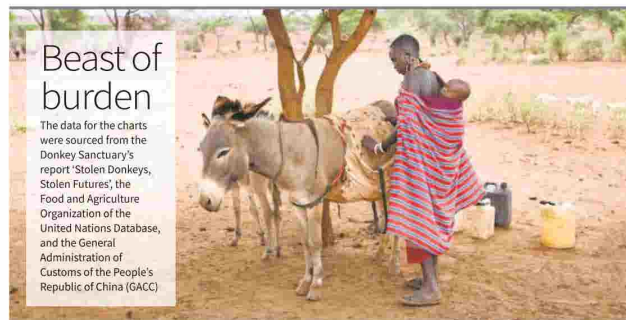
Foals, adults, pregnant, or even injured donkeys are transported in poor conditions and ultimately pushed into slaughterhouses to fuel this international trade. This poses the risk of not only zoonotic diseases, but also the exploitation of already vulnerable donkey populations worldwide.

This has been evident in some African and South American countries, which have recorded steep declines in their donkey populations as a consequence of their trade with China (Chart 4). In Egypt, for instance, the population of donkeys decreased from 3.1 million in the 1990s to 1 million in 2020s (68%). Steep declines were also recorded in South Africa, Brazil, and South Africa.

The trade has also come with a cost for communities that rely heavily on donkeys. For vulnerable groups in some of these countries, donkeys play a vital role in transporting goods and meeting domestic needs, supporting the livelihoods of many poor families.

The Donkey Sanctuary points out that when donkeys are stolen, it is often women who are forced to take on the work that the animals once did. In Ghana, girls are even pulled out of school early to shoulder these burdens.

The report also shows that the trade has led to a surge in donkey prices. For instance, the cost of a donkey in Kenya increased from £78 in 2016 to £156 in 2019. News reports show that the price of a donkey in Pakistan, China's latest market, had surged to ₹2 lakh in June this year.



Beast of burden

The data for the charts were sourced from the Donkey Sanctuary's report 'Stolen Donkeys, Stolen Futures', the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations Database, and the General Administration of Customs of the People's Republic of China (GACC)

Chart 1: Ejiao produced and the estimated number of donkey hides required

Year	Ejiao produced (tonnes)	Minimum hides required
2013	3,200	1.2 mn
2016	6,000	2.3 mn
2020	15,288	5.7 mn
2021	15,700	5.9 mn
2027*	18,000	6.8 mn

*Projected

Chart 2: Donkey population in China across years (in millions)



Chart 3: Region-wise share of equine hides imported by China in the last decade (2015-2025)

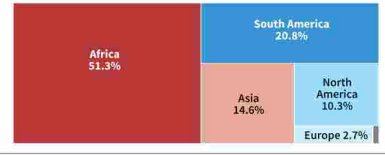
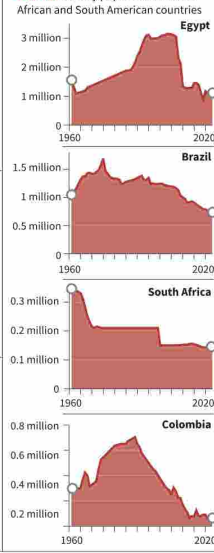


Chart 4: Donkey population in select African and South American countries



FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindu

FIFTY YEARS AGO AUGUST 19, 1975

Jatti suggests use of Nagari as common script

New Delhi, Aug. 18: The Vice-President, Mr. B.D. Jatti, to-day pleaded for the use of Nagari script as an effective instrument to bring about unity, understanding and integration between different regions.

He said the use of Nagari script as the link between the South Indian languages of Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam, and between the southern and northern languages would prove of the utmost benefit both to the south and to the north.

Inaugurating the Nagari Lipi Parishad here, Mr. Jatti said the South Indian languages were close to each other but were almost rigidly confined to their respective regions, because of difference in script. For a similar reason northerners were unable to understand Malayalam or Kannada even though 70 per cent of the words in these languages were in Sanskrit.

Mr. Jatti said the Devanagari script was currently in use in the languages of Marathi and Hindi and with slight variations this script was being used in many other languages prevalent in the north. It was also used in the ancient languages of Sanskrit, Ardhamagadhi and Pali.

"It need hardly be said that the Nagari script is not needed to learn one's own language but to learn a language other than one's own. This is necessary if we are to be united and conscious of our common literary and philosophic heritage," he observed.

It had been widely recognised that Devanagari had advantages as a script which roman and other scripts did not possess. In it there was no ambiguity in utterance as there was no divergence between spelling and pronunciation.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO AUGUST 19, 1925

China's coastal traffic

Canton, Aug. 18: The Chinese authorities have drawn up rules with regard to the coastal navigation, providing that steamers of any nationality except British and Japanese shall be allowed to run to and from any ports provided that they omit Hong Kong. All steamers entering that port must be inspected by a picket of Anti Imperialist Union. The export of foodstuffs or any other raw material from island will not be allowed.

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Fine imposed on Qantas airline for illegally sacking staff

59 in \$ million. Qantas decided to sack the workers and outsource their jobs in August 2020 during the pandemic. Its fine is to be paid in two parts, the court said, with 50 million Australian dollars going to the Transport Workers Union and 40 million being held for future payments. *AFP*

Number of candidates to be fielded by AAP in Gujarat local bodies

10,000 Gujarat Aam Aadmi Party president Isudan Gadhvi and general secretary Manoj Sorathiya released "nomination papers" for candidates and claimed the party has emerged as a credible political option in the State. *PTI*

Amount sanctioned to improve infra in 29 Amaravati villages

904 in ₹ crore. The funds will be used to upgrade roads, drains, drinking water facilities, sewerage systems, and street lighting. Municipal Administration Minister P. Narayana said at the 51st meeting of the Andhra Pradesh Capital Region Development Authority. *PTI*

Number of people dead in Russian gunpowder plant blast

20 More than 100 people were wounded, the authorities said on Monday, as a probe began into possible industrial safety violations. The authorities did not officially name the plant, despite announcing Monday as a day of mourning in the region. *PTI*

Land allotted in tribal-majority district to cement factory

991 in acres. The Gauhati High Court has slammed the Assam government for allotting 3,000 bighas (991 acres) of land to a private cement factory in the State's tribal-majority Dima Hasao district, and observed whether this is a "joke". *PTI*
COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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Who decides nominations to UT Assemblies?

How should members be recommended to the Jammu & Kashmir Legislative Assembly? What does the Government of Union Territories Act, 1963 state with respect to nominations to the Puducherry Assembly? What was the 'triple chain of command' opined by the Supreme Court in 2023?

EXPLAINER

Rangarajan, R

The story so far:

The Union Home Ministry, in its affidavit before the Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh High Court, has submitted that the power of the Lieutenant Governor (LG) of Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) to nominate five members to the Legislative Assembly of J&K can be exercised by him without the aid and advice of its Council of Ministers.

What does the Constitution state?

The Indian Constitution provides for nominated members in the houses of Parliament and State legislature. The provision for nominating two Anglo-Indian members to the Lok Sabha and one Anglo-Indian member to State Legislative Assemblies was discontinued in 2020. The Rajya Sabha has 12 nominated members. These members are nominated by the President on the aid and advice of the Union Council of Ministers. In the six States with Legislative Councils, nearly one-sixth of the members are nominated. These members are nominated by the Governors on the advice of the States' Council of Ministers.

What about Union Territories?

The composition of the Legislative Assemblies of three Union Territories (UT) are governed by acts of Parliament. Section 3 of the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi Act, 1991 provides for 70 elected members in the Delhi Assembly. There are no nominated MLAs in the Delhi Assembly. Section 3 of the Government of Union Territories Act, 1963 provides for 30 elected members in the Legislative Assembly of Puducherry. It also provides that the Union government may nominate up to three members to the Puducherry Assembly.

Section 14 of the J&K Reorganisation Act, 2019 (as amended in 2023) provides for a total of 90 elected seats in the



Different metrics: Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah during the Budget session of the J&K Assembly, in Jammu on March 7. *ANI*

Legislative Assembly of J&K.

In addition, Sections 15, 15A and 15B provide that the LG may nominate a total of up to five members – two women, two Kashmiri migrants and one displaced person from Pakistan occupied Kashmir – to the J&K Assembly.

What have courts ruled?

The procedure for nomination of members to the Puducherry Assembly came up before the Madras High Court in the *K. Lakshminarayana versus Union of India* (2018) case. The court upheld the power of the Union government to nominate three members to the Assembly and that it need not be based on the advice of the UT's Council of Ministers.

Nevertheless, considering the importance of the matter as well as larger principles involved, the court provided certain recommendations for consideration of Parliament. It suggested statutory amendments to lay down a clear and unambiguous procedure for nomination of MLAs. It should provide clarity about where such nomination should emanate from and who/which office will exercise the powers of nomination. However, the Supreme Court on appeal had set aside the recommendations in this judgment of the Madras High Court.

In the *Government of NCT of Delhi versus Union of India* (2023) case, the Supreme Court had delved into the concept of 'triple chain of command' that

ensures democratic accountability. In this 'triple chain of command' opined by the court, civil servants are accountable to ministers; ministers are accountable to the legislature; and the legislature is accountable to the electorate. It therefore held that the LG is bound by the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers in all matters except where the Delhi Assembly does not have legislative powers. While this case was related to the appointment of officers to services in the Delhi government, the rationale in this judgment may hold good for nomination of members to the Assembly as well.

What should be done?

A UT does not enjoy the same status of a full-fledged State in our federal set up. However, UTs with Assemblies have their own elected governments that is accountable to its population. The nomination of MLAs does not create any issue when the same party is in power at the Centre and the Union Territory. However, political differences between the Union government and a UT government should not derail the democratic process in the UTs. In smaller assemblies like that of J&K and Puducherry, these nominated MLAs can have the potential of converting a majority government into a minority one and vice versa, thereby rupturing popular mandates.

J&K is a case *sui generis* for it was a State till 2019 with even more autonomy than other States. While the conversion of J&K into a UT has been upheld by the Supreme Court, the Union government has informed the court that it would restore statehood to J&K at the earliest. Considering these factors, it is appropriate that the nomination of five members to the J&K Assembly is made by the LG based on the advice of its Council of Ministers. This would uphold the democratic principle.

Rangarajan, R is a former IAS officer and author of 'Courseware on Polity Simplified'. He currently trains at Officers IAS academy. Views are personal.

THE GIST

▼ The Rajya Sabha has 12 nominated members. These members are nominated by the President on the aid and advice of the Union Council of Ministers.

▼ The composition of the Legislative Assemblies of three Union Territories (UT) are governed by acts of Parliament.

▼ In the *Government of NCT of Delhi versus Union of India* (2023) case, the Supreme Court had delved into the concept of 'triple chain of command' that ensures democratic accountability.

How should toll collection practices be reformed?

What has the Public Accounts Committee of Parliament recommended? What was said about FASTags?

Jagriti Chandra

The story so far:

The Public Accounts Committee (PAC) of Parliament has recommended significant reforms to toll collection practices on national highways, such as calling for an end to the perpetual tolling system. The report was submitted before Parliament on August 12.

What are the key recommendations?

The PAC headed by Congress MP K.C. Venugopal has advocated for discontinuing or significantly reducing toll charges on national highways once the capital expenditure and maintenance expenses have been fully recovered. The Committee expressed concern that current toll practices allow for indefinite collection regardless of road quality, traffic volume, or user affordability, creating what it termed a "regime of

perpetual tolling". The panel emphasised that any continuation of toll collection beyond cost recovery should only be permitted with clear justification and approval from a proposed independent oversight authority. It proposed establishing a specialised regulatory authority to ensure transparency and fairness in toll determination, collection, and regulation. The PAC noted that while toll rates currently increase annually by a fixed 3% increment plus partial indexation to the Wholesale Price Index, there exists no institutional mechanism to independently evaluate whether these charges are justified relative to actual operational and maintenance costs or future service requirements. The panel has also insisted that highway users should receive toll reimbursements when construction is in progress and commuters cannot properly utilise the roadways. Regarding FASTags, the panel observed that despite their extensive

implementation, traffic bottlenecks persist on NHs due to malfunctioning scanner readings at collection points, and suggested establishing on-location services for motorists to top up, buy, or exchange FASTags.

How is toll determined?

Section 7 of the National Highways Act, 1956 empowers the Government to levy fees for services or benefits rendered on national highways while Section 9 empowers the Union government to make rules in this regard. Accordingly, the policy for the collection of user fee is formulated and governed by the National Highways Fee (Determination of Rates and Collection) Rules, 2008. The levy of user fee is based on the base rates fixed under the NH Fee Rules across the country and is not related to the cost of construction or its recovery.

The rates of fees have been increasing by 3% each year from April 1, 2008. In

order to cover the impact of variable cost of operation and maintenance, 40% of annual increase of WPI is provided. The fee is to be collected by the Union government if a highway is publicly funded or by the concessionaire if it follows any of these models – Build Operate Transfer (BoT), Toll-Operate-Transfer (ToT) or developed under Infrastructure Investment Trust.

An amendment in 2008 allowed user fees to be collected in perpetuity. So, if the concession period is over, the highway is handed over to the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI), and the toll collected will go directly to the Consolidated Fund of India. The toll collection has gone up from ₹1,046 crore in 2005-06 to ₹55,000 crore in the financial year 2023-24. Of this ₹25,000 crore will go to the Consolidated Fund of India, and the remaining to the concessionaire toll plaza.

How has the Ministry responded?

The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways acknowledged the Committee's concerns and informed the PAC that it has initiated a comprehensive study with NITI Aayog to revise the user fee determination framework. Ministry representatives indicated that the study's scope has been finalised and will cover parameters such as vehicle operating cost, damage to the highway due to vehicle use as well as user's willingness to pay.

THE GIST

▼ The PAC headed by Congress MP K. C. Venugopal has advocated for discontinuing or significantly reducing toll charges on national highways once the capital expenditure and maintenance expenses have been fully recovered.

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▼ The Ministry of Road Transport and Highways acknowledged the Committee's concerns and informed the PAC that it has initiated a comprehensive study with NITI Aayog to revise the user fee determination framework.

BUILDING BLOCKS



Artisan soap bars. GETTY IMAGES

On soaps and detergents: how they are made and manufactured

During World War I, there was a shortage of natural oils and fats to make soaps, which spurred some industrialists to look for alternatives that could be synthesised chemically. Thus, the first commercial soap-like detergents emerged in the mid-1930s

R. Vasudevan

There is nothing like a refreshing bath after a sweaty workout or a hard day outside. The feeling of freshness and the pleasant odour after the bath is the contribution of the ubiquitous soap. In ancient India, soap nuts were crushed and used to clean, as were the bark of certain trees and specific flowers and leaves. The first use of soap has been traced back to 2800 BC in Mesopotamia. From there this little item later spread into Europe. During the Industrial Revolution, soaps started to be mass-produced. But even until the 19th century, soaps were treated as luxury items and taxed heavily in Europe.

What is soap?

Soap is essentially a sodium (Na) or potassium (K) salt of a fatty acid based on vegetable oil or animal fat. In chemistry parlance, soap is represented by the formula RCOONa or RCOOK , where R is an organic fatty acid chain and C and O are carbon and oxygen atoms, respectively.

For example, a fatty acid based on coconut oil contains lauric acid, which has the formula $\text{C}_{11}\text{H}_{21}\text{O}_2$. Similarly, a palm-based fatty acid will have palmitic acid, which is represented as $\text{C}_{15}\text{H}_{31}\text{O}_2$. The corresponding formula of soap with a lauric acid base will be $\text{C}_{11}\text{H}_{21}\text{COONa}$.

Solid soaps are generally sodium salts while liquid soaps are generally potassium salts, both of fatty acid chains.

How is soap made?

Traditionally, coconut or olive oil has been reacted with caustic soda (NaOH) to produce a crude form of soap. This process of soap-making was quite slow

and producing it in large quantities was laborious.

The contemporary process to produce soap en masse is much faster. The process begins by converting the triglycerides in the vegetable oil base to a fatty acid. This process allows the manufacturer the flexibility to use different types of vegetable oils like soya, sunflower or palm, aside from the more conventional coconut or olive oil, to make soap. The fatty acid forms when the vegetable oil is treated with hot water at a very high temperature and pressure:

Triglyceride (vegetable oil) + water = fatty acid + glycerin

The glycerin is refined to remove moisture and other impurities and converted to industrial grade or pharmaceutical grade glycerin, according to demand. The fatty acid is then used to make soap by reacting it with caustic soda (NaOH) in a large vessel:

RCOOH (fatty acid) + NaOH = RCOONa (soap) + H_2O

The soap thus produced is extracted from the mix and dried to remove excess moisture using vacuum drying. The resulting mass is then extruded through a die to produce soap "noodles". These strings are much thicker than the noodles we eat but are much shorter in length.

At this juncture, a critical element of soap is the total fatty matter (TFM): it is the percentage of natural oils and fat in the mass. The higher the TFM, the better the soap is in terms of its cleaning performance. At this stage, the moisture content in the noodles are controlled depending on the end use. Soap noodles destined for bathing should have less moisture content than those destined for laundering soaps.

The manufacturer moves the soap

noodles into a blender, where they are mixed with additional ingredients to achieve the final product. To the fatty matter and moisture already present in the noodles, the manufacturer adds perfume, colour, filler material, and performance enhancers.

Some popular perfumes in India are sandal-wood oil, which is natural, or synthetic alternatives. Similarly, colours can be plant pigments or synthetic options like oxides. Soap fillers are generally talc (that is, magnesium silicate), sodium silicate or certain sulphates.

Surfactants also known as surface active agents, are added to reduce the surface tension of water and allow the soap to spread more easily when bathing. A common surfactant is sodium lauryl sulphate. Depending on the brand, some manufacturers also add antifungal, antibacterial (e.g. triclosan), and other medicinal additives (e.g. tea-tree oil or neem oil) to the soap.

Once the soap formulation is complete, the manufacturer extrudes the blended mixture to produce long soap bars, which are then stamped in a die into the desired shape, size, and weight as individual soap cakes. Finally, they are wrapped in a specifically designed wrapper and packed in cartons for shipment.

The technologies and automation in soap-making have advanced significantly over the years such that automatic production lines can deliver 600-700 soaps per minute (100 gm each) today.

Why do soaps clean?

A soap molecule has two ends: one end attracts water (that is, it's hydrophilic) and the other end repels water (hydrophobic). Thanks to the presence of surfactants,

soap also tends to reduce the surface tension of water, allowing it to spread more evenly.

During a cleaning activity, the hydrophobic end is attracted or embeds itself in grease or dirt while the hydrophilic end stays attached to water. The act of scrubbing and rinsing then dislodges the dirt, which flows out along with the water. The detergents used to wash clothes, utensils, various surfaces, etc. are also liquid soaps in a way – but their formulation consists of a large amount of surfactants along with additives like bleach, fragrances, and dyes.

During World War I, there was a shortage of natural oils and fats to make soaps, which spurred some industrialists to look for alternatives that could be synthesised chemically. Thus, the first commercial soap-like detergents emerged in the mid-1930s.

Depending on the formulation, detergents have the ability to soften hard water making the cleaning action more effective. However, their surfactants are known to be environmentally unfriendly. The use of phosphates has spurred concerns about nutrient pollution in the soil and some sulphonates have been known to linger in the environment for many years. In light of these concerns, chemical engineers are currently developing more biodegradable surfactants and enzymes that can replace phosphates.

Both soaps and detergents are a part of our everyday lives today, so any effort that makes them more ecofriendly should be welcome.

R. Vasudevan has a decade's experience in the manufacture of soaps and fatty acids.



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

K. Subrahmanian
S. Upendran

"Hello there! And how are you this morning?"

"What's wrong with you? You seem to be in a cheerful mood this morning!"

"I've got a good reason to be in a cheerful mood. I got a letter from my cousin Ravi yesterday. He's coming here next week."

"That's nice. I haven't seen Ravi since he was knee-high to a grasshopper."

"Since he was what?"

"Knee-high to a grasshopper. It means short and small as a child."

"I see. When I was knee-high to a grasshopper, I was very cute. Can I say that?"

"Not!"

"Why not?"

"Because you could never have been cute! Your mother told me the other day she had nightmares looking at you."

"Ha! Ha! Very funny. Here's another example. I have two nieces, both knee-high to a grasshopper. My next door neighbour has... oooh, that hurts."

"What's the matter?"

"It's my stomach. It really hurts."

"It must be all that rabbit food that you ate last night. It probably..."

"...rabbit food! I didn't eat any rabbit food!"

"Of course, you did. You ate a lot of salad, didn't you?"

"You mean salad is sometimes referred to as rabbit food?"

"That's right. Salad and green vegetables are sometimes jokingly referred to as rabbit food. For example, I hate rabbit food. Give me a fried puri any day."

"My father thinks that we need to have a little more rabbit food in our diet."

"Rabbit food tends to be full of vitamin C. It's good for you."

"Then, why don't you eat it?"

"Because it disagrees with me."

"Disagrees with you! Ha! Ha! That's a good one. How can green vegetables disagree with you? Can the vegetables talk to you?"

"No!"

"Then what are you talking about?"

"When you say something disagrees with you, it means eating it upsets your stomach or makes you feel unwell. For example, pumpkins always disagree with me."

"I see. Can I say garlic disagrees with me?"

"You certainly can. Here's another example. Milk disagrees with a lot of people."

"You mean they cannot even eat ice cream?"

"That's right. They cannot even eat ice cream."

"That's terrible. Instead of saying, milk disagrees with me, can I say, milk doesn't agree with me?"

"You certainly can."

"Well, in that case, you are wrong to say that rabbit food doesn't agree with me. It certainly does agree with me."

"Whatever you say Bugs Bunny!"
Published in *The Hindu* on September 9, 1997.

THE DAILY QUIZ

August 19 is celebrated as World Photography Day. A quiz on the same

Prathmesh Kher

QUESTION 1

What historical breakthrough does World Photography Day pay tribute to?

QUESTION 2

Who first suggested that a dedicated day should be set aside for photography, and when did the idea take shape?

QUESTION 3

Who introduced the word 'photography', and what meaning does it carry?

QUESTION 4

What steps were involved in producing a daguerreotype image in the 19th century?

QUESTION 5

Before Daguerre's invention, what process did Joseph Nicéphore Niépce devise, and what landmark image did it yield?



Visual question:
Identify the image and explain its significance.

Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz:

1. He is known as the son of the god Apollo, and the staff he held in his hand, is still relevant today in medicine. **Ans:** Asclepius, after whom the rod with the snake twirled on is named

2. This goddess in south Indian folklore is believed to have protected children from the pox. **Ans:** Mariamma

3. In Japanese myth, Sukunabikona is credited with inventing this drink. **Ans:** Sake

4. Roman myth boasts of this goddess who could protect people from fever and malaria. **Ans:** Febris

5. In Egyptian mythology, this goddess could unleash her messengers to cause plagues upon populations. **Ans:** Sekhmet

Visual: The twins mentioned in the Rig Veda. **Ans:** Ashvini Kumaras
Early Birds: Tamal Biswas| Arun Kumar Singh| Sudhir Thapa| Piyali Tuli| Arjun Debnath

Please send in your answers to
dailyquiz@thehindu.co.in

Word of the day

Meander:

a bend or curve, as in a stream or river; an aimless amble on a winding course; to move or cause to move in a sinuous, spiral, or circular course

Synonyms: ramble, thread, wander, weave, wind

Usage: This path meanders through the vineyards.

Pronunciation: newsth.live/meanderpro

International Phonetic Alphabet: /miˈænd.ə(d)ʃ/

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

thehindubusinessline.

TUESDAY - AUGUST 19, 2025

Cutting the clutter

GST reforms, not a day too late

In his Independence Day address, Prime Minister Narendra Modi unveiled a proposal that would amount to a sweeping reform of the GST system. The proposed reforms of GST rates would amount to making 'essential and aspirational goods' cheaper, removing anomalies such as inverted duties and resolving clutter with respect to classification.



A clutter of rates was always considered to be against the spirit of the 'good and simple' tax, and hence the Prime Minister's proposal, coming after the completion of eight years of GST, has not come a moment too late. This proposal — details of which were reported in a section of the media — has been sent to the Group of Ministers on rate rationalisation, linked to the GST Council, set up in July 2014. This GoM has ministerial representatives from Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala and West Bengal. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is expected to address the GoM very soon in a bid to kickstart the process of consultation with States, even as a Diwali deadline looks rather ambitious. Before going into specifics of this proposal, it is important to appreciate what a rate rationalisation exercise at this juncture is expected to achieve. A reduction in levies of mass consumption goods as well as discretionary items is expected to boost consumption at a time when urban demand in particular is not looking upbeat, as the Reserve Bank of India has noted in recent times. Crucially, it could offset at least a part of the impact of the tariff shock on labour intensive exports, giving small and medium units a lifeline.

The move is an economic stimulus in a time of global uncertainty. In its essence, the proposal deals with doing away with the 28 per cent and 12 per cent slabs, expanding the 5 per cent and 18 per cent slabs, and creating a 40 per cent slab for demerit goods. Over 99 per cent of the goods in the 12 per cent bracket (processed foods, butter, apparel and mobile phones) will move to 5 per cent (footwear, apparel and some processed foods). And similarly, over 90 per cent of the items in the 28 per cent category (cars, A/Cs, refrigerators and premium motorbikes) will move to the 18 per cent category, which is the rate for all services, besides some consumer goods. So, we are left with an expanded 5 per cent slab for mass consumption goods (including those meant for exports); an 18 per cent one for 'aspirational' items and all services (a slab which will bring most of the revenue); and a 40 per cent slab for 'demerit goods'.

There can be no convincing argument against this 'demerit' rate. It offsets the revenue foregone from the slab rejig; those who can afford premium products should be taxed. The Centre has a tough task in seeing these reforms through in time for the festival season, which is just about a month away; it is even less in Kerala with Onam just a fortnight away. With the process being a lengthy one, it can only be hoped that the GST Council can be convened early and will do its job with alacrity.

POCKET

RAVIKANTH



R. SESHASAYEE

In the din and noise of the tariff torpedoes unleashed unreasonably by the Trump Administration, and of the consequent debates, a major threat and an opportunity relating to an extremely important element of India's global trade might not have received adequate attention: Trade in services.

With increasing prosperity across nations, services' share of global GDP has increased dramatically to 70 per cent. Correspondingly, global trade in services has also surged. The WTO reports that in the last three decades, global trade in commercial services, including Mode 3 (which involves setting up commercial establishments to render services in the importing country) has exploded from 19 per cent to 42 per cent of total global trade.

Given the AI and accompanying digital revolutions, besides increasing global prosperity, there is little doubt that, in the coming years, services will dominate global trade, far outstripping trade in goods.

Despite all the turbulence in the US economy, it's equally certain that US would continue to be the largest market for services exports. The entrepreneurial talent of India sniffed the opportunity for export of services early enough and has systematically built a cadence of enterprises ranging from mega to small, over the last five decades. India's service exports reached \$340 billion in 2023-24, accounting for 44 per cent of total exports, including goods. While more than half of these are IT/IT-related services, over a third is accounted for by engineering, financial services, consultancy, legal services, etc., it is anticipated that India's exports of services will outpace exports of goods by 2030.

Expectedly, the largest destination for India's service exports is the US, with 70 per cent share in IT/IT-related services.

THE LOOMING THREAT

Exports of services do not attract protective tariffs, but they have been subject to other types of barriers, such as visa restrictions and non-recognition of professional degrees, from various countries. The emotional impact of buying hosiery made in India from a departmental store in San Francisco is vastly different to that of letting in a Indian janitor into the bathroom in an American home. Hence Mode 4 involving movement of natural persons to importing countries, had been one of the most contentious issues in the WTO discussions between India and the Western countries. This tension is bound to escalate further, given an increasingly non-inclusive world.

In the past, there have been episodic and even unreasonable restrictions placed by countries, especially the US,



Services trade — the queen in the chessboard

BE ON GUARD. Changing context poses both challenges and opportunities for India

on movement of professionals or natural persons, but these have been reasonably well managed and got over without political confrontations. It would be unwise to assume that US would remain benign with regard to import of services without extracting some kind of a price, given the likelihood of rising unemployment in the US, even if the political equations between the two countries were to return to normalcy in the coming months.

In the last several decades, India has been able to build the export market for services, leveraging its comparative advantages of easy availability of skilled manpower, as well as lower costs. Besides the growing risk of protectionism in the US, this leverage might be upended, with AI threatening to replace human effort through intelligent systems. While the Indian IT sector leaders are already rapidly pivoting to integrate AI in their service offerings, depending less on cost arbitrage, there is still a large number of medium and small firms who continue to provide manpower, commonly described as body shopping, who will need to reimagine their service offerings and business models.

India has over 1,700 Global Capability Centres, mostly belonging to US corporations, employing over two

With AI destabilising job markets in the West in the coming years, we should expect that the cry for protectionism would go beyond factory jobs to service jobs as well

million people. The output from these are direct imports of services by the US corporations. While there might not be imminent threat to the existence or even growth of these large pools of employment, it would be prudent to develop scenarios and develop appropriate policy interventions to incentivise their continuation and growth, in the event of an adversarial move by the US.

With AI destabilising job markets in the West in the coming years, we should expect that the cry for protectionism would go beyond factory jobs to service jobs as well. There are already reports of tightening H-1B visa regulations in the US and this could get worse in the coming years.

The common consensus is that AI will not affect manual services such as those of carpenters, plumbers and nurses, but the Western society will take time to reorient itself to suit the market demand. It's not easy for a college graduate to migrate from a software engineering job to that of a nurse.

RESPONSE TO TARIFF ASSAULT

There has been a great deal of justifiable anger in India against the Trump Administration as a result of the tariff assault. Reactions have ranged from retaliatory tariffs, to not succumbing to pressures to cut back oil imports from Russia. It has been correctly argued that if you bow down once to a bully, you bow down forever. But geopolitics is more than wounded egos. In the complex calculus, it's important to include the significant dependence on the US for trade in services, which also has the potential for phenomenal growth. As India pursues a diligent path to conclude trade agreements with the US

despite the unsettling rhetoric, the need to protect and even promote trade in services cannot be overemphasised.

IMPROVING COMPETITIVENESS

While the major component of services exports, viz., IT/IT services have established their global competitiveness beyond doubt, it would not be unreasonable to say that a part of this competitiveness rests on the comparative advantage of cheaper manpower. In a world that would increasingly look for competitiveness based on intellectual property, there needs to be a reorientation amongst smaller players to deepen innovation, particularly in deep tech. This is best taken up in a mega mission mode by leading academic institutions like the IITs and the IISc as a mission.

There is a more fundamental transformation needed in the areas of services relating to legal, accounting, medical and educational services. Just as the quality of Indian manufactured goods improved dramatically after the market was opened up to foreign competition, there is a strong case to open up these services to foreign competition. Our human talent is second to none and we could safely expect that services would improve their competitiveness and will confidently address opportunities in the global markets, including the US. There is also a need for these services to integrate AI and wrap the services digitally.

In summary, trade in services deserves greater attention and policy action in the ongoing trade feud.

The writer is former Chairman, The Adyar Cancer Institute and Chairman, Executive Committee of Hinduja National Hospital. Views are personal

Jammu and Kashmir's escalating heat crisis

Apart from a spike in heat-related health ailments, the output of apples, saffron and paddy has been impacted

Bilal Gani

Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), one of the most ecologically fragile regions of the Himalayas, is now facing an unprecedented heat crisis. Snow-less winters, record-breaking June temperatures exceeding 37°C in Srinagar (nearly 10°C above normal), and prolonged dry spells signal a dangerous new climate reality. The rising temperatures, triggered by both global climate shifts and unchecked regional development, are threatening public health and undermining a largely agrarian economy.

The climate crisis is reshaping life in J&K with unimaginable consequences. Hospitals are reporting a rise in cases of heatstroke, dehydration, and cardiovascular stress. Health advisories have become more frequent, with government data showing a marked increase in outpatient visits related to heat-linked ailments. Last month alone, more than 900 people were treated for heat-related tiredness and dehydration at SMHS and SKIMS hospitals.

The frequent escalation in heatwave directly undermines the region's

primary sectors. Agriculture and horticulture — contributing 20 per cent to the Union Territory's GDP — are suffering due to declining snow-melt and erratic rainfall. Apple and saffron yields, mainstays of Kashmir's economy, have seen up to a 25 per cent decline in some districts over the past two years. These crops are being badly affected both in terms of quality and production due to erratic temperatures.

FALLING WATER LEVELS

The prolonged dry spells have a direct bearing on the region's agriculture production, by significantly affecting water bodies and reducing water-levels in the major streams and impacting irrigation. Government data reveals that paddy cultivation in J&K has shrunk by more than 11,000 hectares over the last five years. Rice is a staple food for the majority of people in the Valley and in some Jammu areas.

Climate change has altered the weather of the region, which generally experiences temperate to sub-tropical climate. The increasing temperature in J&K region is leading to warmer winters and hotter summers, severely disrupting the natural cycles of many species. Apart



ERRATIC WEATHER. Affecting the quality of apple produce

from changing global weather phenomenon, some local factors have precipitated climate change in the region. Decades of deforestation (over 10 per cent forest loss since 2000, according to Global Forest Watch), rapid urbanisation, and hydropower expansion have destabilised the local ecosystem, leading to receding water levels in the Jhelum River and shrinking wetlands. The rapid urbanisation and excessive exploitation of the resources by cutting down trees and rapid illegal riverbed mining have damaged the already shrinking resources, thereby threatening the fragile ecosystem.

J&K requires infrastructural development and better road-connectivity, but these shouldn't be at the cost of damage to the environment and land degradation. The proposed railway-project to Pahalgam in South Kashmir and the newly approved Highway project to Poonch via Doodhpathri and Yusmarg forests in Central Kashmir will wreak havoc on the virgin pastures and lead to catastrophic deforestation in the region.

A holistic approach requires that development be aligned with local ecological settings and the preservation of rich species that depend on such ecology. It is imperative to have alternative sources of power-generation such as solar and wind energy. Use of renewable energy will reduce over five million tonnes of carbon emissions annually. The farmers should be encouraged to grow climate-resilient crop varieties and adopt sustainable agricultural practices. A comprehensive policy could prevent J&K from becoming another Himachal Pradesh or Uttarakhand.

The writer is faculty of Political Studies, Government Degree College Beerwah, J&K

✉ **LETTERS TO EDITOR** Send your letters by email to leditor@thehindu.co.in or by post to 'Letters to the Editor', The Hindu Business Line, Kasturi Buildings, 859-860, Anna Salai, Chennai 600002.

Citizenship status

The editorial 'Wrong SIR' (August 18) has rightly affirmed that Election Commission of India (ECI) is not the appropriate authority for adjudicating the citizenship status of a person, but it is in the domain of Parliament. While the exclusions from revised rolls are quite large, those who are excluded would be clueless about why they are not on SIR list when they have been voting for decades. Hopefully, they will know when the list of exclusions are published by the ECI as per the apex court's directions. In addition, if the burden of proof of citizenship is shifted from the state to the people, it will be an impossible task for the

illiterate and the socially and economically deprived sections of population. Under these circumstances, the direction of the apex court to the ECI to accept Aadhaar as a proof of identity appears to be the best way to set unnecessary controversies at rest.

Kosaraju Chandramouli
Hyderabad

GST reform

Apropos 'GST reform, and welcome economic stimulus' (August 18), the proposed GST reform is being hailed as a timely and strategic economic stimulus, crafted to reinforce India's growth momentum amid global volatility, by restructuring the

existing four-tiered system into just two slabs — 5 per cent and 18 per cent — the government aims to rationalise taxation, simplify compliance, and ease the financial pressures on both consumers and MSMEs, which contribute significantly to national output. By stimulating domestic consumption and providing a buffer against external shocks, the GST reset emerges not merely as fiscal housekeeping but as a deliberate counter-cyclical strategy to safeguard India's economic trajectory in a turbulent geopolitical landscape.

N Sadhasiva Reddy
Bengaluru

Improving tax compliance

The GST rate rationalisation proposal is welcome. However, for GST to fully deliver, two reforms are vital. First, stamp duty should be brought under GST with a fair revenue-sharing model. This will make real estate transactions more transparent and accountable, reducing black money circulation. Currently, stamp duty is a sunk cost, unadjustable or non-transferable, encouraging off-the-books deals. Second, a seamless Input Tax Credit (ITC) system is essential. Frequent credit denials due to mismatches burden honest businesses. A fully automated, transparent ITC mechanism will enhance compliance

and reduce disputes.
Arul Mothi Varman
Shivakasi, TN

Stubble burning

This reference to stubble-fired power plants help end stubble burning' (August 18). This has limitations in view of seasonal changes in crop production. Alternately, the government must promote conversion of straw into organic manure by using decomposers. Mass organic farming has remained at discussion levels since farmers are wary of yield loss in switching from chemical farming to organic.

Rajiv Magal
Halekere Village, Karnataka

Tete-e-tete in Alaska

Trump-Putin meet: More hype than substance

Sridhar Krishnaswami

When Air Force One pulled up its wheels from Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson in Anchorage, Alaska, US President Donald Trump was heading home with a conviction that his meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin was not a damp squib. There might be a sense of disappointment of sorts had not been achieved but perhaps a framework of one had been discussed with the Russian leader remarking that an “understanding” had been reached before going on to warn Europe not to “torpedo the nascent progress”.

But there was at least one major takeaway from the summit: Putin saying that the war in the Ukraine would not have started had Trump been in office in 2022. Or as Trump later put it: “This isn’t my war. This is Biden’s war. Biden screwed this up”.

“We had an extremely productive meeting, and many points were agreed to,” Trump said adding “One is probably the most significant, but we have a very good chance of getting there.”

BALL IN ZELENSKIY COURT

At the peak of the 2024 political season in the US, Trump made it look like the conflict in the Ukraine would end on Day One of his stint at the Oval Office.

