



EDITORIAL

ALLIES IN ARMS

The announcement of a “Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement” between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia marks a striking moment in the evolving geopolitics of West Asia and South Asia. For decades, Pakistan has leaned heavily on Saudi Arabia for economic bailouts, energy supplies, and diplomatic cover in times of global scrutiny. Riyadh, for its part, has often viewed Islamabad as a junior but indispensable partner — providing manpower for its military; logistical support for its security infrastructure; and symbolic reinforcement of pan-Islamic solidarity. Yet this relationship, until now, was largely transactional and implicit. By declaring that aggression against one will be treated as aggression against both, Saudi Arabia has elevated Pakistan from a client state to a formal defence ally. This changes the calculus across the region. Significantly, the deal was inked in the shadow of two destabilising events: Israel’s strike on Hamas leadership in Qatar, which rattled Gulf capitals, and the limited but sharp military exchange between India and Pakistan only months ago. The agreement is therefore not just a statement of mutual trust but also a hedge against a rapidly polarising security environment in which both Saudi Arabia and Pakistan feel strategically vulnerable. For Riyadh, closer ties with Islamabad provide an additional layer of deterrence against Iran and a reassurance of military manpower if Gulf stability is tested. For Pakistan, it offers international validation and the hope of emboldened diplomatic standing at a time when its economy remains fragile and its military credibility is constantly challenged by its eastern neighbour.

India’s response has been carefully calibrated, reflecting both awareness of the potential risks and recognition of the constraints. New Delhi cannot afford either alarmist overreaction or complacent neglect. The External Affairs Ministry’s decision to “study the implications for national security and regional stability” signals strategic prudence. For India, three dangers are immediately apparent. First, Pakistan may interpret the pact as a form of insurance against Indian pressure, whether along the Line of Control or in the broader theatre of diplomatic contestation. With Saudi Arabia nominally committed to Pakistan’s defence, Islamabad could adopt more adventurist postures in Kashmir or in international forums, calculating that Riyadh’s weight will act as a shield. Second, the pact places India in a difficult balancing act with Saudi Arabia, which in recent years has emerged as one of its most important partners in West Asia. India relies on Riyadh not only for energy imports — crude oil and liquefied natural gas remain vital to sustaining its growth — but also for the welfare of nearly three million Indian expatriates whose remittances are crucial to the Indian economy. Moreover, Saudi Arabia’s Vision 2030 blueprint counts India as a major investment destination in areas ranging from infrastructure to renewable energy. These stakes mean that New Delhi cannot afford to allow the Kingdom’s embrace of Pakistan to dilute its own engagement. Third, the pact complicates the regional environment at a time when India is carefully recalibrating its ties with multiple actors in the Gulf, including the United Arab Emirates, Oman, and Qatar. If Saudi Arabia chooses to lean more decisively into pan-Islamic solidarity at the expense of strategic neutrality, India may find itself forced to deepen countervailing ties with other Gulf players, potentially fracturing its West Asia policy.

Yet it would be misleading to view this agreement solely through the prism of immediate threat. India must also recognise the structural shifts underway. Saudi Arabia is pursuing a more activist and autonomous foreign policy, less tied to Washington’s strategic dictates and more open to multipolar engagements. Its rapprochement with Iran under Chinese mediation, its cautious opening to Israel despite Gaza’s bloodshed, and now its formalisation of defence ties with Pakistan all point to a Kingdom hedging its bets in a volatile landscape. India, as an emerging global power and a vital trading partner, is not excluded from this calculus; indeed, Riyadh has strong incentives to keep New Delhi on its side. But that outcome is not automatic. It requires India to act with foresight. First, New Delhi must intensify its dialogue with Riyadh at the highest levels, ensuring that defence cooperation with Pakistan does not translate into anti-India stances in times of crisis. Second, it should broaden its strategic footprint across West Asia, leveraging its strong bonds with the UAE and Oman to balance Saudi positioning and prevent a single axis from dictating outcomes. Third, India must double down on domestic resilience: accelerating defence modernisation, reducing energy dependence through renewables, and strengthening regional diplomacy from Central Asia to the Indo-Pacific so that its strategic horizon is not boxed in by Gulf turbulence. Finally, India must recognise that the symbolism of Saudi backing emboldens Pakistan, but the hard realities of international politics still place limits on Riyadh’s willingness to intervene directly in South Asian conflicts. In the end, this pact is less about Pakistan’s eastward frontier and more about Saudi Arabia’s westward anxieties. The Indian response should therefore be firm but not panicked, cautious but not passive. Vigilance, engagement, and diversification are the keys. In the deserts of Arabia, a new alliance has been signed; in the corridors of New Delhi, a new vigilance must now be crafted.

INCLUSIVE GROWTH



JOHN FELIX RAJ IS THE VICE CHANCELLOR, AND SOVIK MUKHERJEE IS AN ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF ECONOMICS IN THE FACULTY OF COMMERCE AND MANAGEMENT, BOTH AT ST. XAVIER’S UNIVERSITY, KOLKATA

The government must ensure that policy changes, such as mandatory KYC updates, do not inadvertently exclude the very people the scheme set out to empower

On August 28, 2014, the Government of India launched one of the most ambitious financial inclusion schemes globally, the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana (PMJDY). Nearly eleven years later, the scheme has become a milestone in transforming citizens’ relationships with the financial system.

What began as an initiative to bring every Indian household into the banking network has evolved into a foundation for a digitally empowered and inclusive economy. Reflecting on achievements, identifying persisting gaps, and determining the future roadmap is crucial.

Vision behind Jan Dhan

Financial exclusion has long been a significant barrier to poverty alleviation in India. Millions of citizens, particularly from rural areas, women, and marginalised communities, were excluded from formal banking systems. This led to heavy reliance on informal moneylenders, exorbitant interest rates, and debt cycles.

The Jan Dhan Yojana aimed to break this barrier by providing every household with access to a basic bank account, RuPay debit card, insurance, and banking services beyond branch and ATM locations in rural areas through Bank Mitras, as well as credit facilities. The scheme allowed accounts to be opened with zero balance, enabling the poorest individuals to join the banking system. By linking these accounts to Aadhaar and mobile numbers, the government created the JAM Trinity — Jan Dhan, Aadhaar, and Mobile — which became the backbone of direct benefit transfers and digital governance in India.

Expanding the Financial Net PMJDY has undeniably expanded the reach of India’s financial system. As of mid-2025, over 520 million bank accounts have been opened under the scheme, with total deposits crossing Rs 2.2 lakh crore. The scale itself is unprecedented: the World Bank has recognised PMJDY as the world’s largest financial inclusion initiative. Notably, the scheme has significantly reduced the percentage of unbanked adults, lowering it from over 40 per cent in 2011 to under 20 per cent today.

Over 56 crore bank accounts have been opened, covering almost every household. Notably, 56 per cent are held by women, highlighting progress in gender inclusion. Deposits have crossed Rs 2.5 lakh crore, reflecting rising trust in formal banking. Even Guinness World Records has recognised the achievements made under the Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana, which opened the largest number of bank accounts in one week as part of the financial inclusion campaign.

The PMJDY’s integration with Aadhaar and UPI has enabled direct benefit transfers, reducing leakages and ensuring timely cash support, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. With UPI crossing 14 billion transactions in July 2025, Jan Dhan accounts have become vital entry points for first-time digital users.

Challenges along the Way

Despite the impressive numbers, not all Jan Dhan accounts are actively used. The Finance Ministry reported that around 15–20 per cent of accounts remain dormant, with no meaningful transactions as of December 6, 2023. This reflects a deeper problem: mere access to bank accounts does not guarantee financial inclusion. Many households continue to rely on cash and informal lending channels because of a lack of financial literacy, irregular incomes, or distance from functional banking infrastructure.

Another challenge is the low balance levels in these accounts. While the aggregate deposit numbers look encouraging, the average balance per PMJDY account is still modest, raising questions about whether these accounts are genuinely improving household savings behaviour or merely serving as conduits for government transfers.

A closer look reveals that PMJDY’s success has not been evenly distributed. Urban areas and states with stronger banking penetration, such as Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu, show better account usage compared to rural and less developed states like Bihar or Odisha. In 2025, updating KYC has become a significant challenge, with accounts older than 10 years requiring compliance by September 30 or facing closure. The rush is especially intense in rural areas with limited documentation and digital access. Managing millions of updates without disruption is now an urgent priority.

Looking Ahead The critical question after eleven years is whether PMJDY has led to financial empowerment or simply financial access. Opening a bank account is only the first step; the real test is ensuring that every account remains active and is used meaningfully for savings, credit, insurance, and investments are the next frontier. On this front, progress has been mixed. Formal credit access remains limited for small farmers, informal workers, and micro-entrepreneurs. Many still turn to moneylenders for urgent needs, often at exorbitant interest rates.

Expanding financial literacy is central to this effort. Many first-time account holders still struggle with digital banking, cyber safety, and investment options. Simplifying processes, offering vernacular support, and enhancing digital awareness are

The ‘Jan Dhan’ Journey

Eleven years after launch, Jan Dhan Yojana stands as the world’s largest financial inclusion drive — but real empowerment hinges on usage, literacy, and digital trust



The Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana is more than just a banking scheme — it has become a social revolution

essential for its long-term success. Furthermore, while digital transactions have surged in urban India, rural adoption lags due to poor connectivity, cyber fraud risks, and limited trust in digital platforms.

Another priority is reaching remote and tribal areas where banking infrastructure remains weak. Strengthening mobile banking, expanding the network of banking correspondents, and adopting innovative fintech solutions will be key. The government must also ensure that policy changes, such as mandatory KYC updates, do not inadvertently exclude the very people the scheme set out to empower.

Conclusion

The government has recognised some of these gaps. In July 2025, the Department of Finance launched a three-month nationwide saturation campaign to expand coverage of PMJDY and related schemes like Pradhan Mantri Jeevan Jyoti Bima Yojana (PMJJBY), Pradhan Mantri Suraksha Bima Yojana (PMSBY), and Atal Pension Yojana (APY). Within the first month, nearly 6.6 lakh new PMJDY accounts were opened, and over 22.65 lakh new enrolments were recorded under Jan Suraksha schemes.

The Pradhan Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana is more than just a banking scheme — it has become a social revolution. In eleven years, it has brought millions from the margins into the mainstream of India’s economy, including women. It represents a remarkable achievement but at the same time, a reminder of how far India still has to go in creating an inclusive financial ecosystem.

For PMJDY to truly fulfil its promise, India must focus on deepening account usage, bridging the digital divide, and embedding financial literacy into the very fabric of its inclusion strategy. Only then can the scheme evolve from being a numbers-driven program into a genuine instrument of economic and social transformation.

Views expressed are personal

RISK REALITY



RAJAN SANKAR

THE WRITER IS A PUBLIC HEALTH AND NUTRITION RESEARCHER. HE WAS A FORMER DIRECTOR OF NUTRITION AT TATA TRUSTS

Romanticising home-cooked food as inherently healthy misses the mark. We need to re-examine our everyday diets and promote balanced meals

Rethinking India’s Weight Crisis

India’s rising obesity rates demand urgent action, but alarmist narratives risk stigma. Clear, evidence-based, and empowering messaging can inspire healthier habits and lasting public health change

India’s rising rates of overweight and obesity are real—and concerning. But the way we talk about them matters just as much as the numbers themselves. Alarmist headlines and oversimplified narratives risk doing more harm than good. If we want meaningful change, our public health messaging must be nuanced, evidence-based, and empowering.

The Numbers Are Rising—But What Do They Mean?

India’s weight crisis is no longer confined to urban elites or middle-aged adults. According to the National Family Health Survey, the prevalence of overweight and obesity among children under five rose by 127 per cent in just over a decade—from 1.5 per cent in 2005–06 to 3.4 per cent in 2019–21. Among adolescents, the surge is even sharper: girls saw a 125 per cent increase (2.4 per cent to 5.4 per cent) and boys a staggering 288 per cent rise (1.7 per cent to 6.6 per cent). Adults aren’t spared either—obesity among women nearly doubled (12.6 per cent to 24 per cent), and among men, it more than doubled (9.3 per cent to 22.9 per cent).

If current trends continue, India is projected to be home to over 27 million children and adolescents living with obesity by 2030, accounting for 11 per cent of the global burden.

These figures are striking—but they must be interpreted with care. Numbers alone don’t tell the full story. How we frame them can either motivate action or trigger fear.

Overweight vs Obesity: Let’s Not Conflate the Two

One of the most common pitfalls in obesity discourse is the conflation of overweight and obesity. While both are associated with increased health risks, they are not the same—and treating them as such distorts the picture.

Obesity carries significantly higher risks for conditions like type 2 diabetes, hypertension, and cardiovascular disease. Overweight, on the other hand, often presents modest or variable risks depending on other factors like waist circumference, physical activity, and metabolic



India’s growing obesity challenge has roots in changing diets, rising junk food, and declining physical activity

health. Yet, many reports lump the two together to inflate prevalence figures or extrapolate consequences indiscriminately. This not only misleads but also fuels unnecessary anxiety among individuals who may be overweight but otherwise healthy.

We must communicate the difference clearly. Relative risk statistics—like “three times higher risk”—can sound terrifying, but without context, they obscure the actual likelihood of disease. Absolute risk numbers, which show how many people are truly affected, are far more informative and less fear-inducing.

Beyond Biscuits and Burgers: The Home-Cooked Blind Spot

Another troubling trend is the singular focus on ultra-processed foods (UPFs) as the primary culprit. Yes, UPFs like chips, sodas, and packaged snacks are increasingly consumed in India. But they still account for a relatively small share of total calories—far less than in Western countries.

The real issue may lie closer to home. Traditional Indian meals, though lovingly prepared, are often high in refined carbohydrates and oils, and low in fibre and protein. Excessive use of white rice, wheat flour, and deep-frying techniques can contrib-

ute to insulin resistance and weight gain—even without a single packet of chips in sight.

Romanticising home-cooked food as inherently healthy misses the mark. We need to re-examine our everyday diets, promote balanced meals with whole grains, vegetables, and lean proteins, and reduce reliance on calorie-dense staples. Public health campaigns must broaden their lens to include home food, serviced food, and processed food alike.

The Automation Paradox: Less Drudgery, More Inactivity

India’s rapid urbanisation and technological advancement have brought undeniable benefits. Tasks that once required physical effort—washing clothes, fetching water, grinding spices—are now automated. But with this convenience has come a steep decline in physical activity.

According to recent WHO data, nearly half of Indian adults are physically inactive. Among adolescents, only 15% meet recommended activity levels. This sedentary shift is a major driver of weight gain, independent of diet.

We must acknowledge the paradox: while automation has relieved us of daily drudgery, it has also robbed

us of incidental movement. The solution isn’t to bring back manual labour, but to encourage purposeful physical activity—walking, cycling, dancing, playing. Leisure time should be reclaimed for movement, not just screens.

Messaging Matters: From Fear to Empowerment

Perhaps the most urgent reform needed is in how we communicate about overweight and obesity. Scare tactics—especially those relying on relative risk figures—can backfire. They create panic, guilt, and stigma, pushing people toward extreme diets or unsustainable routines.

For example, when we say obesity triples the risk of a disease, it sounds alarming. But if the actual risk rises from 2 in 100 to 6 in 100, the increase—while real—is less dramatic than the phrase suggests. This is the difference between relative and absolute risk. Public health messaging must make these distinctions clear, so people understand their true risk and respond with informed, not fearful, choices.

Instead, we must frame health as a journey, not a punishment. Small, achievable changes—like walking 30 minutes a day or swapping refined grains for whole ones—can significantly reduce disease risk. Campaigns should highlight these wins, celebrate progress, and avoid moralising weight.

Importantly, we must stop equating thinness with health. Many individuals with higher BMIs are metabolically healthy, while some with “normal” weight are not. Let’s shift the conversation from body size to body function—from fear to empowerment.

A Way Forward

India’s weight crisis is complex, rooted in changing diets, declining activity, and evolving lifestyles. Tackling it requires more than blaming biscuits or broadcasting scary statistics. It demands thoughtful, inclusive messaging that respects people’s realities and motivates sustainable change. Let’s stop shouting about obesity and start talking about health—clearly, compassionately, and constructively.

Views expressed are personal

THE DAILY GUARDIAN SURVEY ON INDIA-US TRADE TALKS

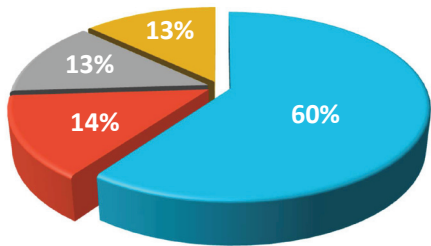
58% believe that the 25% panel tariff has indeed created a geopolitical situation.

According to the survey, a majority of respondents believe that the imposition of a 25% panel tariff has created geopolitical challenges. About 58% agreed that the tariff has influ-

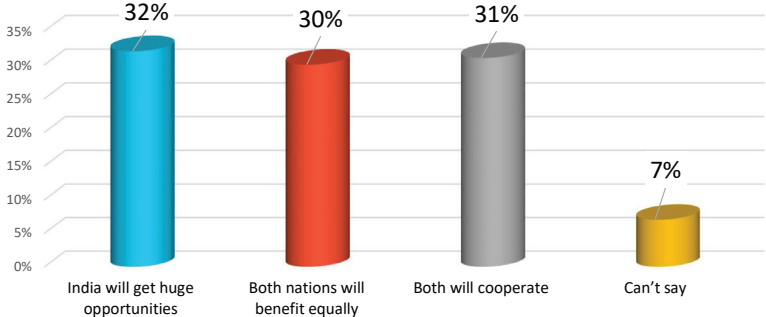
enced international political dynamics, while 33% disagreed, and 9% were uncertain. This reflects differing public views on trade and global relations.

Q1.▶

According to Chief Negotiator BVR Subrahmanyam, the 25% American tariff may be lifted after November 30. What is your opinion?



Effect of India's better economic policy
Effect of better relations
Both of the above
Can't say

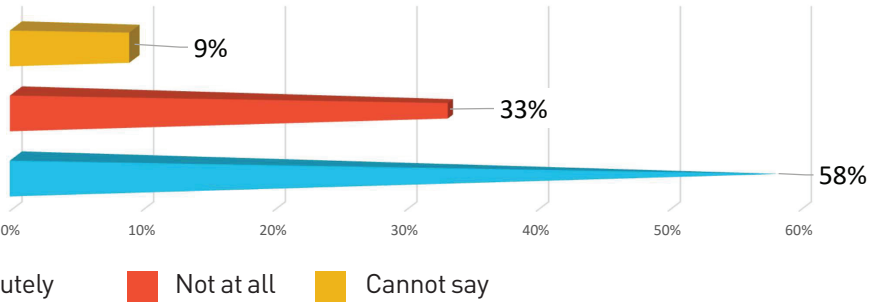


Q2.◀

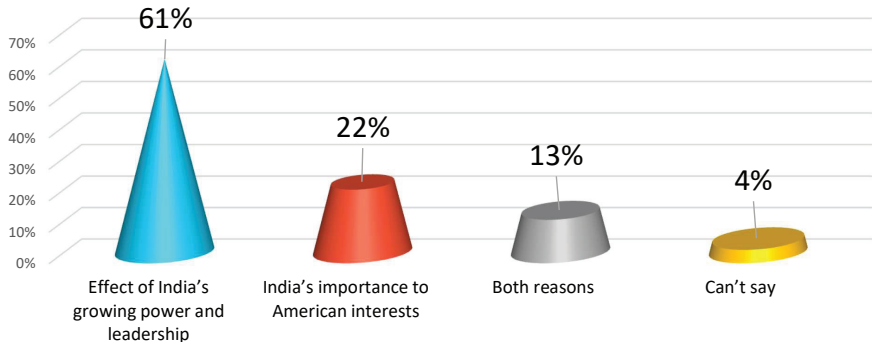
In your opinion, can the India-US trade talks lead to a new strategic and economic agreement?

Q3.▶

Is it true that the 25% panel tariff has led to a geopolitical situation?



Yes, absolutely
Not at all
Cannot say



Q4.◀

How do you view America's changing stance towards India?

THE DAILY GUARDIAN SURVEY ON SAUDI-PAKISTAN DEFENCE PACT

Indians see intent, trust India's firm response

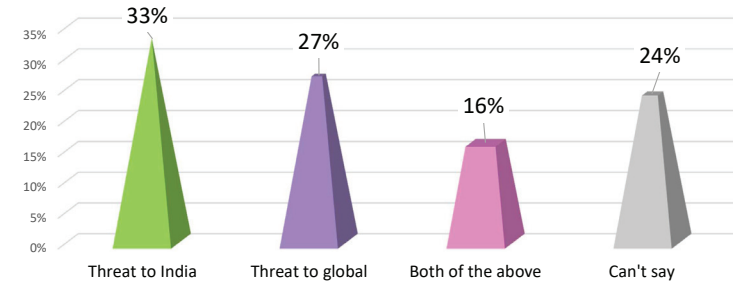
An national survey conducted on 18 September 2025 (sample: 171; 95% male, 5% female) gauged public sentiment on the Saudi Arabia-Pakistan

defence pact. One in three respondents (33%) view the agreement as a direct threat to India, while 27% fear wider global instability; 16% believe both are

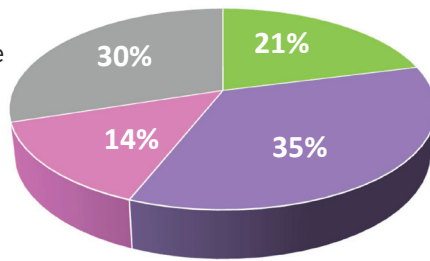
true, and 24% can't say. Asked about likely impact on India, 35% anticipate Asian instability, 21% expect India-Pakistan tensions to rise.

Q1.▶

The defence pact between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia says an attack on one will be treated as an attack on both. What is your view?



A. India-Pakistan tensions will rise
Instability in Asia
Both of the above
Can't say

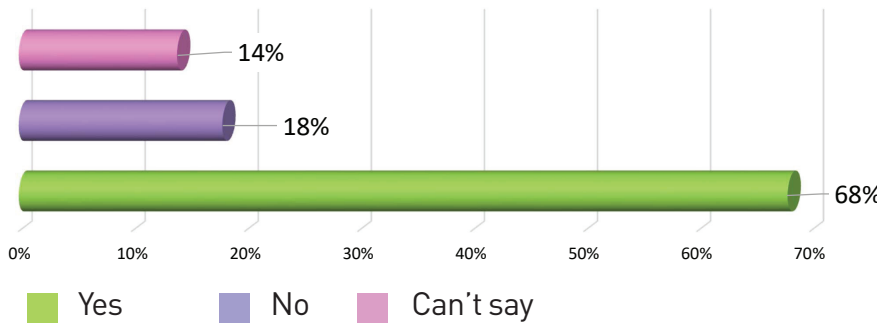
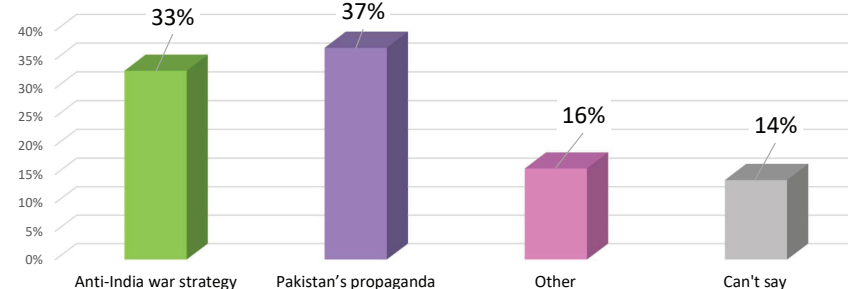


Q2.◀

With the Pakistan-Saudi defence pact, what impact could it have on India?

Q3.▶

In your view, what could be Pakistan's intention behind the Pakistan-Saudi defence pact?



Q4.◀

Is India aware of the possible effects of this pact?

Politics in Delhi heats up over SIR

CONTINUED FROM P1

leader Rahul Gandhi and AAP chief Arvind Kejriwal were opposing the SIR to protect "infiltrator voters" who form their "vote bank." Sachdeva claimed that in several cases, 60 to 100 votes were registered at a single address, while even "minority votes" were allegedly created using fake house numbers on footpaths. He cited irregular increases in the rolls, pointing out that after

2014, 1.3 million new votes were added in the 2015 Assembly polls, followed by over 800,000 more in 2019 and 2020. A BJP campaign, he said, led to a 10,000-page complaint submitted to the Election Commission with details from booth-level investigations.

He further alleged that opposition parties had been facilitating such fraudulent registrations for 20 years by making "tempting promises" to vot-

ers.

The Election Commission has now rolled out the SIR nationwide. In Delhi, the process will be based on the 2002 voter list. Voters whose names were on the 2002 rolls will need only to submit an enumeration form, while those whose parents' names appear will have to attach photocopies of the same.

The Congress and AAP have opposed the exercise, terming it an attempt at "vote theft."

CONTINUED FROM P1

had ignored 18 letters in 18 months from the Karnataka CID, which is probing the Aland case, seeking destination IPs, device ports and OTP trails associated with the suspect applications. He demanded the ECI release the requested data "within a week", adding, "When they withhold information, they are defending the murderers of our democracy."

Election Commission sources countered that "no deletion of any vote can be done online by any member of the public" and reiterated that no name can be removed without giving the voter a chance to be heard. They confirmed that in 2023 there were "unsuccessful attempts" to delete electors in Aland and said an FIR had been filed by the Commission's authority to enable investigation. The ECI also pointed out that Aland was won by the BJP's Subhash Guttadar in 2018

and by Congress's B.R. Patil in 2023, rejecting Gandhi's insinuation that the Commission's conduct skewed outcomes.

The political crossfire widened as the BJP linked Gandhi's "vote chori" charge to what it calls the Opposition's "softness" on illegal immigration. Union Home Minister Amit Shah, campaigning in Bihar, labelled Gandhi's recent "Voter Adhikar Yatra" a "Ghuspaitiyya Bachao Yatra", alleging the Congress seeks to protect "Bangladeshi infiltrators" whose names are being removed during the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls. Shah said the BJP would "expel infiltrators from Bihar, one by one", arguing the exercise was cleansing rolls and denting the Opposition's "vote bank".

BJP leader Anurag Thakur dismissed Gandhi's presentation as yet another "baseless allegation" from a leader "repeatedly rebuked

by courts", quipping that a promised "hydrogen bomb" had "ended in firecrackers". He urged the Congress to substantiate claims on affidavit.

Congress leaders rallied behind Gandhi. Party president Mallikarjun Kharge lauded him for "thoroughly exposing mass vote deletion" in Aland, asking "who the ECI is shielding" and whether the BJP is "hollowing out institutions meant to protect our democracy". Priyanka Gandhi Vadra alleged the Commission was "colluding to destroy the electoral process" and urged citizens to watch her brother's presentation. Karnataka minister Ramalinga Reddy said the ECI was "not an independent body", alleging Central interference.

At the core of Gandhi's charge is a technical trail he says reveals automated filing patterns—applications submitted in seconds, at odd hours, from mobile numbers registered outside

Karnataka, and serial-number selections that indicate algorithmic targeting, such as repeatedly choosing the first name on a booth list as the "applicant". He cited instances where a single user ID allegedly filed a dozen deletion forms within minutes, insisting such behaviour proves the use of software at "call-centre scale".