But some eight months down the line all that he could say in Alaska was that “I think we are pretty close to a deal” making the point that it was now up to the Ukrainian President, Volodymyr Zelenskiy, and Europe to see it all up.

“Now, it’s really up to President Zelenskiy to get it done. And I would also say the European nations, they have to get involved a little bit. But it’s up to President Zelenskiy. And if they’d like, I’ll be at that next meeting,” Trump told Sean Hannity of Fox News after his meeting with Putin in Alaska.

In spite of the optics and atmospherics the bottomline in the words of Trump “There’s no deal until there’s a deal”, still rating his meeting with Putin “ten out of ten”. Trump may be a businessman known for cutting deals but he also knows the political environments of America and Europe — calling the summit a failure in the absence of an accord and deeming it a “sellout” if a deal had been reached in the



MIXED BAG. US President Donald Trump with Russian President Vladimir Putin at Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson in Anchorage, Alaska, US (file photo) REUTERS

absence of Ukrainian participation.

Down the line more light will be shed on why the one-on-one between Trump and Putin turned into a three-on-three with the American President having Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Special Envoy Steve Witkoff; and President Putin with his Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and foreign policy advisor Yuri Ushakov.

Those on the The American side perhaps did not want their President to be alone with the wily former KGB Chief who has seen many American leaders both while serving the Russian Federation and the erstwhile Soviet Union.

MEETING IN THE ‘BEAST’

But for quite sometime no one will know what actually transpired during the 10-minute limousine ride that Putin had in the “Beast” with Trump.

There are any number of things the two leaders could have talked about with not having to worry about even the presence of interpreters: the modalities of an immediate truce leading to a permanent solution; status of territories; and relations between Ukraine and Europe with specific reference to the NATO.

The private moments that leaders share are always seen as critical.

Leaders like the President of France, Emmanuel Macron and the Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, had also been alone with Trump in the “Beast”, but Putin is different. He has been in the crosshairs of many an American President perceived as a ruthless autocrat, responsible for the start of many conflicts and also allegedly interfering in American domestic politics.

The writer is a senior journalist who has reported from Washington DC on North America and United Nations.

thehindu **businessline.**

TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

August 19, 2005

Mauritius firm told to cut stake in Centurion to 10 pc

The Reserve Bank of India has asked the Foreign Investment Promotion Board (FIPB) to direct Mauritius based investment firm Kephane Investment (Mauritius) Pte Ltd to bring down its stake in Centurion Bank Ltd to the prescribed limit of 10 per cent.

Cabinet seeks more details on KRL merger with BPCL

The Finance Minister, Mr P. Chidambaram, today said that the Union Cabinet has sought more information on the proposed merger of Kochi Refineries Ltd (KRL) with BPCL. The Cabinet is understood to have taken up the issue but no decision could be arrived at. The boards of the two companies had approved a swap ratio of 4:9 in January this year. BPCL holds 54.81 per cent stake in KRL, which operates a standalone refinery that process 7.5 million tonnes a year.

WTO talks: ‘Address concerns of exporters’

The ongoing negotiations in the World Trade Organisation (WTO) on trade facilitation must address the concerns of exporters in developing countries since the current conditions suggest strong handicaps for the developing world, the Union Minister of Commerce & Industry, Mr Kamal Nath, said.

The dollar’s present and future

Trump’s actions have hastened the decline of dollar. Its future hinges on US financial dominance

MACROSCAN.



CP CHANDRASHEKHAR, JAYATI GHOSH

In the living memory of most people on earth, the world economy has been characterized by the hegemony of the US dollar. For the most part, that has been very much a reflection of US economic, financial and military dominance, even as it has also contributed greatly to that. As the economist Charles Kindleberger had pointed out many decades ago, money is about power, and international money is about international power.

Yet the fact that American economic power has been on the wane for a while now is well known. And this obviously raises questions about the future of US dollar hegemony as well. This matter has come to global centre stage in the wake of the chaos and confusion unleashed by US President Donald Trump’s tariff wars ostensibly meant to reduce US bilateral trade deficits, which have been combined with an apparently contradictory attempt to maintain dollar supremacy.

There are now two distinct views about whether the US dollar will maintain its current powerful status. One posits that US economic power is clearly on a declining trend, possibly accelerated by Trump’s policies, so the dollar’s role as an apparently contradictory attempt to maintain dollar supremacy.

The other position argues that despite recent tendencies, the hegemony of the dollar is likely to continue into the medium term, because it is the only currency able to provide the role of global store of value and thereby function as the *numeraire* commodity for international transactions.

DOLLAR REIGNS

Both perspectives have some validity to them, simply because, as Table 1 shows, the indicators themselves appear to be somewhat contradictory. When the US dollar emerged as clearly hegemonic after the Second World War, in a system cemented by the Bretton Woods conference in 1944, the US accounted for one-third of global GDP and one-half of international trade. It clearly dominated over Europe, still devastated by the effects of the war, and was a net creditor to the United Kingdom, whose pound sterling was the previous monetary hegemon. But in 2024, the picture is much more complicated.

The US now accounts for only a quarter of global GDP, and less than 17 per cent of global trade. Yet it still dominates in export invoicing (more than half) and 57 per cent of all official foreign exchange reserves. Even more tellingly, no less than 88 per cent of all foreign exchange transactions involve US dollars. No other rival currency comes anywhere close. It may not be surprising, then, that it is still used as the currency peg or anchor for all other currencies, despite recent volatility in its value and uncertainty about US economic policies.

Nevertheless, there are straws in the wind portending change. It is important to note that these indicators — and the data used in this analysis — predate Trump’s “Liberation Day” tariffs and the aggressive US bargaining positions taken with several trading partners, such as India, Brazil and others, which are likely to push them to consider alternative trading and financial arrangements with much greater urgency. These are medium term trends over the past decade, which point to

important tendencies that are likely to be greatly accelerated and intensified by recent US behaviour.

Figure 1 provides trends in two of these indicators: the share of foreign exchange reserves held in US dollars, and the share of US Treasury Securities held by foreign investors. Both are indications of the dollar’s importance as a store of value. While the dollar’s share of forex reserves holding is still significant at 58 per cent, it has come down significantly since the turn of the century, when it was as high as 72 per cent — a decline of more than one-third.

The pattern of foreign holding of US Treasury Bills is similar: the share of foreign investors holding these assets rose sharply in the first two decades of this century to nearly half, peaking at 47.8 per cent in 2015Q1, but since then this has declined to 34 per cent in 2024Q4 — a very significant decline in a relatively short period of time.

GOLD BUYING SURGES

This has been accompanied by a significant increase in the holding of gold in official reserve assets, especially since 2010, as shown in Figure 2.

Between 2010 and 2014, the amount of gold held as forex reserves increased by 58 per cent, equivalent to 173 mn fine troy ounces. This shows an interestingly divergent pattern across rich nations and middle income countries. The rich countries shown in Figure 2 either maintained the same level of gold stocks in volume terms (US, Italy, Switzerland, France) or slightly lower (Germany).

By contrast, many countries in the rest of the world increased their official gold holdings, with Russia (29 per cent) and China (22 per cent) accounting for more than half of this. India also increased gold holding, accounting for 4.6 per cent of the increase.

This pattern has become more pronounced in the recent past, with several other countries like South Korea and Japan also becoming significant buyers of gold. A recent move by the Chinese government may also have implications for the gold market. If it does require insurers to allocate 1 per cent of assets to gold by drawing down on US dollar holdings, this would sharply increase global demand for gold.

Nevertheless, the US dollar still accounts for the vast majority of financial transactions. One reason for this is its hold on the debt market. As Figure 3 shows, it holds a dominant and increasing share of foreign currency debt issuance. This is probably why the US Federal Reserve’s own index of USD international usage, which is a weighted average of each currency’s share of globally disclosed forex reserves (25 per cent weight), forex transaction volume (25 per cent), foreign currency debt issuance (25 per cent), foreign currency and international banking claims (12.5 per cent), and foreign currency and international banking liabilities (12.5 per cent) finds the index to be largely stable since 2010.

Indeed, as indicated in Figure 4, it even finds that the US dollar’s share of international payment has gone up substantially in the same period, from 32 per cent in 2010 to 47 per cent in 2024.

In other words, it is the US control over global financial markets that really drives its significance today. Its future therefore depends crucially on whether it is able to retain that control.

The US now accounts for only a quarter of global GDP, and less than 17 per cent of global trade. Yet it still dominates in export invoicing (more than half) and 57 per cent of all official foreign exchange reserves

CHART 1

Dollar dominance

Significance in the global economy in 2024 (% shares)

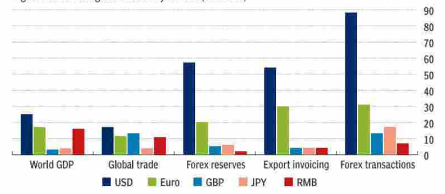


CHART 2

Declining trend

Foreign holding of US assets

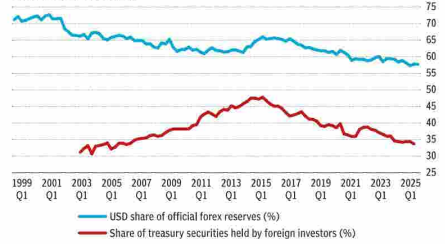


CHART 3

Gold shine

Gold in official reserve assets (mn fine troy ounces)

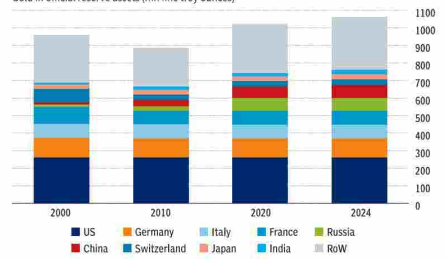


CHART 4

Debt factor

Share of foreign currency debt issuance (%)

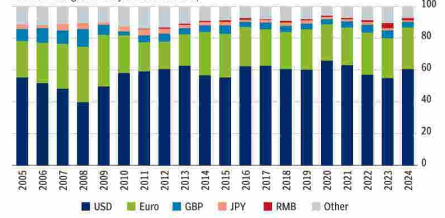
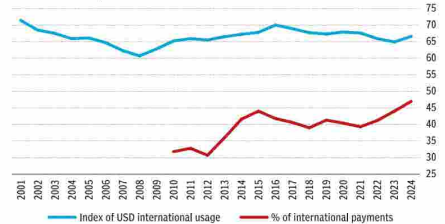


CHART 5

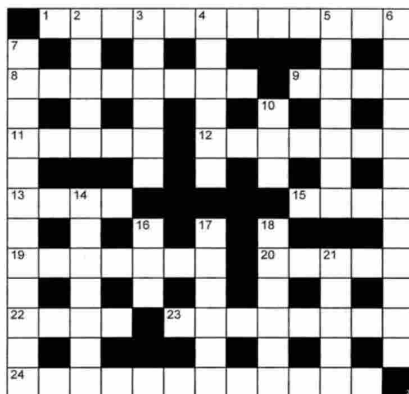
Rising share

Measures of USD importance



Source: US Dollar Dominance Monitor, Atlantic Council; US Federal Reserve - The international role of the dollar, 2025; Macromio

BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2764



EASY

ACROSS

01. Place where wounded are treated; changing-place (9-4)
08. Elegant, courteous (8)
09. One-sided inclination (4)
11. Examination of accounts (5)
12. Moved with bar on fulcrum (7)
13. Magnetic ribbon (4)
15. Leg joint (4)
19. Bony pike (7)
20. Close-fitting (5)
22. Possesses (4)
23. Overwhelm, overrule (8)
24. Supervises (12)

DOWN

02. Raging, fanatical (5)
03. Upper house of US legislature (6)
04. Frozen water-dropping (6)
05. Greek short 'o' (7)
06. Mishap; accidental killing (12)
07. Useful, of benefit to one (12)
10. Clinging evergreen (3)
14. Root vegetable (7)
16. Theatre orchestra accommodation (3)
17. Not bearded (6)
18. Die without nourishment (6)
21. Covetousness (5)

NOT SO EASY

ACROSS

01. Space to change here where wounds are treated (8-4)
08. Elegant and carefree as a bird one let loose (8)
09. Prejudice of one surrounded by graduates (4)
11. Verify accounts of fraud itemised internally (5)
12. Soundly prized when led around for an eternity (7)
13. Measure of liquor to make a recording of (4)
15. Pat and Ella joined in part of it (4)
19. Sort of pike the RAF ship about (7)
20. Money may be in short supply for the intoxicated (5)
22. Admits to seeing topless dresses (4)
23. Overrule one, or beaver will turn to it (8)
24. Oversees distribution of purse one means to follow (12)

DOWN

02. Fanatical way to be afflicted with hydrophobia (5)
03. Legislative body is seen at variance with it (6)
04. Example of frozen motion makes one join circle right away (6)
05. Little 'o' from a Greek could be moronic (7)
06. Is mad about speculative enterprise - bad luck! (12)
07. It's useful to save a toad gun was out to get (12)
10. Roman historian who lost his head to a clinging type (3)
14. It's even a bargain as a vegetable (7)
16. Where racing drivers stop to take the stones out (3)
17. Have to appear among Poles without a beard (6)
18. If harvest is topped off with confusion one will get no food (6)
21. A wish for too much to be settled without a leader (5)

SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2763

ACROSS 1. Lavish & Igloo 9. Consult 11. Patience 12. Jelly 15. Loft 16. Way 17. Oust 19. Belly 21. Pathetic 24. Nothing 25. Manic 26. Dormer

DOWN 2. Alone 3. Insulate 4. Help 5. Limit 6. Flan 7. Poke 10. Tarpaulin 12. Joit 13. Together 14. Stay 18. Fetch 20. Lance 21. Pomp 22. Tune 23. Cold

Getting Ready for a Post-Phone World

Smartphones will cede space to smarter devices

Last month, Samsung introduced two new phones that feature foldable screens. Z Fold 7 can turn into a tablet; Z Flip is an old-school flip-phone with smartphone capabilities. Together, these two may be upsetting Apple's cart — Samsung's market share in the US in Q2 2025 is up from 23% to 31% (Apple's is down from 56% to 49%). This could be well be a sign of larger shifts to come. The smartphone as we know it has evolved from being an instrument with buttons and foldable screens to its current form, where it is a touch-sensitive sandwich of metal and glass. Manufacturers are trying to get around design constraints by pushing customers towards tablets and watches. Yet, these don't seem to be reversing flattening sales. Tech companies are investing in an array of potential successor gadgets like glasses, wristbands and even tattoos. The most audacious effort is to implant devices in the brain — Elon Musk's Neuralink, for instance — to connect with computers through thought.

No one is sure what device will replace the smartphone, or even if there will be one device to rule it all in the future. There is, however, consensus that 'phones' and computers, which need to 'sleep', won't be around in their current form. AI firms are trying to imagine devices that represent the on-off binary of the current state of computing. Chipmakers are hedging their bets for a future when the smartphone doesn't dominate. Lensmakers are experimenting with holographic interfaces.

Even if the smartphone were to walk into the sunset, it would have spawned a hardware revolution to make computing more available to consumers than it is now. Personal computing is entering new territory where physical and emotional conditions of humans are taken into account. Machines will not only make our morning coffee, but they'll also be telling us whether we should be drinking it at all after a late-night party. Smartphones have been our steady companions for a while now. But they haven't been able to read our moods. They'll have to learn. Or make way.

Make Physical Books Trendy, Cool for YAs

When digital media first took off, many feared it would spell the end of printed books and bookstores — and even the end of reading anything beyond scrollable paper. Those fears certainly weren't misplaced. Brick-and-mortar bookstores have become a thing of the past. But there may be a new phenomenon emerging: digital and physical book publishing feeding off each other. Surprisingly, it's online that's nudging readers back towards 'paper'.

Take Britain's Waterstones. Book sales are reportedly being buoyed by young adults (YAs) treating books as an escape from their screens. TikTok's 'BookTok' community has turned literary chatter into viral recommendations, a millennial version of Oprah's Book Club, reviving interest in genres like YA fantasy and romance. In Cologne, antiquarian bookstore Willbrand was rescued from closure after its owner began discussing classics online, drawing new customers. This symbiosis between digital and print can only grow. Back in 2004, when Google set out to digitise millions of books, publishers worried about copyright infringement and death of book sales. Yet, a 2023 American Economic Journal: Economic Policy study, 'Digitization and the Market for Physical Works: Evidence from the Google Books Project', tracking nearly 38,000 titles digitised between 2005 and 2009, found digitisation boosted visibility and helped sales.

For Indian publishers and retailers, these are green shoots worth seizing. But the challenge goes beyond selling books. It lies in reimagining the book, curating experiences around it, enhancing bookstores as experiential spaces with events and shows, even involving celebs. In other words, by positioning reading physical books as something cool, especially for the young, non-boomer crowd.



JUST IN JEST

After a loud experiment that went awry, the job returns to its description

Veeping's Back in its Good Old Quiet Ways

With the departure of Jagdeep 'dhamaka', and Maharashtra gov C P 'Who?' Radhakrishnan as BJP parliamentary board's Chosen One for the post, veeping — the condition of being vice-president — should return to where it belongs: seen, but not heard. Let's be honest: veeps are the human equivalent of the 'close door' button in elevators — comforting, but ornamental. They exist in a strange political purgatory: important enough to have their names remembered for civil service exams, but too irrelevant to remember off the top of one's head, especially when you so have to remember who the president is.

The veep's job description is a masterpiece in ambiguity: attend state functions, smile at foreign trips — but less broadly than the president. If and when veeps do speak, it's usually to say something so carefully neutral, it could be printed on a beige wallpaper. PMs must be articulate, and occasionally shouty. But veeps are the political equivalent of elevator muzak — inoffensive, vaguely reassuring, and best kept at low volume. And, yet, every election cycle, we pretend the VP pick is a seismic event. So, it's best to embrace the truth while maintaining the show. Vice-presidents are ceremonial bunsal trees — pruned, polished, and best admired from a respectful distance. Let them wave, smile. But for form's sake, let them stay delightfully silent.

CHAPATI A chill is setting in that will take a long time to recover in the India-US relationship



Ashok Malik

Over the past few weeks, as the India-US relationship has near-implemented, several opinions and assessments have emerged. Most analysts have been measured and thoughtful, and attempted to discern the long view. Others have been astonishingly uniform, ranging from amateurs talking through their hats to (former) professional analysts opining through their golf caps.

To be sure, any consequential policy episode must see a reckoning and self-appraisal within the government. This is to be expected in an accountable democracy. The external affairs ministry, commerce ministry and even the PMO would naturally undertake such an exercise. Were there diplomatic mistakes? Could the trade negotiations have gone differently? Were gaps in Operation Sindoor's strategic comms deterministic?

These are all good questions. Since there is always room for improvement, they must be asked and deliberated upon. However, this should not deflect from a fundamental and pivotal point: nothing India did, no act of commission or omission, merited the sort of response that has come from the White House and Trump regime. It is egregiously disproportionate. Inevitably, this warrants the conclusion that the issue is not about some minor sticking point that can be resolved with a 'high-level phone call' here, or 'more trade concessions' there. Advice that India should rethink its position on GM food, or making investment announcements even without resources to back them, is not particularly sensible either.

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Drowning out opportunities

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So, what is driving the Trump regime's decision flow? How geopolitics have shifted recently in recent weeks would suggest that trade imperatives have long given way to political imperatives, perhaps even strategic and domestic calculations in the US president's inner council. If that is, indeed, the case, the basket of bilateral challenges could both deepen and expand in the near term.

Either way, the relationship will take a long time to recover to the levels of political trust it has been used to over the past 20 years. A chill is setting in. The public moody of hardening, and the pressure on the Narendra Modi government — including on its ability to offer further trade concessions — is there for all to sense.

The reckoning in New Delhi is that India is facing the most structured and coercive assault on its strategic autonomy — industrial and policy — in a long time. Inevitably, this perception will shape reactions. Consequences will not be limited to just the immediate future.

50% tariffs aren't going to be easy to manage, especially for industries dependent on US exports. Yet, this will also make other sectors wary of geopolitical risks of excessive market exposure to the US.

A longer-term hedge option vis-a-vis the US. The lessons of the Summer of 2025 will alter the baseline for a reset, whenever that happens. This is not a store-down India wanted — or more accurately wants. But whatever happens, India cannot allow itself to be outlasted.

The writer is partner, The Asia Group (TAG), and chair of its India practice

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No doubt there will be an economic cost. 50% tariffs are not going to be easy to manage, particularly for industries significantly dependent on US exports. Yet, this will also make other sectors wary of the geopolitical risks of excessive market exposure to the US. Rather than spur further engagement — as the trajectory of India-US relations has done in recent decades — it will induce caution and a desire to hedge and diversify. India's economic approach, particularly in the US, will be seen as a self-fulfilling prophecy for Washington's tariff theologists.

In a slightly longer, but still not too distant, timeframe, India could conclude a deal with the EU. Once the EU recovers from its current 'He loves us, he loves us not' trans-Atlantic minutiae, and assesses its position in the ballroom, it will note the opportunity of the moment. Next, India needs to find a non-China, non-RCEP (Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership) pathway to an economic and supply chains partnership with the Indo-Pacific.

CTPTP (Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership) lends itself as an idea. Admittedly, CTPTP standards are very stringent. Could there be a trade-off between political expediency and the absence of arm-twisting and/or supply chains surrender — and calibrating just now much an external trade agreement could be used to drive internal reform and regulatory change?

The process will not be easy, or without pain. Even so, if it is achieved, it could give India a longer-term hedge option vis-a-vis the US. The lessons of the Summer of 2025 will alter the baseline for a reset, whenever that happens. This is not a store-down India wanted — or more accurately wants. But whatever happens, India cannot allow itself to be outlasted.

The writer is partner, The Asia Group (TAG), and chair of its India practice

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OUR VIEW

THEIR VIEW



A patch-up with Beijing would suit our interests

As world trade wobbles, India and China could gain from mending commercial ties. It's the geo-strategic aspect that demands deft handling in the context of our security challenges

India seems ready to improve business relations with China. Though hints of it have been emerging since Prime Minister Narendra Modi met Chinese President Xi Jinping last year at the Brics summit, signs of rapprochement have grown. New Delhi is contemplating easing its restrictions on direct investment from China, for example. Non-sensitive sectors could see barriers being lowered, according to a *Mint* report. To be sure, India's Press Note 3, which mandates that investments from countries with which India shares land borders get government approval, is not about to be withdrawn. But India could ease scrutiny under this policy. Direct flights between the two countries are set to resume, even as India slowly gets more generous with visas issued to Chinese citizens. Meanwhile, China's foreign minister Wang Yi's visit to New Delhi on Monday has set the stage for Modi to meet Xi at the forthcoming summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in Beijing. Sectors like defence equipment, nuclear energy and telecom will probably be kept barred from Chinese participation, but the shadow cast by the Galwan rupture of 2020 has begun to fade.

The economic logic of it is clear. China needs India's large market for its goods all the more as America tries to deter its shipments. India faces US trade hostility too and needs both Chinese capital and raw material inputs to accelerate the expansion of its economy. Asia's promise would go unfulfilled without its big two reinforcing each other's growth. Given China's leadership of clean-tech industries, we could gain from partnerships in these fields that result in domestic absorption of know-how. There may also be something to learn from China's recent advances in low-cost artificial intelligence (AI).

That said, fraught relations with Beijing make any patch-up prone to dissonance. We must engage China even as we gradually break free of dependence on it, lest Beijing is tempted to use such leverage against us. We remain reliant on China for supplies of rare-earth magnets, inputs for pharmaceutical drugs and more. Also, while retail-use AI may be safe, it has military applications too, so AI should partly be treated as a sensitive sector. As for other Chinese apps, a review of India's 2020 ban list is overdue. It helps that Beijing has been making conciliatory noises. If it is ready to grant our exports better access to its market and help address today's skew in bilateral trade, a reset of commercial ties would serve both countries well.

The thorny part, however, may be the geo-strategic aspect of the relationship. China's support for Pakistan during Operation Sindoor looms large in memory. But Islamabad has gotten closer to the US since then. This would not have escaped Beijing's notice. Nor would America's emphasis on Aukus as an alliance focused on projecting military power in the East, with nuclear submarines patrolling the Indo-Pacific. The Quad, of which India is a member along with the US, Japan and Australia, is not turning into a Nato-like pact. Notably, it does not oblige each member to act in any other member's defence. Moreover, how deeply the current White House is invested in its future remains unclear. While the Quad's agenda enables maritime coordination, it does not compromise India's strategic autonomy. In other words, Beijing has no reason to consider India a hardbound adversary. For New Delhi, engaging China could potentially loosen its ties with Pakistan. All in all, it's a tricky trapeze act, but one we should try pulling off.

GST 2.0: A tax reform that could deliver a more competitive India

A structural rework of this tax regime would serve people well and also boost the country's economy



CHANDRAJIT BANERJEE
is director general, Confederation of Indian Industry.

The announcement of next-generation goods and services tax (GST) reforms by India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the occasion of our 79th Independence Day is a landmark moment for the nation.

Eight years after the historic implementation of GST, which subsumed a complex web of indirect taxes into a unified system, this reform is ready for its second phase. The new agenda, centred on a structural revision aimed at rate rationalization and ease of living, promises to further consolidate India's economic transformation and deepen the foundations of Atmanirbhar Bharat. It is in this spirit that the Prime Minister has heralded GST 2.0.

GST 2.0 would not only address long-standing challenges, but also position India's indirect tax architecture well to meet the aspirations of a fast-growing economy that is seeking to expand its global footprint.

One of the pressing concerns over the current GST regime has been inverted duty structures in several sectors, where inputs attract higher taxes than final products. This anomaly has resulted in the accumulation of unfutilized input tax credits, raising costs for industry and creating distortions in value chains. By promising to correct these structures, the government has signalled strong support for domestic value addition, competitiveness and 'Make in India.'

Equally important is the focus on resolving classification disputes that have burdened industry with litigation and uncertainty. The emphasis on stability and predictability is particularly welcome, as it will inspire greater confidence among global investors looking at India as a reliable destination.

Another major thrust of GST 2.0 is rationalization. The move towards a simplified two-rate structure—one standard rate and one merit rate, with only a few exceptions—has long been an aspiration of the CII membership. This shift will substantially cut complexity, improve compliance and strengthen the integrity of this tax system.

The decision to reduce taxes on essential and aspirational goods will directly benefit the common man, farmers and MSMEs. By enhancing affordability and boosting consumption, it will provide a demand stimulus to the economy. At the same time, rationalization will help eliminate distortions and create a fairer and more transparent tax framework, promoting efficiency across sectors. The expiry of the GST compensation cess will also open up opportunities for the government to consider bold steps on rate restructuring without compromising revenue sustainability.

The reforms also focus on ease of compliance, particularly for small businesses and startups. Technology-driven solutions such as seamless registration, pre-filled returns and automated refunds will substantially reduce administrative burden. Faster refunds for exporters and sectors affected by inverted duty structures will support working capital and strengthen India's competitiveness in global markets.

For ordinary citizens, these changes mean quicker processes and a more transparent and responsive tax system. GST 2.0 will therefore ensure that the benefits of reform in terms of ease of living are not limited to businesses, but are experienced by households and individuals across the country.

While GST 2.0 sets the stage for transformative change, its success will depend on effective implementation and partnerships among stakeholders. It is here that industry has a pivotal role to play in this journey.

First, businesses must actively participate in the consultative processes being led by the GST Council and states to ensure that sector-specific issues are effectively addressed. Constructive engagement will help the government refine rate structures and compliance systems to maximize benefits. Second, industry must commit to full and timely compliance, leveraging digital tools and data analytics to align with GST 2.0.

Businesses can thus reinforce trust in the tax framework and contribute to a robust formal economy. Third, industry should showcase case studies of efficient GST adoption, particularly in sectors where supply chains are complex. Demonstrating how reforms reduce costs and improve competitiveness will encourage wider participation and compliance. Fourth, by engaging in alternative dispute resolution mechanisms and providing constructive feedback to GST authorities, industry can help reduce litigation and support faster, consensus-driven resolutions. Finally, a collaborative mechanism will enhance trust and accelerate implementation.

The cumulative benefits of GST 2.0 will be far-reaching. Simplified rates and enhanced compliance ease will reduce costs, boost consumption and promote investment. They will also help expand the tax base and create greater buoyancy in revenue for the government. In fact, GST 2.0 is an economic stimulus of sorts, since indirect taxes have a direct bearing on the cost of products and services. CII believes this would also have a salutary impact on inflation, giving monetary policy action more space to promote growth.

The announcement of GST 2.0 therefore carries the promise of a stronger, fairer and more competitive India.

10 YEARS AGO



JUST A THOUGHT

I am firmly convinced that, in future years, China and India will join hands in playing a more active role in maintaining peace and stability in the region and the world at large and make due contributions to the cause of human progress and development.

LI PENG

THEIR VIEW

The behaviour of lawyers versus the delivery of justice

PRADEEP S. MEHTA



is the secretary general of CUTS International.

India's legal profession faces a behavioural crisis as lawyer strikes paralyse courts nationwide over trivial matters. This professional misconduct costs the nation ₹7,500 crore annually in lost productivity.

We examine four critical issues that offer an unflattering portrait of advocate behaviour. First, lawyers often engage in strikes over petty grievances. Second, advocates systematically seem to abuse adjournments, while exploiting 'exceptional case' clauses to monetize delays. Third, a cosy judge-lawyer nexus resists meaningful reform. Fourth, while the Advocates Amendment Bill of 2025 had proposed to ban strikes, it was withdrawn on resistance from lawyers, so we are back to square one.

In the light of good practices elsewhere, such as South Africa's strict adjournment caps and Singapore's fixed scheduling, we propose balanced reforms, such as a limit of three adjournments, professional accountability measures and timely enforcement mechanisms to restore judicial dignity.

while preserving legitimate professional autonomy.

Strikes over silly grievances: Recent events expose how many advocates have abandoned professional ethics to serve their egos. The Uttar Pradesh (UP) boycott in February left thousands stranded. Similarly, Jaipur lawyers broke their April 2023 undertaking at the Supreme Court by striking again over administrative issues. These incidents reflect a troubling pattern.

In August 2023, advocates in Karnataka boycotted courts for three days. The reason was shocking. A sessions judge had refused a fourth consecutive adjournment. The judge's insistence on proceeding with arguments was deemed enough for a collective boycott. Even more egregious are strikes triggered by FIRs filed against advocates. In October 2022, after an advocate was alleged to have threatened a UP magistrate, the entire bar association called a boycott.

These frivolous strikes directly violate the Supreme Court's directive in the *Harish Uppal* case of 2003. That ruling held boycotts permissible only in the rarest of rare circumstances involving judicial dignity. Instead, strikes have become routine responses to everything from denied adjournments to parking disputes.

The adjournment racket: The link between strikes and endless adjournments reveals how advocates have transformed delay tactics into profit strategies. Consumer commissions routinely witness lawyers seeking postponements. This professional misconduct nullifies the Consumer Protection Act's mandate for case resolution within 90-150 days.

Over two-thirds of all consumer cases have exceeded that limit, with lawyers seen to have manipulated exceptional circumstances clauses. An apparent judge-lawyer nexus perpetuates delays, with advocates resisting adjournment caps. If reforms are implemented, it would reduce the discretion of judges, which many lawyers aspire to become. An agitation at Delhi's high court over judicial transfers in February 2023 exposed this uncomfortable reality.

Restore professional purpose: A Supreme Court ruling of 1 March 2024 complicates the accountability debate. The court held that advocates do not meet the definition of

'service providers' under the Consumer Protection Act. This immunizes lawyers from consumer litigation for deficient service, marking a significant departure from earlier high court interpretations. Moreover, this could open the door for exemptions for other service professions like healthcare.

Learn from models that work: South Africa's Constitutional Court operates under strict adjournment caps with penalty provisions, ensuring accountability. Cases cannot exceed three postponements, except for genuine emergencies. Moreover, lawyers face professional sanctions for frivolous delay tactics. This model has restored public confidence without compromising due process. Singapore's state

courts operate on fixed schedules, with no scope for routine adjournments. Cases receive specific time-slots and lawyers must be prepared; this system achieves 90% adherence. A key challenge lies in distinguishing between frivolous strikes and legitimate protests against systemic issues. Thai

land's model offers lessons: internal mediation mechanisms balance discipline with professional freedom.

We need a blueprint for balanced reforms: The path forward requires immediate implementation of proven international practices adapted to Indian conditions. Consumer commissions must abandon their 'as far as possible' approach and implement a firm limit of three adjournments. This alone could reduce consumer case pendency by 15%.

We should set up district-level redressal committees to look into the grievances of advocates. These panels should have real enforcement teeth—in line with the recommendation of the Law Commission in the wake of the *Harish Uppal* matter. Lawyers participating in strikes over trivial issues should face consequences ranging from warnings to temporary practice suspension.

Timeline enforcement mechanisms must include automatic case transfers to higher benches should delays result from lawyer tactics. In general, the legal profession must redress its basic purpose of serving justice. India's economic aspirations depend on efficient dispute resolution. This cannot remain hostage to advocate whims. Reforms must be done before public faith in judicial institutions weakens any further.



| GUEST VIEW

MINT CURATOR

Round-the-clock clean power is waiting to play the game changer

Clean and reliable renewable energy at gigawatt scale is closer than ever before but needs policy support to make a difference



AMOL PHADKE & NIKIT ABHYANKAR are, respectively, faculty director and co-founder director, India Energy and Climate Center at the University of California at Berkeley's Goldman School of Public Policy.

India stands at a pivotal moment, poised to translate its renewable energy achievements into broader economic gains. Our recent study, backed by market developments, demonstrates that solar-plus-storage systems in India now deliver reliable, round-the-clock electricity at costs competitive with new coal plants. These systems offer fixed prices for 25 years, rapid deployment and near-zero emissions, effectively meeting urgent industrial demands and advancing national clean-energy commitments.

This affordability arises from global technological advancements, with solar-panel and battery storage costs dropping over 90% in the past decade and battery lifespans tripling. Equally critical have been India's strategic policy interventions, particularly large-scale transparent auctions that have significantly reduced costs. Indian developers now achieve some of the lowest solar and storage costs worldwide, with solar project capital expenditures less than a third of those in the US. Recent solar-plus-storage bids in India have sharply declined to ₹3.1-₹3.5 per kWh—a 50% decrease in 18 months.

Our analysis, based on implied costs from recent solar-plus-storage bids and validated against global bottom-up estimates, shows that 24/7 clean power with over 95% availability can be delivered for under ₹6/kWh. This is comparable to—and in many cases lower than—the cost of power from new coal plants. A common criticism of India's firm and dispatchable renewable tenders is that they do not match coal in reliability and result in excessive surplus generation. However, our analysis shows that appropriately sized solar-plus-storage systems can achieve over 95% availability even without significant oversupply, directly challenging that assumption.

Why does this matter? First, at under ₹6 per kWh, solar-plus-storage now directly competes with new coal plants and is significantly cheaper than industrial tariffs in most Indian states—even after accounting for transmission charges. Renewable energy also offers fixed pricing, insulating India's economy from inflation and global energy market volatility. Over the past decade, industrial electricity tariffs have doubled, underscoring clean energy's unique potential to stabilize prices for the next 25 years—providing a decisive advantage for Indian industry.

Clean energy technology costs are expected to continue falling, alongside ongoing performance improvements. Emerging battery chemistries such as sodium-ion and iron-air—based on abundant, low-cost materials—show promise, while solar and lithium-ion battery prices are projected to decline further. If India follows this trajectory, electricity costs could decrease substantially over time.

India's rapidly growing demand for air-conditioning, artificial intelligence and data centres



requires reliable power. Tech leaders like Mark Zuckerberg and Sam Altman have identified electricity access as a critical constraint in the global AI race. Gigawatt-scale solar-plus-storage systems can be deployed in less than two years—much faster than new coal or gas plants. With one of the world's largest and most agile grids, India is well-placed to meet rising demand via this pathway. Finally, pursuing this strategy will help India reduce air pollution, meet its clean energy targets and demonstrate global climate leadership. It could also attract companies like Google and Microsoft that are committed to sourcing 24/7 carbon-free electricity.

What must be done to harness this opportunity? First, India needs coordination across state and national levels to accelerate deployment. Streamlining permits and replicating successful solar land-leasing models will be key to timely execution. India should attract global investment by offering long-term contracts tailored to data centre operators seeking renewable energy that's reliable and inflation-proof at gigawatt scale. Establishing dedicated green data centre valleys—special economic zones powered entirely by clean energy, with fast-track land access, single-window clearances and tax incentives—could further enhance India's competitiveness.

Second, a broader policy shift is needed to reform and further deregulate India's electricity markets. Rapid cost declines and the modular nature of clean energy create an opportunity for large consumers to access low-cost power directly. In the US, Texas, through a fully deregulated mar-

ket, has led renewable deployment and now enjoys some of the lowest electricity prices, beating California's. In India, industrial and commercial consumers still face surcharges beyond market prices, with state utilities procuring power on their behalf—often at high costs. All large consumers should be allowed and required to buy power directly from the market without such charges. Support for vulnerable consumers can continue through alternative subsidy mechanisms. A more market-driven system would lower India's industry's energy costs and boost competitiveness—unlocking major economic gains.

Third, India must address concerns around battery imports and critical mineral dependence. Unlike oil, batteries last over 20 years, reducing long-term energy security risks. China's current battery surplus offers a timely opportunity for India to procure low-cost storage. As lithium is indefinitely recyclable, with proper infrastructure, India can ensure long-term domestic availability. Simultaneously, India should scale battery manufacturing and secure mineral supply chains to reinforce resilience.

As a strategic next step, India should launch a national mission to provide affordable, round-the-clock clean power to strategic industries. A flagship initiative—say, a PM nirantran nirmal shakti yojana—would signal India's commitment to clean and reliable electricity for global investors in AI, data centres and advanced manufacturing.

Now is India's moment to lead by driving innovation, industrial growth and global leadership one sunrise at a time.