While the ECI's statement underscores procedural safeguards and the existence of an FIR in the Aland matter, it did not, according to Congress, address the Karnataka CID's specific requests for backend metadata (destination IPs, device ports and OTP logs). Gandhi argued those data would "lead us to where the operation is being done".

The clash now intersects with the BJP's campaign emphasis on "infiltration", particularly in Bihar, West Bengal and Assam, where the party claims demographic pressure from undocumented migrants

is altering local rolls and straining welfare systems. Shah's remarks in Begusarai and Rohtas framed the election as a choice between "development for Bihar's youth" and "benefits for infiltrators", a line the Opposition says is polarising and a diversion from bread-and-butter issues—and from the integrity of the electoral roll itself.

With Bihar set to vote in October–November, both narratives are likely to harden. Gandhi has set a one-week ultimatum for the ECI to provide the Aland probe data; the Commission maintains deletions cannot be executed as alleged and that due process stands. The coming days will test whether investigators can bridge the data gap at the heart of the Aland case—and whether either side can convincingly persuade voters that India's electoral machinery is, or is not, being systematically gamed.

India, UAE set \$100 bn non-oil trade target

CONTINUED FROM P1

Indian markets. He praised Prime Minister Narendra Modi's reforms to reduce compliance burdens and improve ease of doing business, which he said are driving India's rapid growth.

Turning to India's relations with the US, Goyal confirmed that bilateral trade negotiations are showing "promising signs." "The US discussions with the Assistant USTR happened two days back. They were productive and are working on the right track. The US relationship is a very strong, comprehensive strategic partnership," he said.

Talks for a just and mutually beneficial Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA) began in March and aim to conclude the first stage by late 2025. On Tuesday, US Chief Negotiator Brendan Lynch met Indian Commerce Ministry Special Secretary Rajesh Agrawal in New Delhi, with both sides agreeing to intensify efforts for an early deal. India has held five rounds of negotiations so far, though the August round was postponed.

Tensions remain after US President Donald Trump imposed 50 per cent tariffs on Indian goods, citing continued Russian oil imports, but Goyal emphasised that

agriculture and dairy — critical for Indian livelihoods — remain off-limits in the talks.

"As regards the relationship with the UAE, it stands on its own legs. It is underpinned by trust, possibilities and opportunities. For India, no two relationships are co-mingled or dependent on each other," he clarified.

Highlighting people-to-people ties, Goyal said the Indian workforce in the UAE has nearly doubled over a decade to 4.2 million, and quoted Prime Minister Modi: "The relationship between India and the UAE will become a role model for the entire world."

Omar Abdullah slams closure...

CONTINUED FROM P1

terror attack earlier this year, Abdullah acknowledged it was an unfortunate incident but stressed that once security measures were in place, there was no justification for keeping destinations shut indefinitely.

He listed Drung, Doodhpathri, Yousmarg, Tosamaidan, and parts of Gulmarg among the areas still

inaccessible. "Tourism stakeholders are suffering. Hotels are empty, transporters are idle, and livelihoods are at stake," he said.

The Chief Minister underlined the contradiction between official statements and the ground reality. "If you want us to promote tourism, then open the tourist places. You can't have it both ways," he added.

He urged both central and state administrations to immediately review and reopen all viable tourist spots to support the struggling tourism sector and restore public confidence.

The remarks come as Kashmir attempts to revive its tourism economy post-pandemic amid renewed security concerns that have unsettled stakeholders.



Smiley faces of kids after the inauguration of the Namo Toy Bank, in Kota on Thursday. ANI

EPFO simplifies PF

CONTINUED FROM P1

portal, users can easily view contributions, withdrawals and balances without visiting the separate Passbook Portal.

Another major change allows employees to directly download Annexure K online after a job change, enabling them to track provident fund transfers and verify balances and service periods themselves. This digital access also ensures permanent records for EPS benefit calculations.

Additionally, the ministry has delegated approval powers for transfers, settlements, advances and refunds from senior officers to Assistant PF Commissioners and subordinate officials, significantly cutting processing time for members.

Mandaviya said the initiative reflects EPFO's commitment to "efficient, transparent and user-friendly" services, while promoting ease of living and trust among its members.

US Embassy targets...

CONTINUED FROM P1

working together will our two governments address this transnational threat and keep both our people safe from illicit drugs." The announcement

echoes earlier US policy under the Trump administration, which prioritised stopping fentanyl inflows through executive orders aimed at securing borders and intensifying anti-trafficking efforts.

A BIRTH CENTENARY TRIBUTE UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL WITH MUSIC MAESTRO DR. BHUPEN HAZARIKA

OPINION

SABIR NISHAT

At a time when Government of Assam is celebrating the year-long birth centenary celebrations of music maestro, Bharat Ratna Dr. Bhupen Hazarika, I fondly remember my close encounter with the legendary singer, music composer, filmmaker, actor, poet, journalist and author all rolled into one dating back to the year 1995.

That year around mid March, I was just transferred from Hatsingimari, Mankachar in South Salmara, which was a subdivision of Dhubri district then, now a district, to the Chief Minister's Public Relations Cell during the Government led by Chief Minister Hiteswar Saikia. I was placed with another Officer, Anupjiyoti Choudhury, youngest son of eminent dramatist and actor, late Lakshyadhar Choudhury under the Chief Information Officer to the Chief Minister, Bimal Bhuyan.

A month later, one fine late evening in last part of April, Chief Minister Saikia called Bhuyan Sir and me to his official chamber. When we stepped into his chamber, we saw the Chief Minister busy at a meeting with officials. The PS to the Chief Minister took us to an adjacent room where we waited there for close to an hour. Saikia turned up and in his inimitable style asked us whether the waiting was too long. He said the purpose of calling us was that he wanted both of us to accompany the doyen of music Dr. Bhupen Hazarika from Tezpur to Nazira. The occasion: Basanta Utsav (Spring Festival) at Nazira playground.

The Chief Minister informed us that he had already apprised Dr. Hazarika about the event and that he had consented to come down to Nazira despite his busy schedule. Saikia instructed us to take every care of Dr. Hazarika in course of the long journey.

The very next day in the wee hours, we set off for Tezpur. My excitement knew no bounds that I was soon going to meet a multifaceted towering personality, a living legend in his own lifetime. Dr. Bhupen Hazarika, whose fame and popularity extended far and wide.

After three-and-a-half hours journey in an Ambassador car with a brief stopover at Amoni for the morning breakfast, we reached our destination - a wooden bungalow in the midst of a lush tea plantation on the outskirts of Tezpur situated on the north bank of the Brahmaputra River.

The security guard manning the gate inquired about the purpose of our visit and whether we have obtained the necessary permission. When we told the guard that we were

officials from the Chief Minister's Office and had our visit had been already intimated, he at once flung open the huge iron gates. We later realised why the guard posed questions to us, for a shooting was going on inside the bungalow, with strict instructions not to let anyone inside. Later, I came to know from the crew members that owing to the maestro's popularity, each dwelling in that town became a participant in the shoot, its inhabitants always had something to offer to the cast and crew. Said a crew member (whose name I fail to recollect), "Each morning, in the hotel lobby there would be scores of people waiting for his darshan. And Dada never disappointed anyone. It was truly a royal spectacle as this durbar played out unfailingly each morning." He was quick to add, "At the local market when people came to know that we were with Bhupen-da's unit, goods were either given free or at throwaway prices. They felt they owed him perhaps for healing them through his songs."

I saw the area with cameras, spotlights and other equipment with the crew following a lady draped in salwar kameez with cropped hair. Later, I came to know that this lady was none other than Kalpana Lajmi.

We were taken to a spacious drawing cum dining room of the bungalow and was served with tea and snacks. My heart started pounding sensing that any moment the man I was expecting to witness from very close quarter was about to enter the scene. Questions kept cropping up in my mind as to how to greet the maestro, the heartthrob of millions, what should be the proper salutation to address, and how to introduce myself.

I could hear the sound of footsteps approaching closer and closer and with it my heartbeat started racing. I tried my best to remain calm and composed as the hour of reckoning finally dawned to which I was looking forward to with bated breath. Draped in spotless white kurta-pyjama with an Assamese gamocha around his neck and his trademark black Gorkha cap, arrived the legendary icon, Dr. Bhupen Hazarika accompanied by filmmaker, Kalpana Lajmi, his close companion of many years.

With a disarming smile, Dr. Hazarika greeted us and made me feel totally at ease. He shook hands with us and asked us to take our seats. Bhuyan Sir introduced me to the maestro as a Janasanyog (DIPR) official working under him at CM's Public Relations Cell. Lajmi too joined in the conversation. We came to



know from her that shooting was going on for the 26-episode English tele-series Dawn for Star Plus starring Shahbaaz Khan, Mona Ambegaonkar, Arif Zakaria, Tom Alter, Deepa Laago and others.

Set against the backdrop of pretty town Tezpur, the stories revolve around the struggle for freedom with young revolutionaries making supreme sacrifices for freeing the country from the yoke of imperialism.

After spending close to an hour, Bhuyan Sir asked Lajmi to quickly pack off some clothings, medicine and other belongings of Dr. Hazarika for the overnight halt at Nazira. Lajmi told Bhuyan Sir that she would not take much time to do so and get Dr. Hazarika ready for the trip.

Meanwhile, we went round the sprawling verdant campus and saw the main protagonist of the serial, Shahbaaz Khan, tall and handsome, dressed in a traditional attire.

After 15-20 minutes, we saw Dr. Hazarika and Lajmi with a handbag stepping out of the bungalow and heading towards our vehicle. As we were about to board the vehicle, Lajmi called up Shahbaaz and Mona draped in a muga dress, and introduced them. Mona looked akin to an Assamese damsel, greeted us with a smile while Shahbaaz shook hands (such a big hand he had that mine paled into insignificance) and, in his baritone voice, said, "Its a pleasure meeting you all". He wished Dr. Hazarika referring to him as Bhupen Da, which he is affectionately known all-over, a safe and pleasant journey.

As the driver ignited the engine ready to move with Dr. Hazarika and Bhuyan Sir seated at the rear and I at the front seat, Lajmi gave some last minute instructions to Bhuyan Sir to ensure that he 'takes his medicine before and after meals on time, no visitors on odd hours and retiring to bed early'. She also whispered on Bhuyan Sir's ear which I overheard not to allow the maestro to binge and if he insisted then 'no more than two pegs'. The maestro could sense it, may be from her lip reading, and asked

Lajmi not to act like a good wife by giving instructions. When we moved out of the bungalow gate, the maestro said that Lajmi tended to him as a good wife all these years. The maestro met a young Lajmi at her residence in Mumbai (then Bombay) when he went there along with her uncle and eminent filmmaker Atmaram. She was just 17 and Bhupen Da 45 years, more than her father's age.

In a write-up entitled 'Kalpana Lajmi and her lifelong companionship with Bhupen Hazarika' in The Hindu on September 28, 2018, eminent journalist and author, Samudra Gupta Kashyap wrote, 'Lajmi brought some order to Hazarika's life after he had spent several years like a jajabor (nomad)'.

Fast forward. In her memoir 'Bhupen Hazarika: As I Knew Him', Lajmi poured her heart out, giving an up, close and personal account of her long-standing relationship with the maestro. It was launched a few days before she passed away in 2018. Filmmaker and writer Vinta Nanda who drafted the speech for Lajmi for the book launching ceremony (ironically the speech was not read out by Vinta nor Lajmi's mother, Lalita Lajmi on Kalpana Lajmi's

behalf). To quote a few excerpts from the speech, it goes: "I was only 17 years old when Bhupen Da visited our home with my uncle Atmaram, the very well known producer and director, for whom he was working. I was the one who opened the door when they arrived, and it was love at first sight for me. I didn't want to separate myself from Bhupen Da after I met him then. I couldn't. I started hiding from my mother and meeting Bhupen Da on the sly. An affair started and I was unable to deal with life without this man, who I felt, had cast his spell on me. I wanted to drown in his music; I wanted to die in his arms."

I began to realise that I had lived 40 years of my life with a person who was a giant, remained immersed in his conquests as an artist, although comforted by his poetry, which as a matter of fact would be disturbing to many people and an awakening for others; and I was lost in the music that he was consistently making. The creativity he inspired in me in those glorious years that we shared with each other, had transported me into a space from which had emerged all the realism that most of you saw in the stories, that I told you through my

cinema; and Bhupen Da's music helped me to give them form. He composed music for me and even lent his voice to the films that I made. He gently stirred those emotions within me, that we mostly prefer not to visit and which we separate ourselves from by building walls between ourselves and the truth that haunts us, at different stages of our lives.

Bhupen Da had been a fortress that had protected me from everything adverse. And he had been so resolute in securing me in our personally imagined acropolis, that I had known nothing other than that universe, which I had inhabited within the fold of his embrace. And suddenly now, he wasn't there anymore."

Fast rewind. Back to where I left off; the journey with the maestro along the banks of the Brahmaputra. As we moved along the Kaliabhomora bridge over the Brahmaputra to the south bank, the maestro was in full flow bursting into bistirno parore oxonkhyo jonore haahaakar xuniu nixobde nirobe Burha Luit tumi

Burha Luit buwaa kiyo? The panoramic bird's eye view of the vast expanse of the mighty Brahmaputra with its flowing waters sparkling in the afternoon sun and the maestro's singing in gay abandon touched the inner recesses of my heart; an experience of a lifetime. Many of the maestro's compositions were on the Brahmaputra or Luit (another name of the river) which he considered to be the lifeline of Assam and

its people, its culture and history. His magnum opus is 'Mahabahu Bram-

hoputra' followed by evergreen melodies like 'aaji Brahmaputra hol barniman' and 'Luitar chaaparit kore nawariya'.

After a while, there was pindrop silence. And then the Bard of the Brahmaputra narrated to us his experiences as a jajabor (wanderer) and how he travelled from one place to another vis-a-vis even to the far off New York where he happened to meet Paul Robeson, composer of the famous song 'Ol' Man River which inspired him to pen the famous Bistirno parore....Burha Luit tumi Burha Luit buwa kiyo? in Assamese to that in Hindi "O, Ganga tum" and in Bengali as "O, Ganga tumi" where he questions the river for remaining indifferent to the woes and sufferings of the people. He was a global citizen and took the music of Brahmaputra to far away places. He intermixed it with Volga, Mississippi. Bhupen Da and Brahmaputra River were inseparable.

The cultural icon told us that seeing peoples and places changed his outlook and vision towards life and helped in his creations. His song 'Moi eti jajabor' speaks of the nomad wandering from one place to another. It is said that the maestro would disappear with his family members no inking of his whereabouts and appearing suddenly with souvenirs, trophies and certificates, handful of books and gramophone records.

At our request the maestro sang in his evocative voice some of his immortal and soulful renditions - manuhe manuhar babe jodihe akonu nabhabe (If humans do not care about humans at all, who else will care!) speaks volumes about his love for mankind, 'kato juwanor mrityu hol' composed during Chinese aggression, 1962), 'aah aah olai aah', 'Ganga amar maa, Padma amar maa' (Bangladesh War of Independence, 1971), and the evergreen 'Asom amar rupahi gunaro naai sesh'. Not only he sang in full gusto these songs, the maestro would explain how each composition came into being. Songs like 'buku ham ham kore mor aai' which was later rendered into Hindi 'dil hoom hoom kare' and sung by the Queen of Melody Lata Mangeskar for the film Rudaali resonated far and wide. The maestro told us that being the eldest of 10 siblings, he inherited his voice from his mother, "who regularly sang lullabies to me as a child".

His songs coming from the core of his heart covered a wide spectrum of human emotions vis-a-vis love and its manifestations - sorrow, despair, hope, to nature (hills and rivers), tribal life and, above all, the faceless common men and women, and their struggles and hardships.

Arif Zakaria, who acted in Dawn and debut film 'Darmiyaan' in a tribute to the maestro, aptly said: 'Even the most heartless would be moved by his voice which was earthy yet coming from the scales of his heart.'

After travelling for a little over two-and-a-half hours we reached Bokakhat and the maestro desired to have puri with potato curry in a kolpat (banana leaf). He said whenever he passed through this sleepy town for musical performances, film shooting and some other work, he used to make a stopover to relish the gorom gorom (hot) puri with alu (potato) curry and jolokia chutney (chilli chutney) in kolpat. When he entered the roadside eatery, scores of people gathered to have a darshan of the maestro. Some came to have a picture with him, some came with strange requests too ranging from admission sought, a government job, a land deal intervention, sharing happy news or naming a just born. The maestro smiled and obliged them all. He mingled with them as if he knew them since long, gave some a patient hearing to their pleas, a modicum of advice to another - all his outpourings accompanied by songs that acted as a soothing balm to those afflicted physically and mentally.

And more facets of his personality were unveiled during the long journey with the maestro. A sharp mind who conversed on a gamut of subjects like religion, international politics and art. But amidst all his leanings he was a true artist and a patriot who stirred everyone's soul with his powerful songs like 'biswa bijoy nojawan', 'aji Kameng simanta dekhilu, dekhilu sotru posutta sinilu' (I have seen the Kameng frontier, and seen the beast in the enemy), 'ranaklanta nahau hai muhorto loi, ji muhortote mur simantate sesh satru daityatir nahoi moron' (I will not be tired of the battle till the death of last enemy on my frontier)

A multifaceted persona stripped of all ego and commercial trappings, there was no exaggerated or lofty sense of self. He was born with it hence he wore it with elan.

The almost seven-and-a-half-hour long journey with the maestro from Tezpur to Nazira with stopovers at Bokakhat and Jorhat came to an end, without even knowing it, will remain a treasured memory of my life.

After that, I met the maestro several times during his live stage performances in Guwahati, Morigaon, Dhemaji, Sivasagar and Nazira, and also at his Nizarapar residence in Guwahati. And everytime I met the doyen of music I was enriched with a new perspective on life. Such was his profound impact!

Though the maestro is no longer physically present among us, all that he had left behind - his memorabilia, rich repertoire of music, soul-stirring songs, and journey of his life will reverberate across the length and breadth of the country and beyond and continue to guide the present and many generations to come.

The author is a Liaison Officer at Information & Public Relations Department Govt. of Assam

SC Defers plea over reservation of transgenders in PG medical courses

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday deferred till next week the hearing of a plea seeking reservation for transgender candidates in post-graduate medical courses.

A bench led by Chief Justice B.R. Gavai and Justice K. Vinod Chandran was hearing the matter when senior advocate Indira Jaising requested that 2 seats each under the all-India and state quotas be kept vacant for the petitioners. The bench, however, re-

fused, noting that counselling for admissions had not yet begun.

“We cannot keep seats everywhere in limbo. You are saying two seats in all-India quota, two in state quota. Counselling has not started. We will keep this matter for next week high on board,” CJI Gavai said.

PLEA SEEKS QUOTA IN LINE WITH NALSA JUDGMENT

The case, Kiran A.R. and Others vs Union of India, seeks implementation of reservation benefits for transgender candidates



File Photo

in PG medical admissions. The plea relies on the Supreme Court's landmark 2014 NALSA judgment, which recognised the rights of transgender persons and upheld their

entitlement to affirmative action.

During the proceedings, Jaising clarified that the lead petitioner, Kiran A.R., had withdrawn, and only petitioners 2 and 3—be-

longing to the OBC and general categories—would pursue the plea.

UNION GOVT TO ADDRESS LARGER ISSUE

Additional Solicitor General Archana Pathak Dave, appearing for the Union government and medical authorities, told the court that Solicitor General Tushar Mehta wished to person-

ally address the larger issue of transgender reservation. The bench then scheduled the matter for September 23.

HORIZONTAL VS VERTICAL QUOTA DEBATE

Jaising flagged a critical issue: whether reservation for transgender persons should be horizontal or vertical.

Horizontal quota would cut across caste categories (SC, ST, OBC, General), allowing transgender persons reservation benefits irrespective of their caste status.

Under vertical quota, they would be included only within their existing caste-based categories.

The petitioners argued for horizontal reservation, ensuring broader access to seats.

CONFLICTING COURT RULINGS

Jaising also pointed out

that high courts across the country have issued conflicting orders: some granting ad-hoc reservations to transgender candidates, while others declined similar relief. This inconsistency, she argued, left transgender aspirants in uncertainty.

Both petitioners have cleared the entrance exams, but ambiguity persists over cut-off marks and whether transgender reservation will be formally recognised.

The Supreme Court has previously observed that if a judicial order exists mandating quota for transgender persons, it must be implemented. With the Centre indicating that the issue will be argued at length, the coming week's hearing may provide crucial clarity on whether and how transgender candidates will receive reservation in medical education.

Additional Solicitor General Archana Pathak Dave, appearing for the Union government and medical authorities, told the court that Solicitor General Tushar Mehta wished to personally address the larger issue of transgender reservation.

2008 Malegaon Blast: Bombay HC issues notice to NIA, 7 acquitted persons on appeal by victims' kin

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

The Bombay High Court on Thursday issued notices to seven persons acquitted in the 2008 Malegaon blast case, following an appeal filed by families of the victims.

Notices were also sent to the National Investigation Agency (NIA) and the Maharashtra government. The matter will now be heard after six weeks.

A bench comprising Chief Justice Shree Chandrashekar and Justice Gautam Ankhad was hearing the appeal filed by relatives of the 6 people who lost their lives in the explosion.

APPEAL CHALLENGES ACQUITTAL

The appeal contests the judgment of a special NIA court delivered on July 31, which acquitted seven accused, including BJP MP Pragya Singh Thakur and Lt Col Prasad Purohit. The petitioners argued that the order was “wrong and bad



File Photo

in law” and deserved to be set aside.

They maintained that deficiencies in investigation cannot form the sole basis for acquittal, especially in cases involving conspiracies carried out in secrecy where direct evidence may not be available.

VICTIMS' FAMILIES CRITICISE TRIAL COURT

The appeal accused the special court of failing to play its role in ensuring justice, stating:

“The trial court has unfortunately acted as a mere

post office and allowed a deficient prosecution to benefit the accused.”

It argued that judges in criminal trials are not meant to act as mute spectators and, when necessary, can summon witnesses or question them to bring out facts.

CONCERNS OVER NIA PROBE

The petitioners also raised doubts about the NIA's handling of the investigation, claiming the agency diluted charges after taking over the case from the Maharashtra Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS).

The petitioners also raised doubts about the NIA's handling of the investigation, claiming the agency diluted charges after taking over the case from the Maharashtra Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS).

They noted that the ATS had unearthed a conspiracy by arresting the seven accused, and since then, there had been no blasts in areas heavily populated by minority communities. According to them, this undermined the credibility of the ATS probe, which the NIA later weakened.

THE 2008 MALEGAON BLAST

On September 29, 2008, an explosive strapped to a motorcycle detonated near a mosque in Malegaon, Nashik district, around 200 km from Mumbai. The blast killed six people and injured over 100 others.

The prosecution alleged that the attack was carried

out by right-wing extremists with the aim of terrorising the Muslim community in the communally sensitive town.

COURT'S FINDINGS

While acquitting the accused, Special NIA Judge A.K. Lahoti held that “mere suspicion cannot replace proof” and that there was no cogent or reliable evidence to establish guilt beyond reasonable doubt.

Besides Pragya Singh Thakur and Lt Col Purohit, the other acquitted accused were retired Major Ramesh Upadhyay, Ajay Rahirkar, Sudhakar Dwivedi, Sudhakar Chaturvedi, and Sameer Kulkarni.

BMW Accident Case: Delhi Court issues notice to police to preserve CCTV footage of Accident Site

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

A Delhi court on Thursday directed the Delhi Cantonment Police Station SHO to preserve CCTV footage related to the fatal BMW accident at Dhaula Kuan, which claimed the life of Navjot Singh, Deputy Secretary in the Finance Ministry.

Judicial Magistrate First Class (JMFC) Ankit Garg issued the notice while also directing the Investigation Officer (IO) to appear with the case file at the next hearing. The matter will be heard again on Friday.

Accused Seeks Preservation Of Footage

The application was moved by accused Gaganpreet Kaur, seeking preservation of footage from cameras installed near Pillars 65 and 67 at the accident site.

Advocates Gagan Bhatnagar and Nikhil Kohli, appearing for Kaur, ar-



Representational Image.

gued that the police's reply to the application was “evasive.” They pointed out that during a media briefing, the DCP had claimed to have seen the CCTV footage and stated that it had also been shown to both the accused and the victim's side.

The defence insisted that the footage be preserved and produced during Kaur's bail hearing.

Defence Questions Police Stand

The defence further high-



Representational Image.

Bengaluru-based petitioner H.S. Gaurav.

The High Court observed that it was not convinced by the argument that inviting a person of a different faith to the event would violate any constitutional or legal rights.

The petitioners argued that the inauguration involves the ceremonial lighting of a lamp before the sanctum sanctorum of the Chamundeswari temple, a ritual that should not be performed by a non-Hindu.

However, the State defended its decision as being consistent with Karnataka's tradition of inclusivity in public celebrations.

The row has sparked political debate, with BJP leaders questioning Mushtaq's selection and alleging disrespect

to religious traditions. Meanwhile, police have registered cases over communal posts on social media relating to the controversy.

Banu Mushtaq, 62, is a noted Kannada writer, activist, and former participant in farmers' and Kannada language movements.

She made history in May 2025 as the first Kannada author to win the International Booker Prize for her short story collection Edeya Hanate (Heart Lamp), translated into English by Deepa Bhashth.

The 10-day Mysuru Dasara festival, beginning on September 22, is one of Karnataka's grandest events, drawing nearly five million visitors annually from India and abroad.

KERALA HC ORDERS PROBE INTO DISCREPANCIES IN SABARIMALA TEMPLE'S GOLD PLATING PROJECT

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

The Kerala High Court has ordered a detailed investigation into discrepancies surrounding the Sabarimala temple's gold plating project, after it was discovered that 4 kgs of gold were unaccounted for during replating works in 2019.

A Division Bench of Justice Raja Vijayaraghavan V and Justice KV Jayakumar directed the Chief Vigilance and Security Officer—who is also the Superintendent of Police of the Travancore Devaswom Board (TDB)—to conduct the probe. The court emphasized that the truth behind the missing gold must be brought to light.

GOLD DISCREPANCY DETECTED

The issue came to notice after the Special Commissioner of Sabarimala submitted a report raising concerns about the handling of the temple's Dwarapalaka



Representational Image.

Unnikrishnan Potti, who sponsored the plating, was represented by Advocates R. Sudhish and M. Manju.

idols (door guardians). According to records, the idols' gold-plated copper coverings were removed in 2019 for repair and re-plating. However, when the plates were returned, the weight of the gold was found to be nearly four kilograms less than what was recorded.

The court observed: “The registers which are placed before the Court by the Chief Security Officers shall be returned so that the

proper investigation will be conducted.” It further directed the Travancore Devaswom Board to extend full cooperation to the Vigilance Officer during the enquiry.

The controversy deepened when it was revealed that the Board removed the idols' gold-plated coverings without seeking prior approval from either the Sabarimala Special Commissioner or the High Court. The Special

Commissioner pointed out that such actions violated protocol and raised suspicions about the loss.

The idols were originally made in 1999. In 2019, on the request of sponsor Unnikrishnan Potti, the gold plating was sent for repair to a Chennai-based firm, Smart Creations. It was during the idols' stay with the firm that the reduction in gold weight was recorded.