Climate havoc: Even jellyfish can trip electricity supply now

Heat has begun to impact power infrastructure in unforeseen ways



DAVID FICKLING is a Bloomberg Opinion columnist covering climate change and energy.



A swarm of jellyfish caused two nuclear plants in France to shut down. ISTOCKPHOTO

It's not just people who struggle to perform effectively when temperatures soar. The electricity system we depend on to keep us cool has the same problem. A swarm of jellyfish linked to unusually warm waters in northern Europe caused French utility Electricité de France to shut two nuclear power stations this week after these invertebrates clogged up parts of their cooling systems. Other reactors in the country may have to cut output because temperatures in the Rhône and Garonne rivers are too high. In Iraq, supply to most of the country went down last week as millions of pilgrims descended on the city of Karbala for the Arba'in festival, spiking grid demand for fans and air-conditioners as the mercury rose above 40°C Celsius.

Even back-up equipment struggles in such conditions: electricity went out and play was suspended at the Cincinnati Open tennis tournament last week after an on-site generator apparently overheated.

Power that goes out when we most need it should infuriate but not surprise us. Most of our infrastructure is designed to perform within specific temperature ranges that the global climate is leaving behind. More and more of it is likely to start breaking as heatwaves become more intense and widespread. That's particularly the case with thermal generators, which use the heat of burning fuels or atomic decay to spin turbines and create electricity. Such plants need to dump excess heat, but this gets harder as the air and water outside warm up. The result is decreasing efficiency and overheating, forcing plants to burn more fuel for the same output or halt operations.

The probability that a coal generator will have a forced outage goes up by 3.2 percentage points during heatwaves, while gas and nuclear are respectively 1.3 and 1 percentage points more likely to suffer an unplanned failure, according to a recent study by researchers in Sweden and Italy. Separately, Iraqi researchers found that a gas plant lost about 21% of its generation potential as the temperature rose from 25° to 50° Celsius.

Drought, which commonly occurs alongside heatwaves, makes the problem worse. Most thermal generators cool themselves by heating up water, whether it's in the sea, rivers or cooling towers. Cool water, like cool air, gets less abundant as the temperature rises.

India has lost 19 days' worth of coal electricity since 2014 because water shortages have forced shutdowns. Reuters reported recently. In many areas, residents depend on tanker trucks and ever-deeper bore-

les because generators are using up all of the surface water. Power stations may put more pressure on supplies of water between now and 2050 than the drinking water needs of its population, according to government forecasts.

Conventional generators aren't the only ones to suffer. Anyone who's sat through a still and humid summer day would recognize, wind speeds often plummet in hot weather. Since the early 1980s, the area of the globe affected by such conditions has increased by 6.3% every decade—to the point that about 60% of the planet is now at risk. In Australia, Siberia and Europe, the availability of wind can now decline by 30% to 50% during heatwaves relative to what it would be in normal years—though a few areas, such as the northern US, east Africa, the Amazon and western China experience the opposite effect.

Even if we can solve the problem of generating energy, getting it to consumers presents challenges. Transmission cables and transformers heat up as electrons travel through their wires and rising air temperatures make such components more susceptible to failure—especially as they're typically working harder on such days due to all the air-conditioners and fans running.

It's not just people who need relief from the heat. About a third of electricity consumption from data centres comes from heating and cooling to maintain stable temperatures on site. That demand rises along with the mercury and is becoming more pressing with the spread of artificial intelligence and cryptocurrencies. A heatwave in 2022 caused chaos at two London hospitals when their server racks shut down, scrambling the IT systems they depend on to process medical data.

The rising dominance of solar panels and lithium-ion batteries, which tend to be more resilient than thermal generators and wind during heatwaves, will offer some respite. It still may not be enough. Most of our industrial civilization, built from the energy riches unleashed by coal, oil and gas, depends on a moderate climate that their carbon emissions are throwing into disorder. The damage caused by fossil technology is going to be with us long after we have switched to cleaner ways of generating power.

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| MY VIEW | IT MATTERS

The great AI shake-up: TCS layoffs may be just a start

SIDDHARTH PAI



is co-founder of Siana Capital, a venture fund manager.

Last month, Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), India's largest private sector employer, made a seismic announcement: 12,000 employees would be laid off, mostly from middle and senior management. This was an unmistakable signal of a strategic shift by a company that had prided itself on employee stability and incremental growth for decades. More than a simple HR pruning, the move revealed that the traditional edifice of Indian outsourcing—a pyramid built on human capital arbitrage—was beginning to show its age.

Officially, TCS cited a growing skills mismatch as the reason for its layoffs, saying that such changes were necessary to prepare for the future. CEO K. Krithivasan deployed automation as the main reason for the decision. However, industry experts might see it differently. A large part of its workforce reduction—about 2% of its global total—is thought to be a response to the increasing impact of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) on IT processes.

This isn't just about TCS. The entire Indian IT sector, which employs over 5.6 million people and contributes more than 7% to India's GDP, is in the early stages of a potentially massive disruption. As AI agents increasingly handle testing, low-level code writing, infrastructure support and other traditionally secure functions, forecasts suggest that up to half a million jobs could vanish from the industry in the next few years. Once seen as engines of upward mobility and economic progress, these businesses now face a technological shift that threatens their very operating models.

This is not just a typical business-cycle correction; it represents something much more profound. There was a time when Indian IT firms were judged by their headcounts. The larger it was, the higher your billing potential. That idea stands shattered.

Instead of hiring in bulk, companies are racing to embrace AI. Infosys has reportedly deployed over 100 proprietary AI agents in client environments. TCS has helped modernize operations for global clients using AI automation. HCLTech, too, is reshaping itself as a digital transformation partner rather than a body shop. But the real challenge lies in re-architecting a long-established business model.

To understand the precarious situation these firms face, it's helpful to read Evan Armstrong's insightful essay, 'How Technology Giants Die,' where he traces the decline of General Electric ([shorturl.at/3Zl0Q](https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2025-08-15-how-technology-giants-die)). Once a symbol of American industrial strength and managerial skill, GE didn't collapse overnight. Its downfall was due to structural inertia, complacency and a failure to recognize systemic changes in time.

Armstrong explains how dominant companies often fail not because they stop innovating, but because their internal systems—such as organizational culture, incentives and leadership—become too ossified for true reinvention. Indian IT firms are increasingly vulnerable. Their businesses are optimized for a world where labour scales up faster than innovation. Their cultures focus on process adherence rather than agile reinvention. For years, companies like TCS, Infosys and HCLTech competed not on intellectual property, but on execution: large teams per-

forming repetitive tasks at competitive charges. This model was effective in an era of digital transformation driven by cloud migration and enterprise resource software integration. However, it is ill-suited for a future where AI agents can take up tasks at scale in real-time without fatigue. What happens when the labour pyramid turns obsolete?

Indian IT firms may fade into obscurity unless they reinvent their outdated labour-pyramid business models


Look at the early signs. Many Indian IT firms report stagnant or declining sales growth, even as digital demand surges. These firms, though, are mainly viewed as legacy service providers. Their clients, while loyal, now look for solutions, not just services, and packaged solutions need intellectual property, domain expertise and agility—traits that don't always flourish in large, hierarchical organizations. TCS's layoffs highlight a structural delay in adapting to a world where scale must be digital rather than human. They expose a talent model designed for the past, even as the future calls for cross-functional fluency, continuous learning and algorithmic think-

ing. While TCS and its peers are doing the right thing by focusing on reskilling and internal innovation, it remains uncertain whether these efforts will prove fruitful.

The stakes are high. India's IT sector has long supported the country's middle class, which has been an engine of urban growth with IT incomes powering consumption. Unless this sector undergoes a significant transformation, this tailwind is at risk. If it seems exaggerated, consider Armstrong's warning: even a company as diverse, reputable and established as GE couldn't escape structural entropy. The same entropy now threatens Indian IT.

To avoid a similar fate, these companies must do more than retrain staff to deploy AI assistants. They must cannibalize parts of their own business, experiment with unproven product lines, attract a new generation of AI-native talent and accept that the qualities that once made them great—rigour, stability and process—could become liabilities. Reinvention, not re-engineering, is what they need.

If TCS, Infosys and HCLTech can crack that code, they might become integral to the artificial intelligence economy. If they can't, their fate may mirror that of GE as they slowly fade into obscurity.



A thought for today
For a nation to try to tax itself into prosperity
is like a man standing in a bucket and trying
to lift himself up by the handle

WINSTON CHURCHILL

Get It Right

Vital that GST reform is designed in a way that spurs spending. Economy needs it

India's proposed GST overhaul can spur demand in the festive season that starts in about a month. It can also partly offset the impact of Trump's "penal" tariffs that have been estimated to shave off up to 0.6 percentage point from GDP growth this year. That's why it's important to get this overhaul right. Eight years ago, GST replaced VAT with the promise of a good and simple system. But there's nothing good about taxing cream-on-toasted-bun at 18%, when cream and toasted bun are taxed at 5% separately. Nor can three different rates for popcorn – 5% for open, 12% for packaged, and 18% for caramel – be considered simple. These are only the most glaring distortions under the prevalent system.

A quick glance over the list of GST rates reveals the bigger problem of classification into luxuries and essentials.

By any measure, 28% is an enormous cut for govt to take. It might be justifiable for cigarettes and other "sin goods", whose consumption govt wants to discourage, but why tax cement at this high rate? Worn-out tyres are among the leading causes of accidents, yet new tyres are taxed at 28%. Why is tooth powder taxed at 12% but toothpaste at 18%? Soap is taxed at 18% across the board, making it a luxury for manual labourers who possibly need it the most.

The underlying principle of taxation so far seems to be revenue maximisation. Metaphorically, it amounts to squeezing the goose without killing it. With the proposed GST overhaul, India could transition to an economy that keeps the goose happy, stimulating it to lay more golden eggs. For example, taxing small cars at 18%, as against 28% now, could revive a segment that used to be the main driver of the car market until 2019. That's why scrapping the 12% and 28% GST rates, and shifting most of the goods and services under them to the 5% and 18% rates, is welcome. But after offering relief on income tax in this year's budget, nudging interest rates downward, and now reducing GST, govt will run out of options to spur demand. The problem of stagnant incomes is the private sector's to fix. And it can, sitting as it is on record profits.

Quietly Does It

India's best response to Trump's 'daddy diplomacy' is to keep back channels open

As Trump's attempts to close in on a peace deal in the Ukraine war gather pace, his personalised foreign policy is turning out to be a double-edged sword. Dubbed 'daddy diplomacy', Trump obviously wants to take credit for every perceived foreign policy win. But that desire also makes him susceptible to manipulation. Just before meeting Putin in Alaska, he declared he wanted a ceasefire. After that meeting, he wanted a peace deal, aligning his views with Putin's. Similarly, some flattery by Pakistan army chief Asim Munir and a Nobel Peace Prize recommendation led Trump to declare that he loves Pakistan. India, far from playing along, is being punished with secondary tariffs for buying Russian oil.

According to the Lowy Institute, there are two sides to this phenomenon. First, personalised diplomacy may seem to reap short-term rewards, but it does tend to be counterproductive in the long run. For diplomacy isn't a one-shot event. It's continuous over the years. Sure, Trump might count the recent Armenia-Azerbaijan peace deal as a win for his daddy diplomacy. But having leaders fuse their persona with diplomacy runs the risk of foreign policy unpredictability – they will bail if a process doesn't align with their political goals.

That may not be good for the countries themselves. India and US have all the makings of natural allies, and New Delhi can be Washington's best partner in the Indo-Pacific as a hedge against China. But Trump's tariffs are undermining this synergy. Second, Beijing has figured out that if it holds strong and doesn't give into Trump's tariff threats, it can actually turn the tables and win. Stand up to daddy diplomacy and eventually Trump will back down. This is precisely why many in Washington believe Trump is going about countering China the wrong way.

Hence, both India-US relations and US efforts to counter China with American allies can do with some quiet diplomacy. New Delhi's best bet is to keep up back channels in Washington to bring the Trump White House around for mutual benefit. When goes get in the way, foreign policy and long-term national interests suffer.

Family war zone

Talks end in no ceasefire, no peace agreement

Anil Abraham

It is impossible to win an argument with Kamala. Even when she is obviously right, she will sit me down like in a press conference and explain how I am actually responsible. And she can be very convincing. ECI should recruit her in its defence. Putin and Trump could also benefit from her negotiating skills. Every person in the room listening to her version of the story would be certain she was an innocent victim who did not deserve to be blamed.

It all started with a wedding on her side of the family. I went along dressed up in a bandgala, determined to keep my mouth shut. Her family politics were more complicated than the Russia-Ukraine war. There are uncles who will not speak to us, and aunts who may smile at us but are not to be spoken to. Everyone knows the old Thattai sitting in the front row is the root cause of the conflict. But no one says so. Kamala left me stranded in the middle of this war zone and wandered off cheerfully to a group of matricorns fussing over the bride's jewellery.

The inevitable happened. An uncle walked up and enveloped me in a bear hug, the kind politicians use on the world stage. "You know me... I'm Piyush Uncle. I stayed in the house behind yours" a population of more than 1.4 billion could hold many people named Piyush. There could be eighty people living in the same house and their house numbers could all be zero. Their father's name could be fdgpl for all I cared. Even a PowerPoint presentation could not make things obvious for me.

He began talking about his share of the ancestral property and I could see that was being projected onto the big screen and Kamala had noted my discomfort. She swooped down and removed me from the scene like a street dog from Delhi-NCR. "Why are you talking to that man?" she hissed at me angrily. Apparently he belonged to that side of the family that had encroached on the family property decades ago. I was summoned by the old Thattai in the front row who attempted to broker a ceasefire. Or at least a peace agreement.

Everyone huddled together and discussed matters seriously. Nothing seemed to change but someone was being nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize. Now Kamala insists I take an oath never to speak again in public or to submit a written apology. I elect to maintain a stoic silence. Have been commissioned as a husband to do so.

OF RAINS AND VOTES

Elections are never held during monsoon simply because netas have no place to hide when roads buckle, drains overflow, airports shut down. It's a moment of truth, and reality bites

Partha Sinha

Only a few things are for certain in India: that the price of onions will rise before an election, that an India-Pakistan match will be described as 'more than cricket', and that elections will never be held in monsoon. The calendar is ruthlessly clear: Our great democratic extravaganza unfolds in the comfortable shades of spring or winter. By June, when the clouds gather and the first raindrops hit, the ballot boxes are already tucked away. Coincidence? Hardly.

It's not that the Indian monsoon is apocalyptic. It is not a Katrina, a Harvey or a typhoon with a Viking name. In fact, in most places the rain is oddly well-behaved. It arrives roughly on schedule, cools the earth, restores groundwater and gives farmers reason to exhale. But let it rain for two hours in Gurgaon and suddenly the Millennium City looks like an audition tape for Atlantis. Cars bob like half-beaten gondolas, office towers turn into aquariums, and WhatsApp fills with memes of corporate executives rowing to work.

The problem isn't that the rain is catastrophic. The problem is that it is revealing.

The great seasonal audit | In India, summer is the season of excuses – the transformer blew because of heat, the tap ran dry because of drought. Winter is the season of denial – 'our snow is not as bad as Beijing's', the chill is 'good for tourism'. But monsoon? Monsoon is the season of evidence. It doesn't argue, it doesn't exaggerate – it simply exposes. Roads buckle, drains overflow, airports shut, metro systems stall. All the shiny PowerPoint slides about 'smart cities' and 'world-class infra' are instantly reduced to PowerCuts and Class-II drains.

And here lies the truth no govt will admit: Elections aren't avoided in the monsoon because voters dislike soggy shoes. They're avoided because politicians dislike soggy reputations.

When rain drenched the ballot | On the rare occasion elections brushed against rains, incumbents paid the price. West Bengal in 1982 saw its assembly polls creep into late May, as the rains opened. The Left Front won power, yes, but ministers lost in flooded constituencies where voters decided that 'revolution' should at least include

working storm drains. In 1991, parts of the general election dragged into June, turnout sagged, patience snapped, and the incumbent dispensation never recovered.

The monsoon is an unforgiving campaign manager – it insists you run not on ideology but on infra. Political strategists understand this. Since then, the model code of conduct has worked to minimise the weather's impact. Rainy season elections are avoided, dry seasons are merciful to memory.

Poem that haunts the pothole | There is a Bengali poem that, translated loosely asks: If one season of rain can wash away my name, then after all this walking and wading, what have I gained?

It is meant as an existential lament, but it reads like municipal complaint. Citizens trudge through knee-deep water past campaign billboards that dissolve like watercolours, to wonder exactly that: After so much wading, to wander after so much wading, what have we gained?

The rain, like the poem, provides no comfort. It is an eraser, swift and ruthless. Names, slogans, reputations – all fade into the puddle. Only the potholes remain, and they remember everything.

Why the ballot dodges the bucket | So let's abandon the polite fiction that elections avoid monsoon because of turnout or logistics. India holds elections in 45°C, when stepping outside is a medical risk. It holds elections in Himalayan winters, when villages need snow boots to reach booths. Voter inconvenience has never deterred the Republic. What deters it is embarrassment.

The monsoon is a season when truth seeps through every crack in the pavement. It is the one season that resists spin, resists spectacle, resists even WhatsApp forwards. You can deflect inflation, you can obfuscate unemployment, you can distract from corruption – but you cannot rebrand a drowning bus. You cannot Photoshop a flooded metro station. You cannot argue with a pothole that swallowed a car.

And that is why democracy, otherwise fearless, ducks the rain.

A closing crack | The monsoon is India's most democratic season because it treats everyone equally – minister and motorist alike, all knee-deep in the same anonymous flood. But it is also the season most feared by those in power, because it levels not just roads but illusions.

Remember this the next time someone says elections aren't held in the monsoon because of rain-soaked inconvenience. That's the polite lie. The real reason is simpler, sharper, and wetter: India doesn't vote in the rain because the rains are already voted. And their verdict, every year, is that incumbents are never dressed for delivery.

The writer is a senior advisory professional

A TALE OF TWO ACQUITTALS

Recent judgments in the 7/11 and Malegaon terror cases show similarities as well as dichotomy. These suggest how law has become weaponised for political expediency

Rohin Bhatt

Two recent acquittals have become part of a provocative discourse in India. First, on July 21, a division bench of the Bombay high court, in a 671-page ruling, overturned the 2015 MOCOA sentencing for the 7/11 serial train blasts, which had horribly torn up Mumbai in 2006.

Second, on July 31, an NIA court in Mumbai, after a protracted trial, acquitted all the accused in the 2008 Malegaon bomb blast case.

The key similarity in both acquittals is that the prosecutions failed to discharge their duties in establishing the offences beyond reasonable doubt. And then there are glaring dichotomies, which are of grave significance too.

Whose torture is torture? | Cockroaches in the vest. Rats in a man's underwear. Pouring water down his throat. Threatening families. Sounds like scenes from a gory Bollywood movie, doesn't it? Except this was the exact torture that was referred to in paragraph 1210 of the Bombay high court judgment acquitting the accused of the charges against them in the 7/11 case.

On the other hand, in the Malegaon case, Rohini Salian, the Special Public Prosecutor, had in an affidavit to the Bombay high court, deposed that she was asked to go soft on the accused. She further alleged that different evidence was laid out in the trial than what was first recorded.

These differences arguably arose from the difference in the religions of the accused in the two cases. In the 7/11 case, the prosecution went to inhuman lengths to obtain confessions and convictions, while in the Malegaon case, it refrained from even prosecuting the case effectively.

Thus, the two acquittals together lay bare the political nature of prosecution of terrorist offences in

India. If the accused are minorities, or Dalit activists, the prosecution has gone to all lengths, from torture in the 7/11 case to allegedly planting evidence in the Bihma Korean case.

It is a lamentable truth, backed by studies, that a segment of our population, the adherents of the Muslim faith, appear in some instances to bear an undue brunt of the criminal law and anti-terror law.

Questions should therefore be asked about how the prosecution could have employed methods of confession that stripped away human dignity, that mocked the



very laws it seeks to uphold in one case, while seemingly going soft in another.

In the 7/11 case the Bombay high court suggests that the prosecution knew that the accused were innocent and decided to extract confessions with torture. In the Malegaon case, the former public prosecutor has gone on record several times to say that her conduct of the case was interfered with by the political dispensation, even though there was a solid investigation, until she was ultimately removed. This is extremely

demoralising.

The two acquittals are a locus classicus on whether India's law and order system pursues justice, or whether it is strongly motivated by a festering resentment against minorities.

Did no one blast the bombs? | Secondly, both cases have inched forward painfully. From shoddy investigation to the prosecution going soft, ultimately what has meant is that the state has failed to discharge its duty to prove the case. This further leads to the most excruciating question: What is the state accountability to all those whose lives were affected by the dastardly terrorist acts of 2006 and 2008?

What happens to the families of the victims who were injured or killed? How do we secure justice for them? Who was responsible for the bomb blasts in both cases?

These questions ought to be answered by the investigating agencies and the prosecutors with a sense of urgency.

Why does the state mind some acquittals, not others? | Finally, Maharashtra gvt rushed to appeal the Bombay high court judgment in the 7/11 case within three days, but has not shown the same alacrity in the Malegaon case.

In response to the Maharashtra plea, the Supreme Court has held "that the impugned judgment shall not be treated as a precedent".

In sum, what we have here is almost a Dickensian dichotomy. Unlike at the opening of *A Tale of Two Cities*, here, there are no best of times. As a nation, we seem to be losing our sense of justice. We are allowing law to be used as a weapon for political expediency. This is a moment that calls for profound gravity. It demands serious introspection about the way in which crime is prosecuted and investigated. There must be accountability, and there must be justice for the victims. For if we cannot assure that, the scales of justice are not just bent, but broken.

The writer is advocate, Supreme Court

Calvin & Hobbes



Let's Make The World A Humane Place

Sumit Paul

This is my simple religion. There is no need for temples, no need for complicated philosophy. Our own brain, our own hearts, our temple: the philosophy is kindness. – Dalai Lama.

Aug 19 is commemorated as World Humanitarian Day. While acts of humanity, sensitivity, empathy and camaraderie cannot be squeezed into just a specific day, this day reminds us of humanity's shared destiny on earth. An individual can live fully only when he rises above individualistic concerns to broader concerns of all humanity because life's most urgent question is, "What are you doing for others?" This is the crux and purpose of human existence. What are we doing for others?

Remember, the two most important days in the lives of all of us are the day

we're born and the day we find out why? Because it's not enough to be just a human. We must exercise our humanness and empathise with all. Service to others is the rent we pay for our room here on Earth. The Upanishadic concept of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam – the world is a family – is not utopian or quixotic. The thread and spirit of humanity and empathy run through all souls and all individuals.

If our souls aren't stirred by what's happening in Gaza, Ukraine, Afghanistan and many parts of the world, we're dead souls of Russian author Nikolai Gogol's novel. Jalaluddin Rumi says in *Dari Afanasian* variant of Persian, "Kaz mim anfaas nee insaan", – just to breathe doesn't make us a human. To be human,

you must be humane and adopt a humanitarian approach and attitude towards all beings, not just humans. It's worthwhile to mention that in Islamic mysticism and spirituality, tasawwuf, there's a subtle difference between *adami* and *insaan*. The former is one who breathes – *jo 'dam le' woh adami* – the latter is endowed with Uns – universal love. Aqueelur Christiani, the Urdu/Urdu is Arabic for love. *Jis mein Uns ho woh insaan hai*. We can all experience love, no matter who we are or where we come from. No matter our differences in background, culture, or beliefs, love connects us all. It is a powerful force that unites people from all walks of life and brings communities together in times of joy and sorrow. Love transcends

boundaries and reminds us of our shared humanity, making it the most precious and enduring aspect of the human experience. Whether it is love for family, friends, or even strangers, it is the common thread that weaves us together in a world that can often feel divided.

An individual's humanity and humanness can bring about a universal change. This is humanitarianism. In these uncertain and gory times, mankind is beleaguered, even the smallest act or deed of love and empathy can make a difference. Urdu-Persian poet 'Nashir' Nishapuri said, "Ya toh har chehra muskuraye ya phir har chehra roe". *Jahabat saah ke ba se hon, sabhi saath bansein, sabhi saath royein*. – Every face should either smile or cry/ Feelings of all should be the same; all should smile and cry in unison. Let us act right now.

Sacredspace



Whenever you are about to find fault with someone, ask yourself the following question: What fault of mine most nearly resembles the one I am about to criticise?

Marcus Aurelius, Meditations



THE GOAN EVERYDAY

The most I can do for my friend is simply be his friend.
Henry David Thoreau

BITS and pieces: Tragedy calls for deeper reforms

The death of another student at the BITS Pilani, Goa campus last week has once again put the spotlight on issues within an institution, this time, prompting a wider view of issues plaguing students. The 20-year-old Kushagra Jain's death, which reportedly occurred in his sleep, represents the fourth campus tragedy in eight months, prompting pressing inquiries about the atmosphere, mental health resources, and the accountability of the institution.

While reports indicate that Jain died in his sleep, the precise circumstances are still being investigated, and the cause of death has yet to be determined. The previous three deaths, linked to suicides due to academic pressures, presented a troubling narrative regarding the impact of relentless stress and high expectations on students. However, Jain's death prompts us to consider factors beyond academic pressure. It highlights the necessity to scrutinize the larger campus culture that may be creating an environment in which students feel trapped, isolated, or unsupported.

Goa is home to several prestigious colleges and institutes, but the situation that has unfolded at BITS Pilani needs to be pondered. Why do such extreme cases happen at this institute, and why not elsewhere? The concentration of these tragedies at BITS invites inquiries about its distinctive institutional culture, policies, and support mechanisms. Are there systemic problems within BITS that intensify stress? Is there a culture that deters students from seeking assistance or discussing mental health issues openly? Or does the competitive atmosphere generate feelings of inadequacy and hopelessness? Or are there issues beyond academics? These questions require deep reflection from the administration, and a superficial reshuffling of protocols will not help in the long run. The pattern suggests that issues require further attention.

Adding to the worry is the lack of transparency regarding these incidents. The comprehensive report submitted to the Governor in May, which included the three suspected suicides, has not been made public. Transparency is crucial in addressing systemic problems; keeping such reports hidden only breeds suspicion and hinders constructive discussion. When stakeholders — parents, students, staff, and the broader community — are left uninformed, it obstructs efforts to effect meaningful changes. The silence surrounding the report suggests a disconnect between the institution's internal measures and the community's right to be informed and involved in protecting student welfare.

The recurring tragedies, despite announced initiatives such as curriculum reforms, flexible examinations, and wellness courses, imply that these actions are either inadequate or poorly executed. Inadequate counseling resources, ineffective mental health frameworks, and a culture that stigmatises seeking help are significant obstacles that must be urgently addressed. In recent times, there have been cases of narcotics being consumed around campuses, although several managements have kept it under wraps to protect the image of respective institutes. The BITS scenario serves as a crucial reminder that elite institutions are not immune to issues and that the inability to tackle these problems can have disastrous outcomes. There is a need for a fundamental cultural transformation, keeping in mind empathy and support, and genuine student-oriented reforms.

The death of Kushagra Jain, along with the preceding tragedies, illustrates a critical necessity for systemic reflection. BITS Pilani must address the foundational campus culture that may be exacerbating student distress. In the pursuit of excellence, an institute cannot overlook situations because these could only vitiate the environment.

OPEN SPACE >>

Encroachment by law: Goa's comunidade crisis deepens

The recent amendment to the Code of Comunidades, pushed through by the Pramod Sawant government, has ignited a firestorm of controversy across Goa. By inserting Article 372-B, the government has created an unprecedented mechanism to regularise illegal houses built on age-old village commons. The Opposition has rightly called out the amendment for what it is: a backdoor attempt to convert unlawful occupation into legal ownership, thereby rewarding encroachers and punishing the rightful custodians of comunidade lands. The insertion of Article 372-B has weaponised silence. If comunidade attorneys do not respond within 45 days, their silence is deemed as consent. This is a dangerous distortion of due process and a clear violation of property law. Moreover, it contradicts landmark Supreme Court rulings that prohibit the regularisation of illegal constructions on common lands. The ecological fallout is equally alarming. With land use "corrections" under the TCP Act, vast swathes of agricultural and orchard land — over 17 lakh sqm — have already been converted into settlements. The courts must intervene to uphold the sanctity of comunidade lands and the rule of law.

EVERETTE ASSIS TELLES, Margao

So, who's selling Goa's land?

The "Goans are selling" narrative is an alibi. To avoid accountability for bad governance and crony capitalism



FREDERICK NORONHA

Frederick Noronha, besides writing, also publishes books

When Goa complains about the many unwelcome changes taking place here, our benighted political class is often quick to turn around and promptly say: "But who is selling the land?" Is this argument realistic, legit and true, or just an alibi? Is the average Goan really responsible for the mess Goa is in?

This issue is complex and important. It reaches the heart of the debates over Goa's transformation. How we understand it will determine the manner in which we judge Goan society.

From a politician's point of view, the answer is simple. Even simplistic: "The Goans are selling their own land." This argument is often used to deflect blame. It suggests that if Goans are themselves selling land to 'outsiders', then they are complicit in the rapid, often reckless, 'development' of the region is seeing.

In such a situation, land speculators, 'outsiders', or governments cannot be blamed alone. On the surface, this may sound like a reasonable point. But, look deeper and it's easy to realise that it oversimplifies the situation. It conveniently ignores a much deeper reality. Context really matters.

As Kenneth Noland, the 20th century American painter, once put it: "For me, context is the key. From that comes the understanding of everything." In other words, context gives meaning to information.

To blame "Goans" as a whole is misleading. Specific individuals have opted to sell their land. This is often the case with those who own, or have inherited, large tracts of prime land. We've seen controversial projects come up in such areas. The heating up of the Goan land market, ever since the CHOGM Retreat and the spurt of tourism in the 1980s (which got more intense with time, and many politicians doubling up as realtors), has made this seem like a tempting deal to some.

Many sellers are absentee landlords, Daizpora Goans, or old elite families. They currently have little day-to-day connection to Goa. The trajectory of Goan politics, especially since the 1960s, has converted them into a politically-disempowered "subaltern elite". One that has the past clout and reputation, but little political influence left.

Average Goans, especially tenants, mundkar families, or low-income locals,

Ordinary Goans cannot be held responsible for the destruction of our environment and communities. To blame them ducks an understanding of the systemic forces working on Goa



often don't own land to begin with. They have little say in such transactions.

But that is not all. There's another side to this story. Why are these individuals selling out?

Economic pressure, lack of opportunities, the rising cost of living, the threat of losing their lands to encroachers, and the collapse of traditional livelihoods — farming, fishing, toddy-tapping — can make it risky to hold on to ancestral properties. In addition, there are also inheritance and partition issues. Families with members abroad often find it easier to sell than manage or develop property jointly.

Hostile land laws further squeeze these sections. From misused mundkar claims to the recent Escheats, Forfeiture and Bona Vacantia Act, a name which some politicians also stumble while pronouncing.

(For the few who might not know by now, The Goa Escheats, Forfeiture and Bona Vacantia Act, 2024, allows the state government to formally assume control — after a speedy inquiry, public notice, and procedure — of land, buildings, or other property in Goa when the rightful owner has died without legal heirs, abandoned it or left it unclaimed. This law's title comes from the legal doctrines involving escheat (inheritance lapsing to the State), forfeiture (confiscation when unclaimed), and bona vacantia (ownerless property).)

For many, the decisions they take are based on a lack of choice rather than greed.

Who enables and benefits from this? Often the state apparatus itself. Including politicians, bureaucrats and real estate lobbies. These have a key role in facilitating the process.

Not surprisingly, this is done through a series of routes: (i) weak or manipulated zoning laws (ii) corruption and regulatory loopholes (iii) skewed infrastructure development that raises land prices in targeted areas. Such changes benefit a narrow few. Among them are politically-connected builders, brokers, and 'developers' (both Goan and

from beyond).

We need to remind ourselves that the state is supposed to govern for the collective good, not just enable private deals. Blaming individuals for selling land is like blaming citizens for climate change. Yes, in doing so, we can ignore fossil fuel companies. Individual choices do exist, but the system often enables and even rewards harmful behaviour.

The average Goan has little political or economic power to influence large-scale change. They are being displaced and priced-out of their own localities, as noticeable in any area getting gentrified. Take a look at Assagao, Anjuna-Vagator, Moira, Panjim's "Lat in Quarter" Fontainhas, Dona Paula or Parra. There is hardly any public consultation on mega projects and land conversions.

So, the "Goans are selling" narrative is an alibi. To avoid accountability for bad governance and crony capitalism. It can divide public opinion and sower protest. Likewise, it is most helpful in shifting the blame from the State to the individual.

Some Goans are indeed selling ancestral land (or even that they don't own). But that does not mean that Goa is selling itself out. Ordinary Goans cannot be held responsible for the destruction of our environment and communities. To blame them ducks an understanding of the systemic forces working on Goa. Above all, it is an abdication of political responsibility.

('Systemic forces' refer to the big, built-in influences in society that quietly reshape how people live and what choices or chances they get. These include the economy, politics, culture or social traditions. This isn't about one person's decision or a single event. These "rules of the system" affect many people in similar ways, often without them even noticing.)

Who profits from these sales? Who writes the laws? Who decides what gets built and where? Till we answer such questions, blaming the average Goan amounts to building a convenient myth.

THE INBOX >>

Between student suicides and parents' dreams

Most parents have the vision to make themselves proud to see their children grow their careers brighter by investing in higher education, at times even drawing educational loans. Children on the other hand, support the parents by working hard to get distinction results to meet parents' dreams. But with four deaths within a year at one of the top institute - BITS Pilani, Goa finds rest of the parents in a hardcore trauma to think, is my child next? Some study speaks about "most of the root causes of these suicides are the lack of encouragement and support from family members, both financially and mentally. Most parents are looking for top returns on their investment and get obsessed with marks as they approach the final years, aiming to see their child have a top-notch job or position, while some may argue — there could be other reasons such as addiction to drugs, etc. Sad though, but where do the parents stand?

GASTON DIAS, Sazora

Infra check needed before approving mega projects

This is with reference to the report, "Mega housing projects in Betalbatim draw local ire - The Goan Everyday - August 18, 2025." One can understand the fears of the villagers of Betalbatim and it was good to see the Betalbatim gram sabha members coming out to oppose mega housing projects in the village. Limited infrastructure such as roads, power, water supply need to be taken into account when such mega projects are planned. But somehow the authorities don't seem to understand. And especially when it is a village the authorities need to think twice as it will also

Stop mindless giveaway of comunidade land

It was really unfortunate for the Chicalim and Chicalona comunidades to issue a statement supporting the government in legalising illegal houses on comunidade land! The statement included the words "To Fill Coffers" Seems like like political parties, corrupt ministers/bureaucrats etc have the same aim today "To Fill Coffers" with no care whatsoever as to the negative effects on Goa and its posterity! The term "Goan" is not clearly defined and hence these comunidade spokespeople should stop misusing the term "Goan" to justify their controversial actions. It's common knowledge that there are corrupt politicians (past / present) who have strong ties to specific comunidade authorities in Goa, which is the reason for the mess we see in the system today. I felt that when the Goa Govt passed this bill, some ministers whose very political survival depended on these comunidade illegalities, had already some sort of understanding with some comunidade authorities; hence such public statements by specific comunidades was to be expected. I hope these gaunkars who truly love Goa stand up and stop all this mindless giveaway of the comunidade land which has been preserved by our forefathers for many generations.

ARWIN MESQUITA, Colva

affect the environment and ecosystem of the region. Even in cities like Mumbai, redevelopment permissions are granted left, right & centre even though the infrastructure remains the same, as such there is no scope for expanding the infrastructure.

MELVILLE X D'SOUZA, Mumbai

Wastage of food served as meals cannot be justified

There is an old tradition to serve meals to devotees and public alike on specific days of the week, all days in the auspicious month in the year for which authorities / organisers get contribution generously and this practice is mostly prevailing at religious places



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(mostly in temples). The meals served while sitting down on the floor or on the tables and those cooking themselves are putting items on the plate in large quantities as they are tired and eager to finish tasks fast. There is heavy wastage of eatables that are left over in the plate in the process as children are not able to consume all and many leave it on one pretext or another. The same scenario is witnessed in parties where wastage is glorified to show financial status. The food so wasted could have been very well diverted, given to shelter homes or such needy places.

BHALCHANDRA VS PRIOLKAR, Margao

The Catholic Church is the world's largest NGO

The Catholic Church operates the world's largest non-governmental system of schools and healthcare facilities. Globally, Catholic institutions serve millions of students and patients. Over 62 million students are enrolled in primary and secondary schools. Healthcare forms the bedrock of the church with 5,000 hospitals, 10,000 orphanages and 18,000 clinics, 10,500 creches, 3,000 rehabilitation centres. Besides, the churches run 33,000 homes for the sick, dying and destitutes, including 550 leprosy care homes. Caritas Internationalis, the charity arm of the Catholic church, is the second largest aid provider of the world after Red Cross, providing humanitarian emergency relief during natural calamities and disasters. The Society of Saint Vincent de Paul is a large international charitable organization with a significant global footprint. They work in partnership with indigenous families, providing them with rations and financial aid among other things.

ROBERT CASTELLINO, Calangute

FUELING INDIA@79: HOW MSMES BECAME THE POWERHOUSE OF A NEW ECONOMIC ERA

OPINION

REKHA SHARMA



The story of India's economic resilience and its ambitions to emerge as a \$5 trillion economy cannot be told without acknowledging the vital role of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs). Often called the "growth engine" of the nation, MSMEs contribute over 30% to India's GDP, nearly half of its exports, and employ over 11 crore people. Yet, for decades, these enterprises were constrained by red tape, lack of formal recognition, inadequate access to credit, and outdated technology.

Under the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the MSME sector has undergone unprecedented transformation — both in spirit and structure. The government's reforms have not been piecemeal fixes; they represent a holistic shift to-

ward formalization, digital empowerment, technological advancement, and inclusive entrepreneurship.

It is important to highlight the glaring negligence of the opposition parties, who for years ignored the urgent need for policy reforms in the MSME sector. Their lack of vision and failure to act left millions of MSMEs struggling under archaic regulations and systemic barriers. The sector, vital for India's economic fabric, suffered immensely due to their shortsightedness and political inertia. In stark contrast, it is Prime Minister Modi's government that has taken bold strides to reshape the MSME landscape with progressive policies that truly empower these enterprises and unlock their full potential.

FROM INFORMAL TO FORMAL — THE DIGITAL LEAP

One of the most significant game changers has been the launch of the Udyam Registration Portal (URP) in July 2020. In a country where form-filling was once synonymous with queues and paper trails, URP is fully online, paperless, and based on self-declaration. It gives MSMEs a unique identity and unlocks eligibility for

government schemes without bureaucratic hurdles.

Recognizing that millions of Informal Micro Enterprises (IMEs) lacked PAN or GST registration, the Udyam Assist Platform (UAP) was introduced in January 2023 in collaboration with SIDBI. This innovative formalization initiative not only eases doing business but also integrates these enterprises into the broader financial ecosystem, making them visible to lenders and markets alike.

DIGITAL INDIA MEETS MSMES

The Modi government's MSME strategy has embedded digital adoption at its core. Enterprises registered on URP can directly link with the Government e-Marketplace (GeM) to participate in transparent procurement. MSME Global Mart Portal offers a dedicated B2B platform to connect with domestic and international buyers. The PM Vishwakarma Scheme takes this further by incentivizing artisans and craftspeople to embrace digital payments. Even a modest cashback of Re. 1 per eligible transaction builds habits that bring traditional trade into the modern digital economy, fostering both trust and traceability.

REDEFINING MSMES FOR GROWTH

In the Union Budget 2025, the definition of MSMEs was revised — investment limits increased by 2.5 times and turnover thresholds doubled. This reform is far more than a statistical



tweak; it allows enterprises to scale without fear of losing benefits, enabling them to access larger contracts, better financing, and invest in technology upgrades. India's focus on Make in India and Skill India is not just policy—it is practice. For instance, Haryana-based Parashar Future Technologies is producing world-class, finest quality prosthetics that are now being exported globally, showcasing how MSMEs can drive India's self-reliance and global standing.

TECHNOLOGY AND SKILLS — THE NEW CURRENCY

To address the technology gap, the Ministry of MSME has established 27 Technology Centres (Tool Rooms & Technical Institutions) across sectors

like engineering, plastics, electronics, and auto parts. These centres not only offer access to state-of-the-art tools but also conduct skill development programmes to prepare MSMEs for Industry 4.0. The MSME Champions Scheme integrates flagship initiatives like the ZED Certification Scheme for sustainable manufacturing and the Digital MSME Scheme to push enterprises toward greener, smarter, and more competitive operations. Entrepreneurship Skill Development Programmes complement this by offering basic and advanced business training, with Udyam Registration now linked to National Career Services, e-Shram, and Skill India Digital Portal — creating a tightly woven network of skills, jobs, and enterprise support.

FINANCING THE FUTURE

Finance remains the lifeline of any enterprise. The government's Budget 2025 announcements have boldly addressed this by:

- Doubling startup guarantee coverage from 10 crore to 20 crore.

- Extending term loan credit guarantees of up to 20 crore for well-run exporter MSMEs.

- Creating a new Fund of Funds with 10,000 crore to catalyze venture investments.

- Launching a special scheme for 5 lakh women, SC, and ST first-time entrepreneurs with term loans up to 2 crore over the next five years.

These measures ensure that capital reaches not just the established but also the aspirational — democratis-

ing entrepreneurship.

A FEDERAL APPROACH WITH LOCAL EMPOWERMENT

While promotion and development of enterprises remain a State subject, the Modi government's role as a catalyst is unmistakable. By designing policies that States can adapt, and by building national-level infrastructure — digital, financial, and technical — the Centre has empowered States and UTs to nurture their own MSME ecosystems.

THE BIGGER PICTURE

This transformation of the MSME sector is not accidental — it's the product of political will, policy coherence, and execution discipline. Prime Minister Modi's governance philosophy has

always been rooted in "Minimum Government, Maximum Governance", and the MSME reforms embody this ethos: reducing compliance burden, enabling self-certification, and empowering entrepreneurs to compete globally. The journey is far from over. But the foundations have been laid for an MSME sector that is formal, digitally integrated, technologically advanced, financially empowered, and globally competitive. In many ways, this is the silent revolution of India's economic story — where small enterprises dream big and the government ensures those dreams have a fair shot at reality.

In essence, PM Modi's MSME reforms are more than administrative changes — they are an investment in India's entrepreneurial spirit. The results will be felt not just in GDP numbers, but in the millions of jobs created, the global markets penetrated, and the innovations born in workshops and small offices across the country. This is the true testament to progressive governance, a stark contrast to the lackluster approach of the opposition, who failed to provide any meaningful support or reform to this crucial sector. The Modi government's commitment and actionable policies have changed the narrative for MSMEs in India, empowering them to become the growth engine of a new economic era.

Rekha Sharma, Member of Parliament, Rajya Sabha, and former Chairperson, National Commission for Women

Nuclear brinkmanship as statecraft: Pakistan's reckless posturing and the case for disarmament

OPINION

PRANJAL CHATURVEDI AND
RUCHIKA KUMARI

Pakistan Army Chief, Field Marshal Asim Munir while addressing the Pakistani diaspora in the United States, on August 10 said, "We are a nuclear nation, if we think we are going down, we'll take half the world down with us". The Indian government expressed its displeasure through MEA Spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal, who responded on August 11, 2025 (Monday), "It is regrettable that such a remark has been made from the friendly third country", further stating Asim Munir's latest "nuclear sabre-rattling is Pakistan's stock-in-trade".

Giving the benefit of the doubt, it may be a coincidence that Asim Munir's threatening remarks came just a day after the 80th anniversary of the Nuclear attack on Nagasaki (Japan). It was dismaying for the global community to notice that on the one hand, Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba urged all the countries to work towards nuclear disarmament; on the other hand, the Army Chief of Pakistan, a controlled state, 'Pakistan', is

threatening to take half the world down.

In the United States, the same voices are looking at Asim Munir's statement with great dismay. Ex. US Official Michael Rubin, expressing his displeasure with Munir's statement, described Munir as "Osama bin Laden in a suit". From Britain (a NATO ally), author David Vance condemned Asim Munir's nuclear threats, calling them "absolutely scandalous and disgraceful". Further, Vance stated that he would like to see the "US break off diplomatic relations with Pakistan until it starts to behave like a civilised country, which it hasn't in a long time."

NUCLEAR DOCTRINE: BUILT ON INSTABILITY AND BLUSTER:

The pronouncement by General Asim Munir transcends the strategic ambiguity of nuclear deterrence and enters the realm of explicit, maximalist threat-making. The core principle of nuclear deterrence is Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD),

Nuclear deterrence is based on the idea that the cost of a nuclear first strike is so high that no country would contemplate initiating a nuclear strike. General Munir's statement invokes a dangerous doctrine of "full-spectrum deterrence" or a "scorched-earth" policy in the event of a perceived existential collapse. The rhetoric of General Munir suggests a departure from rational calculation and a resort to apocalyptic, catastrophic measures. Such irresponsible posturing of a nuclear-armed state is inherently destabilising and disturbing global norms. It replaces the logic of deterrence with an unpredictable calculus of last resort.

Apart from the rhetoric and lamenting on one account, Asim Munir appeared to have some substance. Munir remarked, "India is a shining Mercedes coming on a highway like a Ferrari, but we are a dump truck full of gravel. If the truck hits the car, who is going to be the loser?" Looking at Pakistan's state of economy and political situation vis-à-vis India's fast growth rate, there is no doubt that the dump-truck analogy drawn by the general of Pakistan has substance. Just, General Munir missed that India, a shining Mercedes, is guarded by BrahMos, Agni-V, Nirbhay, Pralay, etc.

The rhetoric was meant for his international vis-à-vis domestic audience. The



Pakistan Army Chief, Field Marshal Asim Munir

Nuclear weapons are a shield for Pakistan's adventurism. Pakistan is a country with terrorist links and weak command and control. On the one hand, Pakistan harbours groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed, raising fears of a nuclear-terror nexus; on the other hand, frequent military coups increase risks of unauthorised launches or theft.

health of Pakistan is in a dilapidated state. Military-controlled Pakistan, having a total debt of Rs 76.01 trillion, with a GDP growth

rate of 3.2% and grappling with political instability, has to have some strong projections for diverting the attention of the domestic populace. The statement appears to aim at consolidating power and deflecting internal criticism domestically. Internationally, the statement appears to aim at raising an alarm bell through nuclear blackmail and compel international actors to intervene in the regional conflict. For India, it's signalling a readiness to escalate beyond rational boundaries. India called out this nuclear rhetoric and gave a proportionate, precise, and targeted response through 'Operation Sindoor' after the Pahalgam terror attacks. But the statement of General Munir appears to do more harm than good for Pakistan. This solidifies the global perception of Pakistan as an irresponsible nuclear state, with a risk of further isolating Pakistan.

The most critical danger of rhetoric lies in the potential miscalculation fostering a 'security dilemma'. When the state abandons cautious language and adopts a tone of brinkmanship, it creates a situation where conventional conflict may spiral out of control. It also shapes people's perceptions about war, making citizens warmongers.

THE CASE FOR PAKISTAN'S NUCLEAR DISARMAMENT:

The nuclear-armed countries are governed by elected leaders, but Pakistan is not under civilian control. The

nuclear program of Pakistan is monopolised by its military, i.e., Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) and Army Strategic Forces Command (ASFC). The past track record of Pakistan shows an irresponsible approach towards nuclear secrets. On February 04, 2004, Abdul Qadeer Khan, the scientist of Pakistan, acknowledged that during the past two decades, he had secretly provided North Korea, Libya, and Iran with nuclear secrets for making nuclear weapons. Mr. Khan was granted a pardon shortly after his confession on national television by the then-president, Gen. Pervez Musharraf. The question stands tall: Would the world tolerate an irresponsible nuclear state threatening global annihilation?

Nuclear weapons are a shield for Pakistan's adventurism. Pakistan is a country with terrorist links and weak command and control. On the one hand, Pakistan harbours groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed, raising fears of a nuclear-terror nexus; on the other hand, frequent military coups increase risks of unauthorised launches or theft. Pakistan is not a signatory to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, 1968 (NPT), but Pakistan violates the very foundational principles of the treaty, rendering humanity

at risk. While 122 countries endorsed the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, 2017 (TPNW), Pakistan's open threat of annihilation defies the very objective of the treaty.

The international community should come forward and condemn the statement made by Army Chief Asim Munir in unequivocal terms. The Financial Action Task Force (FATF) should blacklist Pakistan unless it dismantles terror networks. All the global aid to Pakistan must be conditioned on Pakistan adopting a no-first-use nuclear policy. The UNSC should demand Pakistan's nuclear transparency vis-à-vis the responsible nuclear powers, i.e., India, the US, France, and the UK, and should put pressure on Pakistan to act and speak like a responsible nuclear power.

A military-ruled country sponsoring terrorism, with its military chief threatening to erase half of the world, has no moral or strategic right to retain nuclear weapons. The choice in front of the global community is clear — either to act before Pakistan's brinkmanship turns prophecy into doomsday or to be under constant risk born from Pakistan's instability.

Pranjali and Ruchika are Doctoral Research Fellows at Bennett University (Times of India Group)

CUT CANCER RISK: MOVE MORE, LIVE SMART



DR. LALIT MOHAN SHARMA

Cancer is one of the leading causes of death worldwide, but an increasing body of evidence suggests that many forms of cancer are preventable. While some risk factors such as age and genetics are beyond our control, a significant percentage of cancer cases can be attributed to modifiable lifestyle choices. Among these, diet, exercise, and general lifestyle habits play a major role. Adopting a healthy lifestyle doesn't guarantee immunity, but it can significantly reduce your risk and improve your overall quality of life.

1. THE POWER OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

Regular physical activity is one of the most effective ways to lower cancer risk. Exercise helps regulate hormones, reduce inflammation, boost the immune system, and maintain a healthy weight—all of which contribute to cancer prevention. According to the American Cancer Society, adults should aim for at least 150 minutes of moderate-intensity or 75 minutes

of vigorous-intensity exercise each week.

Some ways exercise reduces cancer risk include:

- Lowering estrogen and insulin levels. High levels of these hormones are linked to breast and colon cancers.
- Enhancing digestion and gut health: Physical activity helps move food through the digestive tract, lowering the risk of colon cancer.
- Boosting immune function: A strong immune system can detect and eliminate abnormal cells before they develop into cancer.

Activities such as brisk walking, cycling, swimming, strength training, and even gardening can contribute to meeting your exercise goals. Consistency is key—making movement a regular part of your daily routine is more beneficial than occasional intense workouts.

2. MAINTAINING A HEALTHY WEIGHT

Obesity is a major risk factor for several types of cancer, including breast (postmenopausal), endometrial, esophageal, kidney, pancreatic, and liver cancer. Excess body fat can lead to chronic inflammation and hormone imbalances, both of which can encourage cancer development.

To manage weight effectively:

- Combine a balanced diet with regular physical activity.
- Focus on portion control and avoid emotional eating.
- Limit high-calorie, low-nutrient foods and beverages.



ages.

Losing even a small amount of weight if you're overweight or obese can make a significant difference in cancer risk and overall health.

3. EAT A CANCER-PREVENTIVE DIET

What you eat matters. A plant-based, nutrient-rich diet provides antioxidants and phytochemicals that help protect cells from damage. While no single

food can prevent cancer, the overall pattern of your diet is crucial.

Here are some dietary guidelines to reduce cancer risk:

- Eat more fruits and vegetables: Aim for at least 5 servings per day. They're packed with vitamins, minerals, fiber, and antioxidants.
- Choose whole grains over refined grains: Whole grains contain more fiber, which may help lower the



risk of colorectal cancer.

- Limit red and processed meats: Consumption of processed meats (like bacon, sausages, and deli meats) is linked to a higher risk of colorectal cancer. Red meat should be limited to no more than 18 ounces per week.
- Avoid sugary drinks and excess sugar: High sugar intake contributes to obesity, a known cancer risk factor.
- Stay hydrated: Drinking water instead of sugary



Smoking is responsible for about 22% of cancer deaths and is linked to at least 15 types of cancer, including lung, throat, mouth, pancreas, and bladder cancers.

or alcoholic drinks supports healthy digestion and weight management.

4. AVOID TOBACCO IN ALL FORMS

Tobacco use remains the leading cause of preventable cancer worldwide. Smoking is responsible for about 22% of cancer deaths and is linked to at least 15 types of cancer, including lung, throat, mouth, pancreas, and bladder cancers.

Even if you've smoked for

years, quitting at any age can significantly reduce your risk. Avoiding second-hand smoke is also important, especially for children and non-smoking adults.

5. LIMIT ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION

Alcohol is classified as a Group 1 carcinogen by the International Agency for Research on Cancer. Even moderate drinking increases the risk of several cancers, including breast, liver, and colorectal cancers. If

you choose to drink, do so in moderation: no more than one drink per day for women and two for men.

6. PROTECT YOUR SKIN

Skin cancer is one of the most common—and preventable—types of cancer. Protecting your skin from excessive sun exposure is critical:

- Use broad-spectrum sunscreen with SPF 30 or higher.
- Wear protective clothing and hats when outdoors.
- Avoid tanning beds and sunlamps.

7. GET SCREENED AND STAY INFORMED

While lifestyle changes are crucial, early detection through regular screening is equally important. Talk to your healthcare provider about appropriate cancer screenings based on your age, gender, and family history. Screenings for breast, cervical, colorectal, and skin cancer can detect abnormalities early, when they're most treatable.

Preventing cancer isn't about a single magic bullet—it's about consistent, long-term lifestyle choices. By incorporating regular physical activity, maintaining a healthy weight, eating a balanced diet, and avoiding harmful substances like tobacco and excessive alcohol, you can take control of your health and significantly reduce your risk. Prevention is a powerful tool, and every positive change you make adds up to a stronger defense against cancer.

Cultivating calm: Strategies to keep anxiety at bay



DR. SHOBHITA JAIN

In our fast-paced, interconnected world, anxiety has become an increasingly common companion for many. While a certain level of stress is a natural part of life, chronic anxiety can be debilitating, impacting our thoughts, emotions, and physical well-being. Understanding mental health and proactively adopting strategies to manage anxiety isn't just about coping; it's about thriving.

WHAT IS ANXIETY, ANYWAY?

At its core, anxiety is our body's natural response to stress. It's a feeling of fear or apprehension about what's to come. For instance, feeling anxious before a major presentation or a significant life event is completely normal. This type of anxiety is often temporary and can

even be motivating.

However, when these feelings become excessive, persistent, and interfere with daily life, it might be an anxiety disorder. Common types include Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD), Panic Disorder, Social Anxiety Disorder, and phobias. Recognizing the difference is the first step toward seeking appropriate support.

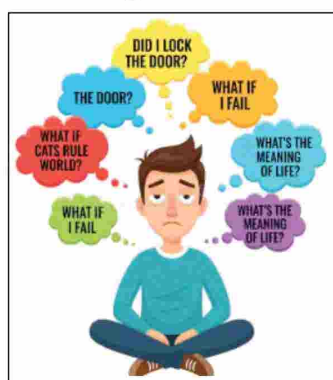
THE INTERCONNECTEDNESS OF MIND AND BODY

It's crucial to understand that your mental and physical health are deeply intertwined. Chronic anxiety doesn't just manifest as racing thoughts; it can lead to physical symptoms like headaches, digestive issues, muscle tension, and sleep disturbances. Conversely, neglecting your physical health can exacerbate anxiety. This holistic view is fundamental to managing it effectively.

PRACTICAL STRATEGIES TO KEEP ANXIETY AWAY

Proactive steps are key to building resilience against anxiety. Here are actionable strategies you can integrate into your daily life:

1. Master Mindful Breathing



One of the quickest ways to calm your nervous system is through controlled breathing. When anxious, our breathing becomes shallow and rapid. Practicing deep, diaphragmatic breathing can reverse this.

4-7-8 Breathing: Inhale deeply through your nose for 4 counts, hold your breath for 7 counts, and exhale slowly through your mouth for 8 counts. Repeat this several times.

Box Breathing: Inhale for 4, hold for 4, exhale for 4, hold for 4. Visualize drawing a box with your breath.

Regular practice, even for just a few minutes daily, can significantly reduce your baseline anxiety levels.

2. Embrace Regular Physical Activity

Exercise is a powerful anxiety reducer. It releases endorphins, natural mood elevators, and helps you burn off nervous energy.

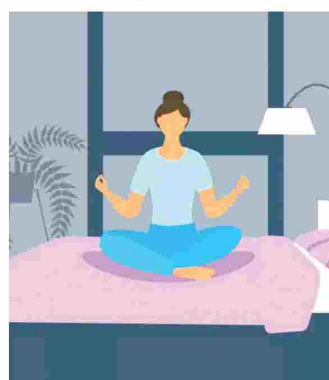
Aim for at least 30 minutes of moderate-intensity exercise most days of the week. This could be brisk walking, jogging, cycling, swimming, or dancing.

Consider calming exercises

like yoga or Tai Chi, which combine physical movement with mindfulness and breathing.

3. Prioritize Quality Sleep Sleep deprivation can heighten anxiety and make it harder to cope with stress. Make sleep a non-negotiable part of your routine.

Establish a consistent sleep schedule: Go to bed and wake up around the same time each day, even on weekends.



Create a relaxing bedtime routine: This could involve reading, a warm bath, or gentle stretching.

Optimize your sleep environment: Keep your bedroom dark, quiet, and cool. Limit screen time before bed: The blue light from devices can interfere with melatonin production.

4. Nourish Your Body Wisely

What you eat impacts your mood and energy levels.

Opt for a balanced diet rich in fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean proteins. Limit caffeine and sugar, which can trigger or worsen anxiety symptoms.

Stay hydrated. Dehydration can affect your mood and concentration.

Consider anxiety-reducing foods: Some research suggests omega-3 fatty acids (found in fatty fish), probiotics (in yogurt, kimchi), and magnesium (in leafy greens, nuts) may play a role

in mood regulation.

5. Practice Mindfulness and Meditation

Mindfulness is the practice of being fully present in the moment without judgment. Meditation is a formal way to cultivate this.

Start small: Even 5-10 minutes of meditation daily can make a difference. Guided meditations are excellent for beginners.

Practice mindful eating, walking, or listening: Pay full attention to the sensations, sights, and sounds around you. This draws your focus away from anxious thoughts about the past or future.

6. Limit Exposure to Triggers

Identify what situations, news, or even people tend to heighten your anxiety, and then find ways to limit your exposure or change how you interact with them. This might include:

- Reducing social media use
- Taking breaks from news consumption
- Setting boundaries with demanding individuals

7. Connect with Others

Social connection is a powerful buffer against anxiety. Isolation can worsen feelings of fear and worry.

Spend time with supportive friends and family. Engage in community activities or volunteer work.

Don't be afraid to reach out when you're struggling.

8. Set Realistic Goals and Manage Time

Overwhelm is a significant anxiety trigger. Breaking down large tasks into smaller, manageable steps can make them feel less daunting.

Prioritize tasks: Focus on what's most important first.

Learn to say "no": Don't overcommit yourself.

Take regular breaks to prevent burnout.

9. Challenge Negative Thought Patterns

Anxiety often thrives on catastrophic thinking and worst-case scenarios. Learning to identify and challenge these thoughts is crucial.

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) techniques can be very effective here. Ask yourself: "Is this thought truly factual? What's the evidence for and against it? What's a more balanced perspective?"

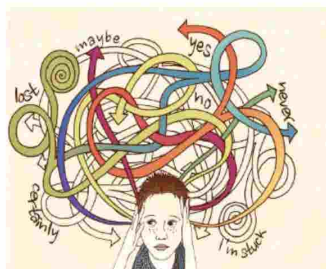
Practice gratitude: Shifting your focus to what you're thankful for can reframe your perspective.

WHEN TO SEEK PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT

While these self-help strategies are incredibly powerful, it's vital to recognize when professional help might be needed. If anxiety symptoms are persistent, overwhelming, interfere significantly with your daily life, or if you experience panic attacks, consider reaching out to a mental health professional.

Therapists, counselors, and psychiatrists can provide personalized strategies, including therapy (like CBT or exposure therapy) or medication, if appropriate. Remember, seeking help is a sign of strength, not weakness.

Cultivating calm in an anxious world is an ongoing journey, not a destination. By consistently integrating these strategies into your life, you build a stronger foundation for your mental well-being, allowing you to navigate life's challenges with greater resilience and peace of mind.



POSTPARTUM DIET: IMPORTANCE OF A BALANCED DIET FOR HEALING AND BREASTFEEDING

DR. ANKURITA GUPTA

The postpartum period is a critical time for a new mother's physical recovery and emotional well-being. After childbirth, a woman's body goes through significant changes as it heals from labor and delivery, while also adapting to the demands of breastfeeding. During this time, proper nutrition is essential. A balanced postpartum diet plays a vital role in promoting recovery, replenishing nutrients lost during childbirth, and supporting milk production for breastfeeding. Unfortunately, many new mothers overlook the importance of nutrition due to fatigue, stress, or the overwhelming responsibilities of caring for a newborn. However, making intentional dietary choices can significantly influence both short- and long-term health for mothers and their babies.

The body undergoes considerable physical strain during pregnancy and delivery, which depletes stores of essential nutrients like iron, calcium, and folate. A balanced diet can help replenish these nutrients and promote tissue repair, muscle recovery, and overall energy levels. Protein is particularly important during the postpartum period, as it aids in the healing of tissues and supports the immune system. Sources such as lean meats, eggs, dairy products, legumes, and nuts provide the necessary amino acids required for recovery. Simi-



larly, healthy fats — found in foods like avocados, nuts, seeds, and only fish play a crucial role in hormone regulation and maintaining skin and joint health.

Iron is another key nutrient that postpartum mothers must prioritize. Blood loss during childbirth can lead to low iron levels, causing fatigue, weakness, and even anemia. Consuming iron-rich foods such as red meat, spinach, lentils, and fortified cereals, along with vitamin C to enhance absorption, is critical. Calcium is equally important, especially for breastfeeding mothers, as the body transfers calcium to the baby through breast milk. Dairy products, leafy greens, and fortified plant-based milks can help meet this increased calcium demand and support bone health for both mother and child.

For breastfeeding mothers,

a balanced diet is essential not only for their own health but also for the quality and quantity of breast milk. Breast milk is the baby's primary source of nutrition, especially during the first six months. It is composed of water, carbohydrates, proteins, fats, vitamins, and minerals, all of which are influenced by the mother's diet. While the body does an excellent job of maintaining breast milk quality even when maternal nutrition is suboptimal, prolonged C to enhance absorption, is critical. Calcium is equally important, especially for breastfeeding mothers, as the body transfers calcium to the baby through breast milk. Dairy products, leafy greens, and fortified plant-based milks can help meet this increased calcium demand and support bone health for both mother and child.

Fiber-rich foods such as whole grains, fruits, and vegetables not only provide es-

sential vitamins and minerals but also aid digestion, which can be especially helpful in alleviating postpartum constipation — a common issue for new mothers. Including a variety of colorful fruits and vegetables ensures a wide range of antioxidants and phytonutrients, which help reduce inflammation and support immune function during the healing process. It's also important to limit processed foods, excessive caffeine, and added sugars, as these can contribute to energy crashes, mood swings, and poor nutrient absorption.

In addition to physical recovery, a balanced diet can play a significant role in mental and emotional health. Hormonal changes after childbirth can lead to mood swings or postpartum depression. Nutrients such as omega-3 fatty acids,

vitamin D, magnesium, and B vitamins have been linked to improved mood and cognitive function. Including foods like salmon, walnuts, fortified dairy, and leafy greens can support mental health during this transitional period.

Final Thoughts

The importance of a balanced postpartum diet cannot be overstated. It supports healing, replenishes lost nutrients, aids in maintaining a healthy milk supply, and contributes to both physical and emotional well-being. While adjusting to motherhood can be overwhelming, prioritizing good nutrition is a foundational step in ensuring a healthy start for both mother and baby.

Article attributed to Dr. Ankurita Gupta, Consultant-Dietitian (BAMS, DHNE, PGDWM, HC-I) Apollo Cradle & Children's Hospital, Indrapuram, Delhi.

Revolutionary OPTIC Clinic Redefines Precision Eye Care



TDG NETWORK

Artemis Hospitals unveils the Ocular Profiling & Technology-Based Investigation Clinic (OPTIC) at its Sector 51 campus. This is the first clinic of its kind in the region that will revolutionize how eye disorders are identified. The aim of OPTIC, with some of the best imaging systems in the world, is to identify, track, and treat eye disorders with unparalleled speed and accuracy.

"Our goal is to provide the best medical care possible to the community, and OPTIC is a big step toward that goal. We are bringing together some of the best diagnostic tools from around the world in one place, which will help us make diagnoses faster and more accurately and plan treatments more effectively," Dr. Devlina Chakravarty, Managing Director of Artemis Hospitals, said.

OPTIC, which stands for the Ocular Profiling &

Technology-based Investigation Clinic, is a specialized eye care clinic that can quickly and accurately diagnose a wide range of eye problems. It has everything you need with the latest tools, such as OCT, OCTA, IDRA Dry Eye Workstation, Pentacam, ARGOS Biometry, and Digital Slit Lamp Systems, all in one space. These technologies provide a wealth of detail in images and data that help doctors detect disease sooner and more accurately to avoid complications, and, in some cases, before any symptoms appear.

Early detection is critical to preventing irreversible vision loss with diabetic retinopathy, glaucoma, corneal diseases, cataracts, and retinal diseases. With the ability to conduct highly accurate measurements and obtain very high quality images, a customized treatment can be provided to optimize both short and long term out-

comes. By providing this advanced level of care in Gurugram and surrounding communities, OPTIC effectively eliminates the need for patients to travel long distances to access world class eye care diagnostics and see the best eye care sooner.

Dr. Vishal Arora, Head of Ophthalmology at Artemis Hospitals, said, "With OPTIC, we have built a place that transforms what it means to be precise in ophthalmology. These tools let us give world class care in our own regions, saving patients time and improving long term outcomes. They help us find diseases early and make treatment plans that are very specific to each patient."

The launch of OPTIC is another step forward for Artemis Hospitals in their goal of providing advanced, patient-centered healthcare to the community and raising the standard for eye care in the area.

CAN SUPPLEMENTS REALLY IMPROVE YOUR SKIN? WHAT SCIENCE SAYS



FOOD IS MEDICINE DR. ANISH DESAI

We all want healthy, glowing skin — but can pills or powders actually help? While no supplement can replace sunscreen, a good diet, or your skincare routine, research shows that some oral nutraceuticals (nutrition-based supplements) may give your skin an extra boost.

Supplements with the Most Evidence

Collagen Peptides
Collagen is the protein that keeps skin firm and elastic. Studies show collagen powder can improve hydration, elasticity, and reduce wrinkles after 8-12 weeks.
Tip: Look for hydrolyzed collagen (easier to absorb).

Ceramides
Natural skin lipids (fats) that strengthen your skin barrier. Oral ceramide supplements from wheat or milk improve skin hydration and reduce dryness.
Tip: A good option if you have dry or sensitive skin.

Hyaluronic Acid

A 'water magnet' molecule found naturally in skin. Taking it orally improves hydration and can smooth out fine lines.

Astaxanthin
A red antioxidant from algae (also found in salmon). Improves elasticity, reduces wrinkles, and protects skin from sun damage.

Carotenoids (like Lycopene from Tomatoes)
Natural plant pigments with antioxidant effects. Help skin resist UV damage and redness after sun exposure.
Note: Avoid high-dose beta-carotene if you smoke.

Special Uses
Acne
• Zinc may help reduce pimples (but don't take too much long-term).
• Certain probiotics also show modest acne improvement.

Skin Cancer Prevention
• In high-risk patients (with

frequent non-melanoma skin cancers), nicotinamide (vitamin B3 amide) reduces new spots.

• This is medical prevention — ask your dermatologist first.

Safety Reminders
• Supplements work gradually — most take 2-3 months to show results.
• They should complement, not replace, sunscreen and healthy skincare.
• Always check labels for allergens (fish collagen, wheat ceramides, etc.).
• More is not better: stick to studied doses.

Takeaway
Yes — some supplements really can support your skin. Collagen, ceramides, hyaluronic acid, astaxanthin, and carotenoids have the best cosmetic evidence. For acne, zinc and probiotics may help. For those at very high risk, nicotinamide has strong data for preventing certain skin cancers.

Think of these not as magic pills, but as gentle boosters to your skincare routine. Combine them with sunscreen, a balanced diet, and dermatologist-approved skincare for the best results.

Can Healthcare Financing Fix India's Out-of-Pocket Healthcare Crisis

TDG NETWORK

India's healthcare paradox is stark. On one end, there are world-class hospitals while on the other are financially devastating treatment costs. Despite advances in medical infrastructure and healthcare innovation, India's 48% of total healthcare expenditure remains out of pocket. Subsequently, the medical emergencies translate not just into a health crisis but a financial distress for millions of households. In rural India and even urban settings, sudden hospitalization or critical care often leads to debt, asset liquidation or deferred treatment.

This results into alarming consequences as according to National Health Accounts data, nearly 17% of Indian families incur catastrophic health expenditure annually. As a result, higher healthcare costs are pushing millions into extreme poverty. In tandem, the government has launched Ayushman Bharat and various state insurance schemes, however, the problem remains unsolved.

The Uninsured Population and Coverage Gap
The health insurance market in India is still underpenetrated. Despite the proliferation of insurance products, approximately 38% of India's population lacks

any health insurance which clearly indicates that over 500 million individuals pay entirely out-of-pocket for all medical services. Among these, an estimated 30% i.e. around 40 Cr people are the "missing middle" who earn too much to qualify for subsidized schemes but are unable to afford private premiums.

Due to significantly higher out-of-pocket costs, households face challenges in availing certain treatments that are not covered by standard plans such as cosmetic procedures (INR 10,000- INR 300,000), hair restoration (INR 40,000- INR 150,000 per session, often over INR 1,00,000 yearly), dental care (braces INR 10,000- INR 300,000; root canals INR 4,000- INR 8,000 per tooth) and IVF (INR 100,000- INR 300,000) per cycle, up to INR 500,000+). These costs are fully OOP, delaying or deterring millions from accessing treatments that improve quality of life and well-being.

Rise of Healthcare Financing Solutions
This is where healthcare financing solutions are emerging to fill in the critical gap. Driven by technology and increasing healthcare costs, healthcare financing acts as a catalyst for raising awareness for accessible and affordable care. This leads to a surge in innovative financing so-

lutions including digital payment platforms like no-cost EMIs and instant credit at the point of care; blended finance models and specialized financing for specific healthcare needs to make healthcare more equitable.

The interest-free EMI platforms transform healthcare financing by embedding digital lending directly within provider billing systems. Operating under a subscription model, these platforms allow healthcare providers to absorb the financing cost as a marketing expense. This enables patients to break down large medical bills into easy monthly installments at zero percent interest. With AI-based credit assessments, these platforms grant instant approvals and make the process both quick and accessible. These solutions play an instrumental role in eliminating long waiting periods of insurance and offer instant financial assistance, especially for emergency and other procedures that traditional insurance providers do not cover such as fertility treatments, dental work, bariatric surgery and even cosmetic dermatology.

Expanding Access and Choice
The emergence of healthcare financing opens new avenues for patients for their financial readiness to get treated when and where. This is especially significant in public healthcare

systems which are often overburdened due to lack of resources. By expanding the pool of financial tools, patients get accessibility to treatment in private hospitals and specialty clinics, bridging the gap between public infrastructure limitations and private healthcare availability.

As a result, the missing middle, which earlier postponed surgeries due to exorbitant upfront costs, now opt for timely and quality care, without compromising on the time and standard of the treatment. This turns the reactive healthcare approach to proactive first preventive care approach, allowing healthcare providers to reduce treatment costs and increase affordability and improve patient retention. This creates a win-win for both ends of the healthcare value chain.

Final Thoughts

India's out-of-pocket healthcare crisis is a structural and systemic challenge. On one end, traditional insurance will continue to evolve and expand its reach while healthcare financing is emerging as a complementary force to reshape how Indians plan, access and pay for health services. Hence, the future lies in implementing hybrid models where financing, insurance and digital health converge to ensure patient-centric care.

Attributed to Gaurav Gupta,

Breakthrough Personalized Treatment Preserves Voice in Cancer Patient

TDG NETWORK

A man in his late 50s with advanced laryngopharyngeal cancer, traditionally treated with total laryngectomy and permanent voice loss, underwent a groundbreaking approach by Dr. Mandeep Singh Malhotra at CK Birla Hospital & AOH, Delhi. Using bio-selection, precision oncology, and robotic surgery, the team combined chemotherapy, immunotherapy, and high-dose vitamin C. NGS testing at 4baseCare Genomics identified CCND



and FGFR drivers, enabling targeted drugs Pamigatatinib and Palbociclib. Within three cycles, scans showed dramatic tumor regression. Robotic surgery confirmed no residual cancer, with histopathology validating complete response — preserving the patient's voice and showcasing the power of personalized, precision-driven cancer care. In Dr. Malhotra's words, "This success underscores the potential of personalized medicine in the fight against laryngopharyngeal cancer." Embracing bio-

selection, precision oncology, and robotic surgery optimizes treatment, preserves voices, and enhances survival, marking a significant step towards a brighter future for patients and their families.

Chief Mentor, Art of Healing Cancer
Quote: Dr. Mandeep Singh Malhotra, Chief Mentor, Art of Healing Cancer, expressed, "This journey showcases the transformative power of personalized care, offering hope and paving the way for a new era in the treatment of laryngopharyngeal cancer."

Seven Rounds, Seven Promises: The Marriage Vows

Discover the meaning behind the vows, embrace the true spirit of marriage.



SACRED PULSE
JYOTSNA G BANSAL

In a North Indian Hindu wedding, every round taken around the sacred *Agni* is a promise – from sharing food and well-being to staying lifelong companions – a tradition that ties family values with today's life. This ritual of seven rounds – known as the *Saat Phere* – forms the emotional core of a Hindu wedding ceremony. With *Agni* as witness (*sakshi*), the couple makes sacred promises, confirming their commitment and sincerity to the new relationship they are beginning. Each vow carries deep cultural significance, reflecting values of mutual love, duty and trust that will guide the pair through married life.

THE SEVEN VOWS (SAYINGS/PROMISES) OF THE BRIDE

In context of *Vivaha Samaskara* (Hindu marriage ritual), this usually refers to the **seven vows or promises made by the bride** during the wedding rituals.

1. Whatever *Yagya* (Havan), is performed, my approval/ consent should be taken.
2. If he gives a donation, in that too my consent must be taken.
3. Thirdly, in the three stages of life – childhood, youth and old age – he should take care of me.
4. Fourth, if (he) needs to hide or keeps aside wealth or anything else, then in that too my consent should be taken.
5. Fifth, if cows, bulls, horses or other animals are to be purchased, then in that too my consent should be taken.

6. Sixth, in all the six seasons – Spring, Summer, Rain, Autumn, Hemant and Winter – he should take care of me.

7. Seventh, among companions and friends, if you neither mock me nor speak harsh words, then I shall come to your left side.

THE FOUR VOWS (SAYINGS/PROMISES) OF THE BRIDEGROOM

- First, she should not go to the forest.
- Second, she should not appear before an intoxicated man.
- Third, she should not visit her father's house without my consent.
- Fourth, if she does not disobey my (husband's) command in accordance with the scriptures, I shall accept her at my left side.