COURT PROCEEDINGS

The matter was taken up seriously by the court, which stressed that accountability must be fixed. Senior Government Pleader S. Rajmohan represented the State, while Standing Counsel G. Biju appeared for the Travancore Devaswom Board. Advocate Sayujya Radhakrishnan served as amicus curiae on behalf of the Sabarimala Special Commissioner.

Unnikrishnan Potti, who sponsored the plating, was represented by Advocates R. Sudhish and M. Manju.

The Statesman

Incorporating and directly descended from
the Friends of India -founded 1818

Tariffs and Friendship

The latest interaction between Washington and New Delhi is a study in how diplomacy often mixes warmth with hard bargaining. A birthday phone call from the American President to India's Prime Minister, replete with praise and talk of partnership, came even as punitive tariffs on Indian exports remain firmly in place. The gesture offered a fleeting moment of goodwill, but it also underscored a deeper reality: sentiment may open doors, but strategy decides what crosses the threshold.

The American leader's message was carefully calibrated. By thanking India for its role in efforts to end the Russia-Ukraine conflict, he acknowledged New Delhi's global relevance while avoiding any direct concession on trade.

India, for its part, responded with equal optimism, emphasising friendship and the shared goal of elevating the relationship to "new heights." Both sides thus managed to project camaraderie while sidestepping the uncomfortable fact that the tariffs ~ some of the steepest in recent memory ~ remain untouched.

The economic stakes are significant. India's exports to the United States have already shown signs of strain, with monthly figures slipping after the duties were announced. Washington has openly tied half of the 50 per cent tariff to India's continued purchases of Russian oil and weapons, linking commercial pain to geopolitical choices.

New Delhi has defended those purchases as a matter of national energy security, arguing that global energy markets cannot be held hostage to political conflicts. Both capitals recognise that a protracted stalemate serves neither side, especially as global supply chains remain fragile and investors seek predictable trade rules amid shifting geopolitical alliances.

Against this backdrop, trade negotiators from both countries described their discussions on Tuesday as "positive" and "forward looking." Yet officials were quick to clarify that the meeting was exploratory rather than a formal round of negotiations.

That distinction matters. It signals that while both sides are willing to talk, neither is prepared to retreat from core positions. For the United States, tariffs remain a tool to pressure Moscow and to extract trade concessions. For India, maintaining diversified energy supplies is a red line.

This episode illustrates a broader truth about 21st century diplomacy. Economic instruments ~ tariffs, market access, investment approvals ~ are increasingly wielded as levers of strategic influence.

Friendly rhetoric can soften the edges, but the underlying calculus is transactional. India and the United States share a long-term interest in closer economic integration, yet the path to a comprehensive trade agreement will be strewn with tests of political will.

A brief exchange of birthday greetings cannot mask the complexity of these negotiations. It can, however, serve as a reminder that even the hardest bargains require a measure of personal rapport. If Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Donald Trump can convert their public warmth into private flexibility, the current pause in hostilities could become the first step toward a trade deal that reflects both strategic convergence and economic pragmatism.

Century Challenge

Japan's newest demographic milestone ~ nearly one hundred thousand people aged a hundred or more ~ is more than a statistic. It is a window into a future that many societies will soon face: a world where human longevity grows faster than our ability to adapt to it. What was once a marvel of medicine and culture has now become an unavoidable test of economics, social policy, and intergenerational responsibility.

The first lesson is that long life is not an accident. Japan's achievement rests on decades of deliberate choices: a national diet low in red meat and rich in fish and vegetables, an enduring public-health drive to cut salt, and a culture that prizes daily movement.

Simple routines like group calisthenics in parks, walking to markets, and relying on public transport keep older citizens physically active and socially engaged. These habits have lowered rates of obesity, heart disease, and common cancers, creating a society where reaching 90 is unremarkable and crossing 100 is increasingly routine.

Yet behind the celebration lies a sharper reality. An ageing population with a shrinking birth rate creates structural strains that no amount of fish and green tea can offset. Pensions and healthcare costs rise as the working-age base shrinks. Younger generations shoulder a heavier tax burden while simultaneously caring for parents and grandparents who live longer than any in history.

Rural towns empty out as youth migrate to cities, leaving behind clusters of the elderly with dwindling services and limited social support. The very success of extending life has exposed a failure to renew it.

This paradox offers both warning and guidance to other nations. Many developing economies, including India and parts of Africa, still enjoy youthful demographics but are already adopting diets and lifestyles that lead to chronic disease. They risk ageing before they grow rich, facing a double blow of rising healthcare costs and falling fertility without the financial cushion that Japan built during its boom years.

Meanwhile, wealthier countries in Europe and North America must confront their own version of the century challenge as medical advances lengthen lives without guaranteeing purpose or economic security.

Longevity should be celebrated, but not romanticised. A society of centenarians demands new thinking about work, retirement, and family life. Policies that encourage lifelong learning, flexible employment for older workers, and stronger community networks can turn added years from a fiscal burden into a social dividend. The goal is not merely to live longer, but to live well ~ safely, productively, and with dignity.

Japan's centenarians embody human potential, but they also remind us that biology will not pause for politics. Every country that hopes to emulate their longevity must also prepare for the obligations it creates. Longer lives are a triumph; sustaining them is the true test.

Institutional integrity

The Armed Forces are trained to answer the call of any civilian requisitioning, without ever seeking to appropriate any claim or recognition for the tireless work they do. The soldier does not care which government is at the Centre or in the State where the devastation has taken place, as these governments are busy blaming each other with what aboutery while the citizens are hanging on to dear lives in the hope someone would come to their rescue

Floods have ravaged the states of Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Assam, Uttarakhand and many more. From unusual rain patterns, upstream dam releases, to sheer heavy monsoon ~ the flooding and the accompanying devastation have been back-breaking for so many citizens.

With politicians blaming each other, institutions responsible for safeguarding and rehabilitation failing in their duties, and the usual bureaucratic apathy, there is only one institution that has silently been aiding the relief and protection missions successfully ~ the Indian Armed Forces.

Images of daredevil Indian Army soldiers wading through neck-deep waters, to that of helicopters involved in daring rescue and lift missions have emerged yet again.

As an example, the Indian Army's Western Command launched massive Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) missions, executing 82 relief missions, evacuating over 6,000 people dangerously caught in flooded areas and delivering essential supplies to the affected communities.

Just under this Command's operations, another 13,000 people are believed to have received emergency medical assistance and facilitation (including air dropping) of nearly 50 tons of rations.

The Army Command's Engineer detachment worked against odds to repair damaged infrastructure (including restoring critical bridge links), strengthened flood defenses, and laid optical fiber cables to reinstate mobile connectivity.

Just another crisis facing the nation and yet another show of resilience, courage and commitment by India's "sword arm" ~ not just to defend the territorial integrity and dignity of the sovereign, but even to defend its citizens within, when all other ostensible institutions of managing internal affairs (including relief and rehabilitation works, planning and administration) have melted



into the oblivion. The nameless, faceless and often forgotten (once the purpose or perceived utility is served) "Indian Soldier" rises to the occasion.

The institution is trained to answer the call of any civilian requisitioning, without ever seeking to appropriate any claim or recognition for the tireless work it does.

It does not care which government is at the Centre or in the State where the devastation has taken place, as these governments are busy blaming each other with what aboutery, while the citizens are hanging on to dear lives in the hope someone would come to their rescue. Increasingly that someone to the rescue (without any biases or taking sides from a political, ideological or partisan prism) is the institution of the proudly apolitical "Indian Soldier".

It is little wonder that every time a survey on the most respected Indian professional is carried out, the "Indian Soldier" always tops the list while the infamy of the most distrusted and disrespected profession is consistently the Indian politician, the one who preaches about most nationalism, national sacrifices, and commitment to society.

All national and regional political parties (without any honourable exception since independence) are guilty of preaching one thing publicly, and doing the exact opposite in practice.

Therefore, the more the "distance" that any institution can manage with the political classes, the more credibility, professionalism and efficaciousness it demonstrates in real life. The closer it gets to the eyes, ears and minds of the political classes, the more biased, corrupted, and shamefully obsequious it gets in its conduct.

History is witness that the more a politician claims to be god-fearing, in service of society, and "nationalistic", the guiltier he/she has

always been of attempting to control the narrative undemocratically, and misuse its accompanying institutions of governance.

However, not all in security related "Uniforms" have been able to maintain the required "distance", and therefore many have lost their perception of apolitical

independence, trust, and reputation of conduct. Some "uniforms" like that of the Police personnel tend to evoke a combination of dread, corruption and excess.

The reputation has got far worse for the investigative agencies like the Investigation Bureau (IB), Enforcement Directorate (ED), Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) etc., who can potentially lend invaluable (though unconstitutional) service to the political masters as a form of quid pro quo, thereby risking the unbiased conduct.

Whereas another set of investigative agencies which do not catch the eye, imagination or even utility (beyond a point) like the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), National Cyber Coordination Centre (NCCC) or the Defence Intelligence Agency (DIA) are able to maintain professional output without any interference or "tilt" to the detriment of professionalism, relatively.

The recent incident of a Deputy Superintendent of Police-level woman Police Officer getting publicly slammed by a sitting Deputy Chief Minister of a State as she was undertaking her duties, explains the institutional pressures, morass, and therefore the consequential public perception.



BHOPIINDER SINGH

The writer is Lt Gen PVSM, AVSM (Retd), and former Lt Governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Puducherry



Cultural diplomacy reinforces Viet Nam's soft power in new era: Deputy FM

Since the launch of the renewal policy, the Party and State have identified cultural diplomacy as one of the three pillars of Viet Nam's comprehensive diplomacy, alongside political and economic diplomacy. These pillars are closely connected, with culture both laying the foundation and acting as a catalyst for political and economic engagement.

Politically, cultural diplomacy has helped create a favourable environment and enhanced Viet Nam's image and prestige on the global stage. President Ho Chi Minh's thought and Vietnamese cultural icons such as Nguyễn Trãi, Nguyễn Du and Hồ Xuân Hương have been honoured by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) for their contributions to the planet and wider society. Cultural elements are also woven into high-level visits, from the inauguration of the Memorial Room dedicated to President Ho Chi Minh in Azerbaijan to leaders' visits to the Temple of Literature and the Imperial Citadel of

Thang Long. These symbolic moments present Viet Nam as a country of rich identity and reliability. Viet Nam's growing role at UNESCO also illustrates this success. By contributing initiatives and holding important positions, the country has built international trust while creating new channels for diplomatic engagement. Economically, cultural diplomacy has promoted trade, investment, tourism and the development of a 'heritage economy'. Large-scale events such as 'Viet Nam Days Abroad' combine art, cuisine, handicrafts and business networking, creating strong appeal for international partners and new opportunities for localities and enterprises. UNESCO-recognised sites such as Hoi An, Ninh Binh, Quảng Ninh and Huế have become drivers of green tourism and sustainable livelihoods. With 73 UNESCO titles, the highest in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Viet Nam has turned heritage into both a cultural and economic asset.



In short, cultural diplomacy, intertwined with political and economic diplomacy, is not just a task under the Cultural Diplomacy Strategy to 2030 but a long-term vision for a modern, comprehensive diplomacy that serves national interests and development. Nearly six million Vietnamese living in over 130 countries and territories across the world have served as 'unofficial cultural ambassadors' and helped preserve and spread Vietnamese cultural identity while integrating with local communities. Wherever Vietnamese people settle, vibrant expressions of Vietnamese culture flourish: language, customs, cuisine and festivals such as Lunar New Year and Mid-Autumn Festival. These celebrations attract not only Vietnamese communities but also international friends, with dishes such as pho, spring rolls and banh mi transcending community boundaries to become cultural bridges. What is remarkable is the way Vietnamese culture, through its warmth and authenticity, resonates with foreigners. Many international friends

are not just admirers but active practitioners of Vietnamese culture as they study the language, practise Vovinam martial arts, cook Vietnamese dishes or don the Áo dài. Some even celebrate Tết with Vietnamese families, while world-renowned chefs embrace Vietnamese cuisine as a creative inspiration. The love of culture knows no borders: once it touches people's hearts, it transcends geography.

Promoting Vietnamese culture abroad is not about one-off events but a long-term journey of the entire community. Overseas Vietnamese are living bridges and endless cultural currents carrying Viet Nam's identity further to the world, where it is increasingly recognised, embraced and shared. Viet Nam is entering a new era ~ the era of the nation's rise, aiming for prosperity and strength. In this context, the diplomatic sector in general and cultural diplomacy in particular must adapt with new mindsets and approaches, as set out in the Politburo's Resolution No. 59-NQ/TW on international integration in the new situation.

Letters To The Editor | ✉ editor@thestatesman.com

Hypocrisy

Sir, The sanctimonious champions of free speech, who would rush to candlelight marches at the slightest provocation over 'constitutional morality', remain conspicuously silent on the unofficial ban on "The Bengal Files" in Bengal. Their hypocrisy is as glaring as their strategic silence on the ethnic cleansing of Hindus in Kashmir, expertly exposed by Vivek Agnihotri.

The West Bengal government's ban on "The Bengal Files" is a stark revelation of its duplicity regarding the preservation and promotion of Bengali asmita. The horrific massacres of Hindus in Noakhali and the Great Calcutta Killings are etched in the collective memory of Bengali Hindus, passed down through generations like a family heirloom.

These spine-chilling historical facts refuse to be suppressed, and Abul Kalam Azad's 'India Wins Freedom' lays bare the atrocities,



indicting leaders like Suhrawardy and Ghulam Sarwar.

The overreaction of the Trinamool Congress and the Left isn't about the film's potential to widen societal cracks but about confronting an uncomfortable narrative that reflects Hindu sentiments prevalent 78 years ago. They're perturbed not by the film's potential viewership but by the unpalatable past it brings to light, a past where the smell of the present lingers, refusing to be denied.

These self-proclaimed custodians of history are less concerned with factual accuracy

and more with perpetuating a narrative that fits their ideological mold. Their tantrums are not about the film's impact but about challenging the dominant narrative of Hindu-Muslim unity peddled by Left-leaning historians of the Nehruvian consensus.

"The Bengal Files" has ignited a firestorm, and the truth, once revealed, cannot be wished away.

Yours, etc., Sudipta Ghosh, Jangipur, 15 September.

Cracks in Nato

Sir, Apropos "NATO tested" published today, the incursion of Russian drones into Polish territory has made NATO's red lines glow and beep. Moscow's tactics would keep provocations just below the Article 5 threshold, probing the alliance's unity. The gamble is that Europe, softened by complacency and years of dependence on Russian energy, may settle for words over deeds.

In this scenario, the United States, once the steadfast sentinel of Nato, underwriting Europe's defense with unmatched commitment, has become the calculating merchandiser Uncle Sam in striped tail coats of yore.

Insulated by geography from direct threats, he strikes a hard pose without real risk at home. Meanwhile, he leverages allies' vulnerabilities to sustain his primacy, even as he pursues global bargains in arms, energy, and trade to advantage.

He barter's arms for commodity rights with a hapless Ukraine even as he duns payment from allies for the Ukraine war he brands as that of Europe alone.

This unapologetic shift has unsettled an alliance built on mutual sacrifice, not selective profiteering. If its strongest member is seen as trader rather than guardian, Russia may achieve its aim, not by victory in battle, but by eroding trust within the alliance.

Yours, etc., R Narayanan, Navi Mumbai, 15 September.

epaper.thestatesman.com

Riding the waves of oceanic opportunity



DR. JITENDRA SINGH

For a nation as vast and diverse as ours, the journey to becoming a developed country, 'Viksit Bharat' by 2047, requires us to look at every resource, including those hitherto unexplored or under-explored, and every available opportunity - particularly, when the ambitious goal is to move up the ladder from Economy Rank 4 to Rank 1.

For decades, our focus has been primarily on harnessing the potential of our land resources. We have built highways, expanded the railway network, developed industries, and cultivated our fields. But as we stand in this pivotal period of our history, the Amrit Kaal, we recognize that our greatest untapped resource lies not just on land, but in the vast blue ocean that surrounds our country.

The Blue Economy is more than

just another sector, it is our new exclusive frontier for growth, a pathway to prosperity, sustainability, and national strength. It is also recognized as a key focus pillar within India's vision of Viksit Bharat. It is a broad and powerful concept that includes everything from traditional activities such as fisheries, ports, and shipping to cutting-edge new fields such as marine biotechnology, eco-tourism, renewable ocean energy, and deep-sea exploration.

The Blue Economy defines it as "comprising the entire system of ocean resources and man-made economic infrastructure in marine, maritime and onshore coastal zones within India's legal jurisdiction, aiding the production of goods and services with clear linkages to economic growth, environmental sustainability and national security".

With a revised coastline stretching now over 11,098 kilometers and a vast Exclusive Economic Zone spanning 2.4 square million kilometers, India is exceptionally well-placed to become a leader in this ocean-based growth engine. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the Blue Economy has emerged as a key pillar of New India's growth vision, with an ambitious target of building a US\$100 billion economy through sustainable use of ocean resources.

Blue economy not only promises to create jobs, but also support our coastal communities, protect marine ecosystems, and strengthen our global maritime presence. We

are now in Blue Economy 2.0, a new phase that is more modern and forward-looking. This new phase focuses not just on traditional sectors, but on the emerging, high-potential areas that will define our future.

Our efforts are already in motion through key initiatives. The Deep Ocean Mission is helping our scientists explore the deep sea using advanced technologies like the 'Matsya 6000' submersible, aiming to find strategic resources and create new technologies for the future. The Sagarmala Programme is modernizing our ports and infrastructure to make trade faster and more efficient, making our businesses more competitive. For the welfare of our coastal communities, the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana (PMMSY) is a flagship scheme to bring a "Blue Revolution" to our fisheries sector.

But our vision goes far beyond this. It is a vision that empowers people and protects our planet and entails creation of new opportunities for women's empowerment by encouraging them to lead in sustainable fields like seaweed farming and eco-friendly tourism. This provides them with new income streams and a greater voice in their communities. It also entails investments in our youth, offering them training and skills for the new jobs that the Blue Economy will create, from marine engineering to data analytics. We are nurturing

a new generation of blue-collar innovators and entrepreneurs.

To support this innovation, the Ministry acts as a catalyst for private investment and innovative start-ups which are the core of Blue Economy. This would mean creation of a business-friendly environment where young, energetic companies can develop solutions in areas like smart fishing, green port logistics, and marine biotechnology. Our focus on technology and start-ups is a key part of our plan to build a self-reliant India, a nation that not only consumes but also creates.

Sustainability and climate action are at the very core of our Blue Economy. We are encouraging clean and green activities, such as sustainable fish farming and the restoration of mangroves and coral reefs, which act as natural barriers against climate change and rising sea levels. In places such as Lakshadweep, India's first ocean thermal energy plant is demonstrating how innovation can provide both clean electricity and drinking water. Our Harit Sagar Guidelines are a clear commitment to making our ports green, aiming for zero carbon emissions and the use of clean fuels.

India is also taking a leadership role in global ocean governance. During our G-20 Presidency, we launched the Chennai High-Level Principles for a Sustainable Blue Economy, setting a global framework for responsible ocean development.

We are strengthening partnerships with other developed countries and multilateral agencies for science-based decision making in the interest of oceans and people.

We have also signed the historic Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) agreement, reaffirming our commitment to protecting marine biodiversity on a global scale. Most recently, India participated in the United Nations Ocean Conference (UNOC3) in Nice, France, where we launched the SAHAV Portal, a pioneering digital platform to enhance coordination, knowledge sharing, and transparency across Blue Economy initiatives such as Marine Spatial Planning.

The journey to "Viksit Bharat" is a shared one. The Blue Economy is a national commitment to responsibly harness the full power of our oceans. By empowering our people, protecting our nature, and investing in science and technology, we are building a maritime future that will benefit all Indians.

As we look ahead to 2047, the Blue Economy will be a driving force behind the "New India" - one that is prosperous, inclusive, and ecologically secure. The tide is with us, and we are ready to ride it towards a brighter future.

(The writer is Union Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Science and Technology, Earth Sciences and Minister of State for PMO, Department of Atomic Energy, Department of Space, Personnel, Public Grievances and Pensions.)

100 Years Ago



Front page of The Statesman dated 19 September 1925

OCCASIONAL NOTE

The Stockport by-election indicates two things clearly enough — a rapid fall in the stock of the Conservative party and a definite revival of Liberalism. Of the three parties that ran candidates the Liberals have had the greatest accession of strength. Labour has done sufficiently better to capture the seat, and the Conservative poll shows an almost sensational fall. No very exact comparison can be made because at the General Election two members were returned and each elector had the disposal of two votes, but that the Conservatives should have lost Stockport in a three cornered contest is significant of the change that is sweeping over British political opinion. The poll was one of eighty-four per cent and the electors cannot, therefore, be accused of apathy. On the contrary they have given a most emphatic verdict against Mr. Baldwin after a year's experience of his Government.

News Items

TOKIO TO PARIS

FRENCH WELCOME FOR JAPANESE AIRMEN

Paris, Sept.

The Japanese airmen, Abe and Kaivacii, and two mechanics, who left Tokio on July 25 arrived in Berlin yesterday from Moscow. They have covered 10,300 kilometres, in thirteen stages, across Siberia. This is the return flight for Capt. Pelletier D'Oisy's flight to Tokio last year. Great preparations are being made in France to fete the Japanese airmen. They will be escorted from the frontier to Epemay by Colonel Vuillemins and an air squadron, and from Epemay to Le Bourget by aeroplanes of the 34th Air regiment. Capt. D'Oisy will be among the welcomers.—Reuter.

ROYAL WORLD TOUR

PRINCE AND PRINCESS ANDREW

London, Sept

Prince and Princess Andrew of Greece will be members of a party numbering forty which will tour the world aboard the yacht Istar which is one of the largest privately owned vessels afloat. The tour starts in January and covers 30,000 miles. It begins at Southampton and includes visits to the Mediterranean, Constantinople, Egypt, India, Malaya States, China, Japan, South Sea Islands, and North America. Admiral Mark Kerr supervises affairs.—Reuter's Special Service.

“BLACK BILL”

BURMA INDIANS’ STRONG PROTEST

(From Our Correspondent)
Rangoon, Sept.

The Burma Indian Chamber of Commerce has addressed a protest to the Chief Secretary of tile Government of Burma on the Expulsion of Offenders Measure, otherwise known as the "Black Bill." The gist of the protest is that if the Government of India permits such legislation in a province of India they can hardly be justified in protesting against the treatment of Indians in the Colonies. The measure will also lead to undesirable tension and bitterness. The Committee of the Indian Chamber expresses regret that there is a section of people who would like to oust Indian traders and labourers from Burma. The Government of Burma, they say, have no right to assume that Indians resident in Burma have homes in India. The Chamber urges the Government of Burma not to adopt "this humiliating and unjust piece of legislation."

ELECTION COMPLAINT

ALLEGED ASSAULT BY SWARAJISTS

Madras, Sept.

Another election complaint connected with the recent Madras municipal elections has been filed to-day in the Chief Presidency Magistrate's court. The complainant is one Purushottama Mudaliar (Justice Party) who alleges that when he was standing in the compound of the Ripon Buildings on September 14, at the time when the counting of votes was going on, he was assaulted and beaten at the instance of Shaffe Mohatned and Sreeramalu Naidu, Swarajists.

Chance for Nepal to reform itself

KHIM LAL DEVKOTA

Nepal is again experiencing political upheaval, this time through the Gen-Z movement. Led largely by young people, it has rattled governance structures and forced the country to confront critical questions about democracy, accountability and the future of federalism. The movement, however, is more than just a protest. It channels frustration with corruption, exclusion and the stranglehold of entrenched elites. At its core, it carries a deeper demand: To make governance genuinely people-centred.

For decades, political parties have been dominated by a handful of senior leaders who control everything - from candidate selection to government policy - while side-lining grassroots voices. Party members are rarely permitted to speak or write freely, and dissent is punished. This suffocation wastes the energy of young leaders and builds resentment. Suppressed voices eventually erupt. The Gen-Z movement is a prime example of the explosion of long-silenced voices demanding recognition.

Notably, the movement is not merely about jobs or education, though those concerns remain. It is about space, recognition, transparency and participation. It demands an end to the monopoly of elites and the creation of a political culture where every citizen feels heard. This is not just youth frustration; it reflects the disillusionment of generations who have long been excluded from governance. A democracy that silences

its youth is a democracy at risk. The roots of frustration also lie in governance failures. Transparency and accountability have remained rhetoric rather than practice. Instead of ensuring fair distribution of resources, leaders funnelled projects into their own constituencies. Budgets became tools of patronage rather than instruments of service.

While Nepal struggles with exclusion and centralised control, international experiences offer valuable lessons. Switzerland, in particular, provides one of the most inspiring examples of how direct democracy and federalism can sustain a strong democratic culture. Ordinary citizens in Switzerland are engaged in decision-making, and their leaders live modestly, seeing themselves as servants of the people rather than rulers above them. In Switzerland, politics is not a full-time profession but a duty performed alongside one's regular occupation. Teachers, doctors, lecturers, police officers and small business owners serve as members of parliament while continuing their primary professions. Members of the cantonal parliament come from diverse walks of life. Once inside parliament, everyone is equal, with no hierarchical distinction. After sessions, they return to their jobs and communities, resuming their normal responsibilities - not as MPs but as colleagues. This practice discourages arrogance and keeps politics grounded in service rather than power. At the federal level, Switzerland prevents concentration of power through rotation. The President of the Confederation serves

only one year before returning to a ministerial post, with another colleague assuming the presidency. Similarly, the Speaker of Parliament serves a short term before passing the responsibility. This reinforces collective leadership and prevents individuals from dominating the political stage. Swiss modesty is also reflected in remuneration. For instance, in the Canton of Fribourg, members of the Grand Council receive only CHF 250–300 per session, not monthly salaries. It sends a clear message that politics is a service, not a career for enrichment. At the municipal level, citizens are directly involved in approving budgets. Communes openly publish their financial plans, which are debated and often decided in town assemblies or through local referendums. This transparency builds trust and ownership among citizens. The most distinctive feature of Swiss democracy is its system of direct democracy. Citizens are called to vote in multiple referendums each year, deciding on constitutional changes, laws and major policies. Since the 19th century, Switzerland has held hundreds of national referendums, with the Constitution amended around 200 times. These rights are not just traditions but are constitutionally guaranteed. Articles 138–142 of the Swiss Constitution enshrine the people's initiative and referendum powers. Through a popular initiative, 100,000 citizens can propose constitutional amendments, which must then be decided by a nationwide vote. A mandatory referendum is required for any constitutional change,

demanding approval by both a majority of voters and cantons. In addition, optional referendums allow 50,000 citizens to challenge laws passed by parliament. These provisions legally embed people's participation at the heart of governance.

Another important Swiss tradition is 'Vernehmlassung', or consultative federalism. Before passing laws, the federal government consults with cantons, municipalities and civil society organisations, collecting opinions and adjusting accordingly. This process creates ownership at every level and ensures smoother implementation. By contrast, in Nepal, laws are often drafted in Kathmandu and imposed on subnational levels without consultation, leading to resistance and weak implementation.