RECEPTIONS & MODERN TOUCHES

During the *pheras*, a priest recites Sanskrit mantras guiding them through each step. Many older generation couples followed the motions without fully grasping the Sanskrit, but today it's common for priests or families to explain each vow's meaning in the local language or even English.

Modern couples, especially in urban settings, increasingly view these vows as mutual promises rather than strictly gender-defined roles – some-



times even personalizing or reinterpreting them to fit their relationship. "We didn't understand the ancient words at first, but once we learned the meaning, it felt incredibly special," says one newlywed, reflecting on how knowing the vows' significance made the ritual even more poignant.



In North India, the seven marriage vows are more than a wedding formality – they are a blueprint for married life grounded in love, trust, respect and support.

"These vows are the core of a Hindu wedding without which the marriage is incomplete."

Disclaimer: The marriage vows described here reflect common cultural practices in North Indian Hindu weddings. Explanations are for general understanding,

not strict religious guidance and may vary by region, family or tradition and individual choices and the vows may be explained differently by priests or elders.

Jyotsna G Bansal is a Reiki Grandmaster, Crystals & Spiritual Guide, Numerologist, IKS & Vedic Learner & Seeker. Author, Researcher, Counselor. She has presented research papers at various Colleges & Universities including DU, CSU. Her Research Papers & Articles are published in International Journals & Magazines. Contact her on 98113-43119 (WhatsApp only)

Pilgrimages as Journeys of the Soul

TGD NETWORK

A pilgrimage is much more than a physical journey to a sacred destination – it is a profound inner voyage of faith, reflection, and transformation. Across cultures and religions, the tradition of pilgrimage has always symbolized the human desire to connect with the divine, seek blessings, and rediscover purpose in life. Whether it is the Char Dham Yatra in India, the Camino de Santiago in Spain, or the Hajj in Mecca, the essence remains the same: it is a path that unites the body, mind, and soul.

The act of traveling to a sacred place often demands effort, patience, and endurance. Long walks, challenging terrains, or simple living during the journey remind pilgrims of the value of humility and discipline. These hardships are not seen as obstacles but as stepping stones toward spiritual purification. The external journey mirrors the inner one – shedding ego, pride, and material distractions while embracing surrender and simplicity.

Pilgrimages also serve as moments of deep self-reflection. Away from the noise of daily life, one finds the silence to listen to the inner voice. The sights, chants, rituals, and prayers encountered on the way awaken a sense of belonging to something greater than oneself. Many pilgrims describe the experience as one that shifts their perspective – helping them view life's challenges with acceptance, gratitude, and renewed strength.



Ultimately, a pilgrimage is not just about reaching the destination but about what unfolds within during the journey. The holy site is a symbol of the goal, but the true pilgrimage is the transformation of the soul along the way.

Another beautiful aspect of pilgrimages is the sense of community. Though each pilgrim walks their own path, the shared faith and collective devotion create bonds that transcend caste, class, and nationality. A stranger's kindness on the road, shared meals, or joint prayers remind us of the universal spirit of humanity and compassion.

Ultimately, a pilgrimage is not just about reaching

the destination but about what unfolds within during the journey. The holy site is a symbol of the goal, but the true pilgrimage is the transformation of the soul along the way. When a pilgrim returns, they carry back not just memories but also a sense of peace, clarity, and connection that continues to guide them in daily life.

In essence, pilgrimages remind us that life itself is a sacred journey. Every step we take, when infused with devotion and awareness, becomes a step closer to the divine.

RENDEZVOUS WITH SHRUTI SACHDEVA, A RENOWNED SPIRITUAL HEALER

TGD NETWORK
NEW DELHI

When it comes to spiritual healing, our thought process is spontaneously drawn towards India which has most acclaimed spiritual healers working unstintingly for the betterment of mankind. On the top of hierarchy is placed a lady whom her clients reverentially address as Shruti, a real healer with utmost devotion. Therefore, the fact cannot be refuted that Shruti Sachdeva, over the years, has registered her towering and lofty presence in this realm as an eminent spiritual healer who indubitably epitomizes the subtle idea and ideal of the spiritual essence of Karma and deftly goads her people to the path of self-realization. In an exclusive conversation, The lady with a mission to heal the world speaks with the Daily Guardian.

Q. From your experience, how do you define healing?

A. As a spiritual healer, I understand spiritual healing as a holistic approach to wellness that involves addressing the spiritual, emotional, and energetic imbalances that may be contributing to a person's physical or psychological health challenges. This healing approach acknowledges the interconnectedness of all aspects of human experience, and aims to promote balance and harmony within the individual and between the individual and the wider world.

Q. What are the duties of a spiritual healer? A. The duties of a Spiritual Healer may vary, depending on their approach and training, but some common responsibilities may include: Creating a safe environment, facilitating the healing process by using techniques such as meditation, energy work, or prayer, providing guidance to overcome obstacles, advocating for the well-being by promoting healthy habits and self-care practices, continuing their own personal and spiritual growth through ongoing education, self-reflection, and

self-care.

Q. How did you become interested in becoming a spiritual healer and therapist?
A. I am honored to share my journey with you and shed light on how I became passionate about spiritual

certification in their area of practice. This can help ensure that the practitioner has the knowledge and skills needed to provide effective and safe healing services. Specialization and Expertise: Consider the specific areas of focus and expertise of the Spiritual Healer. Some practi-

How Reiki Helps...

- 3. Enhanced immune system function
- 4. Relief from pain and tension
- 5. Improve and cin
- 6. Improve



As a spiritual healer, I understand spiritual healing as a holistic approach to wellness that involves addressing the spiritual, emotional, and energetic imbalances that may be contributing to a person's physical or psychological health challenges.

healing and therapy. My interest in this field began at the young age when I witnessed firsthand profound impact that spiritual practices and inner work can have on an individual's well-being.

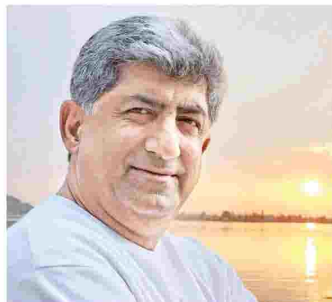
Q. What should people look for when seeking out a healer? When seeking out a Spiritual Healer, there are a few key things that individuals should look for to ensure that they find a practitioner who is a good fit for their needs and goals. These include: Qualifications and Training: Look for a Spiritual Healer who has undergone professional training and

tioners may specialize in certain areas of healing, such as energy work, meditation, or trauma recovery. Look for a practitioner whose specialization aligns with your own needs and goals. Personal Connection: It's important to feel comfortable and at ease with the Spiritual Healer you choose. Look for a practitioner who creates a safe and supportive environment, listens deeply to your concerns, and demonstrates empathy and compassion. Ensure that the Spiritual Healer you choose operates with ethical standards and boundaries.

Topic - Awakening to Inner Joy: Moving Beyond External Validation

TGD NETWORK

Recently, I read an article about botox injections, the various silicone implants and the cosmetic surgeries that have created a revolution in the fashion, film and glamour industry. Many models, supermodels, actors and actresses are running to get these surgeries done that they believe, will accentuate their beauty. This got me thinking what beauty is for them. Beauty is more about external validation rather than having actual beauty. We are living in an age that is ruled by what others think of us. In a world driven by achievement, appearance and constant comparison, it's easy to believe that happiness comes from what we gain or how others perceive us. We're taught to seek approval, to measure our worth by the likes, praises, promotions and relationships that we have. This pursuit of external validation becomes a vicious cycle that may be temporarily satisfying but ultimately, it is extremely unfulfilling leading to anxiety, stress, unhappiness and



depression. True, lasting joy, however, doesn't come from the outside. It begins when we turn inward and Awaken to our own Truth. Spiritual Awakening is the moment when we begin to question the illusions that we have lived by all life-long. It's a deep, inner shift where we start to realize that the joy that we have been chasing has always existed within us. This Awakening invites us to move beyond the need for constant approval and instead, connect with the quiet, steady presence of

our true self. As we become more self-aware, we start to see how much of our suffering comes from trying to meet expectations - our own and others'. The fear of rejection, the need to prove our worth and the anxiety of not being 'enough', all stem from being disconnected from our inner source of joy. Spiritual growth helps us reclaim that connection. Moving beyond external validation doesn't mean that we stop valuing relationships or success. But it means that we no longer rely on them

to define who we are. We begin to live more authentically, making choices based on inner alignment and Consciousness rather than societal approval. There's a quiet power in knowing that our worth is not up for debate - it simply is.

This transformation often unfolds when we set out on the spiritual path with spiritual practices like meditation, self-inquiry, solitude and mindful living. These practices help us listen beyond the worldly noise, the constant chatter of the mind to the quiet, resilient, subtle yet powerful Divine voice. When we set out on the path of Spirituality, over time, we begin to experience a joy that isn't attached to outcomes, a joy that arises from peace, purpose and inner freedom. Awakening to inner joy doesn't mean that life becomes perfect or free from pain. Challenges still arise but we face them with more grace and less resistance. We start accepting without protesting. Our happiness becomes more stable, grounded and rooted because it's not built on things that change

or fade. Rather, it is built on the Realization of the Truth, Spiritual Awakening and Enlightenment. It's rooted in the truth of who we are - that we are a being of Awareness, Divine Love and Eternal Peace. The most beautiful aspect of Spiritual Awakening and Awakening to inner joy is that it deepens our connection to others and ultimately, to the Divine, the Supreme Immortal Power. When we are no longer seeking to be validated, we can truly see others without judgment or comparison. We give from fullness and not from lack. We become more compassionate, grounded and present. In letting go of the need for external validation, we reclaim our power. We remember that joy is not something to be earned, it's something to be uncovered. It lives within us, waiting patiently beneath the noise of the world. When we Awaken to this inner joy, we don't just feel happier - we become liberated.

By: A/R Aman in ravi - Happiness Ambassador and Spiritual Leader

The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Contempt for delay

HC order gives teeth to SC's 6-month timeline

THE Supreme Court's six-month timeline gets teeth with the Punjab and Haryana High Court's ruling that execution proceedings pending beyond six months would now amount to contempt of the SC judgment. At stake is not just the enforcement of decrees but the very credibility of the judicial system. Justice delayed, after all, is justice denied. The ruling draws strength from the Supreme Court's 2021 precedent in *Rahul S Shah vs Jineendra Kumar Gandhi* and its March 2025 directive mandating the high courts to ensure timely disposal of execution petitions. Yet, even with such clarity, compliance has been patchy. Courts often pass judgments, but their enforcement languishes for years, leaving litigants frustrated and eroding public faith in the judiciary. By holding judicial officers and state authorities accountable through contempt proceedings, the high court has signalled that indifference to timelines will no longer be tolerated.

The wider judicial mood supports this course correction. Only last month, the SC scrapped the Jharkhand High Court for 67 reserved judgments pending for years, calling it "a very disturbing issue." It also pushed the Jharkhand HC to expedite 10 long-delayed death penalty cases. Similarly, the Chhattisgarh HC recently issued contempt notices to officials failing to implement compassionate appointment orders. These developments highlight a growing impatience with systemic inertia.

The real challenge, however, lies in addressing structural bottlenecks—vacant judicial posts, inadequate support staff and outdated procedures—that fuel delay. Technology-driven solutions like digital monitoring of execution timelines and regular audits can ensure accountability. Ultimately, contempt is a deterrent, but reform is the cure. The HC's message is clear: decrees are not mere pieces of paper. If the judiciary's authority is to command respect, its orders must translate swiftly into action.

Plastic crisis

India has its work cut out to curb pollution

PLASTICS are choking our planet, yet there is no global consensus on how to combat this ever-growing crisis. The collapse of the Geneva negotiations on a global plastics treaty has revealed the split wide open: a 'high-ambition' group of nearly 70 nations, seeking global caps on virgin plastic and controls on hazardous chemicals, is pitted against a bloc of oil/chemical-producing countries keen on recycling, waste management and voluntary commitments. This bloc includes India, which has the dubious distinction of being the world's biggest plastic polluter, accounting for around 20 per cent of the global plastic emissions.

New Delhi has insisted that there should not be any global listing of products or chemicals with phase-out timelines at this stage. There is no quarrel with India's argument that due consideration must be given to national circumstances and capabilities. Ironically, the petrochemical sector, a key contributor to the Indian economy, is also a major source of microplastic pollution. The impact of such pollution on ecosystems, biodiversity, the climate and human health cannot be overemphasised. It's a tightrope walk to strike a balance between industrial growth and environmental protection.

India and other 'like-minded' nations like China, Russia and Saudi Arabia need to get their act together. They may have succeeded in preventing an 'international legally binding instrument' to end plastic pollution, but this doesn't diminish their responsibility towards their people and the environment. A crackdown on polluting industries can send a strong message. India should also assess the efficacy of its ban on identified single-use plastics and the shortcomings in enforcement. Eventually, all major stakeholders have to come on board—Central and state governments, the public, the industry—to help the nation reduce its alarming plastic footprint. The dream of making India *Viksit*, *Atmanirbhar* and *Sannidhi* cannot take wings without a go-green approach.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

LAHORE, WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 19, 1925

The Indian debate

MORE than one Anglo-Indian journal has described the recent debate in the House of Commons on the Indian estimates as one of the most remarkable debates on India held in that House in recent times. That there were features in the debate which were worthy of this high praise, anyone who goes through the official report of it will at once admit. But as usually happens in such cases, it is not these features of the debate, not the head of fine gold, nor the arms and breasts of silver in the image, which are its chief attraction for our friends, but its feet of clay. Two of the finest speeches undoubtedly were those of Colonel Woodgrove and Ramsay MacDonald, but the only parts of those speeches that have met with commendations in the Anglo-Indian Press are those which were utterly irrelevant to the occasion. Such were the attacks which the two distinguished speakers made on the non-cooperation movement. Undoubtedly, there was much in that movement which admitted of an honest difference of opinion and in regard to which honest differences did exist both in India and England. But when MacDonald, for instance, said the action of the non-cooperators, when the Labour Party was on the threshold of office, "put innumerable obstacles in our way, gave us difficulties that made it impossible for us, for the time being, to do what we should like to have done, that so far from assisting India in its progress towards self-government, it was a most serious and, to my colleagues and myself, a most tragic disaster," he brought a charge against the non-cooperators which is absolutely unsustainable.

Collapse of nuclear grammar

The world's silence in the face of nuclear blackmail is not neutrality—it is complicity



LT GEN SS MEHTA (RETD)
EX-WESTERN ARMY COMMANDER
AND FOUNDER TRUSTEE, PUNE
INTERNATIONAL CENTRE

THE nuclear age has always had its own language. From the Cold War's deterrence and mutual assured destruction to later euphemisms like 'credible minimum deterrent' and 'no first use', every phrase was carefully weighed. Grammar itself became an instrument of restraint. The assumption was that words could discipline weapons and prevent their use. Even adversaries understood that in nuclear affairs, words were kinetic—capable of mobilising, intimidating or escalating without a single missile moving. Public discourse was integral to deterrence; statements were crafted, cleared and channelled through measured voices because a careless phrase could move troops or trigger alerts.

That discipline is fraying. The grammar of restraint has been coarsened. Where the nuclear discourse was once confined to deliberate communiqués, it now seeps into campaign rallies, press conferences and television soundbites. The podium, once a place for statecraft, has been weaponised for domestic theatre. In a nuclear context, such theatre is not harmless; it is rehearsal for miscalculation, an unveiling of the very norms that have kept the world away from nuclear conflict for decades.

The amplifying power of silence The danger lies not only in what is said but in what is left unsaid. When a host nation's silence, the UN's absence and the indifference of other nuclear powers combine to let a nuclear threat pass unchallenged, they bypass accountability and erode nuclear norms.

Nuclear deterrence rests on a paradox: weapons are kept to prevent war, not to wage it. That



OMINOUS: The real threat lies not only in possession but in how nuclear weapons are spoken of and normalised. AP/PTI

paradox survives only through restraint, in posture, deployment, and above all, in language.

Thomas Schelling, the Nobel laureate strategist, warned that deterrence is not merely about weapons but about "the manipulation of risk". Language, therefore, is part of the arsenal. Careless words can tilt the balance as dangerously as careless deployments.

Admiral Arun Prakash, our former Chief of Naval Staff, has cautioned that nuclear dialogue is as critical as nuclear posture. India's credibility, he notes, has long rested on disciplined restraint in both. To dismiss reckless rhetoric as mere domestic theatre is a perilous misjudgment in the nuclear age.

Not from a bunker

A stark case illustrates this decay. On the soil of a major democracy, a nuclear-armed Army Chief declared, "If we think we are going down, we'll take half the world down with us."

This was not whispered in a bunker but spoken into a microphone, to both domestic and global audiences. The host nation did not challenge it. The UN stayed silent. Other permanent members of the Security Council looked away. It signalled that nuclear blackmail could be voiced in broad daylight without diplomatic cost.

Every unchallenged threat lowers the threshold for the next, rewriting restraint into recklessness.

Op Sindoore proved that nuclear-age statecraft can be firm without being reckless.

Beyond treaties

This danger extends beyond treaties like the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The real threat lies not only in possession but in how nuclear weapons are spoken of, threatened and normalised.

When a defeated military chief, standing over his own Prime Minister, threatens both a democratic neighbour and half the world from the soil of another democracy, and the world stays silent, it creates a precedent more corrosive than any treaty violation. It tells authoritarians everywhere that nuclear blackmail can be practised openly without consequence. It hollows out the very grammar of restraint.

Some argue that such rhetoric is for domestic consumption. But in the nuclear age, perception can be as potent as capability. A misread signal can push a rival toward a pre-emptive stance. An ambiguous phrase can be mistaken for intent. And when crises run in parallel, from contested borders

to cyber incidents—the margin for error narrows dangerously.

Lessons from other norms

The international community has shown that restraint can be codified not only in arsenals but in principle.

The Ottawa Landmine Treaty of 1997 proved that when the world agreed that certain weapons were unacceptable, the stigma itself carried weight.

The Chemical Weapons Convention established that some threats cross a universal red line, regardless of circumstance. Even reluctant powers have felt compelled to justify or conceal transgressions rather than openly defy the norm.

These cases show that restraint can be institutionalised not merely through possession treaties but through shared conviction that some weapons, and the rhetoric around them, must be delegitimised altogether.

Alarmingly, the nuclear discourse is moving in the opposite direction. Instead of strengthening taboos against threat and use, silence and indulgence are hollowing them out. What landmines and chemical weapons were spared by stigma, nuclear weapons may lose through the normalisation of recklessness.

The Sindoore construct

India's own history offers a powerful counterpoint. In Operation Sindoore, when Pakistan's military was vulnerable and tensions

ran high, India had every capability to escalate. Yet it chose measured restraint. Targets were struck with precision, and the operation concluded without broadening the conflict. This was not weakness; it was principle applied over impulse.

Op Sindoore proved that nuclear-age statecraft can be firm without being reckless. It showed that power anchored in restraint strengthens credibility rather than erodes it.

Restoring the grammar of restraint

Reflection must come first, but action cannot wait. To protect the nuclear age from the recklessness of the microphone, the world must restore principle to its grammar and discipline to its nuclear lexicon before it is too late. A multi-pronged approach is essential: Hosts must call out nuclear blackmail on their soil, making it clear that such rhetoric is unacceptable.

Institutions—the UN, the P5, regional forums—must reaffirm that even the threat of use demands collective censure, not polite silence.

Diplomatic platforms must be treated as regulated spaces. A press conference or official visit is not a personal stage; it is an instrument of state-to-state communication. Civil societies and the media must learn the vocabulary of restraint, reporting reckless nuclear talk as escalation, not flourish.

Defence establishments must brief political leaderships regularly, bipartisan, historically anchored and threat-assessed, so leaders understand the cost of even casual nuclear rhetoric.

This is not about curbing expression but about ensuring leaders grasp the immense consequences of their words.

The principle

When principle falls silent, power rushes in. Unchecked by grammar, it speaks in its own dialect—the language of threat. That is a dialect the world must never become fluent in, for fluency would mean catastrophe spoken as second nature.

The world's silence in the face of nuclear blackmail is not neutrality. It is complicity. Reversing this trend is not optional; it is an existential imperative.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

The world is over-armed and peace is under-funded. —Ban Ki-moon

From 10-paisa delivery to quick commerce

GURBRINDER SINGH ANAND

THE year was 1979. I was a 10-year-old boy in Hoshiarpur, a city where traffic was so scarce on those days that even a cow crossing the road was considered a bottleneck. Our school teachers had drilled one thing into our heads: "Look right, then left, then right again before crossing the road." What they forgot to add was the most important part—"If there's a truck coming, don't cross at all!" But well, those were simpler times.

Right across the road from our house was a little shop selling books and magazines. It was my sister's paradise. A boarder at a Jalandhar college, she was a voracious reader. She devoured Hindi novels by Rajhans—the kind of books my father referred to as "useless". Later in life, I discovered that many Bollywood blockbusters were actually born out of Rajhans' stories. Back then, though, all I cared about was how my sister used me as her personal delivery boy.

Here's how it worked: novels cost about Rs 5 or Rs 10, but you could "rent" them for 25 or 50 paise a day. My sister would bribe me with 10 paise (25, if she was generous) to sneak across the road, get her a book and smuggle it back without dad noticing. Why the secrecy? Because novels were forbidden in our house. According to my father, we were only supposed to read our schoolbooks. Anything else—especially *romances* (those juicy novels)—was practically contraband.

And that was my first taste of what we now call quick commerce. I was a one-boy delivery startup, running high-risk missions with high rewards: 10 paise and a sense of adventure.

In the process, I developed a love for reading. Since English comics were rare in that shop, I immersed myself in Hindi pocket books and comics. My favourites? *Lot-Pot*, *Nandan*, *Champak*... and, of course, the detective series by *Scot Bond* featuring Rajan-Iqbal—the desi detective duo modelled on Sherlock Holmes. I didn't realise it then, but all that reading honed my Hindi so well that years later, at Bishop Cotton School, Shimla, I was declared a scholar in the subject. Imagine that—thanks to smuggled novels and undercover missions for my sister!

Looking back now, I can't help but laugh. The things that once felt like little adventures—dodging dad's stern eyes, racing across the road with a rented book and pocketing my "delivery fee"—were actually my early lessons in entrepreneurship. I was doing hyper-local delivery decades before apps like Blinkit or Zepto even existed!

Today, we can order anything with a tap on our phones, and companies call it "innovation". But deep down, I know the truth: quick commerce isn't new. It's just my 1979 side hustle in a fancy new avatar. The only difference? Back then, the payment wasn't through UPI—it was with a 10-paise coin and a promise not to tell dad. Honestly, I think I preferred it that way.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Much-needed consolidation

Refer to 'GST reforms': these measures were long pending. The consolidation of multiple slabs into primarily two was much-needed. GST 2.0 marks a significant shift towards the simplification of indirect taxation. The proposed reforms aim to reduce classification disputes and enhance compliance certainty. The GST Council must also leverage technology to counter fake entities and fraudulent billing to strengthen the reforms.

BAL GOVIND, NOIDA

Uphold electoral integrity

The debate over alleged manipulation of 65 lakh voter IDs has put the nation's electoral system under scrutiny. The ECI's response to Rahul Gandhi's speech has sparked a necessary discussion. While the commission's stance appears legitimate, concerns raised through Rahul's *Voter Adhikar Yatra* also deserve attention. Both the ECI and political parties must put the integrity of democracy above partisan gains. Citizens seek only fairness and justice. Hence, all sides must commit themselves to free and fair elections to uphold public trust.

AGAM GARG, JALANDHAR

Rahul must prove charges

Rahul Gandhi has embarked on the *Voter Adhikar Yatra* to highlight the alleged manipulations of voter lists, covering 1,300 km in 16 days. This would require him to march nearly 82 km a day—a daunting task. As for his allegations against the ECI, Rahul must be prepared to substantiate his charges of malpractice, as in the past he has faced embarrassing moments when unable to back his claims with proof. He should cultivate the habit of forward thinking while maintaining discipline and integrity.

SUBHASH VAID, NEW DELHI

BJP plays electoral card

By declaring CP Radhakrishnan as the Vice-Presidential candidate, the BJP has played an

electoral card to assure South Indian voters that it cares for them. But I fail to understand why emphasis is placed on OBC or women candidates for the posts of President and Vice-President, as though these identities are qualifications *abovement*. Upper-caste individuals are rarely considered, as if belonging to that category is a disqualification or even a stigma. In our country, every major decision appears to be driven by vote-bank calculations.

IPS ANAND, GURUGRAM

Putin gains ground

Refer to 'Putin firmly spells out Russia's red lines': the hastily convened summit between Vladimir Putin and Donald Trump appears to have been an attempt by the latter to boost his chances of securing the Nobel Peace Prize. Trump's claim that he could end the Russia-Ukraine war within hours of assuming of US presidency has proved to be mere rhetoric. Instead, he rolled out the red carpet for Putin, while Ukraine's President was publicly berated at the White House in February by US Vice-President JD Vance. The conflict continues unabated, with only Putin emerging stronger from this ill-conceived summit, without conceding anything on the battlefield or at the negotiating table.

HARBINDER S DHILLON, NANA

SAD in decline

Apropos of 'The Badal legacy and SAD fragmentation', the author aptly highlights how a levitation of Punjab politics is now reduced to a sinking ship. Formed in 1920, the SAD played a stellar role in the freedom struggle; under Parkash Singh Badal, it ruled Punjab for nearly two decades. Its decline began with the ingress of close kin of Sukhbir Badal. The baggage of sacrilege incidents, Behl Kalan police firing and the pardon granted (later revoked) to Sirda dera chief Gurneet Ram Rahim eroded the trust of the Sikh community. Even a public apology and *tankha* have failed to help SAD regain lost ground.

HMS NAGRA, FARIDABAD

India's China policy at a crossroads



JABINT JACOB
DIRECTOR, CENTRE OF
EXCELLENCE FOR HIMALAYAN
STUDIES, SHIV NADAR VARSITY

CHINESE Foreign Minister Wang Yi is in India for his first visit in over three years. He is visiting in his capacity as Special Representative (SR) on the boundary talks and is reciprocating the visit made to Beijing by Indian SR and National Security Adviser Ajit Doval in December 2024. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is also headed to China at the end of the month for the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit in Tianjin. It will also be his first visit since 2018 and the first since tensions erupted on the Line of Actual Control (LAC) between the two countries in the summer of 2020, leading to fatalities on both sides.

After a long-drawn disengagement process at the LAC, these visits are being seen as part of a return to 'normalisation' in the relationship, even though New Delhi had frequently claimed that the relationship could not return to 'normal'

without a return to status quo ante the 2020 Chinese transgressions on the LAC.

The irony is that this 'normalisation' is not one that is the result of hard bargains or one that showcases any advantages for India. On the contrary, it comes when India has, as one analyst put it, gone "from occupying a near-perfect geopolitical sweet spot to now inhabiting a geopolitical no-good-option deadlock".

There are many reasons why India finds itself in such a situation, but the principal one has to be Pakistan.

'Pakistan' here is used to represent not just that country itself but also the oversized space that it occupies in the Indian Government's thinking and attention.

There are two aspects to this. One, 'Pakistan' represents the failure of the Indian political class and government machinery to accept the bigger geopolitical challenge that China poses. Despite a boost to infrastructure spending post Galwan, the inadequate resources and attention devoted to military reforms and modernisation mean that there is also inadequate thinking about military responses to China.

There is clearly a preference for dealing with the 'devil you know rather than the devil you don't'. As a result, the natural response to China's repeated transgressions is defensive, not



FIRST SINCE 2018: Prime Minister Narendra Modi will visit China at the end of the month for the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit in Tianjin. *ANI*

offensive, just as the Pavlovian response to Pakistani provocations is to always go on the offensive.

Either way, the result is the same — India ends up reaching, or being forced to reach, deals or compromises before its objectives are fully met.

This brings us to the second aspect — the inability to meet objectives is not entirely the fault of the military but is also the result of political conditions in India. China obviously does not raise the emotional hackles of the average Indian citizen as much as Pakistan does.

As a result, Pakistan policy is driven by sentiment and pandering to public

The irony is that this 'normalisation' of ties with China is not one that is the result of hard bargains or one that showcases any advantages for India.

rage rather than by cold logic. One would think then that because China excites no comparable emotion, the Indian policy would be driven by logic and rational thinking.

However, the lack of attention from the public has led to a situation where there is underinvestment in understanding China in the belief that the consequences can be ignored or hidden from the people, with no one any the wiser.

More than the mercurial US President Donald Trump, it is this reality that has forced India's hand with respect to China — forcing it to walk back on

economic restrictions imposed on China in the wake of Galwan and allowing its condition of 'restoration of status quo ante' on the LAC to be forgotten.

Eastern Ladakh has disappeared from the front pages and we do not know for sure if even disengagement is complete or if Chinese troops are meeting their end of the bargain — of allowing Indian troops access to all patrolling points they had been blocked from.

What is more, despite the stress on Pakistan, Prime Minister Modi is travelling to China just months after Beijing openly collaborated with Pakistan militarily during Operation Sindoor in May.

China has also driven tri-lateral partnerships flanking India weeks after the Indo-Pak conflict — with Afghanistan and Pakistan and with Pakistan and Bangladesh.

In fact, from New Delhi, Wang Yi will be travelling to Kabul for a trilateral meeting with the foreign ministers of Pakistan and Afghan Taliban and then to Islamabad, making it clear where his India visit stands in China's scheme of things.

Meanwhile, after a pause of some years, Pakistan itself has returned, post Operation Sindoor, to its smooth balancing act between China and the US. Pakistani analysts now view the situation as one of "great advantage to both

China and Pakistan" and of Islamabad now being able to exercise "strategic balancing and non-alignment".

Wang Yi's visit is unlikely to achieve much on the boundary dispute. And while both Doval and Modi will, no doubt, raise concerns on the LAC and Pakistan with their Chinese interlocutors, the focus will most likely be on seeking economic relief — namely access to Chinese manpower and supplies, whether for India's iPhone factories or its electric vehicle industry. China, however, cannot be expected to be very accommodative on even these issues.

The logic is quite simple. If China denies New Delhi's requests, the Indian Government is either unlikely to be affected by public opprobrium or will be able to divert public attention, leaving Beijing with no consequences.

Even if China accedes to Indian requests, the political impact on the Indian Government is not likely to be anywhere near as consequential as with decisions related to Pakistan, leaving Beijing little to gain in terms of goodwill either. China might make promises, but will not deliver them.

India's Pakistan and China policies — and now, it would appear, also its US policy — have been beset by tactical and strategic missteps. China will take advantage.

What rankings don't tell us about our universities



AVUITT PATHAK
SOCIOLOGIST

WE live in a world that loves numbers and statistics. It reduces even a highly qualitative experiences into some sort of measurable data. My discomfort with this obsessive craze for quantification has led me to interrogate the prevalent practice of ranking our colleges and universities and reducing the experience of exploring the frontiers of knowledge to pure metrics — the statistics of publications, the quantification of citations, the collaboration with industries, or the employability of students.

Don't get me wrong. Of course, a university should encourage its faculty members to publish research papers in good journals and it should be really concerned about the employability of young students.

However, there are many other socially meaningful and life-affirming tasks that our colleges/universities need to perform in order to pursue the objectives of libertarian education. And, ironically, the ranking

agencies seldom bother to reflect on these 'non-measurable' functions.

In this context, let me raise three questions, which, I am afraid, experts at a ranking agency such as the National Institutional Framework (NIRF) seldom ask.

The first, an uncomfortable question: Are our universities — including the 'top ranking' ones — truly celebrating the spirit of academic freedom and critical enquiry?

Accept it. A meaningful answer to this question cannot be found in attractively packaged database that a college/university presents before the ranking agency.

As I write this piece, what comes to my mind is the anguish of Rashid Khalidi — the Edward Said Professor Emeritus of Modern Arab Studies at Columbia University, USA. He feels that under the changing political circumstances, it is no longer possible to teach a course on Modern Middle East History — a course he has been teaching for many years at Columbia. The reason is that the university administration has completely surrendered before the 'Trump administration and accepted the official definition of 'antisemitism'.

Indeed, as Professor Khalidi has stated with intense pain, it has become almost impossible to teach about topics, such as the history of the creation



NOT LIBERTARIAN: Will the NIRF bother to know if professors and students fear asking questions that unsettle the status quo? *TRIBUNE PHOTO*

of Israel or the genocide being perpetrated by Israel in Gaza with the support of the US and much of western Europe. To quote Khalidi, "Columbia — once a site of free enquiry — has been turned into a gated security zone with electronic entry controls. It has become a place of fear and loathing; it is the antithesis of academic freedom."

Think of the paradox: an Ivy League university, yet, the absence of academic freedom!

As I reflect on the fate of Columbia University, I begin to wonder whether a ranking agency like the NIRF will ever bother to know if the professors and students in Indian colleges/universities too are living with the similar kind

Are our universities, including the 'top ranking' ones, truly celebrating the spirit of academic freedom and critical enquiry?

of fear: the fear of asking the sort of questions that unsettle the status quo — say, the questions related to the cult of narcissism, hyper-nationalism and religious fundamentalism.

Who will tell the ranking agency experts that the management of citations, the performative acts in 'international' conferences and the narratives of 'placements and salary packages' does not necessarily indicate that a college/university is truly encouraging the spirit of academic freedom and critical enquiry?

My second question is related to the mental health of young students and researchers. Look at, for instance, a 'top-ranking' IIT. Of course, it can

easily impress the ranking agency through showcasing its splendid infrastructure, the attractive CVs of its faculty, the collaboration with leading techno-corporate houses and the placement narratives of their 'products'. Yet, the same institution is possibly facing a harsh reality — the recurring suicides and the chronic depression and anxiety amongst otherwise bright students. This malady does not stop, even when these institutions collaborate with psychiatrists, counsellors and even spiritual gurus. Furthermore, in an extremely hierarchical and asymmetrical society like ours, it is not uncommon to find students from the deprived sections who experience diverse forms of marginalisation and humiliation.

Does a ranking agency have a scale to measure the intensity of this pain, agony and alienation? Or, for that matter, can it go deeper into the very root of this crisis?

Let the dark aspect of these much-hyped academic institutions — academically brilliant, yet psychologically wounded, students — not be concealed beneath the fancy narratives that fascinate the urban/middle class: say, this or that IIT has occupied a prestigious place in the QS World University Rankings!

And finally, do these ranking agencies ever search for a libertarian university — a university that

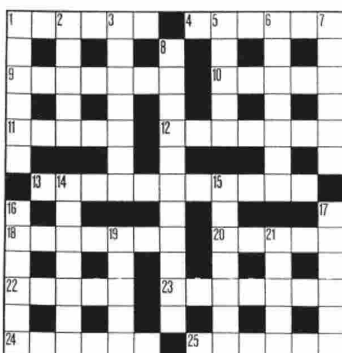
seeks to see beyond the neoliberal doctrine of education, that's also a tool for economic productivity or education as the mastery of the 'skills' the techno-corporate world demands?

Amid the celebration of the university-industry nexus or the corporatisation of higher education, it is really important to assert that a libertarian university ought to generate a learning milieu that activates the moral conscience of the students and teachers and gives them the philosophical clarity as well as the intellectual courage to question what we are witnessing today — the glorification of war and militarism in the name of nationalism, the massive destruction of the ecosystem in the name of 'development', the promotion of some sort of techno-utopianism — the belief that technology has a solution to all social/human problems — marketed by a handful of billionaires.

The ranking agencies should realise that without this moral conscience and sociological imagination, even a 'top-ranking' university might fail to evolve as a libertarian university. It is like recalling what TS Eliot felt through his poetic wisdom:

"Where is the life we have lost in living?
Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge?
Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?"

QUICK CROSSWORD



ACROSS

4. Quarant (6)
4. To increase (4,2)
9. Lacking thought for others (7)
10. Home (5)
11. Rule of conduct (5)
12. Told (7)
13. Spread malicious gossip (4,3,4)
18. Lack of inhibition (7)
20. Outspoken (5)
22. To fare (3,2)
23. Cry out suddenly (7)
24. To foil (6)
25. Expensive (6)

Yesterday's solution

Across: 1 Debased, 5 Valet, 8 Turn the corner, 9 Dwell, 10 Liaison, 11 Aboard, 12 Crafty, 15 Typical, 17 Spent, 19 Stop at nothing, 20 Elf, 21 Thought.

Down: 1 Dated, 2 Burden of proof, 3 Settler, 4 Deeply, 5 Viola, 6 Long-suffering, 7 Tyranny, 11 Artist, 13 Risotto, 14 Planet, 16 Chain, 18 Tight.

DOWN

1. African plant with edible seeds (6)
2. Make less strict (5)
3. A great victory (7)
5. Struggle (5)
6. Conspirator (7)
7. Prefix meaning sham (6)
8. Having insufficient staff (5-6)
14. Agitatedly worried (2,1,4)
15. In reality (2,5)
16. Goal to be achieved (6)
17. Meagre (6)
19. Patron of restaurant (5)
21. Anticipate (5)

SU DO KU



HARD

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

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

CALENDAR

AUGUST 19, 2025, TUESDAY

- Shaka Samvat 1947
- Shravan Shaka 28
- Bhadrapad Purnima 4
- Hijri 1447
- Krishna, Palka Tithi 11, up to 3:33 pm
- Vajra Yoga up to 8:30 pm
- Aardra Nakshatra up to 1:08 am
- Moon in Gemini sign

FORECAST

CITY	MAX	MIN
Chandigarh	34	26
New Delhi	34	24
Amritsar	32	24
Bathinda	34	27
Jalandhar	32	24
Ludhiana	32	26
Bhiwani	34	26
Hisar	34	27
Sirsa	34	29
Dharamsala	28	20
Manali	25	18
Shimla	23	18
Srinagar	27	17
Jammu	30	25
Kargil	30	14
Leh	27	15
Dehradun	31	24
Mussoorie	22	17

EXTENDED 6°C



The principle goal of education in the schools should be creating men and women who are capable of doing new things, not simply repeating what other generations have done

Jean Piaget

INDIAN EXPRESS IS NOT AN INDUSTRY. IT IS A MISSION.