Historically, Switzerland's tradition of direct democracy can be traced back to the 'Landsgemeinde' - open-air assemblies in mountain communities dating to the 13th century. Citizens gathered to debate laws and elect officials, a practice that still survives in some cantons today. This medieval tradition evolved into the modern referendum system, weaving participation into the very fabric of Swiss politics. The lesson for Nepal is clear: Governance must be rooted in citizen participation. Laws should be drafted through consultation, budgets must reflect grassroots priorities, and leaders must live modestly, embodying integrity. Switzerland proves that transparency and accountability are not abstract ideals but daily practices embedded in law and culture.

Nepal now stands at a critical

crossroads. The Gen-Z movement has exposed hard truths about corruption, centralisation and exclusion, but it also presents an opportunity to renew democracy, strengthen federalism and rebuild public trust. The demands of young citizens - fairness, accountability, participation - are not extreme. They are the essence of every functioning democracy. Ignoring them risks unrest; listening to them opens the path to reform.

The Gen-Z movement has already reshaped Nepal's political landscape. A new government has been formed under former Chief Justice Sushila Karki as Prime Minister, and elections for the House of Representatives are scheduled for March 5, 2026. Let us hope they are held on time and usher in a new generation of MPs whose voices and energy can drive constitutional amendments and meaningful reforms.

If Nepal embraces genuine consultation in law-making, fair budgeting and citizen participation in governance, democracy will not just endure but thrive. Federalism will no longer be abstract but lived, owned by the people. Above all, leaders must lead by example, embracing simplicity, integrity and service. The Gen-Z movement and the Swiss model of direct democracy converge on the same truth: Democracy is strongest when people's voices are not just heard but acted upon. Nepal now has the opportunity to turn today's frustrations into tomorrow's reforms. The choice lies with its leaders, and the time to act is now.

The Kathmandu Post/ANN.

Crossword | No. 293238

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8

10 11 12 13 14

15 16 17 18 19 20 21

22 23 24 25 26 27 28 29

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

S P R I C E T E S T T U B E

R E N O H A A T

H E N H O U S E M I N N O W

Y E T I W P K S

A S T R O P H Y S I C S

P R Y R I

E O S D E I N

A V I F A U N A L O C H

A B B V L E

N I T R O U S O X I D E

L O R U C R B

B I C A R B T H U M B S U P

N C I U N E S E

E G G H E A D S A Y E A Y E

ACROSS

1 Without notice, alter fitting (3)

3 Charm ebbed unexpectedly in sleeping quarters (10)

10 Angry demand of shellfish gatherer heard (7)

11 Oblivious of finely-crafted work by Stubbs? (7)

12 Current measures to protect the earth I designed for combatting areas with crowds (13)

15 Fools with missing friends (6)

16 Spice is new dope inhaled by Deep Purple? (8)

18 Relocate German in Abu Dhabi, perhaps (8)

20 Hams it up as English test is in Spanish (6)

23 Move by Tory leader, jerk, if journalist recalled financial shortfall (6,7)

25 Angry young man rings most of island (7)

27 Drugs work: 101 Dalmatians content to be released (7)

28 Product, primarily, in nut tree fluid (10)

29 Nearly prepared to deliver (4)

DOWN

1 Jill s friend caught leaving appetisers for mischievous child (10)

2 Priest cuts shin up with large knife (7)

4 Unrefined cycling centre unknown (6)

5 Range of political blocs announced (8)

6 I m surprised captain with prosthetic leg has no foot (3)

7 British businessman in a pickle, short of time (7)

8 Smack in Staffordshire town changing hands (4)

9 Bullied and denied more shifts (10)

13 Thug wanting bit of attention admitting twisting Trump s slogan, wratched child (10)

14 Made responsive broadcast claiming "Settle is close to Carlisle" (10)

17 Most expensive ways to hold sword up (8)

19 One takes in Canadian singer s claim to be short of energy (7)

21 Perform wearing hat, being touchy? (7)

22 Be next to a judge overwhelmed by murder (6)

24 Fight roughly, the first to be thrown out (4)

26 Seafood that s line caught (3)

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

Signals from Fed

The big trigger for FPIs would be additional rate cuts by the US central bank

THE US FEDERAL Reserve’s 25 basis point (bps) cut in the overnight funds rate—the first in nine months—was widely anticipated and priced in by the markets. The cut signalled the Fed’s intention to support the deteriorating labour markets and a willingness to look through modest breaches in the inflation target. The action suggests a focus on risk management amidst a deceleration in economic growth in the first half of the year and efforts to keep employment levels stable. What central bankers across the global will watch closely, over the next few months, are the trends in the US labour market and the US economy because any meaningful slowdown would impact global growth and trade.

The Fed’s commentary was dovish with two additional rate cuts signalled for CY2025. From India’s perspective, there are no real cues here for the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) which has already cut the repo by 100 bps. Even otherwise, rate cycles between developed and developing economies are not so much in sync these days. While the US dollar strengthened after the Fed’s rate cut announcement, in general the greenback has been depreciating. The weakening dollar has, in fact, allowed both the RBI and other emerging market (EM) central banks to focus less on their currencies and enjoy policy flexibility on rates. Had the dollar appreciated, the EM central bankers may have needed to act in some manner. The rupee’s fairly sharp fall on Thursday of 31 paise against the dollar to 88.1275 should be seen against the backdrop of selling by foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) and sluggish net foreign direct investment. With little support, the Indian currency has depreciated by about 3% over the past three months. There is also some concern that US tariffs would impact India’s exports to that country. The good news is that crude oil prices remain benign.

US treasuries rallied after the Fed’s announcement with yields briefly slipping below the 4% mark, but reversed their gains leaving the yields higher at around 4.09%. For India’s fixed income markets, the domestic factors are more relevant though the Fed’s move provides marginal support. Since it could take a while to evaluate the potential impact of tariffs, the goods and services (GST) tax rate cuts, and the income tax cuts, rate cuts may be deferred until December. Despite a 100 bps rate cut by the RBI, bonds continue to sell off leaving yields elevated; the benchmark yield closed at 6.51 on Thursday, up 4 bps. While local banks have slowed down their bond purchases, and anticipated that the rate cutting cycle is close to ending, FPI appetite has been lukewarm after the index inclusion last year.

The equity markets are rejoicing as they anticipate fresh foreign flows following an increased allocation to EM funds. However, while India’s valuation premium has certainly narrowed vis-à-vis countries such as China, FPIs are waiting for companies to report better earnings growth. The savings from income tax cuts and the GST rate cuts are expected to boost consumption, but the question is whether demand will sustain beyond the festive season. The uncertainty over US tariffs is also weighing on the sentiment but a speedy and favourable resolution should spur buying by foreign funds as it would mean jobs being saved. The big trigger for FPIs, though, would be the additional rate cuts by the Fed.

Why is China stocking up on so much oil?

THE BIG QUESTION troubling the energy market now is why China is stockpiling so much oil. In problem-solving, the principle of Occam’s razor recommends searching for the simplest explanation. So perhaps the answer is as straightforward as “because it’s cheap”. Still, the conspiracy theorist in me says there’s more to it.

China has purchased more than 150 million barrels—costing about \$10 billion at current prices—above its actual use so far this year. For a country that buys more electric vehicles than anywhere else, that demands dissecting. The stockpiling was exceptionally high during the second quarter, when the International Energy Agency estimates China absorbed over 90% of the global stockpiling we can measure. That has helped support prices this year, and with the oil market forecast to move into a huge surplus, whether China continues its buying spree—and for how long—is crucial for 2026.

Here, we should admit what we don’t know. At the annual Asia-Pacific Petroleum Conference last week in Singapore, oil traders agreed only that China has the capacity to store more crude. Beyond that, “nobody has a crystal ball about the duration of Chinese buying for its strategic storage”, Ilia Bouchouev, a former oil trader and now a senior research fellow at the Oxford Institute for Energy Studies, recently said. Be sceptical of anyone claiming to know what the Chinese Communist Party plans. Instead, I’ll offer some educated guesses about the factors at play. Importantly, Chinese policy is multidimensional, so several considerations are probably intertwined.

Let’s start with the simple explanations:

- 1) Opportunistic buying. Chinese commodity officials have demonstrated they are canny traders (look at their copper purchases, for example) with a very long-term view. And oil is cheap. In real terms, adjusted by the cumulative impact of inflation, West Texas Intermediate is changing hands at about the same price as 20 years ago.
- 2) The opportunity is moot if one lacks the capacity. For China, the timing was right: Lots of storage has come online recently, and plenty more is available for 2026. Even now, about half of China’s tanks and caverns are empty, market estimates suggest.
- 3) China has introduced new rules that have effectively added to the storage needs. An energy law enacted on January 1 codifies for the first time strategic storage as a legal requirement for state-owned and private companies. Effectively, the state is sharing the responsibility of stockpiling for the commercial sector, setting the legal foundation for an increase in total oil inventories. That legal change isn’t often discussed, but, anecdotally, it appears to have played a major role in the purchases.

Until here, William of Ockham, the 14th century Franciscan friar who made a mark on the scholarship of reasoning, would probably be proud. The three explanations are straightforward, and probably true. But, very likely, there’s more to it, including a bit of realpolitik, if not conspiracy theory.

4) China has understood that it needs to boost its oil security in a world where the US is wielding sanctions and tariffs willy-nilly. Today, China buys 20% of its oil from countries under US sanctions—chiefly Iran, Russia, and Venezuela. None can guarantee that the US would not be able to, at the very least, hinder that flow in the future. Building more stocks is only prudent. The only question is what’s enough: Currently, China has inventories equal to 110 days of consumption. If the grapevine in Singapore is right, that could be extended to 140 to 180 days by 2026.

5) Does China fear an interruption in supply beyond US and European sanctions? Oil traders who traffic in intrigue utter only one word: Taiwan. For a significant minority in the oil market, the supplemental buying makes sense if Beijing is preparing for military conflict. In this view, the simplest explanation for the stockpiling is that it’s gearing up for conflict. For them, Occam’s razor marries easily with conspiracy.

6) China may see oil as an alternative to US Treasuries, a way to reduce its exposure to US assets. Putting, say, \$10 billion in 2025 in crude, and perhaps as much again in 2026, is a way to diversify its foreign reserves.

Put it all together, and it’s difficult to avoid a conclusion: China will probably continue stockpiling oil in 2026 for commercial and strategic reasons, mopping up part of the expected global surplus. Whether one adheres to the Occam’s razor or elaborate guesswork, Beijing has good reasons to store more oil.

HUMAN CAPITAL

IPOs REFLECT INDIA'S ECONOMIC STRENGTH, BUT DISCOUNTING PEOPLE RISKS CAN LEAD TO ADVERSE OUTCOMES

An emerging IPO powerhouse

INDIA HAS EMERGED as one of the most dynamic initial public offering (IPO) markets in the world. In the first half of 2025 alone, Indian companies raised over \$6.7 billion through public listings, surpassing the IPO proceeds from all of 2024. July stood out as the busiest month, with more than a dozen firms collectively raising over ₹10,000 crore and marquee names like NSDL, Travel Food Services, and Anthem Biosciences commanding strong investor interest. With over ₹25,000 crore worth of IPOs still in the pipeline including big names such as Tata Capital, PhonePe, and Meesho, India is not just participating in the global IPO race, it’s leading it.

This surge is underpinned by strong economic fundamentals. India remains the fastest-growing major economy, with a projected GDP growth rate of 6.8% for FY25. Capital markets have deepened significantly, retail investor participation has grown exponentially, and regulatory bodies have streamlined IPO approvals to encourage more private enterprises to go public. But as attractive as these macro conditions are, going public is not just a financial transaction, it is a fundamental cultural transformation.

An IPO represents a shift from founder-led agility to institution-driven accountability. Companies face not just quarterly reporting pressures but also heightened expectations from regulators, investors, and analysts. There is greater scrutiny on environmental, social, and governance performance, governance maturity, and risk disclosures. In this context, Indian companies preparing to list must look beyond valuation and investor excitement. They must evaluate whether they are organisationally, culturally, and strategically ready for life as a public company.

India’s transformation into a global IPO hub is rooted in macroeconomic stability and investor confidence. With inflation moderating, a stable interest rate regime, and a thriving start-up ecosystem, global and domestic capital is increasingly

GAURAV GOYAL
Senior director, M&A business leader, India, Middle East and Africa, Mercer

flowing into Indian equities. The government’s push for formalisation and digitisation has enabled a pipeline of scalable, tech-driven businesses ready for capital markets. India’s robust regulatory environment and high levels of investor liquidity have further catalysed this momentum. Additionally, Indian firms often enjoy high valuations driven by growth prospects, making IPOs an attractive option for founders and early investors.

Despite this favourable climate, IPO-bound Indian firms must exercise caution. Secondary research of c.100 organisations listed on India’s stock exchanges since 2022 indicates a different story. About 47% of the listed organisations are trading below their listing price and only 42% have outperformed the benchmark index.

IPO success depends as much on people as it does on numbers. The shift from a private to a public company is a gear change in culture. Indian employees must understand the impact of this transition on their roles, incentives, and accountability. Leadership must model a mindset of transparency and consistency, and internal communication becomes critical to manage expectations and change fatigue.

Several challenges typically surface during IPO readiness. Founders may struggle to balance their entrepreneurial instincts with the expectations of public governance. Executive compensation often falls short of public market norms, potentially causing confusion or even

GAURAV GOYAL
Senior director, M&A business leader, India, Middle East and Africa, Mercer

employee attrition. Since 2022, 19% of organisations have seen at least one key management personnel leave within the first six months of listing. This figure more than doubles to 49% within 24 months of the IPO. Board-level movement follows a similar trend—6% companies experience the resignation of at least one board member within six months of listing, rising to 28% within two years. Such departures can unsettle investors, disrupt strategic continuity, and stress the need for well-designed retention initiatives and succession frameworks to maintain leadership continuity post-IPO. The cultural shift from a fast-paced, innovation-driven mindset to one focused on measured performance and rigorous governance can lead to frustration, if not managed effectively. Even then in many cases, succession planning is a check in the box item for the nomination and remuneration committee with little to no effort on identifying and developing successors for critical positions.

Organisations that succeed post-IPO invest early in aligning their people strategy with long-term business goals. This includes conducting comprehensive diagnostics to assess cultural readiness, redesigning total rewards and performance management systems, and implementing succession planning and leadership development programmes to support scalable governance. Building internal change management teams is also essential to help the organisation navigate the transition smoothly and sustain momentum beyond the listing.

The IPO frenzy in the US and Southeast Asia during 2020-2022 offers a cautionary tale. Many high-profile listings faltered post-IPO due to poor planning, lack of internal readiness, and misaligned business models. Indian companies have the advantage of hindsight and must use it to their benefit. Post-listing, the journey only begins. Sustaining investor trust, retaining key talent, maintaining a healthy culture, and evolving governance practices are ongoing imperatives. Indian public companies must continue to invest in upskilling, leadership continuity, and business resilience. A long-term view is critical, especially in a market such as India that rewards consistency and clarity.

igate the transition smoothly and sustain momentum beyond the listing.

Of the 53% of the listed organisations that have a positive stock movement, c. 45% of them have implemented a long term-incentive plan as a retention measure within one year from the date of IPO. Of the 30% organisations where stock price decreased by over 20%, only 20% of them have introduced a long-term incentive plan within one year of the date of IPO.

The IPO frenzy in the US and Southeast Asia during 2020-2022 offers a cautionary tale. Many high-profile listings faltered post-IPO due to poor planning, lack of internal readiness, and misaligned business models. Indian companies have the advantage of hindsight and must use it to their benefit.

Post-listing, the journey only begins. Sustaining investor trust, retaining key talent, maintaining a healthy culture, and evolving governance practices are ongoing imperatives. Indian public companies must continue to invest in upskilling, leadership continuity, and business resilience. A long-term view is critical, especially in a market such as India that rewards consistency and clarity.

India’s rise as an IPO powerhouse is not accidental. It reflects economic strength, regulatory maturity, and the entrepreneurial spirit of its businesses. Going public is a once-in-a-lifetime event for an organisation and requires diligent planning and execution on many fronts. While rewarding, it is a cumbersome and complex process and discounting the people risks can derail the process or result in adverse financial outcomes post-IPO. There is no magic pill for a successful IPO. Identifying critical human capital issues in the context of an IPO and prioritising people strategies may help improve the prospects of a favourable experience and positive outcome in the longer run. For companies to thrive in public markets, they must do more than ride the wave and should not just see this as a funding mechanism, but as a proving ground for enduring value.

The shifting sands of value



SANJEEV KRISHAN

Chairperson, PwC India

Waiting for a new model to be ‘proven’ may result in companies ceding value to players who enter from the edge instead of the core

IN AN ERA defined by disruption, rapid technological changes and increasing fragmentation, the foundations of value are shifting. With the global landscape evolving at a rapid pace, businesses are being challenged in unprecedented ways. The frequency, intensity, and multifaceted nature of disruptions along with changing consumption patterns and regulatory concerns necessitate continuous vigilance. From AI writing code and creating full-fledged movies to digital ecosystems dissolving traditional industry boundaries, reinvention is reshaping the world as we know it. Traditional moats of incremental innovation and brand loyalty are eroding, forcing companies to rethink strategies, business models, and even core identities.

Product-centric companies are moving towards service-oriented models and service-centric companies toward product and platform-based models. Companies are not only diversifying revenue streams and embracing technology, but also partnering with technology providers, start-ups, and even competitors to build ecosystems that co-create value and improve access to new markets. As a result, value is no longer confined to traditional industry boundaries but is being created and captured in new and unexpected places.

Reinvention in the present

Let’s take the automotive industry. With electric and autonomous vehicles gaining traction, value pools are shifting towards software and mobility services. Similarly, banks are being challenged by new entrants which are providing hyper-personalised services. Companies are also exploring novel ways to monetise resources and byproducts in a more responsible

way. For instance, waste heat from a data centre warmed swimming pools during the 2024 Paris Olympics.

In other sectors, firms are leveraging bundling and product line expansion to capture more value. Telecom operators are combining data plans with OTT subscriptions and entering content creation. This isn’t just a “combo pack” but a structural shift blurring the line between telecom and media houses. By subsidising entertainment, telecoms are stimulating data consumption, improving network utilisation, and mining existing accounts better.

Reinvention in the past

Shifting profit and value pools are not a new phenomenon—the changing mix of S&P 500 and other indices is proof. However, the interconnectedness of these shifts demands rapid realignment and reinvention.

Soap operas, which one could argue were the precursors to modern on-demand content, were originally sponsored by soap manufacturers to advertise en masse. Similarly, the Michelin Star, today recognised as a prestigious restaurant rating mechanism, has its roots in an innovative campaign to boost tyre demand. Just as marketing strategies evolved to influence and respond to consumer behaviour, manufacturing has undergone transformative changes. In reference to Model T—an outcome of reinvention in manufacturing—Henry Ford famously stated, “Any colour the customer wants, as long as it’s black.” Au contraire, today’s consumers expect the metaphorical “best of both worlds”,

demanding hyper-personalised products and services. These consumers are more informed, connected, value-driven, novelty-seeking, and much more likely to give in to instant gratification than customers of the past.

Reinvention for the future

The evolution from mass production, marketing, and customer engagement to today’s hyper-customisation reflects how businesses are continuously adapting both—how they create value and how they engage with consumers. With emerging technologies, democratisation of access, and increasing acceptance of technological integration with daily lives, the opportunities to innovate are immense.

Take the basic wristwatch, which some had written off as a casualty of the smartphone era. With evolving smart glasses, the internet of things, and augmented reality technologies, it is not far-fetched to wonder whether smartwatches may one day lead to smartphones receding into the background and even take over as smart home hubs, identity cards, and many other devices.

Though fantastical, such ideas matter as they reveal a deeper truth—incumbents defending industry borders will compete with companies which shape value across traditional confines. Companies must rewire for speed, agility, experimentation, and develop an appetite for risk. Hierarchies and silos must give way to cross-functional operations and faster decision-making. Companies that experiment with new products and services and iterate

rapidly based on customer and market feedback will benefit.

Today’s value shifts are unparalleled, and value will come to those who are proactive rather than reactive. Incumbents must overcome organisational inertia, legacy systems, and cultural resistance to change. Emerging technologies such as quantum computing, blockchain, and advanced robotics will further disrupt existing value pools. Early signals of this are already emerging. For instance, auto companies are partnering with quantum computing players to improve battery chemistry and agricultural machinery manufacturers are reducing herbicide usage through machine learning. Thus, cultivating a mindset of continuous learning is critical. While regulatory pushback, privacy concerns, and slow consumer adoption curves may impact outcomes, hesitation to adopt new technologies and exploring new value pools carries a greater risk. Waiting for a new model to be “proven” may result in companies ceding value to players who enter from the edge instead of the core.

The message is clear—in a world where value is constantly being redefined, sustainable competitive advantage comes from the ability to anticipate, adapt, and innovate. The future belongs to those who are willing to challenge the status quo, experiment boldly, and place the customer at the heart of their strategy. We have entered an era shaped by new domains of growth where organisations work across boundaries to serve fundamental human needs—how we care, how we move, how we fuel, and so on. The sands of value may be shifting, but for those prepared the opportunities are limitless and it’s time to look for growth in new places.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Innovation and tech upgrade for India Inc

Apropos of “How India Inc needs to transform” (FE, September 18), no doubt the various types of corporate structures serve as pillars of

economic growth as they draw massive investments resulting in large-scale production of goods and services. Continuous innovation and technological upgrade in production, ensuring quality, and good corporate governance will give corporate

entities a chance to gain leadership in markets and also potentially create a strong supply chain. They should take steps to prevent mismanagement. And irrespective of the model, and be it in the public or private sector, they must strive to achieve their objectives

as laid out in the memorandum of association, in consonance with the interests of shareholders, and as engines for economic growth for the nation.

—NR Nagarajan, Sivakasi

●Write to us at feletters@expressindia.com

The Indian

EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

EU’s OVERTURE

Brussels’ new strategy document shows keenness to recognise New Delhi as a valuable partner in shaping global order

THE EU’S LATEST strategy document on India, issued this week, marks a definitive moment in the evolution of Delhi’s relations with Brussels, long defined by mutual neglect. This had begun to change in the 21st century, but the two sides had struggled to boost the partnership quickly. In the last few years, there has been a determined effort by Brussels and Delhi to plug the gap between the promise of the partnership and its performance. Troubled by the assertion of Russia, the muscular economic policies of China, and the disruption of historic US alliances by President Donald Trump, Europe is in the middle of rebooting relationships with other powers. Its latest outreach to India is part of that effort. Framed as a “comprehensive strategic agenda” to deepen, broaden, and better coordinate cooperation, the EU strategy is a blend of ambition and pragmatism. In stating that “India’s success benefits the EU, just as the EU’s success benefits India,” Brussels has moved from treating New Delhi as a useful interlocutor to recognising it as an indispensable partner in shaping the international order.

The EU is the second most important commercial partner of India, after the US. Bilateral goods trade has climbed to €120 billion and services to €60 billion. Yet, India still accounts for less than 2.5 per cent of the EU’s total trade. The EU, therefore, focuses on securing a far-reaching Free Trade Agreement with India that reduces tariff and non-tariff barriers and unlocks the enormous possibility of trade and investment flows between Europe and India. After years of drift, India is now equally committed to an early conclusion of the FTA. Buffeted by a massive and persistent trade deficit with China, and shocked by Trump’s exorbitant tariffs, India sees free trade with the EU as a major strategic objective now. The EU also frames India as a rapidly expanding manufacturing and technology hub hosting nearly half of global capability centres; India appreciates Europe’s edge in research, regulation and green and digital technologies. Together, they could gain from EU-India Innovation Hubs, a Startup Partnership, and joint work in AI, semiconductors, and outer space.

In the emerging multipolar world, the EU also recognises the growing salience of security cooperation with India. The planned EU-India Security and Defence Partnership will anchor cooperation on maritime security, defence industrial expansion and modernisation, cyber and hybrid threats, counterterrorism, and crisis management. Yet the war in Ukraine casts a long shadow. The EU is not on the same page with Delhi on India’s oil imports and defence ties with Moscow. This is not surprising, given the fact that Europe is now in the middle of a prolonged and unwanted war with Russia since Moscow’s invasion of Ukraine in early 2022. It is time, though, for India to stop seeing Europe through the eyes of Russia, as it has since Independence. While Delhi must maintain a productive relationship with Moscow, it also needs to balance its ties with Brussels and Moscow. The rapidly rising stakes in India’s relationship with the European Union require such a recalibration.

FED’S PIVOT

US Central Bank has cut rate after nine months. It needs to ensure price stability and maximum employment

AFTER HOLDING STEADY for nine months, on Wednesday, the US Federal Reserve lowered the target range for the federal funds rate by 25 basis points to 4 to 4.25 per cent. The decision, though, was not unanimous. Stephen Miran, a recent appointee of Donald Trump, was in favour of a more aggressive rate cut of 50 basis points. Notwithstanding Trump’s repeated calls to reduce interest rates, the Fed’s pivot does indicate that further policy easing is on the cards. In fact, the central bank’s latest projections, which accompanied this “risk management rate cut”, do indicate the possibility of multiple rate cuts this year.

While the decision to lower rates is due to a weakening labour market, recent data also point towards inflation staying higher than previously expected, complicating the policy matrix. As per the US Bureau of Labour Statistics, non-farm payroll employment increased by just 22,000 in August, significantly lower than expectations. Alongside, the combined employment in June and July was also revised downwards. The Fed highlighted this weakness. It noted that “job gains have slowed, and the unemployment rate has edged up”, adding that the “downside risks to employment have risen”. Alongside this deterioration in the labour market, inflation risks are also surfacing. Inflation, as measured by the personal consumption expenditures price index, has been inching upwards – from 2.2 per cent in April to 2.6 per cent in July. But, while the central bank’s expectation of inflation this year remains unchanged at 3 per cent, it expects price pressures to remain elevated – it has raised its inflation projection for next year to 2.6 per cent, up from 2.4 per cent earlier. Inflation is now expected to return to the 2 per cent target only by 2028. The Fed has, however, also marginally revised upwards its growth forecasts. But, the uncertainty over the economic outlook continues to linger. Fed Chairperson Jerome Powell acknowledged that, saying, “It’s not incredibly obvious what to do”.

The decision to lower interest rates comes against the backdrop of increasing attacks on the central bank’s independence by Trump, who has not only been quite vocal about the path of monetary policy he prefers, but has also tried to fire Fed Governor Lisa Cook. Powell, whose term as Fed chair ends in May 2026, will have to navigate this period carefully as the central bank seeks to fulfil its dual mandate of price stability and maximum employment.

MORE THAN ICE CREAM

By resigning, Jerry Greenfield has highlighted that in the face of injustice, companies and people, always have a choice

IN 1977, TWO friends — one a failed potter, the other with a stack of rejection letters from medical schools — decided to go into business together. They realised the high costs of setting up a bagel shop and pivoted to selling ice cream, crepes and soups. In a renovated petrol pump, they set up the first parlour of what went on to become the multinational ice-cream brand, Ben & Jerry’s. That simple start sits at the heart of their operation to this date. On September 17, Jerry Greenfield resigned from the company over being “silenced” by their parent company, Unilever, saying, “Love, equity, justice — they’re part of who Ben and I are, and they’ve always been the foundation of Ben & Jerry’s.”

In 2021, B&J’s independent board sued Unilever over the renewal of an entrepreneur’s license to sell B&J’s in areas of Israeli-occupied West Bank. Since then, tensions have escalated. But, as they made sure with a deal guaranteeing their independence at the time of acquisition, for Ben Cohen and Greenfield, “it was always about more than just ice cream”. They have extended support to movements aimed at racial justice, LGBTQ+ rights, climate justice — and given away part of their profits to such causes. The founders are trying to find a way to buy the company back.