—Rammath Goenka

NATIONS NEED TO UNITE TO DEFEAT PLASTICS POLLUTION

TALKS for a global plastics treaty at Geneva have ended without a deal. With two powerful blocs of nations entrenched in their stated positions, the collapse of negotiations for an international legally-binding instrument after three years of efforts was not really a surprise. Exasperated negotiators going through marathon sessions failed to reach common ground as two treaty drafts in the last 48 hours remained unacceptable. Clashing visions to fight plastic pollution made the negotiations difficult right from the start. The so-called 'high-ambition coalition' that includes the EU and Australia alongside African as well as small Pacific nations remained insistent on robust measures on the entire life-cycle of plastics; whereas the 'like-minded countries' vehemently opposed the upstream measures. As a result, critical issues such as production cuts, phase-out timelines for single-use plastic, chemicals of concern, and recycle-and-reuse were never resolved.

To be clear-eyed, the treaty was in jeopardy the moment it began with industry lobbyists outnumbering negotiators from some participating countries. An analysis during the early rounds of discussions revealed that such pressure groups figured even in government delegations, exposing the worrying levels of control the plastics industry had on the negotiations. The collapse of the talks at Geneva, however, presents opportunities to the parties to make amends in the future. No date or venue for the next round has yet been announced, which opens the ground for negotiations among nations.

Given plastic's alarming impact on the environment, the need for aligning the visions of the high-ambition bloc with the sovereign rights and development needs of the primary producer nations can hardly be overemphasised. Similarly, adoption of the 'common but differentiated responsibilities' principle would make sense to bring the developing nations on board. India, which has thrown its weight behind the like-minded nations, has made its stand clear by stating that any financial mechanism must be based on understandings reached at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. A crucial factor for a future Global Plastics Treaty would be the voting mechanism to decide, which remained a bone of contention this time. Though majority voting is an option in the absence of a consensus, it should be the last choice. For a legally-binding instrument to defeat the monster of plastic pollution, the world must vote unequivocally.

BCCI MUST PROTECT FANS' INTEREST AT WORLD CUPS

WE have been here before with the Board of Control for Cricket in India. In 2023, with just a few months to go for the men's 50-over World Cup in the country, details around ticket sales remained unsettlingly sketchy. The schedule was released quite late, too. Even when the world's richest cricketing body provided some clarity, other questions emerged. The schedule was changed and the ticketing process left a lot to be desired. Now on the verge of hosting another 50-over International Cricket Council event—this time with Sri Lanka—official ticket sales are yet to be announced. Fans who have shown a lot of appetite for the women's game have not been getting the answers they need to plan. Worse, nobody seems sure where the opener and the final of the Women's World Cup will be held. Bengaluru was supposed to host the opener and was in line for the final if Pakistan did not get that far. But they are yet to get police permission for the matches. With time running out, the organisers cannot dither much longer, as the ICC takes over operations at venues a month before the games.

Even if it's an ICC event, this seems to be a uniquely Indian problem at the moment. The public pre-sale of ticket ballots for next year's Women's T20 World Cup in the UK finished last week; for an event scheduled for June-July 2026, the winners will be notified by this September. Just to drive home the point, there is also no word on the ticketing process or schedule for the next men's T20 World Cup, scheduled in India and Sri Lanka in February-March 2026. Announcing the basics such as ticketing and the schedule gives fans the opportunity to plan their leaves and sort out their travel in advance. But another World Cup in India is in danger of not hosting too many overseas fans because the authorities are once again shortchanging the cricket-loving public. Nobody doubts their ability to bring in a lot of money and organise glamorous events, but they keep failing at the fundamentals needed for any event. Both the ICC and the BCCI will do well to remember that fans are the lifeblood of any sport, and there's only so much they would be willing to suffer before walking away.

QUICK TAKE

NOT DELULU OR TONGUES

NEOLOGISMS that have made it into the Cambridge Dictionary this year—including skibidi, delulu and broli-garchy—show that internet slang may not always be a passing fad. Some of it could be here to stay, thanks to the tech bros' oligarchy whose apps give currency to such coinages. If you are feeling a bit skibidi about their longevity, consider that Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese dropped the phrase "they are delulu with no solulu" into a parliament speech after podcasters dared him. Polyglot Archie Smith recently wowed high school students in Pennsylvania with a lecture entirely in Gen Alpha slang. His subject? The importance of learning languages. Unless we are delulu, it's an advice we should all be heeding.

THE Donald Trump-Vladimir Putin meeting in Anchorage promised forward movement on Ukraine, but delivered only limited outcomes. The good news is there was no breakdown—no deal, but no bitterness either. That in itself is a positive. President Trump mentioned that agreement had been reached on several issues, with only "one or two" matters proving sticky. It does not take much imagination to conclude that the unresolved points revolve around Russia's insistence on holding Donbas and the status of Crimea.

A ceasefire could have been announced as an interim measure while details of a wider settlement were worked out later. That this did not happen suggests disagreement was serious enough—perhaps Putin himself insisted that the war continue until his core demands were addressed.

Trump's own words were guarded: "There is no deal without a deal." Yet his body language in Anchorage was not negative, nor was Putin's. If a deal eventually emerges, Trump is likely to double down on another arena of conflict: Gaza. Bringing about a ceasefire there, alongside progress in Ukraine, would strengthen his credentials for international recognition, perhaps even a Nobel Prize. His effort to bring Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to the White House on Monday, for follow-up discussions does suggest Anchorage was not the end of diplomacy but only a pause.

The immediate result, however, is that the fighting continues. Ukrainian forces remain dug in along defensive lines that have scarcely shifted since late 2024, while Russian forces probe with their greater manpower and industrially-backed munitions. The war has long since settled into a grinding stalemate; with no concessions in the offing. Putin preserved his strategic flexibility, reassured his military and burnished his domestic standing. The mere fact of his appearance in Anchorage, meeting an American president as an equal, was itself a symbolic victory. It reinforced Moscow's narrative that sanctions have not diminished Russia's global relevance.

For Ukraine, Anchorage was at best a holding action. It gained no ceasefire, no pause and no relief from daily bombardment. Zelenskyy was conspicuous by his absence from the table, and his self-imposed fief in Kyiv. His subsequent invitation to Washington is a welcome corrective, but it highlights that Ukraine's place in these discussions remains fragile. For Moscow, the optics of parity with

The much-anticipated Alaska summit yielded little. Moscow and Kyiv must sit together and address their core disputes. Otherwise, future peace summits risk becoming a cycle of photo-ops

VIA ANCHORAGE: NO SHORT-CUT TO PEACE IN UKRAINE

LT GEN SYED ATA HASNAIN (RETD)

Former Commander, Srinagar-based 15 Corps; Chancellor, Central University of Kashmir



SOURAV ROY

the US were invaluable. Putin's strategy is unlikely to change; no outright conquest, but steady escalation—incremental territorial pushes, missile and drone strikes on infrastructure and psychological pressure on both Ukraine's morale and Western patience.

Europe, for its part, faces deepening dilemmas. Its leaders watched the Anchorage choreography with unease. For them, the base issue has always been the Russian threat to Europe itself. Nato's eastward march was meant as a bulwark; Ukraine became the flashpoint, "a nation too far". Now Europe must ask itself: can it accept Ukraine outside Nato but still afford it the benefits of an informal security partnership? Can it contemplate creative, if uncomfortable, compromises—shared or UN-supervised arrangements in Crimea, partial de-militarised zones, or hybrid security guarantees? These are not easy questions, but black-and-white positions will not end this war. Shades of grey must form the eventual solution.

Anchorage also underlined why peace is elusive. The US remains an indispensable player. For India, the task is to steer carefully, avoiding unnecessary exposure while keeping doors open in Washington, Moscow, and Brussels alike. Anchorage was another reminder that the Ukraine war is not a regional struggle but a global one, with ripples reaching Delhi's economy and strategic posture.

The road to peace will be long, uneven and shaded in grey—and in that landscape, silence and patience may serve India better than pronouncements. (Views are personal) (atahasnain@gmail.com)

UNCHAIN STUDENTS FROM DESKS

GLOBAL rankings for 2025 have triggered fresh bouts of soul-searching within India's higher education system. While explanations abound—from resource limitations to lack of internationalisation—one critical but under-recognised factor continues to undermine true educational excellence quietly: India's near-unchecked obsession with prolonged, in-class direct teaching and rigid requirements for on-campus presence. This deep-seated attachment to the classroom as the central, even exclusive, site of learning is symptomatic of broader systemic problems, and urgently demands reflection.

The current controversy at the University of Delhi over the mandated 12-hour daily on-campus presence for students is both emblematic and alarming. Why do our institutions cling so stubbornly to the notion that more hours corralled in classrooms necessarily translates into better learning? And, more importantly, what do we lose by doing so, both as individuals and as a collective academic community aspiring towards global standards?

To understand this persistence, one must reach back to the origins of the 'factory model' of education, devised during colonial and industrial times to produce disciplined, predictable workers rather than intellectually-agile citizens. Indian academia has inherited not just the infrastructure but also the attitudes of this antiquated, control-centred approach. We have equated rigorous supervision with quality, time in class with learning, and discipline with genuine engagement.

However, research in educational psychology and the lived experience of leading universities worldwide have since revealed that this equation is flawed. Global pedagogical thought, influenced by figures such as Lev Vygotsky, Jean Piaget and John Dewey, champions the idea that knowledge is actively constructed, not passively absorbed. Learning is context-rich, socially mediated and deeply self-directed. And yet, in India, the teacher as sole authority, student as vessel model persists, out-of-step with both research and the demands of the 21st century.

Holding to this model comes at a cost. Students, forced to sit through hour after hour of top-down instruction, may appear compliant, but genuine engagement with content—deep, critical learning—waned. When the academic calendar is crammed with contact hours, students have little time for essential independent reading,

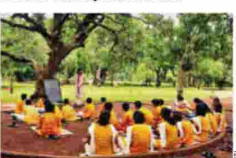


JOHN J. KENNEDY

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interdisciplinary exploration, or the solitary acts of thinking and reflecting that university life should offer.

This approach underestimates students' maturity and capacity for self-regulation, resulting in what Paulo Freire termed the 'infantilisation' of learners. Students, policed and over-scheduled, are given scant practice in taking initiative, a crucial skill as adults and global citizens. The rationale, often stated, that busy timetables keep students "out of trouble" is not just patronising, but fundamentally at odds with the purpose of higher education, which is to nurture independent thinkers and responsible actors.



Indian universities' insistence on in-class teaching is out of step with both pedagogical research and practices at some of the best universities. For genuine academic excellence that arises from empowerment and trust, we have to think beyond the confines of the classroom

Moreover, the toll of such prolonged sedentary, passive engagement is not just cognitive, but also physical. Studies highlight increased risks of back pain, poor fitness and rising anxiety among students; compounded by cognitive fatigue and diminished motivation. Research in cognitive psychology, such as the well-known 'spacing effect', finds that distributed, active engagement fosters deeper, longer-lasting learning than uninterrupted content delivery. Yet, these are ignored.

Nor are teachers spared the consequen-

es. Faculty members tasked with delivering day-long lectures lose out on precious time for research, curriculum innovation and individual mentoring. When exhaustion becomes routine, the entire institution suffers. Staff morale plummets, creativity is stifled, and research productivity falls—all factors that global rankings penalise. The result is a loss of institutional vitality and the intergenerational transmission of low aspirations.

Contrast this with the world's best universities. In the US, Europe, and parts of East Asia, students may spend fewer formal hours in class, but are trusted and expected to learn independently, collaborate with peers, engage in real-world projects, and participate in diverse experiential learning opportunities. The university campus is not just a collection of classrooms, but a vibrant ecosystem: libraries, labs, community sites, workshops, and discussion forums are part of the extended learning environment.

Reform at the institutional level requires a shift in mindset from control to facilitation. It means recognising that genuine academic excellence arises not from surveillance and compulsion, but from empowerment and trust. As Malcolm Knowles' andragogy (adult learning theory) emphasises, university students are adults; their learning thrives when self-directed, relevant, and problem-based.

Change requires courage from university leaders—deans, vice chancellors and policymakers—ready to challenge old assumptions, listen to students and faculty and learn from global evidence. Policies must focus on the fundamental objectives of universities: nurturing critical, lifelong learners who can contribute meaningfully in a complex world. Faculty, students, and civil society also share the responsibility to drive this change.

The essence of a great university is its ability to liberate learning from the confines of both walls and the clock, fostering curiosity, autonomy, and resilience. If we aspire for our universities to truly excel, the answer is more trust, freedom, flexibility, and intellectual adventure.

(Views are personal) (johnjken@gmail.com)

MAILBAG

WRITE TO: letters@newindianexpress.com

GST potential

Ref: GST: Why small can be big for economy (Aug 18). Let the 'sin goods' fetch a 40 percent levy, but for items of mass consumption, the proposed 18 percent levy should reasonably be reduced to 12 percent. The existing levy is a heavy burden on both consumers and traders, and hinders growth potential. **Sulaiman Ambalath, Thrissur**

Interim peace

Ref: Alaska optics: India must read the room and the road ahead (Aug 18). Whatever the US President Donald Trump said was an offhand remark, India needs more diplomacy and deftness to react until the two poles of global power come to a resolution for global peace. **Rajakumar Arulanandham, Tirunelveli**

Tax overhaul

Ref: Key sectors await GST inclusion soon (Aug 18). The Centre's draft for proposed GST reforms will not only benefit the poor and the middle classes by increasing purchasing power, but also benefit the business class by lowering their costs on sales. The states should extend full cooperation with the Centre. **Suryanarayana Murty Perle, Kalaahandi**

Manufacturing options

Ref: Next prosperity round demands human capital (Aug 18). India reaching out to establish trade partnerships with countries other than the US in the wake of tariff impositions, increased attention must be drawn to improve production and exports. That needs efficient and trained workers. **Ravi Nair, Palakkad**

Selfless offerings

Ref: A divine tester of virtue (Aug 18). The author mixes an essence of 'giving', and connects with celestial blessings that eliminates human hardships while extolling its virtue. The law of nature encompasses 'inner being and doing', which is a mere process of selfish individualism. **Raghunandan R, email**

Humans first

Ref: Don't make dogs pay for human inefficiency (Aug 17). People against the rationalisation of dogs should seriously think of a situation where someone from their family members is dangerously attacked by a stray, unvaccinated dog roaming on the road. Human life remains paramount. **V K Kumar, Thiruvananthapuram**

{ OUR TAKE }

NDA's choice for
Vice President

CP Radhakrishnan ticks multiple boxes for the BJP and its alliance partners

Maharashtra governor CP Radhakrishnan, 68, will very likely be the next Vice-President (VP) of India, considering that the National Democratic Alliance has the numbers to get its nominee elected to the office. Radhakrishnan, a senior BJP leader from Tamil Nadu and twice a Lok Sabha MP, is an interesting choice; and his political career is in sharp contrast to his predecessor, Jagdeep Dhankhar, who resigned unexpectedly in late July. Unlike Dhankhar, who was a late entrant into the BJP after having worked in the Janata Dal and the Congress, Radhakrishnan's political grooming was in the RSS (starting in his teens) before he moved to build the BJP organisation in Tamil Nadu when the political climate in the state was unfriendly to the party.

The VP's is a post rich in symbolism, and hence, the choice for the office is important from the perspective of political optics. In this respect, Radhakrishnan ticks many boxes for the BJP (the party has said its allies are on board with its pick). One, he is a party insider with strong ideological moorings and discipline, having been involved in organisational work for many years. His entry into electoral politics in the 1990s coincided with the expansion of the NDA in Tamil Nadu, which appeared out of bounds for the BJP, a party seen as the antithesis of the Dravidian ideology. Radhakrishnan was elected to the Lok Sabha from Coimbatore, an industrial city, in 1998 and 1999, with the support of the AIADMK and DMK, respectively, which suggests an ability to negotiate political contradictions. While he lost in 2014 and 2019, he still ended up with almost a third of the votes cast. Two, the choice of a Tamil for an important constitutional post should serve the BJP well when elections take place in the state next year. It could defuse the DMK's charge that the BJP is prone to ignoring the interests of Tamils. Three, Radhakrishnan belongs to the Gounder caste, an OBC community, with significant political and economic influence in western Tamil Nadu. It may also help the BJP firm up its alliance with the AIADMK, which is strong in western Tamil Nadu. AIADMK chief and former Tamil Nadu CM Edappadi Palanisamy, also a Gounder, has already welcomed Radhakrishnan's nomination. Four, it could help the BJP at a time OBC consolidation is gaining traction in national politics — Dravidian politics itself is centred on OBC empowerment.

Politics apart, Radhakrishnan's likely ascent to the VP's office enhances regional diversity in high public office: Southern India has been relatively under-represented since Venkiah Naidu demitted office as VP in 2022. That said, Radhakrishnan will need all his parliamentary and political experience to conduct the Upper House.

Firewalling the poll
process from politics

An unusually combative press conference addressed by chief election commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar on Sunday underlined the trust deficit between the poll watchdog and the Opposition that can cast a shadow on the poll process. At the press conference, the first by CEC Kumar since he took over and the first since the controversial special intensive revision (SIR) drive in Bihar, the poll body termed the Opposition's allegations of "vote theft" false and baseless, calling upon Congress leader Rahul Gandhi to provide proof of his claims or withdraw his remarks.

As the custodian of the world's largest democracy, the Election Commission of India (ECI) has a right to defend itself and the sanctity of the poll process. And it is also true that some of the purported issues alleged with the voter roll — such as that of duplicate names or dodgy addresses — are legacy issues that lingered for decades and across multiple governments. But turning this exchange into a political showdown will serve neither ECI nor Indian democracy well. It should instead consider the principles of transparency and inclusiveness, upheld by the Supreme Court, which ordered ECI to publish details of all 6.5 million deletions from the rolls in Bihar and accept Aadhaar as a valid document in SIR despite the poll body's apparent reluctance. Instead of resorting to examples involving mothers and daughters to grandstand on privacy, the poll body should consider issuing objective rebuttals of the allegations made (like it did when charges were made against electronic voting machines earlier) and accept lacunae in the process if any exist. CEC Kumar has already conceded the risks of a hurried clean-up of voter rolls. ECI should now attempt to address lingering concerns over the poll process by exercising maximum transparency within the bounds of the law.

Good for the investor,
good for the industry

The growth trajectory of two industries in a similar space reinforces the idea that consumer protection in retail finance is a win-all for investors, agents, and firms. And the nation

Sometime over the course of financial year 2025-26, the unthinkable will happen. The assets under management (AUM) in the Indian mutual fund industry will overtake those in the life insurance industry and end the current financial year just below the ₹80 lakh crore mark. Not just in terms of size, but also in terms of reach: Life insurance penetration (percentage of life insurance premiums to GDP) has remained stuck at less than 3% for over a decade, while the share of mutual funds in household savings has gone up to 8.4% in March 2023 from insignificant levels earlier.

While the mutual fund SIP has become a household name, the bad smell around mis-sold life insurance products refuses to go away. The reason for this change lies in the regulatory behaviour faced by these two industries. This is a text-book case which proves that an investor-first regulatory vision is good for the investor, the agent, and the industry.

What happened to an industry

that was less than half the size of the gigantic life insurance industry a decade ago, that has grown big enough to overtake the latter? The power of good regulatory compounding has resulted in a growth rate of an annual average of 20% for over a decade for mutual funds. The 12% annual average AUM growth for the life insurance industry looks tepid in comparison. The success of the mutual fund industry must not be seen as an accident, but a policy design that put investor protection at the heart of capital market regulation. This meant three things.

One, aligning sales incentives. Starting 2006, capital market regulator Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) has consistently pushed at regulation that removes the incentives to mis-sell.

In 2006, Sebi removed the 6% marketing charge that investors paid to fund houses for new fund offers. This used to result in multiple new schemes without any logic, just to harvest the marketing churning investors in and out of schemes.

The most significant move came in 2009, when Sebi removed the upfront commission that was embedded in the price of the mutual fund. Called a front-end load, this commission encouraged agents to churn an investor portfolio just so that the agent could harvest the front commission on every new purchase. India became the first market in the

world to take this dramatic step in investor interest. In 2018, Sebi banned the upfronting of trail commissions (agent commissions that sit at the expense ratio that should be paid at the end of a holding year) that was again skewing investor choice.

Two, reducing costs. In 2019, Sebi reduced the expense ratio, or the cost investors pay each year as a fee to the mutual fund for its services. These ratios had been fixed in 1996 and needed to come down as the scale of the industry grew.

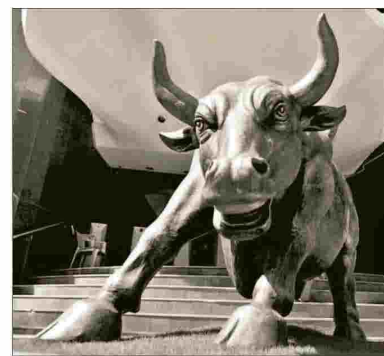
And three, making disclosures meaningful. In 2020, Sebi made funds go "true to label". This means,

for example, a large cap fund should invest at least 80% of its portfolio in large cap stocks, which is a metric to see the size of a company) cannot stuff the portfolio with small cap stocks just to show higher returns, never mind the higher risk. This did for all the categories in the market. Basically, Sebi tried to ensure that if you are on a bus that goes to Noida, it will not go to Gurugram.

On each of these metrics, the insurance regulator has failed. Investors do not really understand what they are buying. They do not understand the cost of an early exit from long-term policies. They do not get a clear answer on what the return is likely to be. Worse, they are trapped by agents and banks into products they clearly did not need or understand. Only this explains the early



Monika Halan



The strong flow of money into mutual funds shows investors have understood that the rules of the game are there to protect them.

HT ARCHIVE

death of life insurance policies in India where less than half the policies sold survive a five-year premium paying term. For a 20-30 year product, this should be a terrible moment of truth, except that the industry actually books profits from the money lost due to early surrender by the investor.

Front-running, mis-selling, and sharp sales, all happen in the mutual fund industry too. No amount of regulation will give us a fully clean market, but the strong flow of money into the industry shows that investors are learning to navigate risk, have understood that the rules of the game are there to protect them in mutual funds.

The same cannot be said about the life insurance policy-holder in policies that bundle both insurance and investment, who usually feels

trapped by the product. As the owner of the largest life insurance company in India and owner of the largest part of the banking sector, the government of India has a responsibility to ensure that investors in life insurance are not misled and trapped. Because what is good for the investor is not just good for the industry, but also the nation. Due to the fat retail pipeline into mutual funds, the Indian stock market no longer is at the mercy of foreign institutional investors. Fixing a soon-to-be ₹80 lakh crore behemoth so that investors are protected can only be good for everyone in the story.

Monika Halan is the best-selling author of the Let's Talk series of books on money. The views expressed are personal

Trump's mercantilism risks
America's global leadership

"I have a chronic, incurable trade deficit with my barber," prominent Washington Post columnist George Will told HBO's *Real Time with Bill Maher* last week. "Once a month... I buy a haircut from him. She buys nothing from me. She has a trade deficit with Iowa because she buys corn products and pork. And no Iowa ever comes to Washington to get a haircut. Amazingly, it works — somehow!"

Nothing captures US President Donald Trump's approach to trade better than Will's quip, delivered with his trademark dry wit. Will, a stalwart of classic conservative thought, grasps a truth the current administration seems determined to ignore: Trade is not a zero-sum game. For centuries, individuals, cities, and nations have prospered not by balancing every ledger entry to the penny, but by engaging in voluntary exchanges that benefit both parties.

Trump's unapologetically mercantile view of trade and foreign relations turns every economic relationship into a scoreboard. Whether it's imposing a 25% tariff on Indian goods — followed by an additional levy linked to New Delhi's purchase of Russian oil — or threatening NATO allies over defence spending, his policies reduce complex alliances to crude profit-and-loss statements.

The consequences go far beyond economics. The US did not ascend to global preeminence by browbeating partners over trade balances when it emerged as a global leader after the end of World War II; it did that by cultivating relationships and influence through alliances, cultural diplomacy, and a rules-based order that reassured friends and allies they could trust Washington's commitments. From the Marshall Plan to NATO to the Fulbright Program, American leadership has been rooted in building confidence, not collecting payments.

In Trump's worldview, allies are "freeloaders" unless they meet his transactional benchmarks, and trade deficits are inherently bad, regardless of whether they reflect healthy economic specialisation. This ignores basic economic reality: Just as Will's barber thrives without selling haircuts in Iowa, the US benefits from importing goods it cannot produce effectively or efficiently, while exporting its strengths in technology, services, and innovation. The danger is that when alliances are treated as little more than business contracts, partners start looking elsewhere for stability. They diversify trade relationships, hedge their strategic bets, and deepen ties with rival powers willing to offer steadier terms.

India provides a powerful example of that. New Delhi is not just another trading partner. Over the past two decades, successive administrations in Washington — Republican and Democratic alike — have recognised the country as central to America's Indo-Pacific strategy. That vision has included defence cooperation, joint military exercises, and growing partnerships in technology, energy, and counterterrorism, all designed to position India as a counterweight to China.

By slapping tariffs on Indian goods and tying penalties to Russian oil purchases, Trump signals that strategic alliance is subordinate to short-term transactional disputes. Even more damaging is the hint that his administration could target H-1B and L-1 visa programmes, which are critical pathways for tens of thousands of highly skilled Indian professionals who help drive US innovation, espe-

cially in the tech sector.

Such a move would not only hurt American competitiveness but also erode goodwill in a country whose young, English-speaking workforce is considered an asset in countering Chinese risks.

If New Delhi begins to question Washington's reliability — and many Indians already have — it has alternatives: Deeper engagement with ASEAN, expanded trade with the European Union and Gulf States, or closer ties with like-minded partners. Losing India's trust would cost the US more than export revenue; it would weaken the entire Indo-Pacific strategy.

Unfortunately, signs of a pivot are already visible. Following Trump's tariff threats, India's diplomatic calendar lit up. Prime Minister Narendra Modi scheduled his first visit to China in more than seven years to attend the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit later this month. He also held back-to-back calls with Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and Russian President Vladimir Putin, both vocal critics of Trump's tariffs.

These moves are not subtle. They are a clear message to Washington that pressure tactics will not work. As the US publication *Axios* observed, the 50% tariffs "were officially designed to drive a wedge between India and Russia, but so far the only result is that the US has caused its with the United States."

Not only will India continue buying Russian oil, *Axios* pointed out, but it has "frozen plans to purchase arms from the US and cancelled a high-level defence visit to Washington." Trump's mercantile instincts may satisfy a domestic political base that equates toughness with tariffs. But internationally, they risk undermining the very alliances and partnerships that have underpinned America's global leadership for generations. If the administration persists in treating friends like competitors, the US may find that when it needs those friends most, they have already found other friends.

History shows that nations that have attempted to dominate solely through transactional leverage often paid a price. Britain's mercantile empire in the 18th century collapsed in part because it treated colonies and partners as mere sources of raw materials. Similarly, interwar US policy, which relied on tariffs such as the Smoot-Hawley Act of 1930 to "protect" domestic industry, deepened the Great Depression and alienated trading partners, contributing to the economic instability prior to World War II.

On the other hand, the US's greatest strategic successes have come when it invested in partners without expecting immediate returns. The Marshall Plan rebuilt Europe not because it turned a profit in 1948 but because it secured a continent aligned with American values for decades. Cultural exchange programmes, immigration pathways for skilled workers, and cooperative defence pacts have been far more effective at cementing influence than any tariff ever could. A mercantile trade and foreign policy may deliver short-term political or economic wins, but it will not sustain America's global role. If Washington continues to trade away trust for transactional gains, it risks becoming just another player in a crowded field of powers, without the credibility, goodwill, or strategic depth that once set it apart.

Frank F Islam is an entrepreneur and civic leader, and thought leader based in Washington DC. The views expressed are personal

{ THOMAS BARRACK } US SPECIAL ENVOY TO SYRIA

I think the Lebanese government has done their part. They've taken the first step. Now what we need is Israel to comply



On the Israel-Lebanon ceasefire

Why leadership that is
also nurturing matters

The words nurturing and leadership are not often used together. Nurturing is seen as synonymous with the feminine quality of caregiving. Leadership is seen as masculine, calling to mind images of men leading other men in battlefields and across boardrooms.

Yet, this brand of leadership has not worked very well, especially in the post-pandemic world. Recent research by Gallup showed that employee engagement across the world in 2024 was at a 10-year low. Gen Zs want more holistic growth, better work-life integration and leaders who are authentic, caring and inclusive.

We interviewed 117 CEOs for our book, *The Nurturing Quotient*. The stories were similar. Leaders faced an unprecedented number of challenges at all levels — macroeconomic, operational, people-related and personal. CEOs faced the additional pressure of maintaining a facade of control and equanimity in times of crises. They were expected to deliver on numbers quickly even as they battled stress, intense public scrutiny, personal crises and the danger of corporate disruption.

The solution is not to do more of the same, but to do things differently. Leaders are not commanders of obedience but gardeners of potential. Nurturing leadership, measured by NQ or nurturing quotient, is the ability of a leader to consistently nurture self and others for sustainable growth.

We saw that the leaders who focus on their own well-being and growth are better placed to grow their teams and the business. Leaders needed to focus on the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual aspects of nurturing themselves to bring their best selves to work. Then, they can mentor, coach, inspire, listen and empower others for growth.

Nurturing leadership is not about control but cultivation — of self, of people, and of performance. At its core are four critical qualities we describe with the acronym HOPE — humility, openness, patience, and empathy. These were the traits echoed by the leaders in our research and they cut across all the behaviours needed to nurture self and others.

Humility is the beginning of learning. Humility shows up daily in the form of the willingness to ask for help, the ability to learn from anyone irrespective of age, gender or title, the grace to celebrate team success instead of taking personal credit. Leaders who admit their mistakes create psychological safety, which provides fertile ground for innovation, risk-taking, and

belonging. Openness is curiosity in action. Listening deeply without any biases and asking powerful questions are superpowers for leaders. This creates a safe, inclusive space for discovery and dialogue. When people feel heard, they stretch, they contribute, they grow, and the business grows. The leader who cannot be a lifelong learner will become irrelevant and redundant.

Nurturing leadership believes in long arcs and deep roots. Patience is a radical act in a world that celebrates TLDN (too long didn't read) and ASAP (as soon as possible) as hallmarks of efficiency and achievement. Plants and children don't grow in a day. People don't need steroids for instant payoff but sustained care for enduring impact. Many of the leaders spoke about a constant tussle between the pressure for quick profits versus the patience needed to grow business and talent. Mature leaders have the discernment to know when to prune the weeds and when to persevere with a flowering plant. Patience shows up as a belief in another's potential when you act as a mentor or coach. Patience is the golden pause between periods of frenetic activity when you give time for deep reflection. Patience is the safety net you provide for people as you let them learn from failures and try again the next time.

Empathy was the quality that was mentioned most often among the leaders we interviewed. One of the leaders said, "People won't care how much you know until they know how much you care." Empathy fuels connection. A 2023 EY Empathy in Business Survey showed that 88% of respondents linked empathetic leadership to increased efficiency, 87% to boosts in creativity and innovation. The leader who is self-aware and can help others manage and regulate their emotions is able to generate better results.

Nurturing leadership requires courage, discipline and a strong sense of purpose. Hope rather than cynicism, bitterness, resignation and anger leads to a better and a more productive workplace. In times of change and disruption, people need leaders who are humble enough to listen, open enough to learn, patient enough to wait, and empathetic enough to lead from the heart. The future belongs to such leaders — those who know that nurturing is not a distraction from performance, but the surest path to it.

Nirupama Subramanian is founder, *Powerful Solutions*. Rajesh Ramakrishnan is former managing director of *Perficient* in India. The views expressed are personal



Nirupama Subramanian



Rajesh Ramakrishnan

Will Radhakrishnan be the game-changer for BJP?

AFTER intense speculation over the potential candidate of NDA over the past few weeks after the sudden exit of the incumbent Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankar, the name of C P Radhakrishnan, presently Governor of Maharashtra, has been officially announced. While his ascension to the vacant slot is almost certain, what is interesting is how the BJP has moved in on-again to focus its attention on the southern state of Tamil Nadu, albeit treading a different route and employing a new strategy. While the obvious answer is that it is eyeing the impending Assembly elections in Tamil Nadu in the coming summer, the known-unknown is why a relatively low-profile Radhakrishnan has been selected to

hold the Vice-President post. As far as credentials go, the media has already sketched profiles of the impending V-P tracing his roots from Jan Sangh days to how over the years he has been a silent, efficient and effective party man for BJP despite the party itself failing to create a significant impact in the Dravidian heartland. Firstly, over the past few years, in Chennai, call it Delhi's daring gambit or ineffective posturing, the party headquarters had reposed its faith on a set of newcomers, defectors and a few who came in from political backgrounds (read Annamalai) to lead the state unit. Barring manufactured hype and a feel good among the English-speaking media moguls, none of them managed to cre-

ate a lasting impact to deliver what the saffron party bosses expected, some thing which they managed in erstwhile hostile terrains across the country, smashing rivals who had held power for long in their respective domains. In the case of C P Radhakrishnan, he has had a direct hotline to Delhi over the years as he has been MP from Coimbatore twice, during the Vajpayee era, when he was a very valued leader for the previous BJP bosses. Very notably, he has had a working relationship with the DMK hierarchy, from its illustrious M Karunanidhi to the current Chief Minister, M K Stalin. Known for his quiet, effective networking, consensual and amiable nature leading to mutually acceptable solutions, Radhakrishnan is

the perfect antidote to the recent set of leaders, who had ruffled feathers of the local Dravidian parties and threatened to go alone, to very unimpressive outcomes at the hustings twice in the recent past. Importantly, with caste being a very important deciding factor, the OBC leader who hails from the Gounder community (like ex-CM and AIADMK leader Edappadi Palani Swamy and Annamalai) is considered to be the appropriate placement. If it is an attempt to mollify the BJP supporters of the community who were sad to see Annamalai being replaced, then one can assume the box would be ticked. It also means the old guard of the BJP which had done all the hard

work over decades to reposition the party among the new voters would feel elated as one of their own is now at a position of eminence in Delhi, having the eyes and ears of the top leaders. While it can be argued that the post of Vice-President is constitutional and free from party bias, the ripple effect of this prospective appointment, one may assume, would be too obvious to be ignored. Already, with the Centre-appointed Governors continuously under attack of acting like agents of the Centre, without attracting such criticisms, the likely new Vice-President may, with his appointment, enable BJP to quietly work behind the scenes to take another serious attempt to wrest power in 2026.

LETTERS

Free bus ride is pure vote-bank politics

It is quite paradoxical that the present AP government, which has no money to pay the just and long-pending dearness allowance to its employees, has launched a free bus ride scheme for all women in the state. As things stand, women employees who draw salaries in lakhs can easily pay the charges to their workplaces. The scheme helps them to save money. Sadly, women from the lower strata have no access to buses and they cannot afford to travel long distances due to disabilities and social restrictions. A fallout of the free bus ride scheme is that it is drawing women in droves to unnecessary travels and leading to hardships to men, who find it hard to get seats. The vote-bank politics that helps parties get unprecedented mandates are deplorable.

M Chandrasekhar, Kadapa

Radhakrishnan makes for the perfect V-P choice

C P Radhakrishnan, the present Governor of Maharashtra, has impressive credentials, including dedication, humility, and intellect. He has remained focused on community service and empowering the marginalised, as has been described by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Incidentally, Radhakrishnan distinguished himself as the Governor of Jharkhand with the additional charge of Telangana and Puducherry. These appointments prove that he is amiable and non-controversial. One hopes that a man with such lofty achievements will be the unanimous choice as the country's next Vice-President.

Kantamsetti Lakshman Rao, Visakhapatnam

Politicians must stop undermining bodies like ECI

The recent article titled "Rahul's allegations against EC detrimental to the foundations of Indian democracy" brings attention to a critical issue – politicisation of the Election Commission (EC). As the guardian of electoral integrity, the EC plays a central role in upholding democratic values in India. Rahul Gandhi's allegations regarding voter list irregularities in Mahadevapur constituency, where his own party is in power, appear strategically questionable. Instead of filing a formal complaint supported by evidence, the opposition leader made public accusations, thereby bypassing the established legal route. The article rightly observes that targeting a Congress-ruled state like Karnataka creates doubts about the intent behind these claims. Such an approach risks damaging public trust in the EC, an institution that must remain neutral and respected. While electoral accountability is essential, unsubstantiated politically motivated claims only erode public confidence in democratic institutions. Political leaders must act with responsibility and uphold credibility of bodies like the EC, which form the backbone of India's democratic process.

Varsha Omprakash, St. Francis College for Women

EC must redeem itself

It is ironic that the Election Commission of India (ECI) that must be politically neutral in the performance of its duties has been at the center of a political storm after the Opposition raised doubts about its competence, impartiality and integrity in the preparation of voters' lists and conduct of elections. The problem with the commission is that it lacks transparency and the will to ensure a level-playing field for all political parties. In taking a confrontational approach towards Rahul Gandhi for lifting the lid on what he calls 'vote chori' and campaigning for righting the electoral process, the poll body has not marshalled its neutrality and willingness to take corrective action. By doubling down on its demand that Rahul Gandhi file a signed affidavit within seven days or apologize in an intimidatory manner instead of investigating the alleged voter theft and putting forth its lucid argument about his failure to do so within the deadline will disprove the allegations, the Election Commission has lent credence to the charge of acting as an agent of the BJP. Its claim that it does not distinguish between parties is belied by its lack of interest in asking BJP MP Anurag Thakur to file an affidavit for alleging voter list discrepancies in Rae Bareilly. The Election Commission must ask itself why it becomes necessary for the Supreme Court to issue orders to it to protect the sanctity of elections. The commission must redeem itself or, failing that, we must redeem it for the sake of Indian democracy.

G David Milton, Maruthanathan (TN)

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BENGALURU ONLINE

HM orders action against person who accused CM of killing 28 people

BENGALURU: Home Minister G Parashuram on Monday said he has instructed officials to take legal action against a person who has alleged Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's involvement in the murder of 28 people. The issue was raised by the opposition BJP in the Legislative Assembly, questioning the government's inaction against the person who levelled the allegations. Although the name was not taken by the Home Minister, Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar or senior BJP leaders, official sources and some BJP legislators identified the person as Mahesh Shetty Thimmaray in the Assembly.

Thimmaray had spearheaded the fight for justice for the 11-year-old student from Ujire, who was raped and murdered in Dharmasthala in 2012. He was also prominent among those who demanded justice and probe, following the claims of mass murder, rape, and mass burials in Dharmasthala, over the past two decades.

The Special Investigation Team (SIT) formed by the state government is probing the claims of mass murder, rape, and mass burials in Dharmasthala. "Do you think the government is so helpless? I'm unable to understand... let's not make that person (who made allegations against CM) big. There are multiple cases against that person. I have given instructions to take action against that person. Such people cannot be left just like that," Parashuram said.

Read more at <https://epaper.thehansindia.com>

Cricket lovers have right to know BCCI activities



PROF. MADABHUSHI SIDDHAR ACHARYULU

Yet another strike against RTI

If transparency is compromised in the case of India's wealthiest sports body, others may seek similar immunity.



RTI has been one of India's most effective tools for grassroots activism and investigative journalism. This exemption will further embolden moves to undermine information commissions, deny information, or narrow definitions of "public interest".

In an unfortunate development, the National Sports Governance Bill, placing the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) outside the RTI Act, was passed recently. It is another attack on transparency in India. It was introduced just before the Lok Sabha adjourned amidst opposition protests. The bill claims to regulate the functioning of national sports bodies, provide for their recognition, but it will further kill the Right to Information Act 2005.

The new Bill against RTI will be violating the principles and several judgments of the Supreme Court, High Courts, Law Commission recommendations, and CIC judgments, declaring BCCI as a public authority under the Constitution.

The BCCI, though technically a private society, wields state-like powers over Indian cricket. It selects national teams, organizes tournaments on public land, uses government security, and enjoys tax exemptions.

Recognizing these facts, (this writer as the then Central Information Commissioner), held that the BCCI was a "public authority" under Section 2(h) of the RTI Act. He stated: "Functioning of the BCCI directly affects the public interest and national image. It cannot shy away from public accountability just because it was not created by statute." In his dissent order (by this writer as CIC) dated July 10, 2018, he

noted: "BCCI is an organization whose actions and decisions affect the fundamental rights of citizens. Selection for national teams, organizing matches in stadiums built on public land, and use of state police and security forces are public functions, not private acts."

On October 2, 2018, the BCCI was covered under the Right to Information Act saying "The SC has also reaffirmed that the BCCI is the approved 'national-level body holding virtually monopoly rights to organize cricketing events in the country'. Hence, it was held answerable to the people of the country under its mechanism."

The CIC appellate body in RTI matters, went through the law, orders of the Supreme Court, the Law Commission of India's report, submissions of the Central Public Information Officer in the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports to conclude that the status, nature and functional characteristics of the BCCI fulfil required conditions of Section 2(h) of the RTI Act.

The CIC directed the President and Committee of Administrators to designate deserving officers as central public information officers, central assistant public information officers, and first appellate authorities as required under the law. Acharyulu gave the BCCI 15 days to put online and official mechanisms in place to receive applications for information under the RTI Act. The matter came before him as the Sports Ministry did not give a satisfactory response to an RTI applicant, Geeta Rani, who had sought to know the provisions and

guidelines under which the BCCI has been representing India and selecting players for the country.

The CIC also stated: The BCCI should be listed as an NSF covered under the RTI Act. The RTI Act should be made applicable to the BCCI, along with its entire constituent member cricketing associations, provided they fulfil the criteria applicable to the BCCI, as discussed in the Law Commission's report.

It was reported: "There was a CIC hearing on July 10, when it was asked as to why BCCI shouldn't come under the RTI? The BCCI didn't even file a reply and sat on the show-cause notice."

Why is Parliament opposing SC judgements?

This legal reasoning was bolstered by the Supreme Court's 2016 ruling in BCCI v. Cricket Association of Bihar, where the court emphasised that BCCI discharges "public functions", and thus can be subject to judicial and constitutional norms.

Furthermore, the Law Commission of India, in its 275th report, concluded unambiguously that BCCI qualifies as a public authority and should be brought under the RTI Act. The Commission observed:

"The BCCI exercises 'state-like' powers and monopolistic control over cricket. Its actions have a huge impact on the fun-

damental rights of players and the public, and hence it must be held accountable under RTI."

It further stated: "BCCI virtually acts as a National Sports Federation. It selects players to represent the country, frames rules for the game, and receives indirect funding and support from the government... There is no justification for keeping such an entity outside the purview of the RTI Act."

Exempting the BCCI from RTI not only undermines judicial and expert opinion but also sets a dangerous precedent for diluting the RTI Act.

Institutional Impunity:

If a body like the BCCI, which receives indirect public funding and exercises public authority, is exempt, other powerful private entities with public functions may demand similar treatment.

Legitimising secrecy:

The move signals citizens and bureaucracies that 'opacity is acceptable' in public-interest domains. It emboldens other departments to resist transparency by altering definitions and classifications.

Weakening RTI norms:

RTI has been one of India's most effective tools for grassroots activism and investiga-

tive journalism. This exemption will further embolden moves to undermine information commissions, deny information, or narrow definitions of "public interest".

Reversal of progressive interpretation:

Over the years, courts and information commissions have expanded the scope of RTI through liberal interpretations. This proposed law legislatively overturns that progress and curtails the Act's evolution.

We need to be warned: "Shielding sports bodies from RTI sets a regressive precedent. It will encourage privatized governance of public resources without any democratic oversight."

UK and Australia show the way:

Far from exempting powerful sports bodies, democracies like the United Kingdom and Australia have moved towards greater transparency in sports governance.

UK Freedom of Information Act:

The UK Sport and Sport England, both government-funded sports bodies, are subject to the UK Freedom of Information Act.

Even national governing bodies for sport that receive significant public funds are required to publish financial statements, governance codes, and performance metrics.

After football, UK athletics and football, sports governance codes were introduced with strong emphasis on openness, diversity, and accountability.

The Australian example:

In Australia, national sports organizations that receive funding from the Australian Sports Commission must meet transparency benchmarks.

These organizations are subject to public audits, performance reporting, and ethi-

cal compliance requirements.

Australia's Freedom of Information Act 1982 applies to sports bodies engaged in public functions or funded by public money.

In both these jurisdictions, the trend is toward more—not less—accountability in sports governance.

India's proposed BCCI exemption reverses this democratic trend.

Cricket is a public trust:

Cricket is more than a game in India—it is a public trust, and the body that governs it must be accountable to the people.

By excluding the BCCI from the RTI Act, the government is not just shielding one organization—it is sending a message that powerful institutions can evade public scrutiny if they are politically or financially influential enough.

If transparency is compromised in the case of India's most visible and wealthiest sports body, it won't be long before others seek the same immunity. Such moves will steadily erode citizens' rights to know, corrode the culture of accountability, and damage India's global image as a democracy that values openness.

The RTI Act is a pillar of democratic governance in India. Any exemption to BCCI will not just be a technicality—it will be a precedent with far-reaching consequences.

Parliament must think twice before legislating secrecy into a domain that so clearly belongs to the public.

As the Law Commission reminded us: "Transparency in sports governance is essential to ensure fairness, prevent corruption, and uphold the spirit of the game. The BCCI must not be allowed to escape public scrutiny."

One must understand that transparency is not optional. It is foundational.

(The writer is a former CIC and Advisor, School of Law, Mahindra University, Hyderabad)

Do hot drinks cause cancer? An expert explains

VINCENT HO

WHEN you order a coffee, do you ask for it to be "extra hot"? Whether you enjoy tea, coffee or something else, hot drinks are a comforting and often highly personal ritual. The exact temperature to brew tea or serve coffee for the best flavour is hotly debated. But there may be something else you're not considering: your health.

Yes, hot drinks can be too hot – and are even linked to cancer. So, let's look at the evidence. What's the link between hot drinks and cancer? There is no evidence for a link between hot drinks and throat cancer and the evidence for a link between hot drinks and stomach cancer is unclear. But there is a link between hot drinks and cancers of the "food pipe" or oesophagus.

In 2016, the International Agency for Research on Cancer classified drinking very hot beverages, meaning above 65°C, as "probably carcinogenic to humans" – this is the same risk category as emissions from indoor wood smoke or eating a lot of red meat. The agency's report found it was the temperature, not the drinks, that were responsible. This is based mainly on evidence from South America, where studies found a link between drinking a lot of mate – a traditional herbal drink usually drunk at around 70°C – and a higher risk of oesophageal cancer.

Similar studies in the Middle East, Africa and Asia have also supported



The risk of cancer may depend on how much hot liquid you drink in one sitting and how quickly. It seems drinking a lot in one go is more likely to damage the oesophagus by causing a heat injury. In one study, researchers measured the temperature inside the oesophagus of people drinking hot coffee at different temperatures.

the link between drinking very hot beverages and developing oesophageal cancer. However, until recently we didn't have substantial research exploring this link in Europe and other Western populations. This year, a large study of almost half a million adults in the United Kingdom confirmed drinking higher amounts of very hot drinks (tea and coffee) was associated with oesophageal cancer.

The study found that someone who drank eight or more cups a day of very hot tea or coffee was almost six times more likely to develop oesopha-

geal cancer, compared to someone who didn't have hot drinks. How do hot drinks cause cancer?

Drinking a lot of very hot drinks can damage cells in the oesophagus lining, and it's believed over time this can lead to cancer developing. Researchers first proposed this link almost 90 years ago. What we know about how hot drinks can damage the oesophagus mainly comes from animal studies.

Very hot water may accelerate cancer growth:
One animal study from 2016 stud-

ied mice that were prone to developing cancer. Mice given very hot water (70°C) were more likely to develop precancerous growths in the oesophagus, and sooner, compared to mice given water at lower temperatures. Another theory is that heat damage to the oesophagus lining weakens its normal barrier, increasing the risk of further damage from gastric acid reflux (from the stomach). Over time, this chronic damage can increase the chance of developing oesophageal cancer.

Does the quantity matter?

The risk of cancer may depend on how much hot liquid you drink in one sitting and how quickly. It seems drinking a lot in one go is more likely to damage the oesophagus by causing a heat injury. In one study, researchers measured the temperature inside the oesophagus of people drinking hot coffee at different temperatures. They found the size of the sip the person took had more impact than how hot the drink was. A very big sip (20 millilitres) of 65°C coffee increased the temperature inside the oesophagus by up to 12°C.

Over time, large sips can lead to sustained heat injury that can damage cells. The occasional small sip of coffee at 65°C isn't likely to result in any long-term problems. But over years, drinking large amounts of very hot drinks could very well increase the risk of oesophageal cancer. So, what's

a safe temperature? The brewing temperatures for drinks such as coffee are very high – often close to the boiling point of water.

For example, takeaway hot drinks may sometimes be served at very high temperatures (around 90°C) to allow for cooling when people drink them later at the office or home.

One study from the United States calculated the ideal temperature for coffee, factoring in the risk of heat injury to the oesophagus while preserving flavour and taste. The researchers came up with an optimum temperature of 57.8°C.

Tips to consume hot drinks safely:
1) Slow down, take your time and enjoy; 2) Allowing time for a very hot drink to cool is important and research has shown a hot drink's temperature can drop by 10–15°C in five minutes.

Other things that may help cool a hot drink: 1) stirring and blowing; 2) opening the lid on a takeaway drink. Coffee with the lid off can cool twice as fast as with the lid on; 3) mixing in some cool water or milk.

Finally, small sips are a good idea to test the temperature, given we know having a large amount has a significant impact on the temperature inside the oesophagus and potential damage to its lining.

(The writer is associated with Western Sydney University)

DECCAN Chronicle

19 AUGUST 2025

Will move to cut GST rates trigger consumption boom?

The BJP government's proposal to cut GST rates is long overdue and could boost domestic consumption, easing the impact of global economic uncertainty on India. When the Goods and Services Tax (GST) was rolled out in 2017 as part of a major indirect tax reform, the Central and state governments brought 1,300 goods and 500 services under its ambit to end the incidence of "tax on tax." However, the initiative was criticised for being too complex due to its multiple tax slabs — five per cent, 12 per cent, 18 per cent and 28 per cent — along with a special sin tax on some items.

After eight years, the government has proposed reducing the number of tax slabs to two — five per cent and 18 per cent — with a 40 per cent special rate on a select few items. Though the official draft is yet to be released, indications are that 90 per cent of the goods in the 28 per cent and 12 per cent categories will shift to 18 per cent and five per cent respectively. This could translate into at least seven to 10 per cent savings for consumers, depending on the product purchased.

Products in the 28 per cent bracket — which make up 19 per cent of manufactured goods — include non-essential FMCG items such as chewing gum and pan masam, as well as big-ticket consumer durables and cars. Moving them to 18 per cent could reduce prices by about 10 per cent.

Goods currently taxed at 12 per cent — such as semi-essentials like frozen meat products, butter, cheese, namkeen, sauce, spoons, forks, tooth powder, mobile phones, apparels, and hotel accommodation among others — will shift to the five per cent bracket, enabling savings of at least seven per cent.

The biggest savings in absolute terms would be for those planning to purchase a small car priced between ₹6 lakh and ₹15 lakh. A 10 per cent lower tax rate would reduce prices by ₹60,000 to ₹1,50,000. Other products could see an average saving of around eight per cent, meaning a family with a ₹1-lakh monthly expenditure could save up to ₹8,000 per month.

Analysts believe that lowering GST could disproportionately affect state governments, as indirect tax is their major revenue source and the Centre does not share income from cesses and surcharges. This could weaken states' capacity to spend independently without seeking support from the Centre.

Overall, the current rejig of GST slabs, along with the previously announced income tax rationalisation, could lead to more money in people's hands and theoretically boost consumption, triggering a virtuous cycle. While the government's measures are well-intentioned and timely, the big question remains: Will these moves compensate for years of stagnant private-sector salaries? Will they instil enough confidence for people to borrow, spend, and revive animal spirits in the economy? Will these measures inspire confidence in the private sector to spend to create new capacities and hire more people? It is a \$4-trillion question, which is waiting to be answered.

NDA's V-P pick appears acceptable

The ruling BJP may have pulled an acceptable name out of a hat in picking Chandrapuram Ponnamasu Radhakrishnan from Tamil Nadu as the vice-presidential candidate of the NDA. The veteran politician who was twice elected as MP from the erstwhile Tamil Nadu Congress Party (TNC) ticks many boxes in these particularly politically polarised times.

Coming as he does from an RSS Pracharak background, he may be the olive branch offered by the PM at a time when the ideological parent organisation has been speaking about the retirement age of 75. As the PM is fond of quoting from Tamil classics, his choice of *Yadum ore Yaavaram kheir* ("Every place is our native. Every one is our companion") is seemingly apt for "CPR", a moderate and accessible face from a state that is getting ready for the polls to be held next summer.

The TN ruling party DMK, dispiritedly opposed to the BJP, also welcomed his nomination, which it had to let it be seen as opposing a fellow Tamil.

However, it came up with a political riposte to the strategically shrewd NDA nomination by calling for a Tamil politician to be picked as the I.N.D.I.A. bloc choice to oppose Radhakrishnan, who was named after the scholarly Vice-President Dr Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan from the state who also went on to serve as President.

The NDA, enjoying a sufficient majority while commanding around 423 votes in an electoral college of 782 MPs (including nominated Rajya Sabha members), should get him elected against anyone the Opposition may name as it is compelled to field a Vice-Presidential candidate, ostensibly for ideological reasons but also to test the political temperature.

There is no basis for any conjecture that CPR as the NDA candidate would have any influence on the Tamil Nadu political scene in which the DMK is firmly ensconced now. But the ruling dispensation would like to send the message that Tamil Nadu is not necessarily being singled out for step motherly treatment even as the BJP hopes to enhance its support in the state.

The plus point in this candidature is Radhakrishnan's experience as the Centre's representative in Raj Bhavans in Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Hyderabad and Puducherry might help him to be a capable chairman of the Rajya Sabha, which had seen a tumultuous and argumentative period with the garrulous Jagdeep Dhankhar in the chair and whose resignation has necessitated the mid-term election of a Vice-President.

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Subhani



3 hard choices ahead for India in uncertain world



Syed Ata Hasnain

There are several hard choices lying ahead for India — it must decide whether to ride out the storm in India-US relations, to yield to Mr Trump's pressures, or seize the opportunity to reshape its relationship with China.

India-US ties are again going through a difficult patch, in marked contrast to its earlier tenure, when Donald Trump castigated Pakistan for duplicity and spoke warmly of India's role in the Indo-Pacific region, he now seems determined to cause discomfort. His outreach to Pakistan's Army Chief and his disparagement of India's positions all point to an abrasive phase. Yet just as the US imposed sanctions after Pakistan's 1998 nuclear tests, it is now ready to reset ties under George W. Bush Jr with the civil nuclear agreement, this downturn too is unlikely to be permanent. India-US ties have always been cyclical, and resilient enough to recover.

What matters now is how India navigates the interim period. Should it stay the course, treat the present as temporary turbulence, and preserve both US and Russian ties? Should it bend towards Washington to protect the strategic partnership, even if that means eroding Moscow's confidence? Or should it use the moment to test new initiatives with China, beginning with foreign minister Wang Yi's visit to India? Each option has costs and benefits, but all must be weighed against one caveat: Mr Trump's gestures towards Pakistan should make no difference to India, and New Delhi must studiously ignore them. Pakistan's external equations have never determined India's trajectory. India's focus must remain on managing the major power triangle of the US, Russia and China, while protecting its economy.

The first option is continu-

ity. Just hold the line, no bravado, and keep the India-US relationship alive in functional domains until the political climate improves. It means some loss in the US strategic calculus, but it would safeguard the Russia partnership, which continues to matter for energy, defence supplies, and diplomacy. This approach plays to India's tradition of patience and strategic autonomy. It would allow India to sustain networks with Europe, Japan, ASEAN, and the Global South, all while waiting for the inevitable post-Trump thaw. The cost: some edging out of potential Indo-Pacific planning. Yet the benefit is stability, particularly when Moscow still values loyalty and continuity at a time of its own stress.

The second option is correction. India could move more openly into the US camp, accept Mr Trump's transactional style, and work to restore the sheen of the India-US strategic partnership. That would reaffirm India's centrality in the Indo-Pacific, protect its access to technology and investment, and reassure Western markets.

The risks, however, are serious. Russia would be the loser in this equation. If Washington and Moscow were to find a transactional accommodation in the future, India might suddenly be left exposed, distrustful in Moscow, beginning with foreign minister Wang Yi's visit to India? Each option has costs and benefits, but all must be weighed against one caveat: Mr Trump's gestures towards Pakistan should make no difference to India, and New Delhi must studiously ignore them.

The third option is opportunity. India could use Wang Yi's visit to test the possibility of a cautious reset with China. Officials acknowledge that India's growth trajectory depends heavily on access to Chinese supply chains. For China too, side see lines of communication through the Indian Ocean

Each option has costs and benefits, but all must be weighed against one caveat: Mr Trump's gestures towards Pakistan should make no difference to India, and New Delhi must studiously ignore them.

are an overriding security concern. Today, Beijing views India with suspicion as a potential disruptor working in concert with anti-China powers, and this perception has partly driven its Himalayan assertiveness. If India takes the initiative to build modest trust, even via limited economic or maritime dialogues, the long-term payoff could be significant.

In ten years, the relationship could look very different, with reduced chances of conflict and more room for cooperation in areas like climate, trade and connectivity. The risk, of course, is that China could pocket goodwill without altering its behaviour. And even limited confidence-building would signal to Washington and Moscow that India has multiple options.

None of these paths is free of complications. Pretending nothing is wrong risks inertia. Kowtowing to Washington risks alienating Russia. Reaching out to Beijing risks disappointment and domestic scepticism. But foreign policy is rarely about single-track choices. For India, a creative blend may be most effective: preserve operational ties with the US while awaiting a mendier era; reassure Mr Putin that Russia remains valued despite sanctions; and cautiously probe the potential for a reset with China. The key is not to overcommit in any direction while ensuring the economy remains shielded from shocks.

One non-negotiable remains: economic growth must not suffer. India cannot afford sanctions, supply disruptions, or loss of investment confidence. Access to Western markets and capital, discounted Russian oil, and secure manufacturing supply chains

from China all matter simultaneously. A successful foreign policy must therefore be judged by whether it secures the resources needed for India's development.

It is also essential to separate the signal from the noise. Mr Trump's embrace of Pakistan is political theatre. India must ignore it just as it has ignored past swings in US-Pakistan ties. Pakistan once thrived on China's support, forcing the US periodically to return to Islamabad. But India has never defined its policy by such moves. Today too, Mr Trump's flirtation with Pakistan should not become a distraction. India's calculus must remain anchored in the picture: long-term US convergence despite short-term hostility, Russian continuity despite sanctions, and Chinese importance despite mistrust.

India has always been a practitioner of multi-alignment. It has remained between powers without collapsing into dependency. This moment calls for the same dexterity. Mr Trump's US may be difficult, but India's resilience to maintain ties with all three while protecting its core interests. That means patience with Washington, loyalty with Moscow, and initiative with Beijing.

History shows downturns can become breakthroughs. The US that sanctioned India in 1998 became its strategic partner by 2005. The China that fought India in 1962 became a critical trade partner by the 2000s. The Russia that now leans heavily on Beijing still treats India as a valued interlocutor. Nothing is permanent in global politics.

The breakdown in India-US relations under Mr Trump is real but not fatal. With steadfastness and balance, India can endure this phase and emerge with more, not fewer, options when the winds shift. The task is not to choose one option forever, but to steer carefully through turbulence, confident that calmer waters will return.

The writer, a retired lieutenant general, is a former GOC of the Srinagar-based 15 ("Chinar") Corps

LETTERS

WELCOME MOVE ON GST

It is heartening to note that the prices of many goods and services (including consumer durable goods such as cars, motorcycles, refrigerators) are likely to fall, thanks to GST rationalisation policy announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Independence Day. The real income of the people will go up with fall in prices. Keeping GST, an indirect tax, simple, will ensure win-win situation for producers / sellers, consumers and the government. Viewing from the prism of the government, it can be quite sanguine of considerable revenue to its exchequer as the contemplated three-slab structure (including demerit goods) - standard goods (5 per cent), merit goods (18%) and demerit goods (40%) - can ensure better compliance of the people now than before.

S.Ramakrishnasayee
Chennai

MORE PARKS NEEDED

Public parks in India are fast declining. Besides rapid urbanisation, poor infrastructure, lack of safety, and inadequate upkeep have contributed to their decline. This impacts the quality of life for citizens with higher standards of living. The task is not to choose one option forever, but to steer carefully through turbulence, confident that calmer waters will return.

R. SIVAKUMAR
Chennai

Mail your letters to chennaidesk@deccanmail.com



Aakar Patel

New Maharashtra security law open to abuse, threatens rights; say 'no' to it

We celebrated Independence Day earlier this month, to mark the culmination of our freedom struggle. Independence and freedom from what? From alien rule and from all oppressive laws — no matter who imposes them on us. The governor of Maharashtra is currently examining a law passed by the state Assembly called the "Maharashtra Special Public Security Bill".

I have written to the governor, on behalf of Amnesty International India, and asked him to not sign it and instead to deny his assent. Framed as a counter-measure against those who have come to be called "Urban Naxals", the bill threatens constitutionally and internationally protected human rights. "Naxalism" is seen as a decades-old rural anti-Communist-inspired movement. "Urban Naxalism" in the present context presumably refers to alleged support for this movement by intellectuals, academics and others. The term "Urban Naxalism" has no legal definition in Indian law. With its vague language, discriminatory focus, absence of judicial oversight, and high potential for misuse, the bill risks criminalising of legitimate dissent in one of our largest states.

As may be expected, Maharashtra chief minister Devendra Fadnis has asserted that the law will not be used to suppress government critics. However, if the term "Urban Naxalism" has no legal definition in India, then what is it? It is a rhetorical and politically charged phrase — popularised in the

media and political discourse, not jurisprudence. Its very vagueness allows it to be weaponised against civil society, often conflating peaceful dissent with sedition or terrorism. There is a troubling precedent. The Bhatia Koregaon case, in which 16 activists were arrested under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, or UAPA, demonstrates how this label has been used to detain individuals for years without trial. Many of those accused were not linked to any act of violence, but merely to the expression of critical views, advocacy for marginalised communities, or the defence of civil liberties. Notably, the arrests began in 2018 during Mr Fadnis's earlier tenure as chief minister. Seven years later, trials have yet to commence, but remain denied to six of the activists, and one of the accused, Father Stan Swamy, died in custody.

The "Urban Naxal" narrative has dangerously blurred the line between non-violent political opposition and violent extremism. Such conflation is not only incompatible with India's constitutional values, but also violates its international legal obligations.

The law has other troubling elements, such as "discretionary" law. Its opening paragraphs identify "left-wing extremist organisations" as similar organisations" as its focus. This singles out ideologies for criminalisation and violates Article 26 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which guarantees equal protection under the law regardless of political opinion, and which

India is a signatory to. Punishing membership of an organisation solely based on ideas without proof of incitement or participation in violence is also violative of the human rights of Indians.

The law defines "unlawful activity" using imprecise and subjective terms such as "menace to public order" or "tendency to interfere with the administration of law." These definitions could encompass peaceful protest or civil disobedience, the foundational elements of our freedom struggle.

Section 3 empowers the executive to declare organisations "unlawful", with no provision for an independent judicial review. The advisory board tasked with reviewing such declarations comprises only government appointees, meaning that they will be kangaroo courts.

Sections 4 and 5, which permit searches and seizures based on an officer's "opinion" or "personal knowledge" strip away all judicial safeguards and open the door to arbitrary action. This violates the rights guaranteeing fair trial and due process in searches, protecting individuals against undue interference with one's home, property and privacy.

Section 14 prohibits appeals, while Section 17 provides blanket immunity to government officials, even in cases of abuse. Such clauses eliminate accountability.

As has become the fashion, colonial-style oppression on jailing people is present in this law also. Section 15 renders all offences under the bill non-bailable and cognisable, despite the vagueness of

their definitions. This facilitates prolonged pre-trial detention without judicial scrutiny.

On top of everything else, the law isn't needed: India already possesses very restrictive counter-terrorism and criminal laws, including the UAPA, MCOCA, and Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, which criminalise the same or similar alleged conduct. The new bill adds another weapon to suppress dissent, turning the legal process itself into punishment and further eroding civil liberties.

If signed and enforced, the law under the guise of security represents a grave and unnecessary expansion of state power at the cost of fundamental rights. Far from safeguarding Maharashtra, it criminalises dissent, debate and accountability. The misuse of vague terms like "Urban Naxal" has already caused immense harm. Assenting to this bill would legitimise a framework that enables abuse and impunity over justice. This is why I have urged the governor, with the utmost respect, to withhold assent to the bill. The observation of Independence Day should not be restricted to the symbolism of flag-hoisting or salutes and long speeches. What should be observed is our continuing commitment to freedom, the protection of civil liberties, the preservation of human rights, and access to justice. This law is a clear violation of all of these, and for this reason one hopes that it is not inflicted on Indians.

The writer is the chair of Amnesty International India. Twitter: @aakar_patel

Powering farms

Scaling up PM-KUSUM is smart climate and energy strategy

India's agricultural sector consumes nearly a fifth of its electricity and a hefty portion of diesel for irrigation. By replacing diesel pumps with solar-powered ones and solarising grid-connected pumps, the PM-KUSUM (Pradhan Mantri Kisan Urja Suraksha evam Uthaan Mahabhiyan) scheme is playing a crucial role in reducing emission, lowering subsidies, and protecting farmers from volatile input costs. Phase 1 of the scheme, running through 2025-26, aims to achieve an additional 34.8 gigawatt (Gw) of solar power for irrigation through standalone solar pumps, grid-connected pump solarisation, and small solar projects on barren land. With about ₹34,000 crore earmarked, the scheme envisages the setting up of 1.4 million standalone solar agricultural pumps and the solarisation of 3.5 million grid-connected agriculture pumps, including feeder-level solarisation. In fact, demand has surged, which highlights its overwhelming acceptance and urgency for expansion. In 2024-25 alone, the Indian Renewable Energy Development Agency recorded a 27 per cent increase in loan sanctions under the scheme, reaching ₹47,453 crore, while loan disbursements rose 20 per cent.

In this regard, the Ministry of New and Renewable Energy's plan to launch Phase 2 of the scheme, following its integration into the Agricultural Infrastructure Fund in August last year, seems promising. With guidance from Phase 1 learning, it may raise the central financial assistance cap, accommodate agrovoltaic installations, where crops and solar panels coexist, and adopt scalable models like Maharashtra's centralised land-aggregation portal, which mobilised 40,000 acres for solar farming. Replacing diesel pumps slashes carbon emission and mitigates the risk of fluctuating fuel prices. Solar power delivers peak output during the daytime, coinciding with irrigation needs, making it more efficient. Moreover, surplus electricity produced by farmers can be fed back into the grid, generating additional income at a minimal transmission loss. Solar irrigation thus offers a decentralised, resilient power support, empowering rural communities while cutting carbon footprints.

Of course, wind and biomass too are important components in India's renewable mix. They matter, notably for round-the-clock power. But harnessing the wind, both onshore and offshore, remains geographically constrained and less farmer-friendly. Biomass, on the other hand, raises several logistical and sustainability questions. Solar, by contrast, is modular, farmer-controlled, and cheap. Household solar adoption is showing good results. Rooftop solar capacity in India crossed 19 Gw, while installed solar capacity surpassed 119 Gw as of July 2025. Enrolment in home-focused schemes like the PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana has brought 1 million households on to solar power grids, proving that decentralised models are scalable and effective.

If Phase 2 of PM-KUSUM can match or even exceed the scale of Phase 1, India can harness the rural-energy revolution. However, there are hurdles in implementation. It is often a challenge to find contiguous land parcels that can be pooled and made available to a power project developer. Besides, several states offer affordable electricity, which reduces the incentive for farmers to switch to solar pumps. While India's power sector needs deeper reforms, increasing the adoption of solar power in agriculture is an encouraging sign.

Justice delayed

Fast-track courts are not fast enough

Fast-track special courts (FTSCs) were established to speed up trials in rape and child sexual-abuse cases. Yet, these very courts, meant to accelerate justice, are themselves moving at a slow pace, according to the data recently presented in the Lok Sabha by Union Law and Justice Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal. The numbers for Delhi are especially troubling: The place currently has 16 FTSCs, and of the 6,278 cases instituted since inception, only 2,718 were disposed of by June this year. Cases under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (PoCSO) Act take, on average, over 1,700 days (nearly five years) to conclude. This is far too long for providing justice to victims of such abuse. However, this mirrors a broader judicial system across India: The backlog in courts has reached staggering levels. The India Justice Report 2025 found that the pending cases in high courts and subordinate courts had crossed 50 million by the end of 2024 — a 30 per cent rise since 2020. Some high-court matters have lingered for over 30 years. The result is a system that risks denying justice not only to the many but also to those it promised to prioritise.

It is now clear that simply creating more FTSCs will not solve the problem. Many existing courts struggle with severe staffing shortages, procedural inefficiencies, and inadequate infrastructure. Forensic laboratories, critical to evidence in sexual-offence trials, remain chronically underfunded and overburdened, causing delays that often stretch for months or even years. Digital infrastructure, a potential game-changer for efficiency, remains patchy. In some courts, stable internet connectivity is a challenge; secure, integrated digital evidence systems are far from universal. Reforms in India's judicial system are long overdue. They must be structural and procedural. Staffing gaps must be filled urgently, with transparent recruitment and capacity-building for the judicial and non-judicial personnel. Forensic capacity should be expanded through more regional labs and strict turnaround timelines. A robust digital backbone is essential for universal, secure case access, online filing, and virtual hearings. One of the reasons for inadequate capacity is low state expenditure on the judiciary. According to estimates, India's expenditure on this as a percentage of gross domestic product is about half that of European countries.

Procedural discipline is equally necessary: Strict limits on adjournments in time-bound cases, district-specific backlog-reduction plans supervised by senior judges, and standard operating procedures across institutions to expedite legal processes. For victims of sexual assault, prolonged delays are not just administrative failures; they are emotional and psychological burdens. As the Delhi High Court's Justice Swarnika Kanta Sharma rightly observed last year, each moment spent waiting for justice deepens trauma and delays healing. Fast-track courts were designed to symbolise urgency, efficiency, and compassion. Unless bottlenecks are tackled in parallel, "fast-tracking" will remain an illusion, and the promise of swift justice for all categories of gender-based violence will remain unfulfilled.



Global climate failure

At COP 30 this November, the primary goal must be to increase pressure on developed countries to move faster and more credibly on climate mitigation

In November this year, the 30th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) will take place in Belem, in the Amazonian part of Brazil. The UN Climate Convention is crucial because the mitigation of climate change risks cannot be done sufficiently by any country on its own. The accumulation of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases in the atmosphere is inherently global in its impact and requires global cooperation for mitigation.

As originally conceived, the UNFCCC placed the primary responsibility for climate mitigation action on developed countries (more formally Annex 1 countries in UNFCCC). This has changed. The developed countries have moved against the idea of "common but differentiated responsibilities" that is explicitly a part of the UNFCCC (Article 3 Part 1). They have also moved away from negotiated formal commitments and now argue for voluntary national commitments for all countries, whether developing or developed. That is what is reflected in the agreement at the 2015 meeting of the COP in Paris. This has placed developing countries, particularly China and India, at the centre of global action on climate mitigation.

China, India, and other developing countries have accepted responsibilities for actions not envisaged in the original UNFCCC and are already working to make their growth objectives less dependent on fossil fuels. The developed countries have moved in the opposite direction and diluted their commitment that is implicit in their historical responsibility for carbon accumulation in the atmosphere, which is the main cause of climate change.

The 2015 Paris Agreement set a goal to keep glo-

bal temperature increases well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels, with efforts to limit the rise to 1.5°C. The unfortunate reality is that the actual actions of countries have made not just the 1.5°C target, but even the 2°C limit less unlikely.

According to the UNEP Emissions Gap Report 2024, the present commitments made by countries will only keep the global temperature rise in a range of 2.6-2.8°C. It also points out that policies currently in place are insufficient to meet even these commitments, and if no additional action is implemented, the world could experience a temperature rise of 3.1°C.

As of 2024, emissions have not deviated substantially from the high end emissions scenario of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). On this basis, a recent Asian Development Bank report states that climate change could reduce developing Asia and the Pacific's gross domestic product (GDP) by 17 per cent by 2070, and India's GDP could fall by 24.7 per cent if the high end scenario is not avoided.

This fear of temperature increase is not just about the long-term future. According to a report from the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the global mean near-surface temperature for each year between 2024 and 2028 is predicted to be between 1.1°C and 1.9°C higher than the 1850-1900 baseline. A substantial rise in the average global temperature is not just a distant threat but a more immediate one. This year has seen a spate of heat waves in Europe and North America. There is now a growing fear of climate change-induced tipping points that can trigger a large shift in temperature, sea-level rise and weather uncertainties.

We need much more effective cooperative action on climate risks than what is being promised now.



NITIN DESAI

Tariff shock: A wakeup call for India

In an unexpected development, India now faces a 50 per cent tariff on its goods exports to the United States, a hurdle higher than that of almost any other country in the world. As a result, the government needs to consider how it should respond. While there are political considerations that it will need to take into account, the objective is clear from an economic point of view. Mitigate the damage, so India can return to rapid growth. Unfortunately, this task is complicated because overseas prospects have dimmed even as the domestic economy has been slowing down.

How severe is this tariff shock? Many analysts have argued that its impact will be limited. They point out that goods exports to the US account for only 2 per cent of India's gross domestic product or GDP, only two-thirds of which will be affected, since pharmaceuticals, electronics, and petroleum products have been exempted.

However, this line of reasoning overlooks the bigger picture. The US is not just India's largest export market — it is also a critical economic partner. Consequently, the tariff shock will not only affect trade flows — it will rattle investor confidence, disrupt supply chains, and chip away at India's long-term export competitiveness. The real risk lies in these ripple effects, which extend far beyond the immediate numbers.

To understand why, consider the plight of three types of firms.

The first and the most obvious are global manufacturers. India has been pitching itself as the next global manufacturing hub, especially for firms exporting to the US or diversifying away from China. This was seen as a potential game-changer for India's growth path. With a young, increasingly skilled workforce and democratic stability, the advantage seemed clear. However, that edge has now been wiped out by a 50 per cent US tariff. Even at the reciprocal 25 per cent imposed on August 7, India would remain less

competitive than most of its Asian rivals who face only 19-20 per cent tariffs on their US exports. If this differential persists, India risks losing out on a once-in-a-generation chance to become the world's manufacturing workshop.

It's not only exporters of goods who stand to lose. The impact could extend to services exporters too. Nearly 60 per cent of India's 1,700-plus global capability centres are US-headquartered. While tariffs don't directly touch them, worsening US-India relations could make the parent firms wary of expanding here. That would be a serious setback, since services exports have been a cornerstone of India's post-Covid growth.

Finally, consider domestic manufacturers. They may not export much but many of them rely heavily on foreign inputs. If India even considers imposing retaliatory measures on the US, to add to those imposed earlier on China, it risks stalling their investment plans further.