Today, the single-minded pursuit of profit is often accepted as the norm. Ben & Jerry’s model is proof that it is possible to measure a business’s performance against both financial gain and social impact. Some companies do see that the balance sheet does not have to make up the whole picture: In India, leather-goods company Hidesign, in July, made a public statement against Israel’s killing of children in Gaza. “That’s not how things work in the real world,” is the first line of defence against any challenge to the status quo. Ben & Jerry’s and Ben and Jerry have, for long, led the way in showing that the “real world” is what we make it.



PRATAP BHANU MEHTA

DONALD: MY DEAR friend, Narendra. Happy birthday to you. You are a great guy. 75! What a great age. Let me tell you that the best is yet to come. We can beat those youngsters on anything. I aced my cognitive test.

Narendra: Donald, thank you very much. I am a mere servant of one-and-a-half-billion people. God has been kind.

Donald: We are both great countries, with leaders such as our countries have never seen before. But I envy you. I saw all the Indian newspapers. They have put out so many BIG ads wishing you. What a party you must be having. My media – that New York Times, ABC News — they hate me.

Narendra: But you sue them!

Donald: But at least I get them to pay me money. 15 million off ABC. Not bad.

Narendra: I just get them to work for me. Anyway, you know I should not be talking to you.

Donald: Why?

Narendra: You have got to lift that punitive tariff. I should have insisted on it before we let your trade negotiator back in. We don’t negotiate with a gun pointed at our heads. You cannot unfairly punish India. I know we are friends and all that. But India comes first, above personal deals, above friendship, especially above sportsmanship. I am giving you another chance because our countries go back a long way.

Donald: You know you did not quite give me the credit for stopping a nuclear war. But I am going to give you a birthday gift. I am going to thank you for your help in trying to stop the Russia-Ukraine war.

Narendra: India eternally deserves the Nobel Prize. We have always said, war is not the way.

Donald: If I had been around, there would have been no war. Because of Crooked Joe, I was saddled with both Hamas and Ukraine.

Narendra: So, what are we going to do?

Donald: You put pressure on Putin.

Narendra: You think the international community might want more pressure on Netanyahu as well?

Donald: Well, both are my friends.

An imaginary conversation on tariffs, trade and leaders who make nations great

Actually, the funny thing is, both are our best friends. Our friends do no wrong. It’s Zelenskyy and Biden’s war, not Putin’s. And Israel has done no wrong.

Narendra: You are forcing India to exercise leverage over Russia. Not forcing China or Europe?

Donald: I’d like to be friends with Xi, too. Then maybe I could force him too. Anyway, how was Tianjin? Heard they do great buildings over there.

Narendra: Not quite going over to the dark side, if that’s what you mean (laughs). Just keeping the neighbour happy. But, I’ll tell you the real dark side: TikTok. Now that we got rid of it, we are fine.

Donald: The people who use TikTok have always supported me. You, my friend, have got everyone supporting you.

Narendra: Not so easy. You know the Opposition is accusing me of stealing votes.

Donald: Oh, Democrats were stealing elections all the time. But it is ridiculous to accuse you of stealing votes. I have seen the crowds you draw. Must be that same left-wing gang. I have that problem too. Professional hate mongers, spewing hate against patriotic people like us trying to make our countries great. You got to get tough with them is all I can say.

Narendra: Don’t worry, Donald. These were the people who brought in infiltrators to change the demography of the country. I am weeding the infiltrators out. We have a great word: *Ghuspaitiya*, one who comes in without permission.

Donald: Cool word. We should share notes on this. I learnt a few tricks from you. By the way, I am one up on you on one thing. You only control universities. I now control and get them to pay up.

Narendra: We must. Our political challenges are so alike. Our opponents will stoop to any level.

Donald: Yes, they will. They did not spare poor Charlie.

Narendra: Both of us are victims of so much hate. Why do they hate people like us? All we want is for everyone to unite around peace and greatness. Anyway, deepest con-

dolences. But coming back to tariffs, don’t get addicted to them. We may be a poorer country, but we still manage our budgets. And next time you come — you are coming for Quad, aren’t you? — we will serve you some great “makai nu shaak” from my home state, Gujarat. You will understand why we won’t buy American corn...And you really should not have called India a dead economy

Donald: I don’t like corn. By the way, that economy thing was a joke. Who knows whether an economy is dead or alive. So many fake numbers around. We are fixing that. But you got a great stock market going. Congratulations.

Narendra: Thank you.

Donald: I know it’s your birthday, so now is not the time. But you have got to give me something. Xi won’t. Lula won’t. Europeans will give you everything so easily that it does not even count as giving. The Arab world really believes in family values, it has helped family investments a lot. Look at Pakistan. Generous people opened up their crypto market. I know you have an aversion to gambling, so I won’t bet India to buy bitcoins. Anyway, the point is, if I get a win with India, it is a win for both of us. And we personally share so much. Give me something,

Narendra: The goodwill of one-and-a-half billion people, and the steadfast values of our civilisation, will be with you, Donald. Our democracy and demography.

Donald: Yeah, but America does not make as much money from that. About the demography bit, some of our people don’t like having so many of your people. I am not saying that’s me. But you know how it is. And what’s your leverage?

Narendra: Since you asked, a billion warriors on X. And a will for self-reliance.

Donald. Oh, that’s one big company. I get that. But billion X warriors — and not a dime for me? Anyway, have a GREAT birthday, Narendra. Don’t forget the tariffs.

NOTE: Resemblance to any actual figure is purely coincidental.

The writer is contributing editor, The Indian Express

HERE’S TO THE SUNDANCE KID

Robert Redford’s greatest legacy is his championing of indie cinema



POOJA PILLAI

IN 1989, WHEN 26-year-old Steven Soderbergh made his filmmaking debut at a film festival in Park City, Utah, the American movie ecosystem looked a lot like today’s: Big money was thrown at franchises like *Indiana Jones* and *Lethal Weapon* that were fronted by stars like Harrison Ford and Mel Gibson, and which sought to do nothing more than entertain as many people as possible.

Enter Soderbergh, with *Sex, Lies and Videotape*, an intimate look at the falsehoods on which relationships are built. Amidst the “feel-good” and “family-friendly” movies of the time, it struck a note that was fresh in its discordance, announcing the arrival of a bold voice and laying the foundation of the American indie/independent film movement of the 1990s.

While individual geniuses often become catalysts for creative movements, they can only thrive in the right ecosystem. For Soderbergh, it was the Sundance Film Festival in Utah. Following Soderbergh’s breakthrough, the festival — originally called the Utah/US Film Festival — developed a reputation as Ground Zero for indie film talent. The visionary behind the festival’s new character was Robert Redford, the screen legend and filmmaker who had, in 1981, founded the Sundance Institute in Utah’s Provo Valley to support independent filmmakers. Named for the charming, scrappy outlaw Redford played in his breakout film, 1969’s *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, the

institute took over management in 1985 of what had until then a festival chiefly featuring retrospectives. Under Redford’s guidance, it did not just get a new name; the event underwent a complete overhaul, its focus shifting from celebrating the past to exploring the possibilities of the future. A series of filmmaking labs were established, with the idea that those with a story to tell should be able to, at the very least, realise it on the big screen.

All this was happening as Redford, who remained a busy actor, was charting his own course as a filmmaker. Beloved for his all-American good looks and warm screen persona, he was an easy choice to play the romantic lead in films like *The Way We Were* (1973), but there was always something in him that kicked at the notion of being reduced to his face. It may have had something to do with his early exposure on the stage and television, where he played a wide variety of roles unconstrained by his handsomeness. Or, maybe it was the same yearning for the artistic life that had once led him to leave college to pursue (unsuccessfully) a career in art in Europe.

As much as this streak of non-conformity shaped his choice of roles throughout his career — leading him to pursue projects like *The Sting* (1972), *All The President’s Men* (1976), *The Natural* (1984) and *All Is Lost* (2013) — it defined his oeuvre as a filmmaker. He had little interest in the blockbuster films that were be-

ginning to replace the auteur-driven fare of the 1960s and 1970s Hollywood. *Ordinary People* (1980), his first feature as director, told a story of grief that was several shades darker than many mainstream films of the day. It won him an Oscar for Best Director, but the point was never just winning hardware that could be proudly displayed on a mantle. It was about creating a legacy built on storytelling that was not afraid of the complicated and the offbeat.

This vision was more than realised at Sundance, which launched the careers of some of the most daring and creative minds working in cinema today, including Quentin Tarantino, Paul Thomas Anderson, Richard Linklater, Wes Anderson, the Coen brothers, Chloe Zhao and Ryan Coogler. In that sense, Redford the institution builder was simply an extension of Redford the actor and filmmaker who used his tremendous clout and goodwill — and his millions — to push the cause of cinema and foster talent that would otherwise have gone unrecognised. Those who love cinema and those who pursue this uniquely demanding art in the face of overwhelming odds owe much to Redford, for he helped keep the faith alive. As a nursery for indie cinema, if Sundance has few parallels, it is because there are few others like Redford who use the megawattage of their stardom to shine the light on others.

pooja.pillai@expressindia.com

SEPTEMBER 19, 1985, FORTY YEARS AGO

SEVENTH FIVE-YEAR PLAN

THE COUNTRY’S SEVENTH Five-Year Plan envisages an annual growth rate of five per cent, with increased emphasis on infrastructure and human resource development. “This is a financially sound plan which is eminently bankable,” Manmohan Singh, deputy chairman of the Planning Commission, told newsmen. He said that it was not only realistic but had no gaps in resources. The growth rate projected for agriculture was 4 per cent and for industry 8 per cent.

CEASEFIRE IN SRI LANKA

THE INDIAN GOVERNMENT appeared to have persuaded the representatives of Sri

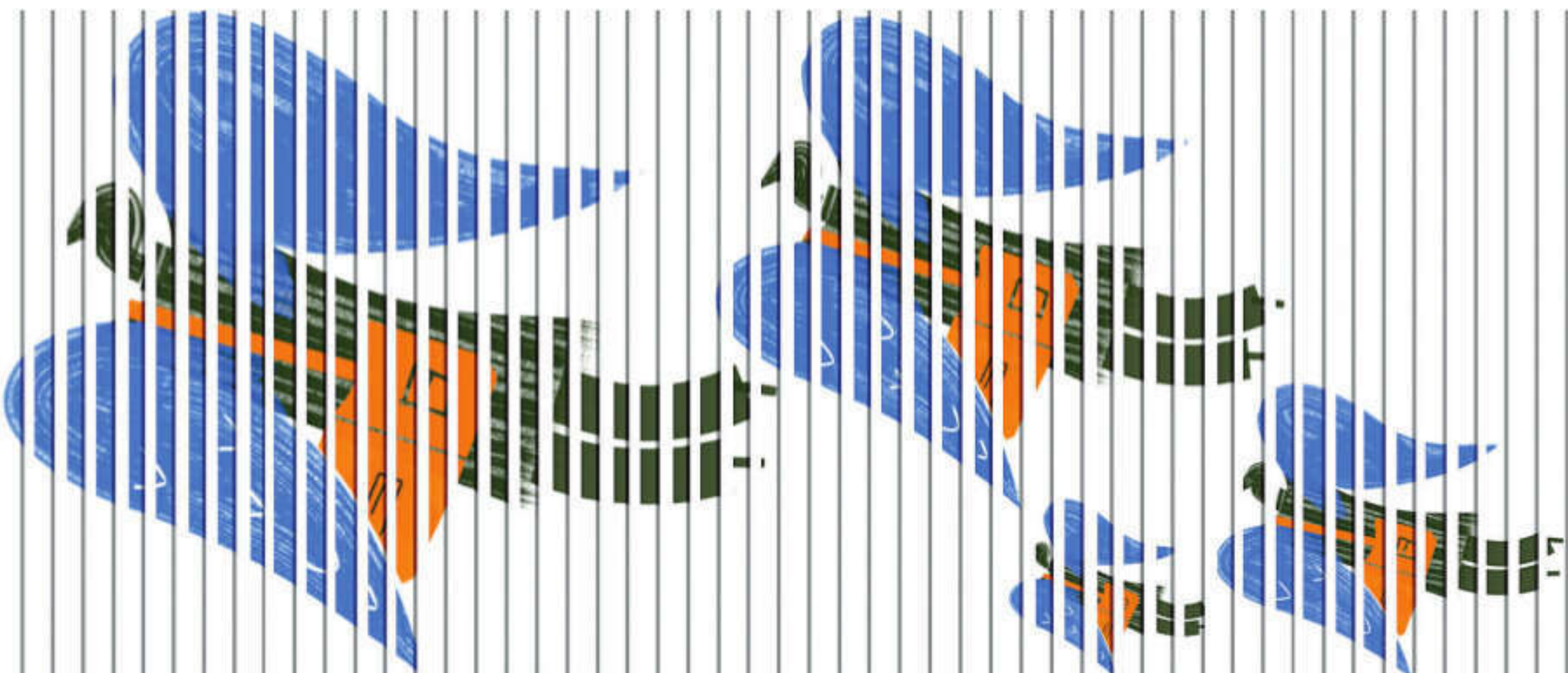
Lanka’s Eelam National Liberation Front (ENLF) to agree to observe the extended ceasefire on the island. At the end of yet another round of talks in New Delhi between the ENLF leaders and the Foreign Secretary, Romesh Bhandari, the government expressed the hope that the Tamil militants and the Sri Lankan government would “faithfully observe” the extended ceasefire. The ENLF leaders are believed to have given their assurance to observe the ceasefire after a great deal of cajoling and persuasion. All through their discussions with the Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, and Bhandari, they reportedly underlined the need to secure proper guarantees from the Sri Lankan government that its security forces would strictly observe the truce.

INDIA REFUSES THE US

INDIA ALL BUT turned down the US plea for taking initiatives to avoid nuclear competition in the Subcontinent. Reacting to the plea made by the two visiting US officials, during their talks with Indian officials and leaders, an External Affairs Ministry spokesman, pointed out that India was already committed “not to produce nuclear weapons”. “If it can be ensured that Pakistan likewise becomes committed, and the US can assist in this process, where then is the need for a regional agreement?” he asked. India believed that Pakistan’s nuclear programme was directed towards acquiring weapons capability. In its view, the best way to deal with the situation was to prevent Pakistan from acquiring it.

DIS/AGREE
THE BEST OF BOTH SIDES

A fortnightly column, which offers not this-versus-that, but the best of both sides, to inform the debate



C R Sasikumar

With widespread anti-migrant sentiment in Western countries, is the era of large-scale immigration over?

Migrants make for convenient villains

They have been woven into the moral fabric of receiving countries as the evil that is required to prove the goodness of the hosts



SANJAY SRIVASTAVA

IT HAS BEEN exactly 50 years since the publication of John Berger and Jean Mohr's *A Seventh Man*. The book poignantly documents the lives of migrant workers in a Europe that needed their labour but rejected their presence. In the Preface to the 2010 edition, Berger wrote, "It can happen that a book, unlike its authors, grows younger as the years pass." *A Seventh Man* has grown younger because, though its facts and figures may now be outdated, the mirror it held up to the privileged about their treatment of beleaguered migrant workers is as clear as ever. The book's subject, as Berger also noted, "is European, its meaning global". Now, around the globe, migrants, refugees and asylum-seekers have become scapegoats for all that is wrong with the present and thought experiments for a future that, ironically, is based on the past.

According to UN data, around 4 per cent of the world's population currently lives in a country other than where it was born, whether legally or (according to the laws of host countries) illegally. That is, just over 300 million people are living outside their countries of birth. Not all migrants are equal and those at the top of the mobility pecking order — white collar professionals and "golden visa" holders, for example — enjoy legal and cultural rights similar to citizens of host countries. What is clear is that migrants at the bottom of the heap — those Berger identified as seeking an "opportunity to earn a living, to have enough money to act" upon the barest necessities of a decent life — have become sites of significant moral dramas of our times. And though they are actors in such dramas, they are also bit players in what are morality plays that seek to define our times.

The first of these is the demand for a strong state that will secure the borders against "too much" or any immigration. This is extraordinary as those who demand a strong state simultaneously rail against state control and regulations, arguing that market forces should be allowed to take over state activities. In the United Kingdom, politicians and activists such as Nigel Farage and Tommy Robinson propagate the narrative that a "weak" state has allowed national borders to be breached by undesirable populations. And in the US, Trump's MAGA movement has thrived on similar sentiments. It is important to recognise the key moral argument here: That just as a family can only flourish if there is a strong father figure, the national family too needs a patriarch, the strong state.

The second aspect concerns the ways in which the migrant is a vessel for ideas

about culture and the past. There is gathering support for the idea that culture is like a commodity and that if you cover it in stain-resistant wrapping, it will stay pristine and, more importantly, just as it was 100 years ago. Here, migrants and asylum-seekers become threats to culture-as-commodity: They grab it with their grubby hands, exhale their strange smells upon it and paint it in their own colours. Ignoring the fact that the only unvarying truth about cultures is that they are forever changing is a crucial aspect of this morality play. It is also ironic that those who hold this view have no problems with the idea of trans-border global financial and economic flows. And yet, such flows also carry within them the forces that are constantly transforming cultures. However, morality tales need clearly identifiable villains: In India, these might be Rohingya refugees and in France, those of Arabic origin.

The culture-as-commodity perspective is strongly linked to another important idea. This the morality tale of a Golden Age, the idea of a past we must return to in order to solve the problems of the present. In this Golden Age, culture was homogenous and harmonious and the presence of "outsiders" has deeply disturbed the equilibrium. The Golden Age narrative is one of the key ways in which arguments about migrants and asylum seekers are currently expressed.

Finally, it is in the nature of morality tales to present a black-and-white view of the world such that those who are their readers are able to distance themselves from the conditions of "evil" that are being described. It is crucial that the audience for such stories does not itself become implicated in the problem that is identified. The audience is always positioned as needing clear-cut solutions whilst having nothing to do with its cause. So, it is rarely

Who created the conditions for the making of refugees? What has been the role of the French in its former colonies, and the Euro-American policies of self-interest that have supported murderous regimes in different parts of the world and created the conditions that make for refugees?

asked: Who created the conditions for the making of refugees and asylum-seekers? What, for example, has been the role of the French in its former sub-Saharan colonies, and the Euro-American policies of self-interest that have supported murderous regimes in different parts of the world and created the conditions that make for refugees? And, what of the making of Palestinian refugees and asylum-seekers?

But morality tales require that the propagation of violence in faraway places, that may have material and financial benefits but also create conditions for the making of immigrants, refugees and asylum-seekers, must be hidden from view. It requires that those who create such conditions can view themselves as under threat from those whose miseries their governments have created.

In our time, the migrant, the refugee and the asylum-seeker are not just workers necessary to do the jobs others might refuse. They have been woven into the moral fabric of receiving countries as the evil that is required to prove the goodness of the hosts.

The writer is Distinguished Research Professor, Department of Anthropology and Sociology, SOAS University of London

Immigration is not ending. It's changing

Boom-and-bust cycles of the past may be broken. But what we may now have to deal with is forced migration on account of climate change



AMIT JULKA

FOR ALMOST a decade now, global politics has churned around a singular issue — migration. While migration is usually seen as a recent phenomenon (and an exception), it has been a norm for most of humanity — at some point in history, someone from our ancestry has migrated. Thus, to talk about its origins is to acknowledge the limits of memory — a native place is the point beyond which we can no longer trace our story of our migration(s).

That being said, there was something unique about the specific form of migration the world has witnessed in the last few decades. Specifically, this was the migration caused by the rise of neoliberalism. The end of the Cold War and the globalisation of the free market not only meant loosening of flows of capital, but also human bodies. Secondly, this was also the time of the rise of the service economy and informational capitalism. This meant that in core economies (the first world), companies needed access to cheaper, skilled labour from the periphery, that is, the developing world. Thus, it is not a coincidence that the H1-B programme, the sustainer of middle class dreams in countries like India, was launched in the year 1990, just as America was entering the unipolar era. Conversely, this was also a win-win for developing countries — it provided a much-needed outlet for their talented youth especially at a

time when domestic jobs in these sectors were lacking.

However, this is a very lopsided picture of immigration — one that involves a particular set of Anglophone countries and caters to the experience of a certain class (skilled Indian migrants typically from the middle/upper-middle class). Much before techies from Bangalore were making a beeline for the Bay Area, millions of unskilled and skilled workers from South and Southeast Asia had discovered the promise of the Gulf petro-states in the 1980s, where the proportion of migrants eclipsed the local community, with the caveat that unlike their counterparts going to the West, they knew that such a migration was always a temporary affair, lasting anywhere between five weeks to 50 years. Then there is undocumented migration — such as that from Central and South America to the United States, or from North Africa to Europe. The latter, with its images of people cutting across fences and crossing the ocean on poorly constructed boats, has fuelled the rise of anti-immigrant politics across the global North.

This immigration wave that we experienced (from 1990-2020 approximately) was also one such cycle in history. For instance, after the destruction of Europe in World War II, cheap labour was needed to

rebuild the factories, railroads, and ports, and, as a result, millions of erstwhile colonial subjects were "let in", to fuel this demand. Soon after though, the racist backlash followed — excrement was thrown on the shops and bodies of the outsiders, and (relatively) native Anglo-Saxons moved out of immigrant neighbourhoods such as Southall or Brick Lane in London. Hence, by the 1960s, England had already paused the freedom of mobility within the commonwealth, and the world once again seemed to be moving towards an era of restricted migration. A similar politics impacts domestic migration. For instance, in Punjab, there has been a rise in hatred against migrants from UP and Bihar, even as Punjabi (and other South Asian) immigrants to Canada and the global North are themselves caricatured as "Pajeets" in online discourse. This online hate has also resulted in increased physical violence against Indians, such as the gruesome beheading of Chandra Nagamallaiiah in Dallas.

On a macro-scale however, this is where the logic of capital is important to understand. The rise of industrial capitalism has led to a double movement — the opening of immigration to increase labour supply (and thus keep domestic wages in check) but also increased reliance on xenophobic politics to prevent consolidation among the working class. This has meant that there is a contradiction — free markets need immigrants to keep themselves running, but this also fuels xenophobia and cultural nationalism in host societies, and that leads to a phase of increased cultural and economic anxiety over immigration. As a result, over the last century, the world has gone through these periodic boom-and-bust cycles of immigration.

So — does this mean an end of the immigrant's dream? The answer is simultaneously, yes, no, and for now. Let me explain. For us, sitting in South Asia, who have always looked towards the West as a destination for upper mobility, that dream may have hit a temporary pause for the next few years. However, here, the picture gets more complicated. While countries like the United States are closing down, nations with falling birth rates like Japan are welcoming migrants. So, on a global level, what we may be looking at is not a macro-decline, but a shift in flows. And yet, there are bigger problems on the horizon. While the

last century has been dominated by the secular advance of industrial and financial capitalism, the next few decades could also be the era of ecological collapse thanks to climate change. This means that the boom-and-bust cycles of the past may be irretrievably broken — and what we may now have to deal with is forced migration on account of climate change. Climate change and mass migration may permanently rearrange societies, economies, and state capacity. Thus, generations ahead may no longer have the comfort of the "wait for a few years, this will pass".

The writer is an assistant professor of International Relations, Ashoka University. Views are personal

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"There should be a global, UN-backed arms, economic and diplomatic embargo of Israel until it stops its campaign of extermination in Gaza. And if states refuse to cooperate and continue to arm and fund Israel, they must be considered partners in crime with Tel Aviv."

— DAWN, PAKISTAN

Tech as grammar of governance

PM Modi has made innovation India's greatest equaliser. Today, the poorest farmer has the same digital identity as the richest industrialist



ASHWINI VAISHNAV

REMEMBER WHEN GETTING a government document involved multiple trips, long queues, and random fees? Now it's in your phone. This transformation has happened because Prime Minister Narendra Modi turned technology into India's greatest equaliser. A street vendor in Mumbai uses the same UPI payment system as a corporate executive. This reflects the philosophy of *antyodaya* — reaching the last person in the queue.

As Gujarat Chief Minister, Modi ji used innovation to transform the state. The Jyotigram scheme used feeder separation technology. Rural industries revived with 24x7 power while groundwater depletion slowed through scheduled farm electricity. Women could study at night, and small businesses flourished, reducing rural-urban migration. The project involving solar panels on the Narmada canal generated 16 million units annually, enough for 16,000 households. It slowed the rate of evaporation, which increased water availability. This dual-benefit approach — generating energy while conserving water — showcases PM Modi's vision. The adoption by the US and Spain adds credibility to the innovation's efficacy. The e-Dhara system digitised land records. SWAGAT allowed citizens to meet the CM through video conferencing. Online tenders eliminated corruption. These initiatives improved the ease of accessing government services.

In 2014, Modi ji brought the Gujarat experience to Delhi. Under his leadership, India Stack, the world's most inclusive digital public infrastructure, took shape. The JAM trinity was at its core. Jan Dhan accounts brought more than 53 crore people into the banking system, bringing the financially excluded into the formal economy. Street vendors, daily wage workers, and rural families who lived on cash now have bank accounts. It has enabled them to save securely, receive government benefits directly, and access credit. Aadhaar gave citizens a digital identity. Direct Benefit Transfer has eliminated middlemen and reduced leakages. DBT use has led to savings of more than Rs 4.3 lakh crore so far. They are used for building more schools, hospitals and infrastructure projects.

Customer verification used to involve physical document checks, manual processes, and multiple touchpoints. This would cost service providers hundreds of rupees per verification. Aadhaar-based e-KYC reduced this to just Rs 5 per authentication. UPI has transformed how India pays. Today, India handles half the world's real-time digital payments. When COVID struck and the PM urged digital transactions, the ecosystem delivered. UPI now processes more transactions than Visa globally.

PRAGATI brings the PM directly into project monitoring. When officials know the PM will review their work on live video, accountability becomes automatic. Officials have to explain the delays. This ensures swifter course correction.

Technology has transformed agriculture and healthcare fundamentally. Take Jagdev Singh, a farmer in Haryana, who now uses AI apps to make crop decisions. He receives real-time weather updates and soil health data on his phone.

Driving licenses, degree certificates, Aadhaar, and other official documents now live securely in a phone. Police checks no

longer require fumbling for papers while on the road. Just show your DigiLocker digital license. Filing income tax returns has become seamless with instant Aadhaar authentication. What once meant carrying folders of documents now fits in pockets.

In space research, India achieved what seemed impossible once. Reaching Mars on the first attempt and that too with a budget smaller than a Hollywood movie. Chandrayaan-3 made India the fourth country to achieve a soft lunar landing and the first to land on the Moon's South Pole. Indian rockets now carry satellites for 34 countries. The Gaganyaan mission will make India the fourth nation to send humans to space using indigenous technology.

When Covid struck, the world struggled with vaccine distribution. India responded through its strength. The CoWIN platform, built in record time, managed 200 crore vaccine doses with digital precision. Unused vaccines were redirected instantly to areas with higher demand. This achievement demonstrated how technology, when driven by political will can deliver at a massive scale and with fairness.

Under PM Modi's vision, our strong base in electronics is now enabling the leap into advanced semi-conductor manufacturing. India has long been a hub for design talent. It now has design capabilities for advanced 2nm, 3nm, and 7nm chips. These are being designed for the world. But the approach extends beyond manufacturing. The chemicals, gases, and specialised materials that feed semiconductor production are being supported. This creates an entire ecosystem, not just isolated factories.