The tariff shock, therefore, threatens to ripple through the entire economy. Added to this, high-frequency data already points to an economic slowdown. Non-food bank credit growth has slipped to 10 per cent from 14 per cent a year ago, merchandise exports rose just 2 per cent

in April-June, goods and services tax (GST) collections slowed to 6 per cent from 11 per cent, passenger vehicle sales have slumped, indicating sluggish urban demand, and the real estate boom of the past few years has stalled, creating a growing stock of unsold homes in major cities. In other words, the US tariff shock could not have come at a worse time.

How should India respond? First and foremost, India must resist the temptation to turn inward. Protectionism has never delivered rapid growth — India's own pre-1991 record proves it, and no other country has succeeded that way. The US may be leaning protectionist now, but India



MACRO PULSE
RAJESWARI SENGUPTA

ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA

What matters most is the climate change management strategy of the six major emitters who account for 74 per cent of the cumulative emissions of carbon dioxide as of 2023. These are the United States, the European Union (including the United Kingdom), China, Russia, Japan, and India, ranked in order of their cumulative carbon emissions up to 2023.

The developed countries have a tendency to shift emphasis from cumulative to current rate of emissions, which have declined in the US, Europe, and Japan since 1995, and increased in China, Russia and India. However, if one focuses attention on current emissions relative to population, then the per capita emissions of CO₂ in the developed states in 2023 were 14.3 tonnes in the US, 12.5 tonnes in Russia, 7.9 tonnes in Japan, and 5.4 tonnes in the EU. Against this, China does look a major emitter with its 2023 per capita emissions of 8.4 tonnes of CO₂; but India's per capita emissions in 2023 were only 2.1 tonnes of CO₂.

The US is perhaps the most serious threat. It was a sceptic even during the negotiations in the 1990s, often voicing doubts about human responsibility for observed temperature increases, a responsibility that is now widely accepted. This negative attitude did change later when the US under Barack Obama joined the Paris agreement and Joe Biden introduced substantial action on climate mitigation with incentives in the Inflation Reduction Act.

This has worsened with the actions taken by Donald Trump. He withdrew the US from the Paris Agreement. His "big, beautiful bill" reversed actions undertaken by the previous administration to promote carbon emission reduction. This will reduce the US's promised emission cuts by 2030 from 40 per cent to just 3 per cent — an increase of about 2 billion tonnes of CO₂ in 2030 relative to the original pledge. Clearly, the prospects for climate change have become even worse than the pessimistic forecasts presented above.

Climate change is potentially the most dangerous threat to the future of virtually all societies and economies, a threat which is getting worse with the inadequacy of public policies in most countries on meeting this challenge. This deteriorating situation in government commitments on climate change management must be addressed at the COP 30 in November. The US withdrawal from the Paris Agreement has perhaps undone the compromises reached 10 years ago between developed and developing countries.

Brazil and India, whose per capita CO₂ emissions in 2023 were just 2.3 and 2.1 tonnes, respectively, can join forces with other large low-emitter developing countries, such as Indonesia and Egypt, to reassert the importance of the "common but differentiated responsibilities" principle of the UNFCCC. Hence, the primary goal of the COP 30 meeting this November must be to raise the pressure on developed countries to move faster and more credibly in their action on climate change mitigation.

(Next month, I will discuss the diplomatic and development strategies required for the worsening climate condition)

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The millennial machinery of exclusion



AMRITH MUKHERJEE

"Aapka naam kya hai? (What's your name?)" "Amrith." "Aapka naam kya hai? (What's your full name?)" "Amrith Mukherjee." "A satisfied smile would follow, if not another question. 'Ye Mukherjee kya hote hain? (Which caste do the Mukherjees belong to?)' The dance of social sorting proceeds thus.

This ritual, perfected over millennia, requires no formal training. Every *Savarna* child absorbs its rhythms through osmosis. The questioner's satisfaction is the visible manifestation of a system that has spent centuries perfecting the art of human categorisation. In that pause between surname and recognition, hierarchies older than empires are reassured.

For a society so deeply entrenched in caste and class lines, the extent of cognitive dissonance would be astonishing to any outsider. In one breath, caste is ancient history; in the next, it determines who cleans your home and deserves your child's hand in marriage. In *Savarna* drawing rooms, caste is declared dead with the same confidence that marriage proposals specify: "Wanted: Brahmin boy for Brahmin girl."

The cognitive dissonance enables *Savarna* society to maintain hierarchical privilege while claiming moral innocence. They've perfected the art of having their cake and eating it too, preserving every advantage while disclaiming all responsibility for the system that bestows these advantages.

Studying this worldview and its impact on Indian society is Ravikant Kisan's *Meet the Savarnas*. It examines how this so-called upper class has modernised its methods of exclusion while preserving its fundamental architecture of inequality into the 21st century.

The "varna system," a euphemistic rebranding of caste for textbooks, shows a neat four-tier pyramid. The reality, Mr Kisan points out, is a system of two fundamental divisions: The *Savarnas* (Brahmins, Kshatriyas, Vaishyas, and even Shudras) who exist within the system, and the *Avarnas* (Dalits and *Adivasis*) who are outside it. The *Savarna-Avarna* divide operates like citizenship: Those within enjoy inherited protections, while those outside remain perpetual refugees in their own land.

Discrimination, therefore, operates like a perfectly calibrated machine. As social prejudice lubricates institutional barriers, institutional exclusion normalises social prejudice. The genius of modern caste lies in its ability to make exclusion look like choice. When private universities (41 per cent of higher education) become *Savarna* preserves, it's blamed on "merit" rather than millennia of accumulated advantage. When cinema, sports, business, and media remain *Savarna* domains, it's attributed to "talent" rather than

systematic gatekeeping.

Like the geography of Indian cities — *Savarna* neighbourhoods with tree-lined streets and Dalit slums without even basic amenities — corporate hierarchies too have Dalits clustered in menial positions while *Savarnas* dominate management. Language becomes a weapon as well: "Freeloaders" for beneficiaries of reservations, "chappi" for anyone who dares aspire beyond their designated station.

Flipping the term "glass ceiling" on its head, Mr Kisan coins the phrase "glass floor". His phrase denotes the lack of equal opportunity in the first place. Most live below that floor, dependent upon the whims of the very few roaming above, the *Savarnas*. For those above, the masses trapped below are invisible. Even the few who manage to make it out, the room still isn't accessible. "Being successful" as a marginalised person in *Savarna* society is like walking on eggshells — carefully avoiding the wrath of *Savarna* masters while constantly losing bits of yourself through erosion and distance from your community.



Meet the Savarnas: Indian Millennials Whose Mediocrity Broke Everything by Ravikant Kisan Published by Ebury Press 256 pages ₹699

boundaries. Mr Kisan highlights how even progressive *Savarnas*, armed with postgraduate degrees and cosmopolitan pretensions, retreat to Manu's marriage manuals when they bring home the "wrong" partner. For those who dare transgress, society offers lynching and honour killing as final arguments. Even when families stop short of murder, social death follows: Ostracism, cultural excommunication. The few inter-caste couples who survive usually do so by

accepting permanent exile from their communities.

Bollywood functions as casteism's dream factory, mass-producing fantasies. "The grand *Savarna* weddings," he writes, "essentially are hollow, narcissistic family-branding performances, sustained by the willing consensus of the young, the old and everyone in between, all jostling and cooperating in unison."

The elaborate rituals, each costing more than most families earn in years, demonstrate economic dominance while the guest lists map social networks that will govern the next generation's opportunities.

The mathematics of *Savarna* nationalism means that the louder the claims of ancient greatness, the more mediocre the modern achievements. And so, attacks on reservations and welfare continue to mask the welfare system's barbaric agenda. Cultural chauvinism gets emboldened despite every economic disappointment. And the glass floor remains intact.

The reviewer is a journalist, writer, and editor fascinated by the stories that shape our world. Instagram/X: arooomofwords



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World PHOTOGRAPHY Day

TUG OF POWER | India navigates among Moscow, Beijing and Washington amid global power play

Juggling Act: Putin dials, Wang Yi visits, US warns

FP Desk

NEW DELHI/WASHINGTON

On a day marked by high-stakes diplomacy, Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke with Russian President Vladimir Putin on Ukraine. External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar urged Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi to ensure calm at the border, and in Washington White House trade adviser Peter Navarro warned that India's oil trade with Moscow was funding Russia's war. Together, the three developments underscored the tightrope India is walking in balancing ties with rival powers.

Modi's conversation with Putin came just days after the Russian leader met former US President Donald Trump in Alaska to discuss a permanent end to the Ukraine conflict. According to the Prime Minister's Office, Modi underlined India's long-



External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar in a meeting with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, in New Delhi on Monday.

standing call for peace and to remain in close touch. Meanwhile, across Delhi, Jaishankar held talks with Wang Yi and stressed that "the basis for any positive momentum in our ties is the ability to jointly maintain peace and tranquility in the border areas."

He said the de-escalation process along the Line of Actual Control must move forward, and added that India

and China must be guided by "mutual respect, mutual sensitivity and mutual interest." The two sides also reviewed trade, connectivity, pilgrimages, river data sharing and global issues. Wang will meet NSA Ajit Doval for boundary talks on Tuesday before calling on Modi.

But even as India tried to balance its two giant neighbours, criticism came from Washington. In an opinion

piece in the Financial Times, Navarro accused India of acting as a "global clearinghouse for Russian oil" and warned that its closeness with both Moscow and Beijing made it risky to transfer advanced US military technologies to New Delhi.

Taken together, the phone call, the border talks and the American warning reflect the delicate act of diplomacy India now faces — engaging Russia, managing China, and convincing the West of its reliability.

My friend, President Putin, for sharing insights on his recent meeting with President Trump in Alaska

Narendra Modi Prime Minister

DRI busts Rs 92crore mephedrone factory

7 held under 'Op Crystal Black'; links to Mumbai, Surat revealed Our Staff Reporter BHOPAL



In a major crackdown, the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) has busted a mephedrone manufacturing unit worth Rs 92 crore in Bhopal, arresting seven people in raids conducted across Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat and Uttar Pradesh.

The operation, code-named 'Operation Crystal Black', was carried out with help from police units in Surat and Mumbai. The illegal drug unit was unearthed in Jagdishpur (Islamnagar), Huzur tehsil on August 16, where officials seized

Mumbai connection
In swift follow-up action, DRI apprehended a key cartel member from Basti, Uttar Pradesh, who oversaw supply of raw materials from Bhiwandi (Mumbai) to Bhopal. Two more suspects—chemical suppliers from Mumbai—were also arrested, along with a transporter who moved the chemicals to Bhopal. Investigations revealed a hawala network was used to transfer funds from Surat and Mumbai to Bhopal. One person handling the financial transactions was held in Surat.

61.20 kg of mephedrone in liquid form, along with a cache of chemicals and processing equipment.

cluded structure, carefully shielded from public view to avoid detection.

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2 minor sisters drown in deep pit, contractor booked

Our Staff Reporter INDORE

Two girls aged 12 and 15 drowned in a deep pit dug for the construction of a culvert under Sanwer police station limits on Sunday afternoon. The tragic incident believed to have occurred when the girls were playing near the pit and accidentally fell into it. According to police, the deceased were identified as Bashkanya and her sister Anushka, daughters of Bhagwan Chauhan, a resident of Chimli village. Their father informed police that a culvert is being constructed on the road behind his house and the road work is still underway. Contractor Bhupendra, a resident of Ujjain district, had dug a pit nearly 25 feet deep to collect sand for the culvert's construction.

After failed NSUI, YC experiments, Rahul turns to Cong

Nitendra Sharma BHOPAL

The former president of the Congress and present leader of the Opposition (LoP) in the Lok Sabha has launched a 'Sangathan Sri Jan Abhiyan (organisation restructuring campaign)'. The party's district unit presidents have been elected through this campaign. The observers sent by the party to districts to select candidates submitted their reports.

The issue was discussed with various leaders of the party. Finally, it was the AICC that selected the DCC presidents.

In the selection process, based on Rahul Gandhi's plan, the state party unit did not have any role in many places.

This is the third experiment of Rahul that he is doing with the Congress. He has already used the formula to reorganise the NSUI and Youth Congress. Rahul started holding internal elections in both these organisations. An NGO conducted the elections in the

DCC DISPARITY

There is disparity in selecting DCC presidents

In some places, very strong candidates have been given the charge, but there is adjustment some places

NSUI. In the Youth Congress, too, the election process was held. The Congress's new leadership emerged from the NSUI and Youth Congress.

Mukesh Nayak, Jitu Patwari, Rajkumar Patel and many other senior Congress leaders have the NSUI background, but strong leadership has stopped emerging from these two organisations.

In appointing the district presidents, Rahul did the same experiment with the party as he did with the NSUI and Youth Congress.

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fp Briefs

NEW DELHI

Rs 6,487 cr for electrification

The government has approved works worth Rs 6,487 crore under the Revamped Distribution Sector Scheme (RDSS) to electrify 13.59 lakh households across the country, the Parliament was informed on Monday. The move is aimed at ensuring that every family, even in the remotest corners, has access to electricity. Minister of State for Power, Shripad Yesso Naik, said in a written reply to a question in the Rajya Sabha,

SURAT

Rs 25 cr diamond robbery in Surat

Diamonds worth '25 crore were stolen from DK & Sons Diamond Company at Kapodra during the three-day public holiday. It is considered as one of the biggest heists in Gujarat's Surat. According to the police, the thieves gained entry into the fourth-floor office in Kapoorwadi, cut open the safe with a cutter, and fled with rough diamonds and cash. The miscreants smashed the CCTV cameras.

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Trump meets Zelenskyy, says reasonable chance of ending the war

IAANS NEW YORK

US President Donald Trump welcomed Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to the White House in a friendly atmosphere on Monday after a cascade of European leaders arrived to back him for talks that could be pivotal for ending the war with Russia.

As they sat down for their talks, Trump said: "If everything works out well today, we'll have a trilateral meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin — and I think there will be a reasonable chance of ending the war when we do that."

Their meeting followed Trump's summit with Putin on Friday in Alaska.

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CM YADAV MEETS PM FOR SECOND TIME IN 19 DAYS

Will suspense over CS end? Our Staff Reporter BHOPAL

Chief Minister Mohan Yadav has met Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the second time in 19 days.

Yadav met Modi at the Parliament House on Monday. Before this meeting, Yadav and Modi held talks for 45 minutes on July 31.

A decision on the Chief Secretary's letter together with other issues, may have figured in the talks between Yadav and Modi. Chief Secretary Anurag Jain is retiring on August 31.

There is confusion over whether a new CS will be appointed or Jain will get an extension.

After the CM's meeting with the PM, there is hope that the



mist over the issue may disperse.

Yadav also met Union Home Minister Amit Shah, and it was his fourth trip to Delhi in the past 20 days.

CM invites PM to MP

Chief Minister Mohan Yadav invited Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the state. He requested Modi to inaugurate the metro rail in Bhopal and Kisan Sammelan. Yadav informed the Prime Minister that Swadesh Initiative had been launched in the state. In the past one year and four months, his government launched a major campaign for industrialisation. He said MOUs over Rs 30,00,000 crore had been signed with industrial houses, which would generate jobs for 21 people.

CS was in Delhi for 2 days, met Governor on return Chief Secretary Anurag Jain was in Delhi for two days. He went to Delhi on Sunday morning and returned from there on Monday evening. Jain met Governor Mangubhai Patil at Rajbhawan after returning from there.

As Jain was the centre's choice as CS, it is the Central Government which will decide the issue of his extension.

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Oppn mulls impeachment of CEC, says he acted like BJP spokesperson

Gaurav Vivek Bhatnagar NEW DELHI

The INDIA bloc of Opposition parties plans to bring an impeachment motion against Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar for lashing out at Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, who has repeatedly made "vote chori" (vote theft) allegations against the Election Commission. On Sunday, the CEC had demanded that Gandhi, the leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha, either submits an affidavit to buttress his claims or apologise in seven days for his allegations and insinuations.

Following a meeting of eight parties, Deputy Leader of Con-

gress in Lok Sabha Gaurav Gogoi asked why EC was silent on the issues raised by Gandhi regarding discrepancies in the Mahadavapura electoral roll, the high voter addition in Maharashtra after the Lok Sabha and Assembly elections and on the deletion of video data.

"The CEC did not reply to the important questions being raised by the political parties and ran away from his responsibility," he said, adding that it would have been better had the official "answered all the valid questions asked by the Opposition" and not "raised questions on political parties and attacked them."

Continued on P.8

NOT AFRAID OF CEC THREATS: RAHUL

Dheeraj Kumar PATNA

A day after the Chief Election Commissioner issued an ultimatum to Rahul Gandhi to substantiate his allegations of "vote chori", the Congress leader intensified his attack, accusing the Election Commission of using the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls as a "new weapon" to disenfranchise eligible voters. Speaking in Gayay, Gandhi declared,

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Hamas accepts 60-day Gaza ceasefire

Online Report

Hamas on Monday said it had accepted a proposed hostage release deal that includes a 60-day ceasefire in war-torn Gaza, news agency Reuters reported, amid continued fighting in the region. However, according to Saudi channel Al Arabiya, the proposal represents a compromise between a full ceasefire and a temporary truce, which includes the release of the remaining hostages and a gradual withdrawal of the Israeli military from Gaza. The development came as thousands of Palestinians fled their homes in eastern areas of Gaza City.

3 killed as under-construction water tank wall collapses

Our Staff Reporter INDORE

In a tragic incident, three people lost their lives while another sustained injury after the wall of an under-construction water tank collapsed amid heavy rain under Rajendra Nagar police station limits on Monday afternoon. The incident occurred inside the under-construction Smart City-II project at Shiv City Colony, where a 200,000-litre underground water tank was being built. The wall, made of cement bricks collapsed and buried four people under the debris. They were rushed to



the hospital, where three were declared brought dead.

Officials believe the accident occurred due to negligence by the contractor, who

was constructing the tank without proper columns or safety measures.

Continued on P.8

FIR against Cong MLA Masood in 3 days; college can run: HC

Constitutes SIT led by ADG, to file report in 45 days

Our Staff Reporter BHOPAL

The Principal Bench of the High Court in Jabalpur on Monday instructed the Bhopal Police Commissioner to register an FIR against Congress MLA Arif Masood within three days.

COLLEGE ON FAKE DOCUMENTS



Masood is the secretary of the Aman Education Society,

which runs the Indira Priyadarshini College of Management. The court is hearing a petition over the college operating for the past 20 years on fake documents. Also, taking note of its approximately 1,000 students, the court stated that the college can continue to operate as long as it does not accept new students for the upcoming academic year.

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PTI

NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday met Group Captain Shubhanshu Shukla who became the first Indian astronaut to travel to the International Space Station (ISS).

Shukla, who was part of the Axiom-4 commercial mission to the ISS from June 25-July 18, met the prime

minister at his Lok Kalyan Marg residence.

Modi welcomed Shukla, who was wearing an ISRO astronaut's jacket, with a warm hug and walked with him with his arm on the astronaut's shoulder. Shukla gifted the prime minister the mission patch of the Axiom-4 mission and the Indian tricolour that he had taken with him to the ISS. This Indian tricolour



was fluttering in the background as the ISS was Shukla interacted with

Modi on June 29. "Had a great interaction with Shubhanshu Shukla. We discussed a wide range of subjects including his experiences in space, progress in science & technology as well as India's ambitious Gaganyaan mission. India is proud of his feat," Modi said in a post on X.

The Lucknow-born astronaut was also seen showing pictures he had taken from

the ISS on a tablet computer to Prime Minister Modi. Shukla was part of the Axiom-4 private space mission that lifted off from Florida on June 25 and docked at the International Space Station on June 26. He returned to Earth on July 15. The prime minister interacted with Shukla on June 29 in the initial days of the Axiom-4 mission that had docked at the ISS.



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EC must rectify, not retaliate

Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar missed a golden opportunity to win the confidence of the people when he addressed a press conference on Sunday. The very timing of the event—twelve days after Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi had raised charges of bogus voters and coinciding with his Vote Adhikar rally in Bihar—inevitably gave it a political hue. Far from appearing independent, the Commission seemed to be reacting under pressure. Kumar, flanked by the two Election Commissioners, demanded that Gandhi either produce “proof authenticated by affidavit” within a week or apologise to the nation. This was an odd demand. Gandhi had indeed waved documents at his press conference, but even if they were fragmentary, the burden of verification ultimately rests on the Election Commission. After all, it is the custodian of the electoral rolls. If Gandhi alleged that 50 voters were shown as living in a one-room house, the Commission could have checked this with a few clicks on its own computer system.

Instead of flatly refuting the charges or demonstrating their falsity, the Commission adopted a defensive strategy—demanding affidavits as if it were a court of law. This approach ignores the fact that the proof lies within the Commission's own data. More disturbingly, it creates the impression that the EC is more interested in shielding itself from criticism than in rectifying errors, if any exist. Take the case of Mahadevapura in Bengaluru, where Gandhi alleged that 12 lakh suspicious names were added. The constituency has just six lakh voters. The Commission could have easily undertaken a Special Intensive Revision (SIR) to verify the rolls. Kumar himself had claimed that the entire voter list of Bihar, with nearly eight crore names, could be revised in a month. That is how he deleted 65 lakh voters from the Bihar list. If that is possible, why could a single constituency not be cleaned up in a week? By doing so, the Commission could have silenced the critics and restored faith in its impartiality. What is more, BJP leaders like Anurag Thakur have alleged that even the constituencies from which Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi won had more than a lakh bogus voters. The Commission, however, has not issued them any ultimatum to file affidavits or apologise. This selective response further undermines the institution's credibility. The Election Commission's constitutional mandate is to conduct free and fair elections. If irregularities are flagged, its duty is to verify and correct them, not to threaten political leaders with punitive language. By adopting the tone of politicians in power, the Commission risks being seen as partisan.

By adopting the tone of politicians in power, the Commission risks being seen as partisan

What the country expects from the three Election Commissioners is reassurance through transparent corrective action—not defensiveness that erodes public trust in

CP for VP, BJP's trusted man

The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has outsmarted the Opposition by swiftly announcing Maharashtra governor C.P. Radhakrishnan as its vice-presidential nominee. The move has forced the INDIA alliance to play catch-up, reacting to developments rather than shaping the narrative. With the BJP's comfortable numbers in both Houses of Parliament, Radhakrishnan's election on September 9 is a foregone conclusion. Yet, the contest is not without significance, for it offers a glimpse into the political undercurrents shaping the days ahead. The vacancy arose after the sudden resignation of vice-president Jageedee Dhankar, who cited health reasons, on July 21. Nearly a month later, questions about his resignation remain unanswered. What is certain is that Dhankar had lost the confidence of the government, making his continuance untenable. His departure underscores the centrality of loyalty in holding high constitutional positions under the present dispensation.

There is also a marked contrast between the outgoing and incoming vice-presidents. Dhankar began his career in the Congress before shifting loyalties to the BJP, and his elevation from West Bengal governorship to Rajya Sabha chairmanship was ultimately seen as a misstep. Radhakrishnan, in contrast, is a product of the Rashtriya Swamijev Sangh (RSS), tested in organisational politics and seasoned in parliamentary functioning, having represented Tamil Nadu in the Lok Sabha and held gubernatorial responsibilities. For the BJP, his nomination ensures that a trusted person presides over the Upper House. The party also hopes that his candidature will resonate in Tamil Nadu, where elections are due in 2026. Whether this gamble yields dividends is debatable. By the same logic, Dhankar's unceremonious exit could alienate Rajasthani voters, exposing the risks of using constitutional offices as electoral currency.

For the Opposition, the choice is stark: put up a token fight or concede gracefully. In either case, the vice-presidential election is a reminder of a constitutional principle often honoured in the breach—that once elected, the occupant of the office must rise above party politics. The vice-president's role is largely ceremonial, with one critical exception: presiding over the Rajya Sabha. It is here that Dhankar disappointed the nation. His stewardship was marked by partisanship, often echoing the government's voice rather than upholding the dignity of the House. It is a different matter that his loyalty did not secure his position. Radhakrishnan, with his grassroots political experience, has the opportunity to do better. But his effective and unceremonious thanks to those who nominated him do not inspire confidence that he will function with independence. Ultimately, the credibility of the Rajya Sabha—and by extension, the office of vice-president—depends on whether CP Radhakrishnan can act as an impartial custodian or merely as another rubber stamp. The nation will watch closely.

Guest Column

MANJEEV SINGH PURI



A Joint Parliamentary Committee is presently considering the draft bill on “One Nation, One Election” (ONOE). India is a unique parliamentary democracy with a Constitution including both unitary and federal features encompassed in a Union of States. The main rationales for suggesting ONOE are time and cost savings. Since these factors are applicable globally, a scanning of international practices may have a certain utility in reaching an informed decision.

ONOE discussions were part of the 79th report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on personnel, public grievances, and law and justice. It cited two cases from across the globe—South Africa and Sweden—of simultaneous elections for the federal and state legislatures/parliaments/assemblies. The high-level committee on ONOE, which submitted its report last year, cited four more cases—Germany, Belgium, Indonesia and the Philippines.

At the outset it is important to understand that in the presidential forms of government people vote directly to elect a president and/or a state governor, and his/her position is not incumbent on his/her party having a majority in the Parliament or State Assembly as is the case for prime ministers and chief ministers. The US is the model that readily

comes to mind for fixed date and tenure elections. On another note, it bears noting that elections to the House of Representatives in the US Congress and state assemblies are held every two years. Given the US tradition of primaries, the country is practically in election mode every other year, something which India wishes to avoid through ONOE.

Of the six countries mentioned in the high-level report, two, Indonesia and the Philippines, have directly elected presidents and governors. Interestingly, in the Philippines, the president and vice-president are not part of the same slate, as in the US, but are in separate races. South Africa also has a president as its head of government. It is, however, a rare case where the president is elected by members of the national assembly (Parliament) and can be subject to votes of confidence like a prime minister.

The S. African situation is not dissimilar to India during the first 25 years of independence when the Congress basically won across the country. How things pan out in the years to come in South Africa will need to be seen.

The fourth, Sweden, is a unitary form of government, with municipalities and regions essentially being forms of local government undertaking different types of tasks. And the Swedish constitution allows for early elections, only that these

are for the balance of the dissolved term. This, of course, adds to the costs through repeated elections, if required.

The fifth and sixth, Belgium and Germany, are federal and have parliamentary forms of government. Belgium's situation is truly peculiar. Elections are held simultaneously for the federal and regional levels, but these invariably result in hung houses, requiring months of coalition building, with governance being continued as an interim by the previous incumbent. After the 2024 elections, it took 230 days for the next government to be formed. A decade earlier, following elections in 2010, the country went without an elected government for 589 days!

The German constitution doesn't have a provision for no-confidence, i.e., an alternative name for the chancellor must be proposed, and it is not just voting a chancellor out of office. A willingness to work in coalitions and this provision appear to have provided Germany a degree of stability, though last year, the then chancellor sought a vote of confidence in himself and dissolved the Parliament when he didn't obtain the house's confidence. Germany, thus, saw early federal elections. Similar situations have happened across all 16 federal states. Now, each follows its own calendar for elections to its assembly, with the federal level following its own calendar.

Fixed dates for elections to assemblies and federal parliaments are a more common feature than simultaneous elections in federal states. Canada, a federal polity with a parliamentary form of government, has enacted legislation at both the federal level and in its provinces, providing for a fixed date for holding of elections, with the date now varying from province to province and following a different timetable for federal elections. In Australia, the terms of the federal parliament and the state legislatures (most) are 3 and 4 years, respectively, thus ruling out simultaneous elections.

The 79th report also refers to the UK's decision, in 2011, to have fixed terms for its parliaments. This report was submitted in 2015 and what it has taken into account is that in 2017, the UK parliament would override the Fixed Term Parliaments Act, which was, in fact, repealed in 2022. The devolved assemblies in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland now follow their own timetable. Interestingly, despite what appear to be major efforts at agreeing on simultaneous polls for the Lok Sabha and state assemblies, the committee's best case was polls in two phases, i.e., for some states around the time of the middle of the Lok Sabha's term and for others with the Lok Sabha polls.

It is believed that a separation of federal and provincial elections en-

suces that voters are not cross-influenced on federal and state issues and are able to focus on the two independently, an important and critical consideration for a federal polity. Having noted this, the idea that time and costs are not unnecessarily incurred on repeated elections is a laudatory one while ensuring that there is as little as possible a democratic deficit in a state not having an elected government. India's Constitution rightly limits the gap between two sittings of a legislature to a maximum of six months. Positive votes of no-confidence are one such way of avoiding repeated elections. Apart from Germany, this is also provided for in the 2015 Nepal constitution.

And then there is the issue of setting the right traditions. In the UK as also in Canada, attempts at fixed terms for parliament were thwarted by the Commonwealth tradition of a prime minister having the right to dissolve the House and seek a fresh mandate. In Nepal, while the same tradition was sought to be invoked, its Supreme Court disallowed the same on two occasions during 2021 and asked the House to elect a new leader. This ensured that the House elected in 2017 sat through its full five-year term with no additional expenditure on mid-term polls.

The writer is a former ambassador of India to the EU and Nepal.

ONOE: For India, it is all about setting the right traditions

A separation of federal, provincial elections ensures voters are not cross influenced on federal and state issues and focus on these two issues independently



Ringside View

JAYANTA ROY CHOWDHURY

On Independence Day this year, Prime Minister Narendra Modi stood at the Red Fort and offered Indians a different kind of freedom pledge: liberation from the country's notoriously tangled tax code. However, the question which haunts most Indians, businessmen and consumers alike, is, will this ambitious plan to slash rates for India's GST tax really bring about a truly “Good and Simple Tax”?

At the same time, more serious analysts are asking, “Did the government choose a year when the global trade architecture is already being redrawn under the assault of Trump tariffs to rework its own goods tax regime, as it intends to come up with sharper import duty giveaways than previously announced and wants to lower taxes for domestic players in anticipation?”

Modi's announcement, framed as a “Dividends” to households, small entrepreneurs and microenterprises, is, on paper, the most ambitious restructuring of India's Goods and Services Tax since its introduction in 2017. Come October, if the rollout proceeds as planned, five separate tax slabs will collapse into a seemingly simpler two-tier system—5 per cent and 18 per cent—with a punitive 40 per cent reserved for alcohol, tobacco and other so-called “sin goods”.

The government's pitch is straightforward: fewer rates, less paperwork, cheaper goods, faster growth. The timing is deft. With elections looming in several states and consumer demand sluggish, the reforms are calibrated to speak both to households struggling with inflation and to small businesses burdened by compliance. However, beneath the celebratory framing lie risks that could test both India's fiscal stability and the political capital PM Modi has staked on the bold plan.

Why reform & why now? For years, economists and businesses have complained that India's GST is one of the most complex in the world. Five tax rates, a compensation cess, and a thicket of exemptions spawned endless disputes: was a chocolate-coated biscuit a luxury or a staple? Litigation piled up, and companies restructured supply chains simply to navigate tax classifications. By contrast, the two-rate structure promises clarity. Essentials like ghee, soap, processed foods and handicrafts will drop into the 5 per cent slab, easing household budgets and giving relief to artisans and small enterprises. Big-ticket items—refrigerators, cement, air conditioners—shift from the punitive 28 per cent rate to 18 per cent, lowering housing costs and nudging manufacturing. For the Modi government, the gamble rests on a familiar

economic bet: cut rates, spur consumption, broaden the base and wait for the Laffer curve effect, a theory which says with lower rates of taxes, government revenues will eventually go up.

With the end of the compensation cess, fiscal space has opened up just enough to attempt it. At the same time, by aligning the GST rates more closely with global norms, India hopes to shield its producers from the added pressure of new free trade deals, which are already bringing in cheaper imports.

With the lowering of import duties agreed upon in a free trade deal signed with the UK and two other bigger ones in the works with the US and the EU, duty protection for Indian manufacturers is likely to go down drastically. In the case of the US, according to news reports, India is prepared to cut its average tariff differential with the US by nearly 9%, bringing it down from 13 per cent to under 4 per cent. Under the circumstances, a slashing of the GST with its input credit system is expected to help lower manufacturing costs for Indian firms.

However, reforms of this scale rarely come without unintended consequences. For instance, by telescoping steep tax cuts two months in advance, the govt has invited an awkward pause in the market. Distributors are already delaying purchases in anticipation of

October's lower rates. Consumer goods companies fear September could see inventories pile up while buyers wait for discounts. The govt insists its anti-profiteering provisions will prevent market distortions, but global precedents enforcement is messy at best.

Even with cuts, India's rates remain higher than those in Southeast Asia, where the GST and VAT levels hover in the single digits. That gap matters for industries exposed to tariff reductions under free trade pacts. A fridge taxed at 18 per cent may be cheaper than before but still costlier than one imported from Vietnam or Thailand, for instance.

The central government is betting that consumption will surge enough to make up for short-term revenue losses. However, states, already bracing for the disappearance of compensation transfers in December, could see a sharp fiscal stress. Health and education budgets may be the first to feel the squeeze. At the same time, moving nearly 1,500 goods and services into new categories is a massive logistical lift. Small firms will have to reprogramme billing systems, update software, and train staff to be able to comply, and the chances of glitches and misinterpretation of rates could well go up exponentially.

Politics of Festival Gifts: For the govt, the symbolism of a Diwali “bonanza” is not accidental.

Cheaper basics can be expected to resonate with households. Reduced costs for cement and construction dovetail neatly with the government's housing-for-all agenda. Relief for handicrafts and microbusinesses gives a nod to sectors long pleading for recognition. However, expectations, once raised, are hard to manage. If consumers fail to feel an immediate difference, or if hoarding and profiteering blunt the impact, the celebratory narrative could sour.

States, meanwhile, may push back hard in GST Council negotiations, wary of being saddled with a revenue risk which could see them sink deeper in the red. In substance, the reforms are bold and overdue. Simplification was the missing ingredient in making the GST the seamless “one nation, one tax” system it was meant to be. Cutting rates is also a pragmatic response to both consumer unease and competitive pressures coming from abroad. The govt's challenge lies in the execution of the plan outlined by the PM. If they can manage the transition smoothly, prevent market distortions, and keep states on board, the reforms could breathe new life into India's consumption story. If not, the “Diwali gift” may be remembered less as a festive bounty and more as a gamble that failed to deliver.

The writer is former head of PTI's eastern region network.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dog Sterilization

The Supreme Court ordered stray dogs sterilized and sheltered, citing rising rabies and attack cases nationwide. Implementation is complex, but necessary for public safety. A humane, nationwide solution should protect people without harming animals, ensuring balance between safety and compassion.

Hema Hari Upadhyay, Khacharod

Safe, Simple Celebrations

Independence Day should be eco-friendly, economical, and safe. Ban plastic balloons to avoid litter, bird and aircraft hazards. Save funds for PM/CM relief. Urge people to watch events on TV, reducing fuel use, pollution, and stampede risk. At venues, create separate blocks with multiple exits, limited entry, and big screens. Use AI to prevent crowding disasters.

PVP Madhu Nivritti, Secunderabad

Sholay's Golden Legacy

Fifty years on, Sholay remains a cinematic milestone. Its action, cast, and dialogues shaped Hindi cinema, inspiring new generations despite today's entertainment choices.

Kirti Wadhawan, Kanpur

Train Your Brain

Today we focus on physical strength but neglect the brain, God's greatest gift. Success requires sharp thinking as much as fitness. Meditation, yoga, self-reflection, and mind games like chess or sudoku strengthen it. A well-trained brain never disappoints—it helps overcome challenges and live meaningfully. We must nurture it daily.

Tejas Sharma, Ujaia

Distrust in EC

CEC Gyanesh Kumar's nervous, evasive press conference deepened doubts about the Election

Commission. Rahul Gandhi's allegations of malpractice in Bangalore Central need impartial investigation. Instead of transparency—publishing voter lists or CCTV—the EC demanded Gandhi's affidavit. Such evasiveness fuels suspicion that India's once-trusted institution has been compromised. Credibility must be restored.

Tharcus S. Fernando, Chennai

Trump-Putin First Step

Though no pact emerged, the Trump-Putin meeting is a vital first step towards Ukraine ceasefire. Trump better understands Putin's demands and may craft a business-peace formula. The next round must include Ukraine and Europe. Together, Trump and Putin should also intervene in Gaza to stop the Israel-Hamas war.

Seerlekha PS, Secunderabad

Tribal Daughter's Victory

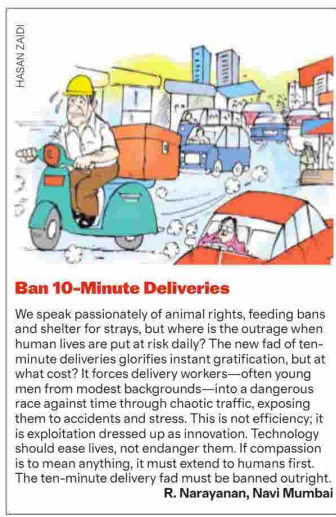
Dhaya's 32-year struggle for her rightful land has shaken tribal patriarchy. The Supreme Court upheld equality under Articles 14 and 15, ensuring daughters inherit property. For 104 million tribals, this is a social revolution. Yet, fears of misuse exist. While laws must safeguard tribal lands, the verdict secures dignity.

Prof. R.K. Jain, Badwani

Remote controlled

If the UP government is remotely controlled by Sonia Gandhi, the present NDA-led government is allegedly remotely controlled by the RSS. India is yet to have governance through chaotic infighting, exposing the lack of independence and is not beholden to any “external” influence. Call it what you will (UPA or NDA), it's just six of one and half-a-dozen of the other.

Avinash Godbole, MP



Ban 10-Minute Deliveries

We speak passionately of animal rights, feeding bans and shelter for strays, but where is the outrage when human lives are put at risk daily? The new fad of ten-minute deliveries glorifies instant gratification, but at what cost? It forces delivery workers—often young men from modest backgrounds—into a dangerous race against time through chaotic traffic, exposing them to accidents and stress. This is not efficiency; it is exploitation dressed up as innovation. Technology should ease lives, not endanger them. If compassion is to mean anything, it must extend to humans first. The ten-minute delivery fad must be banned outright.

R. Narayanan, Navi Mumbai