The PM Gati Shakti portal uses GIS technology on an unprecedented scale. Every infrastructure project gets mapped digitally. Roads, railways, airports, and ports are planned together. No more working in silos. No more delays due to poor coordination.

Through the IndiaAI Mission, over 38,000 GPUs are available at one-third global cost. This has given startups, researchers, and students Silicon Valley-level computing at an average rate of Rs 67 per hour. The AIKosh platform hosts 2,000+ datasets, ranging from weather to soil health. These can power indigenous LLMs developed for India's languages, laws, health systems, and finance. Instead of rigid regulations that could stifle innovation, the government today invests in technological safeguards.

The Statue of Unity at Kevadia, the world's tallest statue, was built using 3D modeling and bronze cladding technology. The project created thousands of jobs and has transformed Kevadia into a tourism hub. The Chenab bridge connects Kashmir to the rest of India. The Aizawl railway line uses the Himalayan Tunnelling Method to pass through tunnels and bridges in tough terrain. The new Pamban bridge replaces a century-old structure with modern engineering. All these represent PM Modi's vision of connecting India through technology and determination.

PM Modi understands technology, but he understands people even better. The poorest farmer has the same digital identity as the richest industrialist. The G20 endorsed Digital Public Infrastructure as essential for inclusive growth. Japan has granted a patent for this. What started as India's solution became the world's template for digital democracy.

PM Modi has made technology the grammar of governance. He has shown that when leaders embrace technology with humanity, entire nations can leapfrog into the future.

The author is Union Minister for Railways, Electronics & Information Technology, and Information & Broadcasting

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

THE FLOOD PROBLEM

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Check the deluge' (IE, September 18). Punjab's floods have claimed 55 lives and left thousands of people homeless. Punjab has experienced floods in 2023, 2019, 2013, 2010, 2008, and 2004. Besides suggesting a range of flood protection measures, revival of village ponds, construction of water harvesting structures and preventing waste disposal in canals and rivers is imperative. The flood problem needs a holistic approach.

SS Paul, Noida

HEED DISTRESS SIGNS

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Heed the hills' (IE, September 17). The recent extreme weather events in our hilly regions demonstrate that, while we were aware of the Himalayan mountains' fragility, the heightened likelihood of landslides during such events, exacerbated by mountain slope blasting and widespread deforestation, have not been sufficiently factored in. The decision by the Road Transport Ministry to reassess the safety

of certain parts of an under-construction roadway may be a bandaid, since there might be many similar cases with other highways in the Char Dham project. Without regulated development, and climate adaptation, these areas will always be vulnerable to calamities.

Kamal Laddha, Bangalore

A GUIDING LIGHT

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'A star, an idealist' (IE, September 18). Robert Redford acted in many Hollywood classics like *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*, *Three Days of the Condor* and *All the President's Men* and he won the Oscar for Best Director for *Ordinary People* in 1980. He was instrumental in bringing the Watergate scandal to the screen and founded the Sundance film festival which became a nursery for new talents away from the pressures of Hollywood. He never really retired from acting. He was last seen in *Avengers Endgame* in 2019. With him, the industry has lost a big star and a guiding light.

Bal Govind, Noida



@ieExplained
#ExpressExplained

If there are questions of current or contemporary relevance that you would like explained, please write to explained@indianexpress.com

Saudi-Pakistan defence pact: Significance for the 2 countries

SHUBHAJIT ROY
NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 18

PAKISTAN AND Saudi Arabia signed a mutual defence pact on Wednesday, formalising a defence and security partnership that dates back to the 1960s.

Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the kingdom's de facto ruler, embraced after signing the agreement. Pakistan's powerful army chief, Field Marshal Asim Munir, was also present.

While not many details about the pact are out yet, a key clause has made headlines around the world: "any aggression against either country shall be considered an aggression against both".

"This agreement, which reflects the shared commitment of both nations to enhance their security and to achieving security and peace in the region and the world, aims to develop aspects of defence cooperation between the

two countries and strengthen joint deterrence against any aggression," a statement from the Pakistani prime minister's office said.

The agreement had been in the works for a while, but was signed in the aftermath of Israel's recent strike in Qatar. Amid Israel's increased belligerence, and the US defence promise looking shakier than ever, this is the first major defence pact an Arab nation has signed, with a nuclear-armed nation.

Pakistan-Saudi Arabia ties

Pakistani troops went to Saudi Arabia in the late 1960s amid concerns about Egypt's war in Yemen at the time. The military cooperation deepened after the 1979 Grand Mosque seizure in Mecca, when Pakistan's special forces helped Saudi troops.

In 1982, the two sides institutionalised security ties through a Bilateral Security Cooperation Agreement that enabled Pakistani training, advisory support and deployments on Saudi soil. Saudi Arabia was a key buyer of



Shehbaz Sharif (left) with Mohammed bin Salman in Riyadh. X/@PakPMO

Pakistan-made arms, and Pakistani personnel trained the Saudi Air Force.

Retired Pakistani Brig Gen Feroz Hassan Khan wrote that Saudi Arabia provided "generous financial support to Pakistan that enabled the nuclear program to continue, especially when the country was under sanctions" (Eating Grass: The Making of the

Pakistani Bomb).

In a 2007 US diplomatic cable published by WikiLeaks, American diplomats in Saudi Arabia said that their Pakistani counterparts had brought up the idea of the kingdom pursuing a weapons program alongside Islamabad.

"...They understand that [Saudi Arabia] does want to protect itself and the region...it is logical for the Saudis to step in as the physical 'protector' just as they have been increasingly stepping in as peace mediators in various regional conflicts," the cable read.

Wednesday's signing represents Pakistan's most consequential formal defence commitment in decades, offering both strategic and economic benefits. It secures vital Saudi investment and funding at a time of fiscal strain, while shoring up Islamabad's claim of being a pan-Islamic security provider.

Husain Haqqani, former Pakistan ambassador to the US, posted on X, "Most likely, Pakistan will now be able to buy US weapons it needs, with Saudi money, which the Trump administration seems willing to sell."

For Saudi Arabia, it strengthens defences against threats from Iran, Yemen's Houthis militias, and the regional turbulence caused by Israel.

Saudi Arabia's ties with India

The Indian government has been cautious in its first official comments.

Ministry of External Affairs official spokesperson, Randhir Jaiswal, said: "The Government was aware that this development, which formalises a long-standing arrangement between the two countries... We will study the implications... for our national security as well as for regional and global stability."

Saudi Arabia has for long invested in a political, strategic and economic relationship with India.

India is the second largest trade partner of Saudi Arabia, whereas the kingdom is the fifth largest trading partner of India. In FY 2023-24, bilateral trade stood at USD 42.98 billion, with Indian exports at USD 11.56 billion and imports at USD 31.42 billion. There is also a 27-lakh

strong Indian diaspora in Saudi Arabia.

The historic visit of King Abdullah to India in January 2006 was a watershed moment that resulted in the signing of the Delhi Declaration. It was followed by the Riyadh Declaration in 2010 during the visit of then PM Manmohan Singh to the Kingdom, which elevated the bilateral ties to a Strategic Partnership.

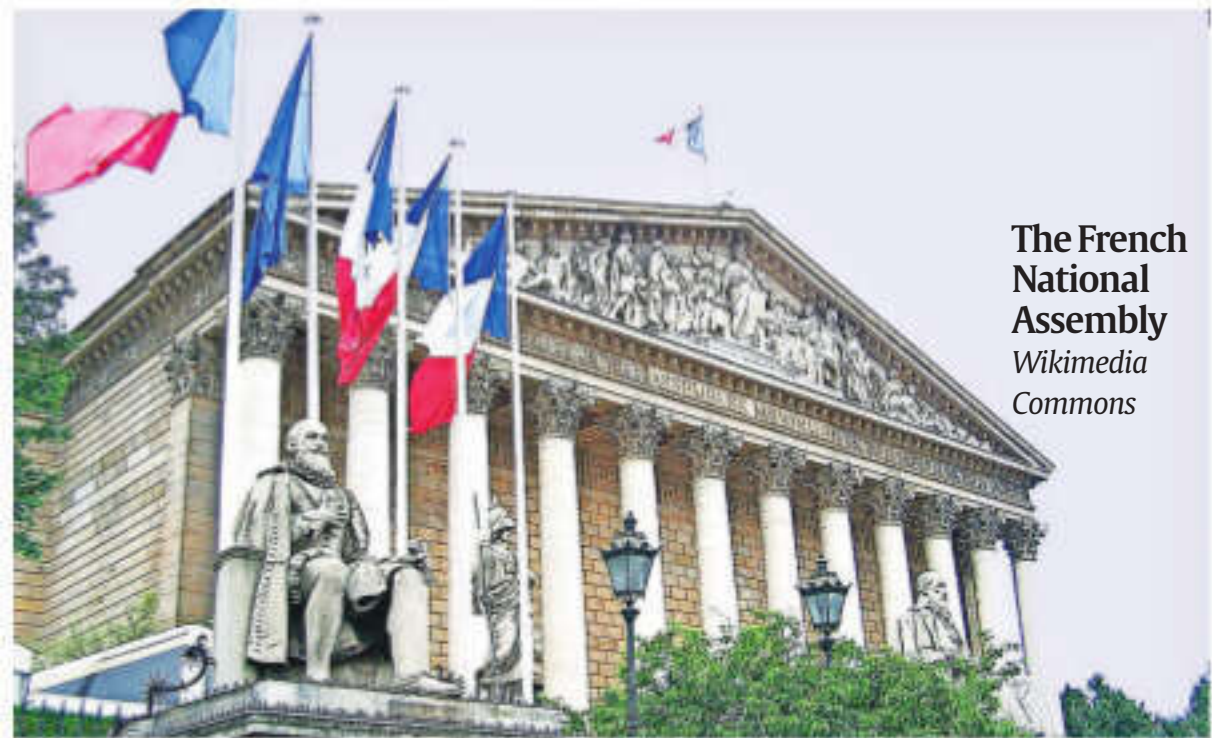
Since Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 2016 visit to Riyadh, various high level visits from both sides have taken place.

During the Pahalgam attack on April 22, Modi was in Saudi Arabia, and his hosts were quick to condemn the incident. Later, Saudi Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, Adel al-Jubeir, made an unannounced visit during Operation Sindoor.

In the past, Saudi Arabia has not made too strong a criticism of the abrogation of Article 370 from Jammu and Kashmir. The Saudis have sought to talk to both India and Pakistan during times of conflict between the neighbours — and have not taken sides in recent crises. That gives some confidence to Delhi about Riyadh's approach.

EXPLAINED GLOBAL

WHY 10-YR BORROWING COSTS OF FRANCE & ITALY MATCH FOR FIRST TIME



The French National Assembly
Wikimedia Commons

FRANCE'S 10-YEAR government borrowing costs are now at the same levels as Italy's, the latest sign that political paralysis in Paris is stoking concern about its ability to get its public finances under control.

Fitch Ratings cut France's rating last week, after opposition parties united to oust Francois Bayrou as prime minister over his unpopular plans for budget tightening. President Emmanuel Macron then named Sebastien Lecornu as the country's fifth prime minister in less than two years.

Italian and French 10-year bond yields both briefly traded at around 3.48% on Thursday, as the gap between the two narrowed to zero basis points (bps) from around 50 bps in April and as much as 200 bps during the 2020 Covid crisis, according to LSEG data.

Why is this a big deal?

Investors now consider the credit-worthiness of the eurozone's second- and third-largest economies to be roughly the same. That has never happened before.

It shows how far perceptions around France, once considered a "core" market, and Italy, long-regarded as one of the weakest links in the Euro area, have changed.

In a sign of market confidence in Italy, foreign investors' net purchases of Italian government bonds rose in June by the largest amount seen in any month since June 2019, Italian central bank data show.

Foreign investors' holdings of Italian debt stood at around 32% in May, still well below the 55% of French debt in foreign hands as of end-March, most recent central bank data show.

Why is this happening?

Concerns that political instability will hamper France's ability to improve its fiscal position have pushed up its bond yields. Meanwhile, relative political stability and downward debt projections have pushed down Italy's bond yields.

France's Lecornu is racing to draft a

budget that is due to be sent to lawmakers by October 7. Analysts say the uncertainty hampers management of public finances.

France is under EU disciplinary measures with its 2026 deficit target at 4.6% of gross domestic product. Italy is expected to leave that procedure soon as it is close to bringing its budget shortfall to 3% of GDP.

What do rating agencies say?

Fitch has downgraded France's sovereign credit score to the country's lowest level on record, stripping the euro zone's second-largest economy of its AA-status.

But Italy is likely to get a ratings boost when Fitch reviews the sovereign on Friday, analysts say.

A more positive outlook for Italy has helped push the premium that investors demand to hold Italian bonds over safer Germany to below 100 bps.

This does not mean that concerns around Italian debt are likely to disappear. Italy has been plagued by chronic problems that will take time to fix. Italy still has the euro zone's second-largest debt as a percentage of GDP after Greece, and well above France's.

A falling population and a low female employment rate hinder its growth outlook. Italy's statistics agency said in June that the economy would grow by 0.6% this year, trimming a previous forecast of 0.8%.

For some observers, the narrowing of the French-Italian bond spread has more to do with French fiscal and political woes than an improvement in Italy's outlook.

What's next?

After the collapse of the Bayrou government, analysts say France's debt will remain under pressure compared with Italian paper. This trend may intensify soon following ratings agency reviews of both countries.

S&P has also cut the French ratings outlook due to a weakening of public finances.

REUTERS



UDIT MISRA

ON WEDNESDAY, the Federal Reserve, the central bank for the United States, brought down interest rates by 25 basis points (one-fourth of a percentage point) in its latest monetary policy review. While this development did not come as a surprise, the expected outcome hides many complexities. Here's a breakdown, in the words of Jerome 'Jay' Powell, the Chair of the Fed's Board of Governors.

The context

This review comes after months of friction between the Fed and US President Donald Trump. Since his election last November, Trump has openly berated Fed Chair Powell for being "too late" in cutting the interest rates in the economy.

Last month, Trump fired Lisa Cook, one of the governors in the Fed's Board. The courts quickly ruled against it, and allowed Cook to participate in the latest policy review. The case against her continues.

On Monday, the Republican-majority Senate confirmed the appointment of Stephen Miran to the Board. Although he has taken an unpaid leave of absence, Miran, the man said to be responsible for Trump's tariff policies, officially remains a part of the administration. This, critics say, is unprecedented in the history of the Fed and has serious implications for the central bank's independence.

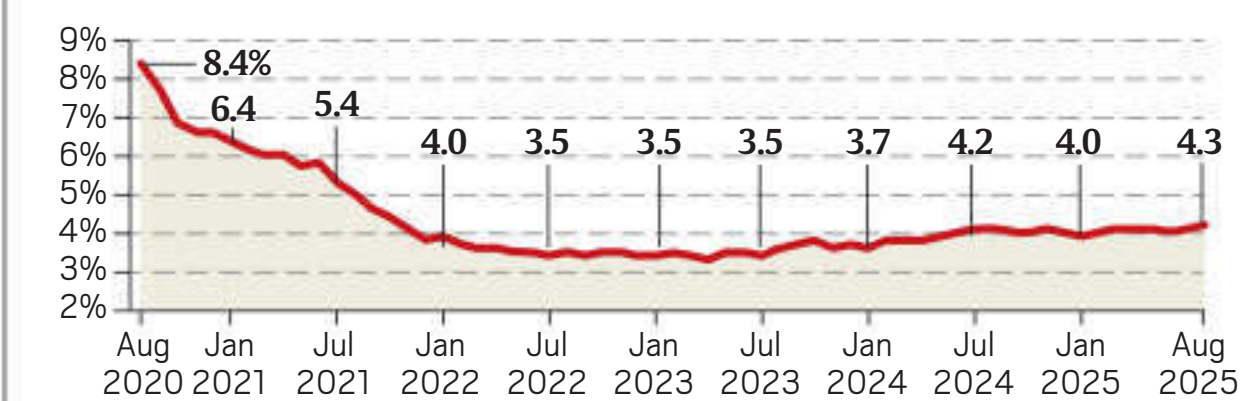
Politics aside, the US economy is currently going through a phase that would challenge whoever heads the Fed. That's because the central bank has a dual mandate: achieving maximum employment and stable prices for the benefit of the American people.

Typically, these mandates do not clash: high inflation usually occurs at a time when growth is surging and new jobs are being created, while faltering growth and unemployment comes with low inflation. But since last year, unemployment has been on the rise even as inflation has shot up (See *Charts*). A cut in interest rates can thus fuel inflation, and raising or keeping steady interest rates can choke economic growth and increase unemployment.

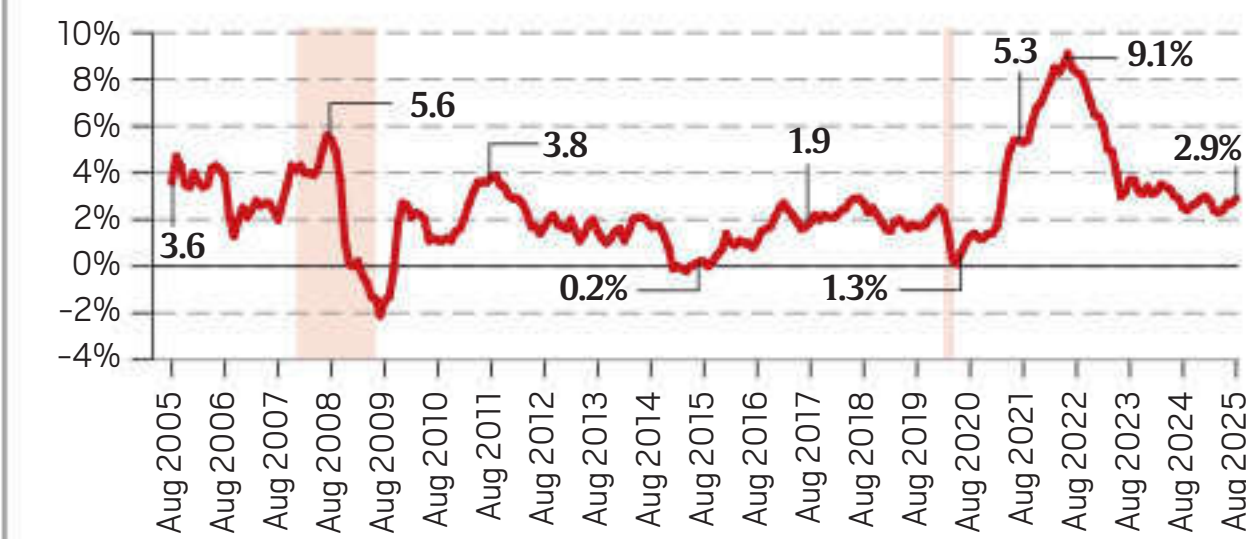
5 key questions

Despite the cut, questions linger.

UNEMPLOYMENT RATE: TRENDING UP SINCE JANUARY



CONSUMER PRICE INDEX: ALSO TRENDING UP SINCE JANUARY



Source: US Bureau of Labor Statistics

ECONOMICS MADE EASY MONETARY POLICY

Monetary policy refers to the supply of money and the cost of credit (read interest rates) in an economy.

■ When a central bank wants to boost economic activity, it makes it cheaper for people to borrow money by reducing interest rates. When it wants to rein in inflation, it makes borrowing more costly.

■ The rates, in turn, influence global stock markets: lower rates imply more money flowing into markets and as a result, indices going up.

■ The Fed independently sets the United States's monetary policy. In India, it is set by the RBI.

■ Changes in US monetary policy have global ramifications: the Fed's rates determine the rate at which anyone in the world can lend to the US government, considered to be the least risky loan and the second safest bet to buying gold.

economy is that the fiscal policymakers (government) intervenes in the functioning of the monetary policymakers (the central bank).

Amid Trump's open attack on the Fed, the fear the world over is that the US will lose the key attribute that makes it the most trusted financial system in the world: the Independence of its central bank. After all, it is the world's faith that the Fed is free to conduct monetary policy without political intervention that makes everyone trust the US dollar.

Powell on Wednesday reiterated that the Fed remains independent.

Upshot

The Fed finds itself in a difficult predicament: it cannot do justice to its dual mandate thanks to both inflation and unemployment worsening at the same time.

Much of this problem is artificially created: Trump's tariffs and immigration policies have raised prices on the one hand and curtailed labor supply on the other. There is little that the US Fed could do about either.

In the months ahead, the US Fed may undergo substantive changes, with calls for an independent inquiry into its functioning.

LONGER VERSION ON
indianexpress.com/expained

Jimmy Kimmel off air: one more blow to an American TV institution in decline

RISHIKA SINGH &
SOUMYARENDRA BARIK
NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 18

AFTER DISNEY'S ABC pulled US comedian Jimmy Kimmel's late-night talk show off the air indefinitely, President Donald Trump reacted with a message of celebration.

"Great News for America: The ratings challenged Jimmy Kimmel Show is CANCELLED. Congratulations to ABC for finally having the courage to do what had to be done. Kimmel has ZERO talent, and worse ratings than even (Stephen) Colbert, if that's possible. That leaves Jimmy (Fallon) and Seth (Meyers), two total losers, on Fake News NBC. Their ratings are also horrible. Do it NBC!!!" he wrote.

The action against Kimmel, coming after the axing of *The Late Show* with Stephen

Colbert in July this year, has raised questions about free speech protections that US comedians have long enjoyed. It has further put a decades-old TV institution, the late-night talk show, under unprecedented scrutiny.

In the US, late-night shows have mixed entertainment and politics; even Presidents have often appeared as guests. They have inspired spin-offs globally, including in India.

Behind Trump's targeting

Kimmel has come under fire for comments he made on his show after the death of conservative influencer Charlie Kirk.

During his opening monologue, Kimmel said, "We hit some new lows over the weekend with the MAGA gang desperately trying to characterise this kid who murdered Charlie Kirk as anything other than one of them and doing everything they can to score political points from it." He also criticised flags being

flown at half mast in honour of Kirk, and mocked Trump's reaction to the shooting.

Kimmel's comments drew criticism from Federal Communications Commission (FCC) chair Brendan Carr. In a podcast, Carr said "What people don't understand is that the broadcasters...have a licence granted by us at the FCC, and that comes with it an obligation to operate in the public interest. When we see stuff like this, look, we can do this the easy way or the hard way. These companies can find ways to change conduct...or there's going to be additional work for the FCC ahead."

Before this, CBS had cancelled Stephen Colbert's talk show citing financial constraints. However, many suspected that there were reasons deeper than that. The show's cancellation came just days after Colbert delivered an on-air monologue crit-

icising Paramount's — CBS' parent company's — controversial \$16 million legal settlement with Trump over a 60 Minutes interview with Kamala Harris, which was seen as a quiet payoff to avoid further scrutiny.

Birth of late-night shows

Variety shows featuring a mix of elements, including comedy bits and musical performances, have long been a feature of American TV.

Late-night shows aired after 11 pm and were filmed quite close to the air date. While the slot meant limited audiences, it was targeted at the young to middle-aged adults demographic, which mattered to advertisers.

The first programme in the genre was pioneered by actor Faye Emerson, who in 1949 launched *The Faye Emerson Show* that

ran for about two years. In the 1950s and '60s, the likes of Jack Paar and Johnny Carson helped popularise the format. Carson, with his dry sense of humour, attained such success that in his prime, he was a star in his own right.

Political and cultural heavyweights lent further legitimacy to these shows. In 1992, then presidential candidate Bill Clinton appeared on the *Arsenio Hall Show* and played the saxophone while wearing sunglasses, aiding his public image as a youthful politician. Barack Obama, Kamala Harris, and even Donald Trump have made appearances on late-night shows.

The success translated into spin-offs, such as Indian actor Shekhar Suman's show *Movers & Shakers* in the 1990s.

Viewership challenges

Today, most people know of late-night

TV through viral video clips of celebrities and hosts. And that is representative of the structural problems that the genre now faces. Viewing habits are increasingly shifting away from TV and fixed time slots, thanks to the ease and flexibility of the streaming era.

The fascination of seeing celebrities in a more relaxed setting is also somewhat dimmed, with their social media accounts and podcasts filling that gap.

Also, TV shows face competition from online content creators, who can build sizable audiences of their own at a fraction of the cost of setting up and operating from a studio in New York or Los Angeles.

Some have also blamed increasingly political takes on such shows for their decline, but that has to do with the polarised nature of American society as well, which seems to be worsening under Trump.



Editor's

TAKE

A human tragedy on the brink

Either the world acts now to halt the genocide in Gaza, or it will be remembered as a silent spectator to one of humanity's greatest tragedies

In what looks like a final step to annihilate Gaza completely, Israel has made its final move. It is moving into the Gaza Strip with the tanks and all the might it can muster to flatten Gaza and smother its people. The tanks have rolled into Gaza City. Thick smoke billows over its skyline. Entire neighbourhoods, once filled with schools, marketplaces, and mosques, are reduced to rubble. Homes to tens of thousands of civilians have been flattened as they flee for their lives. Israel's latest ground offensive, presented as a military operation to defeat Hamas and rescue hostages, is nothing but a calculated move to disseminate the entire area, home to some two million people.

The Israeli Defence Forces claim that Gaza City represents Hamas's "last stronghold." The fact is that the entire civilian population there is being penalised. In just two days, over 150 sites were struck, forcing thousands to flee south in desperation. Families cling to overloaded trucks and donkey carts, inching along broken roads. Reports and images show the ordeal of the people: drones hitting water tanks, solar panels, and power generators; entire neighbourhoods flattened overnight. The humanitarian toll is staggering. Since the war began in October 2023, Gaza's Health Ministry estimates more than 65,000 Palestinians have been killed, nearly half of them women and children. Over 150 people have now died from malnutrition in Gaza City, where famine has been declared. Israel defends its actions as a response to Hamas's brutal October 7 attack. The horror of that incident cannot and should not be dismissed, but that does not justify Israel's actions, which are nothing but systematic cleansing and large-scale destruction of Gaza on the pretext of punishing Hamas.

The deaths of tens of thousands of civilians and the displacement of nearly an entire population are nothing but a crime against humanity. Unfortunately, no one is willing to do anything to stop the carnage. Aid agencies call the inhumanity "unconscionable." The United Nations has warned of an "even deeper catastrophe" if the offensive continues. A UN commission has accused Israel of genocide. Gaza today represents a collective failure of the world community to act decisively and stop the worst human rights violations in recent times. Stopping this tragedy requires more than calls for a "ceasefire" as mere rhetoric. Israel must halt its indiscriminate offensive and allow unhindered humanitarian aid. Regional and global powers must move beyond condemnation and enforce accountability – through sanctions, arms embargoes, or international legal mechanisms.

The international community must act now to prevent Gaza's complete collapse. Those with the power to intervene but who choose inaction will be remembered as complicit in this carnage, judged by history as partners in crime.

Nepal's first woman PM rides Gen Z wave

Former Chief Justice Sushila Karki takes over as the country's first female Prime Minister. Her rise comes against the backdrop of public anger over censorship and corruption, placing her at the centre of Nepal's quest for stability



KALYANI SHANKAR

Nepal has welcomed a new Prime Minister, marking a significant step towards the country's future after a period of turbulence. On Saturday, Sushila Karki, the first female Prime Minister of Nepal and former Chief Justice, took her oath of office and received strong support from Generation Z.

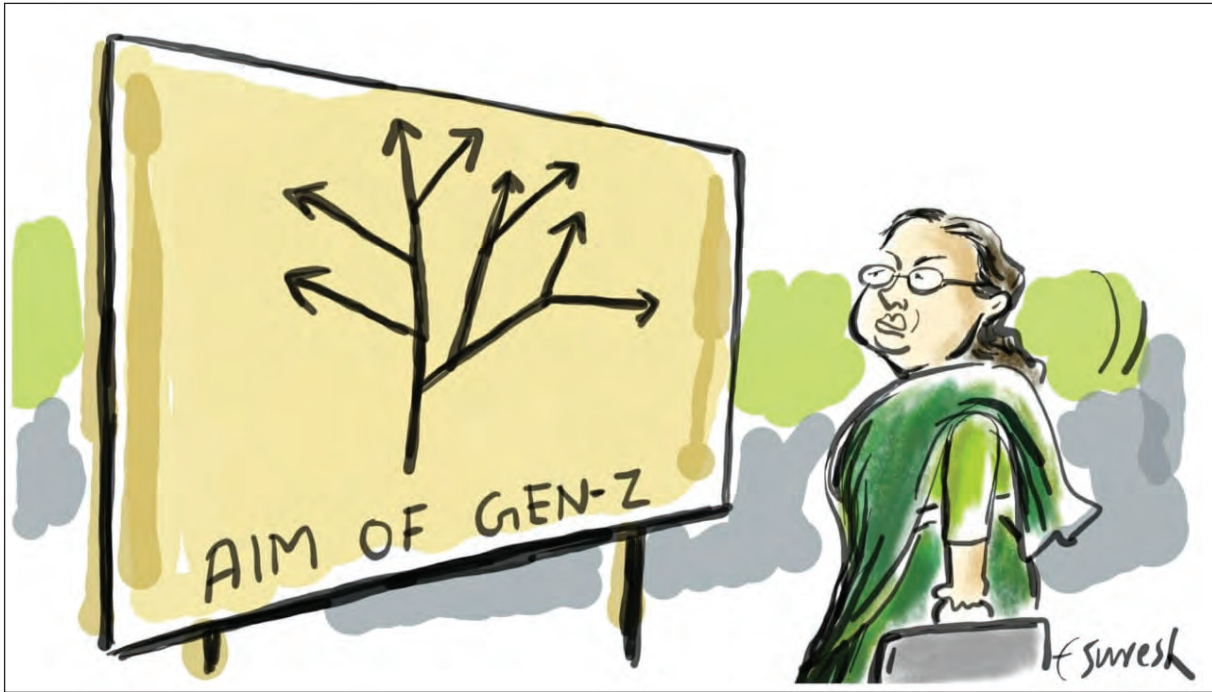
Just hours later, the President of Nepal dissolved Parliament and announced that elections are scheduled for March 5. Karki, known for her anti-corruption efforts, will serve as the interim Prime Minister, paving the way for these elections and potentially ushering in a new era in Nepal. New Delhi is watching the situation in Kathmandu closely because it affects 22 Indian districts near the Nepal border, especially in the east. Nepal is experiencing ongoing instability and disappointment, which could impact these border areas.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi extended his best wishes, stating, "I extend my best wishes to the Right Honourable Mrs Sushila Karki on assuming office as the Prime Minister of the Interim Government of Nepal. India remains firmly committed to the peace, progress, and prosperity of the people of Nepal." Army chief and members of Gen Z decided on the name of Aushils, favoured by Gen Z.

However, Karki is not without controversy; she faced an impeachment incident during her nearly 11-month tenure as Chief Justice. Three main parties dominate Nepal's political landscape: the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) (CPN-UML), the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) (CPN-MC), and the Nepali Congress (NC). These parties have led the country through 14 different governments. KP Sharma Oli resigned as Prime Minister on September 9 after serving four terms.

Recent events in Nepal are the result of long-standing issues that have reached a breaking point. The situation escalated when the Oli government banned 26 popular social media apps. Nepal's path to democracy has faced many difficulties. In 2008, the country ended its monarchy to create a stable democratic government. Instead of achieving stability, Nepal has seen frequent changes in coalition governments that often fail, leading to lengthy negotiations for new agreements.

On August 31, Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli's government required digital platforms to register within a week. This caused hesitation from some companies, such as X. On September 4, the government blocked access to 26 social media platforms, claiming it was part of the registration process. Following Oli's resignation



The Pioneer

SINCE 1865

RECENT EVENTS IN NEPAL ARE THE RESULT OF LONG-STANDING ISSUES THAT HAVE REACHED A BREAKING POINT. THE SITUATION ESCALATED WHEN THE OLI GOVERNMENT BANNED 26 POPULAR SOCIAL MEDIA APPS

The writer is a popular columnist

dailypioneer
 @kalyanishankar
 The Pioneer

amid protests in Parliament and on the streets, the protests continued. For many young Nepalese, social media is crucial for self-expression and accessing job and financial opportunities.

The country has long grappled with internal challenges. Political unrest continued after Oli's resignation, with public anger shifting from censorship to government corruption. Young people, who make up nearly half of Nepal's population, are frustrated by corruption and the lavish lifestyles of the children of political leaders.

Another pressing issue is remittances, as many Nepalese families rely on money sent from abroad, particularly from Arab countries, India, and China. Communication apps such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram are essential for migrants to stay connected with their families. The sudden ban on these apps sparked public outrage and disrupted digital wallets and mobile banking services. Tensions rose in Kathmandu as Gen Z demonstrators supported former Chief Justice Sushila Karki for interim Prime Minister.

In contrast, others backed Kulman Ghising, former head of the Nepal Electricity Authority. Karki's appointment, announced after two days of consultations and followed by elections in March, has sparked hope for peace. Youth leaders have emphasised that their protests are not against the Constitution but against the existing political class. One significant challenge for Generation Z is the lack of a clear agenda and effective leadership.

Nepal's transition to democracy has faced

significant challenges since the monarchy was abolished in 2008. Instead of stability, the country has experienced frequent changes in coalition governments, which often collapse, necessitating lengthy negotiations for new agreements. The three main political parties are the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) (CPN-UML), the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) (CPN-MC), and the Nepali Congress (NC). These parties have led the country 14 times, with KP Sharma Oli resigning as Prime Minister on September 9 after four terms. Another critical issue is remittances. Many Nepalese families depend on money sent from abroad, mainly from Arab countries, India, and China. Communication apps such as WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram are essential for migrants to stay connected with their families. The sudden ban on these apps caused public outrage and disrupted digital wallets and mobile banking services. Now that the interim government is in place, Sushila Karki's main goal should be to bring back peace and order.

Recent acts of arson, vandalism, and looting have caused fear among citizens. Troublemakers must be stopped from hindering the Gen Z movement, while efforts are made to restore authority in the state. Experts indicate that the political fluctuations in Nepal have implications not only for its population of 30 million but also for the broader regional and global landscape. Nepal's stability is crucial in South Asian politics. It plays a significant role in India-China-Nepal relations.

PIC TALK



Priests perform the 'Ganga Aarti' on the occasion of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 75th birthday at Namoo Ghat in Varanasi.

PHOTO: PTI

DIGITAL EXPERIENCE

www.dailypioneer.com

facebook.com/dailypioneer @TheDailyPioneer
 instagram.com/dailypioneer linkedin.com/in/dailypioneer

HAWKERS THRIVE BUT RETAILERS FACE FESTIVE LULL

Walking along the footpaths crowded with hawkers in the city of Mumbai gives a vivid sense that India's festive spirit remains very much alive.

Yet beneath the colour and noise, traders are grappling with challenges that dim the season's promise. The recent reduction in the Goods and Services Tax (GST) was announced with the expectation of putting more disposable income into people's hands. In theory, this should provide a boost to sales of electronics, cars, appliances and other high-value items in the run-up to Diwali.

However, the timing of the implementation has created uncertainty. The revised rates are due to take effect only a week before the festival. As a result, many consumers are choosing to delay purchases, waiting to take

advantage of the lower prices. This has slowed down sales of apparel, footwear and other discretionary goods over the past few weeks. Retailers and small businessmen, who rely heavily on festive spending to balance their annual accounts, now find themselves struggling. The festive season has always been a lifeline for India's traders. Unless policies are implemented with foresight and consideration for timing, such measures risk undermining their very purpose. What should have been a period of buoyancy is instead marked by hesitation and unease. The festive buzz in Mumbai's streets hides a deeper worry – retailers are seeing sales stall. With GST cuts delayed, shoppers are holding back, leaving traders anxious during their most crucial season.

BHAGWAN THADANI | MUMBAI

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

Free will exists within God's supreme will



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

2 THE PIONEER

2ND OPINION

The Sanskrit word for controller is niyantrak, yet Lord Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita never uses this term to describe Himself. Instead, He prefers words such as bharta (sustainer) and bhuta-bhrt (maintainer of all beings). The distinction is significant.

The Lord does not micromanage individual lives; rather, He provides the foundational necessities of existence – air, water, sunlight, fertile land – on which all beings depend. What one makes of life is a matter of personal effort and choice.

As Krishna tells Arjuna: "Perform your prescribed duties" (3.8). Yet Krishna also makes clear that He is the Creator, the Maintainer, and the One who causes Dissolution. In Chapter 13, verse 16, He explains that though

undivided, He is present in every being as if divided, sustaining them while also being the origin and the end. From this, we see that God, being the Whole, is the ultimate Controller, even though the soul exercises limited free will.

To further clarify His role in Creation, Krishna points out that He Himself is not bound by duty: "There is neither any duty for Me in the three worlds, nor is anything unattained by Me. Still, I am engaged in action" (3.22). This statement dismisses the notion of an absent God. The Creator remains active in sustaining the cosmic order. In the next verse (3.23), Krishna emphasises that His actions serve as an example for all beings; if He were ever to withdraw, chaos would ensue because humanity imitates the divine model. Thus, God "controls" not by coercion but through action and example. Another dimension of divine control is God's all-pervasive presence.

In Chapter 13, verses 13-14, Krishna describes Himself as having countless eyes, ears, and limbs, existing both inside and outside all beings, subtle yet infinite, near and far at once. This culminates in the statement: "This entire world is pervaded by Me in My unmanifest form. All beings rest in Me, though I am not in them" (9.3).

His invisible presence ensures the functioning of Creation without direct interference in individual affairs. Krishna further explains the mechanism of cosmic order: "Under My supervision, material nature gives birth to

moving and unmoving beings. Thus does the cycle of the world continue" (9.10). Nature is the instrument, but divine authority is the guiding hand. Souls, being parts of God (15.7), act according to their own conditioning, shaped by the three gunas (modes of nature). Yet the results of their actions are not in their hands: "All acts are performed by the modes of nature, but the deluded soul thinks, I am the doer" (3.27).

Therefore, human beings must turn to God if they wish to transcend material conditioning. As Krishna declares: "My divine energy, consisting of the three modes, is difficult to overcome. But those who surrender to Me cross beyond it" (7.14). Our free will allows us to act, but outcomes – our karmaphala – are governed by divine law (2.47).

The conclusion is clear: God alone is the true Controller. He creates, sustains, and dissolves; He pervades everything, upholds dharma, and ensures cosmic balance. By contrast, humans control almost nothing – not even their own bodies, subject as they are to disease, ageing, and death. Our minds betray us with anger, lust, ego, and greed. To imagine ourselves as controllers is delusion. Only by aligning with God's will and living according to dharma can we find freedom within His perfect order.

The writer is a spiritual teacher

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

India reflects on Modi's journey

Prime Minister Narendra Modi turned seventy-five on Wednesday, a milestone once seen as the unwritten retirement age for BJP leaders. He was greeted by film stars, sportspersons, industrialists, and world leaders who praised his role in raising India's global standing. Among the messages, Mukesh Ambani's stood out. He declared: "God Almighty himself has sent Modiji as an Avatar Purush to lead our motherland to become the greatest nation on earth."

While such praise is lofty, I wish to ask why, during his birthday address in Madhya Pradesh, Modi lauded Operation Sindoor as having "brought Pakistan to its knees," yet India still agreed to a ceasefire instead of eliminating terrorism completely. Further, why does Modi, who continues beyond seventy-five unlike the Marg Darshak Mandal, not avoid comparisons with Jawaharlal Nehru? His duty is to correct past mistakes, not justify his own failures.

Despite his oratory, endless promises and reluctance to face the media weaken his credibility. He travelled widely abroad but delayed visiting Manipur during ethnic violence. Still, his contributions to India's development are undeniable. I pray for his health and for him to continue leading the nation wisely.

BIDYUT KUMAR CHATTERJEE | FARIDABAD

Newspapers still holding strong

According to the Audit Bureau of Circulation, daily newspapers recorded a 2.77 per cent rise in circulation between January and June 2025, with average sales of 29.7 million copies. This proves print media remains strong, despite challenges from digital platforms. For many Indians, mornings begin with tea in one hand and a newspaper in the other – a ritual no mobile screen can replace.

The tactile comfort and depth of verified news sustain readers' trust. While youth increasingly depend on online platforms, the credibility of newspapers ensures they remain indispensable. This rise reflects not nostalgia, but the reliability print still offers. It must also be noted that behind this success is the work of thousands – from reporters and editors to printers, distributors, and delivery boys.

Their effort keeps alive not only a business but also a civic culture rooted in informed citizenship. Newspapers do more than deliver information; they guide opinions, shape debates, and serve as trusted companions in daily life. In an age of misinformation, print continues to symbolise permanence, responsibility, and balance. Truly, newspapers will remain the most welcomed guest in households across India.

M PRADYU | KANNUR

Protest against CJI's remarks

The remarks of the Chief Justice of India against Hindu beliefs cannot be ignored or dismissed lightly. No constitutional office has the right to belittle Sanatan Dharma, its traditions, or the sentiments of millions of Hindus.

If "hate speech" has meaning, the CJI's words in his own courtroom exemplify it. The Hindu community, as well as defenders of broad Sanatan values, must not remain silent.

The Supreme Court Bar must protest unitedly, boycotting his court if necessary, and demand an unconditional apology. Hindu socio-religious and cultural organisations across the country must also register their dissent firmly yet peacefully. In a democracy, dissent must remain civil, but equally, institutions must respect faith and avoid gratuitous insult.

A judge who disparages the traditions of any community undermines public trust in justice itself. Non-violent protest and public accountability are the only ways to ensure such behaviour does not repeat. Respect for Dharma, as for any belief system, is essential for harmony. Silence in the face of such remarks will set a dangerous precedent. Hindus must therefore speak out with clarity and resolve.

JAI PRAKASH GUPTA | AMBALA CANTT

Modi@75: The upsurge in the Howdy Modi-Namaste Trump spirit

As the leaders of sovereign and vibrant democracies that value freedom, the rule of law, human rights and pluralism, Modi and Trump re-affirm the Global Strategic Partnership, anchored in mutual trust, shared interests, goodwill and robust engagement of their citizens

FIRST
Column



ANOOP
BOSE

The US President Donald John Trump called the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Damodardas Modi on the eve of his diamond birth anniversary on 17th September, 2025 to convey his birthday greetings in a genuine effort to put Indo-US relations back on the rails after weeks of unexpected bilateral stresses and strains over trade tariffs. Trump, who was the very first global leader to felicitate Modi, subsequently tweeted, "Just had a wonderful phone call wth my friend, Prime Minister Narendra Modi. I wished him a very Happy Birthday! He is doing a tremendous job. Narendra: Thank you for your support on ending the War between Russia and Ukraine!" Modi readily tweeted in response, "Thank you, my friend, President Trump, for your phone call and warm greetings on my 75th birthday. Like you, I am also fully committed to taking the India-US Comprehensive and Global Partnership to new heights. We support your initiatives towards a peaceful resolution of the Ukraine conflict." The mention of the Ukraine conflict was with reference to Trump's recent positive meetings with the Russian President Vladimir Putin in the joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson in Anchorage, Alaska, and the Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in Washington paving the road to lasting peace on the Ukrainian front.

The genesis of India's relationship with the United States took place soon after the founding of the country in 1794 when the first American President George Washington sent Benjamin Joy, his Consul-designate to Calcutta. But Washington's move was ill timed as the then Governor General of India Lord Charles Cornwallis, smarting from the ignominy of having surrendered to Washington at the battle of Yorktown, simply refused to accept Joy's credentials. Interestingly, The Star-Spangled Banner, the national anthem of the United States, was written by a 35 year old American lawyer Francis Scott Key aboard an Indian teak built British warship, the HMS Minden, on 14th September, 1814!

Indo-American business relations began literally with ice! By the 1830s, ice had become a very profitable American export. The most famous ice maker was Frederic Tudor, who was known as Boston's "Ice King",



LIKE THE UNITED STATES, INDIA ACHIEVED FREEDOM FROM BRITISH RULE THROUGH A REVOLUTION THOUGH IN INDIA IT WAS A PEACEFUL, NON VIOLENT REVOLUTION

The writer is an internationally reputed senior lawyer practising in the Supreme Court of India

 dailypioneer

 @thedailypioneer

 The Pioneer

and who was the founder of the Tudor Ice Company. The first consignment of ice arrived in Calcutta aboard the American ship SS Tuscany in 1833. J Stocqueler, a colourful journalist and editor of The Englishman, the forerunner of The Statesman, was rudely awakened by his Man Friday who could not wait to give him the news that "burruf" (ice) had arrived from America.

"There it lay" wrote Stocqueler later, "in a square mass of purest crystal, packed in felt and fragrant pine dust. A quantity of rosy American Baldwin apples reposed upon the surface of this glacier." Back in his office, Stocqueler continued to write, "How many Calcutta tables glittered that morning with lumps of ice. The butter dishes were filled; the goblets of water were converted into miniature arctic seas with icebergs floating on the surface. All business was suspended till noon, so that people might rush about to pay each other congratulatory visits and devise means of perpetuating the supply. Everybody invited everybody to dinner to taste claret and beer cooled by the American importation."

The American captain of the Tuscany

was presented with a gold cup by the Governor General Lord William Bentinck and the romance of American ice was hailed as an achievement of his government. A subscription was raised for the erection of an Ice House. And anyone who could afford an icebox invested in one of those zinc lined wooden contraptions. Calcutta's banqueting tables took on an arctic character with peaks of solid ice and delicately sculptured swans bearing mousses, galantines, caviarre and cold soufflés were washed down with gallons of "Lal Sharab" (red wines). When a letter with a 90 cent Lincoln stamp was mailed in 1873 by an ice exporter in Boston to his office in Calcutta, Mahatma Gandhi was a toddler of four, Swami Vivekananda was a stripling of ten, and Ulysses Grant, who also visited Calcutta, was the President of the United States.

Like the United States, India achieved freedom from British rule through a revolution though in India it was a peaceful, non violent revolution under the leadership of the great apostle of peace and non violence Mahatma Gandhi, who influenced many Americans like Martin Luther King and President Barrack Obama.

The American people gave their active support in the struggle for our own freedom. In October, 1949, our first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, made his maiden visit to the United States. In the course of that visit, which President Harry S Truman described as "the voyage of discovery of America", Nehru, in an address to the East West Association and the Institute of Pacific Relations, New York, said, "May I also say that all of us in India know very well, although it might not be so known in public, what great interest President Roosevelt had in our country's freedom and how he exercised his great influence to that end". Nehru was an indefatigable admirer of President Abraham "Abe" Lincoln about whom Philip Henry Kerr, 11th Marquess of Lothian (one time British Ambassador to the United States), in a letter to Nehru written on New Year's Eve, 1935, wrote, "I think that the greatest political figure that the democratic world has thrown up is Abraham Lincoln".

In 1951, the well known American professor Arthur Ernest Morgan presented Nehru with a brass mould of Lincoln's right hand that had been cast by the legendary American sculptor Leonard Volk in 1860.

When Nehru visited the United States for the second time in December, 1956, he told the American people in a television and radio address, "It has been kept ever since on my study table and I look at it every day and it gives me great strength...after all, we believe in liberty, the dignity of the individual and the freedom of the human spirit. Because of this, we are firmly wedded to the democratic way of life and in our loyalty to this cause, we will not falter...Our two republics share a common faith in democratic institutions and the democratic way of life and are dedicated to the cause of peace and freedom". In the Nehru museum in Delhi, one will still find the brass mould of Lincoln resting proudly on his study table and a framed lithograph of Lincoln on the wall of his study where he used to study late into the night.

During President John Fitzgerald "Jack" Kennedy's tenure, Indo American relations reached their zenith. In an article published in the Foreign Affairs, New York, seven months before Kennedy's brutal assassination, Nehru wrote, "Indo American relations have seldom been as close and cordial as they are now. The deep sympathy and practical support received from the United States in meeting the Chinese aggression has created a wealth of good feeling and apart from that there is much in common between us on essentials."

President Kennedy's vision of a world of free and independent nations, freely co operating so as to bring about a world wide system of inter dependence, is entirely in accord with our own ideas." Both Nehru and Kennedy idolised the prodigious American poet and the United States Congressional Gold Medal awardee Robert Lee Frost. Frost, who had predicted on 26th March, 1959, that "The next president of the United States will be from Boston," held a special place in Kennedy's intellectual pantheon.

At Kennedy's inauguration at the US Capitol on the blindingly sunny but bitterly cold day of 20th January,1961, Frost, assisted by Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson, recited from memory his 1942 published poem "The Gift Outright" creating a precedent in American history. The Washington Post cited Frost's recital as one of the highlights of the ceremony, noting, "Robert Frost in his natural way stole the hearts of the inaugural crowd."

Please read the complete article online in www.dailypioneer.com

Supreme Court's stray dog verdict: Justice, bias, and the cost of public safety



HASAN
KHURSHID

On 22 August 2025, a three-judge bench of the Supreme Court, headed by Justice Vikram Nath, overturned the 11 August 2025 ruling of Justices J B Pardiwala and R Mahadevan on the contentious issue of stray dogs in Delhi-NCR. The earlier order had directed municipal authorities to immediately begin rounding up stray dogs, set up shelters within eight weeks, and permanently relocate them from streets, colonies, and public spaces.

That ruling, while stern, was grounded in urgent concerns of public safety. However, within days of the decision, nationwide protests from animal rights groups and self-styled dog welfare activists forced a rethink. Responding to the uproar, Chief Justice of India B R Gaval constituted a new bench on 14 August 2025, comprising Justices Vikram Nath, Sandeep Mehta, and N V Anjaria. Their ruling, delivered on 22 August 2025, reversed the earlier order, directing that dogs picked up by municipal bodies be vaccinated, sterilised, and returned to their original locations.

Judicial Euphoria or Judicial Bias?

Justice Vikram Nath did not stop at delivering the judgment. Speaking at a Kerala conference on 30 August 2025, focused on human-wildlife conflicts, he described how the case made him widely known in civil society: "So far, I have been known in the legal fraternity for my work. But I am thankful to the stray dog case for making me known across the world. I am thankful to my CJI for allotting me this matter."

He went further, remarking that not only dog lovers but dogs themselves had blessed him. While some may dismiss these statements as light-hearted, others view them as a troubling sign of judicial bias.

In law, bias-whether conscious or unconscious-undermines impartiality. A judge is expected to decide purely on evidence, not sentiment or personal gratification. The Solicitor General of India, Tushar Mehta, representing the Delhi government, reminded the Court that in 2024 alone India recorded 37.15 lakh dog bite cases-an average of 10,000 a day. Overlooking such stark statistics in favour of personal narratives about blessings from stray dogs appears, critics argue, a deviation from the principle of nemo iudex in causa sua-no one should be a judge in their own cause.



Justice Pardiwala's earlier order had been unflinching. Calling the situation "extremely grim," the bench had argued that no sentiment-however noble-should eclipse the right to life and safety. Referring to the death of six-year-old Chavi Sharma from rabies in Delhi's Pooth Kalan, the Court had taken suo motu cognisance of media reports and set a precedent with its "salutary order." The bench was scathing about the Animal Birth Control (ABC) Rules that mandate sterilised dogs be returned to their original localities. "We fail to understand why you bring back sterilised dogs," the order read. "Forget the rules and face reality."

These dogs are to be captured immediately by whatever means. Only then can children and senior citizens be safe." This order, though controversial, resonated with countless families across India who had lost loved ones to stray dog attacks.

A Trail of Human Tragedies

The menace of stray dogs is not an abstract debate but a lived horror for thousands of families. In 2023, Sushma, a single mother living in Delhi's Ruchi Vihar, lost both her sons — Anand (7) and Aditya (5) — in separate dog attacks within 48 hours. Shattered, she sent her only surviving son to live with relatives. In Kerala, 12-year-old Abbirami succumbed to dog bites in 2022, even after receiving multiple anti-rabies vaccines.

That same year, the state recorded over 1.8 lakh dog bite cases and 21 deaths by September. In Chhattisgarh, five-year-old Sukanto Manjhi was mauled to death in April 2023 by a pack of six dogs while playing outside. In Goa, in April 2025, 20-month-old Anania Shaikh was dragged and fatally attacked by seven dogs.

In Telangana, a three-year-old boy died in August 2025 after complications from a dog bite a month earlier. Most shockingly, in Patiala on

26 August 2025, a dog was filmed carrying the severed head of an infant near a hospital, sparking outrage and grief. These are not isolated incidents but part of a grim nationwide pattern. A survey by Local Circles found that 56 per cent of respondents said stray dog attacks were "common" in their areas.

The Larger Debate: Whose Rights Come First?

The central question remains: whose rights are paramount-those of humans or of stray animals? Activists argue that sterilisation and vaccination ensure coexistence. Critics counter that sterilisation has failed to curb attacks, and releasing dogs back onto the streets amounts to state-sanctioned danger.

Former Union Minister Vijay Goel voiced the frustration of many citizens: "The Supreme Court has ordered the release of dogs, but with around 2,000 dog bite cases daily, who will take responsibility-the Court, NGOs, activists feeding dogs, or the Government?" His question echoes a broader sentiment: judicial rulings must balance compassion with accountability.


Judiciary Under Scrutiny


The episode has also sparked debate on judicial credibility. By reconstituting a bench to reconsider an existing verdict within days of protests, the Court risks appearing swayed by social pressure rather than evidence. Judicial propriety requires respect for prior benches, particularly one led by Justice Pardiwala, who is in line to become Chief Justice of India. Courts, like governments, must rise above populism. Justice should be blind-not influenced by protests, activist narratives, or personal pride. As critics warn, when public safety collides with judicial sentiment, the cost is measured in human lives.


The Supreme Court's 22 August 2025 ruling may have earned applause from dog lovers, but it has left grieving families, ordinary citizens, and legal experts questioning whether justice has truly been served.

The grim reality of over 10,000 dog bites a day cannot be wished away with sterilisation drives and hopeful blessings. The judiciary must not only appear impartial but must be firmly rooted in the principle of protecting life above all. Compassion for animals is noble, but compassion for vulnerable humans-especially children-must never be secondary. Until then, the tragic stories of victims will continue to haunt the conscience of a nation caught between misplaced sentiment and hard reality.

The writer is a legal journalist and an author

 dailyPioneer

 Thedailypioneer

 The Pioneer

When President Ayub Khan of Pakistan met John F Kennedy at Mount Vernon in July 1961, the atmosphere was far from cordial. The reception, elegantly hosted by First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy, concealed the tension between the two men.

Ayub was irritated over Washington's decision to extend a generous economic aid package to India, which he viewed as a direct threat to Pakistan's security. In retaliation, he had suspended the CIA's covert activities at East Pakistan airbases that supported Tibetan rebels and had even halted U-2 reconnaissance flights monitoring China from West Pakistan. Despite the frosty mood, the evening ended with a compromise. During a private garden walk, Kennedy assured Ayub that the United States would not provide military equipment to India, while Ayub agreed to reopen the airbases for American use.

A few days later, inside the Oval Office, Ayub laid out Pakistan's case in military terms. Unfurling maps across Kennedy's desk, he emphasised that India had deployed 85 per cent of its 1.5 million troops against Pakistan, leaving only a fraction on its Chinese frontier. He pointed out Afghanistan's 80,000-90,000 soldiers, equipped with Soviet arms, positioned along Pakistan's western border.

Finally, Ayub displayed Pakistan's defensive lines facing both India and Afghanistan. At the heart of his argument was Kashmir-"Pakistan would be up the gum tree if an attack came from either India or Afghanistan," he warned. Kennedy and his advisers dismissed Ayub's predictions of India seeking to "neutralise" Pakistan, but they acknowledged his central claim: Kashmir was a litmus test for peace.

If India resolved the issue, it could transform relations between the two neighbours. Kennedy pressed Ayub for specifics. What compromise could both sides accept? Realistically, Ayub admitted, Nehru would not concede more than the status quo, but Pakistan could not accept this. He suggested Jammu could remain with India, but Pakistan required "some miles" beyond the Chenab River to secure its water resources.

Drawing on the Indus Waters Treaty, Ayub argued that if the western rivers belonged to Pakistan, so too should the adjoining lands. He hinted that Nehru, weakened politically and distant from Kashmiri sentiments, might be more open to a deal than assumed. He added a warning: without progress on Kashmir, American aid to India would achieve little. Kennedy retorted sharply-aid was not to buy India's friendship, but to safeguard it from communism.

As their discussion wound down, Ayub asked directly: if his efforts to persuade Nehru failed and the matter returned to the UN, would



Washington back Pakistan? Kennedy replied with a firm "Yes." Kennedy's engagement with Pakistan went beyond geopolitics. Only weeks earlier, the Berlin crisis had nearly pushed the US and USSR into direct conflict, making South Asia's stability all the more vital. Yet Kennedy also displayed a personal interest in Pakistan's domestic problems.


The young president, with barely a thousand days in office ahead of him, understood that the post-colonial world was shifting rapidly. The Soviet Union was exploiting this moment through aid, trade, and technical missions, pouring more than \$700 million into India by 1960.


Kennedy, determined to chart a fresh course from Eisenhower's policies, sought balance. While Eisenhower had tilted towards Pakistan with advanced weaponry, Kennedy had advocated more food aid for India during his Senate years. Still, Kennedy recognised the deep fault line of Kashmir. He asked his confidant and ambassador to India, John Kenneth Galbraith, to engage Ayub directly.


Galbraith's privileged access to the White House unnerved the State Department, but Kennedy trusted his judgment. Galbraith, despite sympathising with India, admitted its social and economic conservatism, noting how US food aid prevented crises of hunger and projected a sense of progress.

When Galbraith met Ayub in December 1961, the Pakistani leader remained vague on solutions but repeated his central demand: control over Kashmir's headwaters, especially the Chenab, was vital for Pakistan's survival. He warned of future Indian diversions that could cripple his country's economy. For Kennedy, this was a sobering reminder that the Kashmir question was not merely territorial-it was deeply tied to survival, identity, and the region's fragile peace.

(Excerpts from the book Trial By water: Indus Basin and India-Pakistan Relations, authored by Uttam Kumar Sinha & published by Penguin Random House, 2025)

 dailyPioneer

 @TheDailyPioneer

 The Pioneer

OUR VIEW



Reverse the exodus of India's retail investors

Shrunk direct retail participation in India's stock market isn't good for its overall efficiency.
The wider the range of views that equity prices blend in, the better it is for all participants

Fewer retail investors making direct trades in India's stock market can broadly be explained by red ticker tapes and price volatility having sent individual participants into the relatively safe arms of mutual funds (MFs). Almost a year on, key market indices are yet to recover the peaks they hit in 2024. Data from the National Stock Exchange (NSE) shows that its active retail traders—who trade stocks at least once a month—dropped from a record 15.7 million last September to 10.7 million at the end of August. Separate numbers show that India's count of unique MF investors went up from about 50.1 million to almost 56.4 million over roughly the same period; this includes big-entity MF holders too, but was probably driven by households looking for experts to multiply their wealth. Such a shift is both plausible and sensible. A longer look at the share of direct retail participation in the NSE's cash market, however, reveals a shrinkage that began with covid year 2020-21. From a high of 45% that year, this share shrank to 34.2% in 2025-26 till August, with big non-retail traders making up the rest of the pie. This sounds odd, given how share prices surged in the pandemic's wake amid a retail frenzy for new demat accounts; more than 100 million were opened over the four years till 2023-24. A sizeable chunk of this influx, it would seem, was not aimed at cash trading; instead, it fuelled a startling boom in derivatives, one that India's market regulator had to come down hard on for the safety of novices taking wild punts on complex futures and options (F&O).

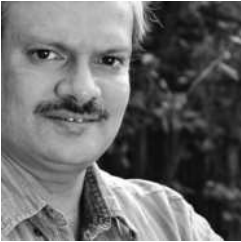
Taken together, a shift in favour of MFs and the regulator's pushback of rookie derivative trades would suggest our equity market has

sobered up and we are headed the right way now. That experts should manage stocks on behalf of retail investors has been promoted heavily as an axiom, with public buy-in evident in the MF industry's resilience. That the casino-like air of the F&O segment was in need of a regulatory dampener was clear too, given its glaring signs of excess. However, while rising expertise at play could make the market safer overall by reducing 'noise' (and its disruptive potential), a reversal of today's retail trend would arguably serve our equity market better. A shrinking share of direct stock trading by individuals acting on their own implies a loss in the diversity of views that feed market outcomes. Financial markets thrive on blending as wide a range of outlooks as possible—bearish, bullish or tentative—into their process of price discovery. Indeed, this is what gives a market efficiency, even if it can never claim the perfection of being 'fully informed.' Retail investors are not only sprawled across the country in large numbers, since they have a wide variety of viewpoints, their participation buffers us from the 'groupthink' that big buyers might find hard to resist. For a more efficient market on the whole, therefore, we need more people at trading screens, not fewer.

So far, so theory-led. India's retail space seems to have polarized in recent years, with MF-happy investors on one side and F&O-dazzled punters on the other. For a reversal of the retail exodus to drive market efficiency, we need a lot more people to invest the classic old way: study companies for where earnings are headed, buy the shares of winners and then track them to see if they should be replaced with other picks. In time, more minds whirring away should work in favour of all investors.

Inequality could threaten social stability and slow growth down

We mustn't ignore the risks that widening horizontal gaps pose to India's democracy and economy



HIMANSHU
is associate professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University and visiting fellow at the Centre de Sciences Humaines, New Delhi.

The government may be echoing the World Bank's recent 'finding' that India is the fourth most equal country in the world, but this isn't true. In reality, India is a high inequality country and any complacency based on artificially adjusted estimates as a result of statistical jugglery should be avoided. More than estimates of inequality, what matters is its nature and impact on growth, mobility and democracy.

For historical reasons, and rightly so, India's debate has focused on poverty more than the distributional aspects of inequality. This was understandable, given our large numbers languishing in poverty. But with India's rising per capita income and growth, poverty is no longer as pervasive. On the other hand, there is substantial evidence to show that the last three decades have been accompanied by rising inequality in all its dimensions. A true assessment of its level is difficult, given the absence of comparable data on consumption inequality. But estimates based on income, as reported by the World Bank, would put India among the countries with high inequality. While these are based on synthetic estimates made using tax data, they not only show high inequality but also a secular rise in it over the past three decades. A similar conclusion can be reached from wealth data.

A far more serious problem is one of 'horizontal inequality', which refers to

inequality among groups with a shared identity. These are based on caste, religion, age, gender, class, region and so on. While most measures of inequality capture only the gap between households or individuals on income, wealth or consumption, it is these horizontal inequalities that determine access to resources and opportunities for upward mobility within, say, a generation. Most of these inequalities are structural and historical, but also relate to social justice and stability. The process of economic growth, which leads to prosperity, can also contribute to alienation of groups if that growth is not broad-based. In fact, the exclusion of certain groups from access to public services such as education, health and nutrition can create barriers to mobility. India's progress on many of these fronts has been slow, compared to its success with economic growth. Even the minor gains on human development outcomes are not equally shared by all groups. Most marginalized groups face disadvantages in basic health, education and nutrition. There are also vast differences across states, with the gap increasing in recent decades between poorer states such as Bihar, West Bengal, Jharkhand and Odisha and the relatively affluent states of west and south India.

Historically, India's growth process

has been unable to reduce these inequalities, with the task left to the state. In recent decades, these inequalities have appeared to not just threaten the process of economic growth, but also social and political stability. The recent farmers' agitation and reservation demands by groups such as Maharashtra's Marathas, Gujarat's Patels and Uttar Pradesh and Haryana's Jats are manifestations of social instability. It has also contributed to the perverse trend of state governments trying to reserve government jobs and access to higher education for residents of the state. This stokes anti-immigrant sentiment. One unfortunate consequence of deepening horizontal inequalities is its impact on inter-generational and occupational mobility. Many studies show that horizontal inequalities contribute to low inter-generational mobility for the disadvantaged.

India has not yet reached a situation of political instability. Recent upheavals in Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka led by their youth culminated in governments being overthrown. Similar protests in Indonesia and Thailand against their regimes and political establishments signal growing discontent with growth not delivering broad-based benefits. Such political unrest is a result of many factors, no doubt, but it still holds some lessons for India.

Despite our economic growth, we face high unemployment among the youth, with stagnant real earnings. Disparities among and within regions and across various groups have only increased. With unequal access to educational and employment openings, there is also a sense of alienation among a majority of disadvantaged groups.

While affirmative action policies can reduce horizontal inequality, this is unlikely to help much without the country's growth process being broad-based and inclusive. Inequality matters not just for economic growth, but, more importantly, for long-term social and political stability.

QUICK READ

We must not get carried away by claims of inequality being low in India, which is contrary to the truth. Instead, take a closer look at the phenomenon and its potential impact on our future.

The recent youth protests in neighbouring countries were manifestations of growth failing to serve everyone. While India remains politically stable, we must pay attention to risks.



THEIR VIEW

Empower states to tackle climate challenges equitably

AMIT KAPOOR & KOYEL KUMAR MANDAL



are, respectively, honorary chairman, Institute for Competitiveness; and director, climate change, Children's Investment Fund Foundation

India is reshaping its growth story, moving from simply chasing speed to ensuring sustainability. The next wave of growth will therefore be driven not by smokestacks, but by green factories, zero-emission transport, renewable power and digital transformation. By 2047, India aims to become a developed economy, and by 2070, a net-zero one. Crossing these milestones would require the country to act on two fronts simultaneously. Investing in clean energy and industries will drive growth, jobs, better air quality and lower emissions; investing in resilience through climate-smart farming, cooler cities and flood defences will protect people and assets. Financing this dual transition will cost trillions of rupees, but the cost of inaction would be even higher, with losses borne by our GDP, competitiveness and macro-financial stability.

To finance this transition and attract private investment, we propose that the 16th Finance Commission introduce a climate

criterion into the Centre-state devolution formula, with an initial weight of 5%. It would take into consideration climate exposure, climate sensitivity and the adaptive capacity of states. Over time, new indicators that reflect the clean-growth investment needs of states should be included and the weight increased.

From heatwaves that push electricity demand to unprecedented peaks almost every year to the recent floods in Punjab, Delhi-NCR and other regions, climate shocks have become a recurrent feature of India's development landscape. This challenge is magnified by India's vast and varied geography; climate risks are unevenly distributed and adaptation needs differ sharply. In such a federal system, much of the responsibility for climate-related investment falls on states. India's system of Centre-to-state revenue transfers is designed to balance resources, with the Finance Commission assessing costs both vertically (between the Centre and states) and horizontally (across states).

Yet, two imbalances persist. Vertically, the Union collects most revenues, while states bear the bulk of climate-sensitive expenditure. Horizontally, the poorer and more climate-vulnerable states face higher risks, but have lower revenue-raising capacity, while

the richer states enjoy both greater resources and stronger capabilities to invest in clean energy and innovation. Unless addressed, these imbalances could deepen inter-state inequality and erode the fiscal foundations of cooperative federalism.

Successive Finance Commissions have tried to bridge this gap. Early Commissions focused heavily on equalization by using population and per-capita income distance as the principal criteria for horizontal revenue distribution. Over time, efficiency considerations such as taxation efforts and fiscal discipline were added.

The 14th Finance Commission marked a turning point by raising states' vertical share of the divisible pool of revenue to 42% and by introducing an explicit ecological criterion: the proportion of the state's area under forest cover. The 15th Finance Commission raised the forest cover and ecology weight from 7.5% to 10%.

Although the Finance Commission's horizontal

devolution formula has undergone incremental evolution to improve inter-state fiscal equity, the existing architecture of the 15th Finance Commission leaves a significant gap: there is no direct measure of climate action in the devolution formulae.

From an adaptation perspective, states recurrently affected by floods, droughts or heatwaves and those facing chronic risks such as coastal erosion or Himalayan fragility receive no systematic recognition of the fiscal pressures these hazards impose. From a clean growth perspective, the cost of a just energy transition varies across states by their drivers of economic growth, potential to diversify their economic base and their resources and capabilities. States with climate-exposed agriculture or carbon-intensive industrial bases, for example, face higher adjustment costs and a chronic productivity drag.

The metrics used in the current horizontal devolution formulae are react-

ive rather than anticipatory. Growing structural climate disadvantages only get reflected in these formulae in the form of increased income inequality among states, which shows up only after climate shocks and weak responses have eroded output, revenues and service delivery capacity.

The policy challenge today, therefore, is one of institutionalizing climate change within our fiscal decision-making frameworks, so that inter-governmental transfers function not just as mechanisms of income redistribution, but also as instruments for achieving clean and resilient growth pathways—arguably the most important stated policy goal of the government.

Including climate change in the Centre-state devolution mechanism would put clean and resilient growth right at the heart of India's fiscal federalism, establishing a new standard for policy innovation. It will provide a replicable model for other decentralized countries in the Global South and offer an additional lever for climate diplomacy, ahead of India's CoP presidency. Above all, it will fill a critical investment gap towards clean and resilient growth by guaranteeing stable flows of domestic funds based on rules that are consistent with our constitutional provisions of fiscal fairness.

The
Hindustan Times
ESTABLISHED IN 1924

{ OUR TAKE }

Spare maths, and students, please

Mathematics education in the country can do with a pedagogical fix, not re-orientation of the curriculum towards the past

After history, mathematics seems to be in the crosshairs of the UGC. Over 900 researchers, mathematicians, and academicians from India and abroad have urged the UGC to reconsider its proposed changes to the undergraduate mathematics curriculum. The higher education regulator wants BA/BSc maths courses to foreground Vedic mathematics, *Bharatiya bijaganita* (algebra), the *Puranas* and ideas of ancient Indian astronomy. It wants students to be taught the *Narada Purana's* citations of geometry, and calculation of *muhurtas* (auspicious time) for rituals using the *panchanga* (Hindu almanac). Students must also learn about ancient Indian time units, evolution of Indian algebra, and ancient formulae in other areas of mathematics. India's rich epistemological heritage in mathematics is well documented. There is no harm in taking pride or showcasing these civilisational accomplishments; it may even help understand the interconnectedness of knowledge generation across the globe mediated by the exchange of ideas — lopsided in many instances, though — that have happened throughout history. But it becomes a problem if these, as part of a revivalist impulse, are foregrounded ahead of modern, evidence-based science learning. For instance, in its bid to privilege the past and encourage esoteric topics such as Mathematics in Meditation, the draft curriculum has reduced the importance of core subjects, including real analysis, linear algebra, algebra, statistics, programming and numerical methods.

UGC must heed the experts' advice. Keeping in step with the knowledge requirements of the modern world means keeping the cartography of university education and national pride separate. The purpose of university education is to familiarise students with evidence-based learning, its methodologies and frameworks, and prepare students to compete with the best in the world and engage in cutting-edge research in the best institutions around the world. UGC's move will only ambush such a prospect — not upgrade or improve the course and enrich learning.

If there is a crisis in mathematics education in India, it is with pedagogy rather than curriculum. While several Indians do exceptionally well in mathematical research and children win accolades, including in Maths Olympiads, numeracy levels among school students — as reported by ASER and PISA inter-country comparisons — remain depressingly low. In many homes, mathematics is a subject of fear and anxiety rather than joy, mostly because of poor teaching methodologies. That's an area the UGC must focus on with the help of serious maths educators, not in chasing chimeras of a golden past.

Dovish in the dark, Fed promises more cuts

The US Federal Reserve on Wednesday announced its first interest rate cut after Donald Trump became president for the second time. The notes from the Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) meeting suggest that there could be more than one rate cut over the rest of the year. The latest rate cut comes in an environment where there is considerable economic uncertainty and outright political hostility facing America's central bank. Trump has been berating the Fed and its governor for not bringing down interest rates sharply — something he did after Wednesday's decision as well. To be sure, Trump's last-minute nominee to the FOMC, Stephen Miran, dissented (he wanted a 50-basis points rate cut against the Fed's 25), though his demand too was significantly smaller than Trump has been calling for. This suggests that Trump's rhetoric is just that rather than thought out policy. The Fed's decision to cut rates is more a result of its worries about a weakening labour market in the US than confidence that inflation will align itself to its target of 2%. In fact, most analysts agree that the full impact of the Trump tariffs is yet to be seen in the inflation numbers and expect them to also cause headwinds in the labour market.

The Fed's action should be seen as a leap of faith in the dovish direction even though there are considerable economic unknowns as far as the macroeconomy is concerned. To be fair, the economic environment and even the inflation-unemployment trade at the moment is not something that can be easily managed by vanilla-style monetary easing or tightening. Monetary policy of the world's largest economy will be closely observed for its efficacy and independence in the near term.

How India can bridge trust deficit with China

Practical and unconventional strategies rooted in cultural goodwill diplomacy, rather than formal bureaucratic agreements, may help in building the relationship

Two elements are vital for fostering a sustainable relationship with China. First, it is important to confront the entrenched historical mistrust that traces back to the Gupta period in the 6th century, which created a philosophical divide between Chinese and Indian viewpoints. Second, promoting genuine collaboration necessitates a more adaptable and pragmatic strategy rooted in cultural goodwill diplomacy, rather than depending on erratic formal bureaucratic agreements, which involve inherent risk, as the Chinese have previously demonstrated their capacity to unilaterally halt agreements. That is why Russia, Central Asian States, and South-east Asian countries have implemented both practical and unconventional approaches to work with China. In modern times, the Indian narrative on China has been influenced by a multifaceted and distorted portrayal of China by the West. Consequently, the Indian military and diplomatic sectors have embraced a cautious stance towards China, thereby perpetuating stereotypes of mistrust and deception. Such mutual perceptions have hardened over time, with the Chinese viewing Indians as overly assertive and unreliable, making it challenging to shift these entrenched beliefs. It is essential to recognise certain

traits of China's statecraft and its approach to negotiations. The Chinese tend to prioritise establishing long-lasting relationships over the pursuit of immediate benefits, highlighting that trust is more significant than the necessity for formal contracts. It is essential to recognise that China's complex society cannot be simplified to Communism, as its roots are profoundly embedded in Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism, which shape social values and interactions. Consequently, in the context of negotiations, Western entities have come to acknowledge that engaging with China needs more nuanced strategies. Over the last 50 years, Western negotiators have progressively adopted *guanxi* (a Chinese term that describes an individual's ability to build relationships for productive purposes) principles to cultivate flexible relationships with China, prioritising collaboration rather than conflict to protect shared interests. China's economic and political landscape defines simple labels, revealing a complex consumer society that prioritises wealth generation rather than adhering strictly to Communist ideals. This perspective is underscored by Joann Pittman, an Australian corporate cross-cultural trainer with 28 years of experience in China, who asserts that when engaging with China, it is crucial to embrace complexity rather than rely on simplistic dichotomies, as the reality often exists beyond simple contrasts. "Saving face" is essential, as the Chinese frequently employ informal intermediaries to facilitate successful negotiations. During the recent border discussions, our perception of the Chinese as "unreliable" was juxtaposed with their characterisation of us as "inflexible". This highlights the significance of intermediaries, such as Russia/SCO, in navigating these complex discussions. The Chinese place importance on the process of striving towards a goal rather than merely focusing on achieving the goal itself. They follow the principle of *Tao Guang Yang Hui* in their diplomatic efforts to highlight the value of strategic patience and the skill of waiting for the most opportune moment to promote their interests. In his 2022 speech at the 20th National Congress of the CCP, President Xi Jinping highlighted the significance of "cultivating opportunities from crises and transforming crisis into opportunities". It essentially means bidding time for leveraging adversaries' vulnerabilities. For example, leveraging the Tibetan dilemma, China effectively transforms India's vulnerabilities into opportunities for its own strategic gain, often unchallenged by New Delhi. The situation involving the Dalai Lama is a prime example of how India has inadvertently played into China's hands. Similarly, Beijing's recent commitment to assist India, in light of New Delhi's concerns regarding Washington, underscores a significant opportunity for China to engage with India without facing pushback. At the same time, it is essential to recognise that, despite a facade of discretion, China's strategic engagements often conceal deeper motives, as evidenced by their careful strategies in collaborating with India on issues such as Afghanistan and the climate crisis, which have done little to alleviate mutual suspicion. The political approach was indeed pursued. However, despite the initial optimism from the 2018 Wuhan Summit, the 2019 Chennai Summit indi-



P Stobdan



It is essential to recognise that, despite a facade of discretion, China's strategic engagements often conceal deeper motives.

AFP/PIB

cated that internal dynamics might have obstructed the advancement of their top-down political dialogue. India's endeavours to establish a sustainable cooperative framework for addressing the border dispute with China have often been met with resistance. One reason is that India has consistently emphasised crisis management over finding a solution. This arises from an insufficiently nuanced comprehension of one another's strategic motivations. Similarly, the initiatives for strengthening trade relations have transitioned into a transactional client-vendor dynamic instead of promoting genuine reciprocity. Although easing investment restrictions on China could alleviate the impact of the 50% US tariff, the future of India's trade relationship is contingent upon China's readiness to lower obstacles to Indian exports and improve market access. It is possible that Indian products could see a rise in demand within the markets of China's western provinces, such as Sichuan, Yunnan, Tibet, and Xinjiang. Nevertheless, realising this potential would require the development of a certain degree of trust, which cannot be achieved without a change in policy viewpoints. While Prime Minister Modi seems keen for a breakthrough, his security advisor, with his intelligence background, would be taking a more cautious perspective on the matter. Nonetheless, the efforts of the special representatives and the Working

Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs (WMCC) institutional framework seem to be having a positive impact in reducing border tensions. However, sustaining optimism is essential to rebuilding trust and normalcy. So far, both sides have avoided delving into sensitive topics, except for a brief clarification regarding India's stance on Taiwan. A lack of openness about their true intentions and strategic clarity may undermine the fragile stability along the border. Indian Sinologists are now expressing the view that it is appropriate for the two nations to explore their historical metaphysical connections that linked India and China millennia ago, alongside diplomatic efforts designed to alleviate the existing mistrust. There exists no alternative "big picture" viewpoint other than to focus on the most significant convergence of Buddhism to foster our future relationship. We seem unaware that China is the only country where India's *Sarvastivadin Abhidharma* Buddhist tradition (the doctrine asserting that all is real) continues to be preserved. Regrettably, this deeply rooted and profound connection between India and China is being subverted by an excessive focus on other relatively minor Mahayana/Vajrayana sects.

P Stobdan is a former ambassador and senior fellow at Delhi Policy Group. The views expressed are personal

What Akasa gets right about airline operations in India

Fortunes in civil aviation swing more than in most other sectors, given that it is vulnerable to any number of factors, including external ones. There could be a billionaire in the cockpit one day, and before you know it, they would have lost it all. Yet, perhaps, no other sector allows players such latitude in shaping their trajectory. Start with the right intent and the right people, and a few wrong twists and turns will be forgiven and forgotten. Both Jet Airways (until its closure) and IndiGo, India's two private-sector success stories in civil aviation, have been through many twists and turns but both had the right intent and the right people at the helm almost all through. In the Indian context, founders and owners hold the key to success. While they might blame circumstances, environment, government actions or inaction for airline failures, these actually stem more from poor administrative or financial management, wrong intent, poor handling of people or some fundamental flaw in the business model than anything extraneous.

That's why the Indian flying public should rejoice that Akasa Air now shows promise of becoming a strong number three in a market that is veering towards a duopoly, with all the inherent risks and dangers of such a market structure. The airline recently surged ahead of rivals in many sectoral parameters, including load factor — at 90.2% in August, it was higher than both the market leader IndiGo and SpiceJet (which has always had high loads despite floundering over the last few years). With 30 aircraft, the airline now flies to 24 domestic and six international destinations. Capacity and revenue have risen by over 45% in a single year, and, while the airline is still making losses, new and heavyweight investors have backed it, bringing in much-needed funds. The Rakesh Jhunjhunwala family, too, has reaffirmed its confidence by putting in further funds, while holding less than 51% stake. The airline's distributed ownership works well to keep all shareholders in check. There are two areas where Akasa appears to have stolen a march over rivals, which should hold it in good stead if it stays the

course. First, while the airline has been accused of being rather top-heavy right from the start, the fact remains that, unlike Air India and others in the past, it primarily has seasoned aviation professionals, many of whom have cut their teeth in full service airlines. Senior management in IndiGo, I can confirm, takes this minnow more seriously for now than it does its closest rival, Air India, which only evokes mild amusement. Second, and perhaps the single-most important factor, is its people-handling, led by CEO Vinay Dube. Dube, in his earlier role as CEO of Go First, has closely seen how mismanagement in this regard can destroy a good business. Akasa has not only managed to move past the unpleasant episode with its pilots in 2023, but its staff also seems to be among the happiest in the sector. The airline took measures to mollify its crew, including introducing a "21 days on and 9 days off" work pattern that the pilots were seeking. Two recent experiences I had with the airline staff validated what I hear from the industry. In an era of short fuses and pursed lips, if one's luggage at check-in exceeds the limit by even 100 grams, one can expect to be firmly told to pay extra luggage charges. However, a check-in counter staffer at the MOPA airport in Goa patiently helped organise my baggage in a way that would obviate the need to pay extra for baggage, while keeping to the company's rules. It wasn't the fact that she saved me a few thousand rupees that made the interaction so unusually pleasant. It was her handling of the entire episode, given how unaccustomed passengers are to such treatment at airport counters across cities. The sceptic in me could pin this to the "Goa effect" — people are quite willing to go out of their way to help others in the state — as an alternative explanation, but if it is indeed an example of a broader culture at the airline, then Akasa is certainly leagues ahead of others.


On an Akasa flight to the national capital, an infant faced a serious medical emergency, seeming almost inert soon after take-off. An announcement sought help from doctors on board and, on their advice, the captain lost no time in diverting the flight to Mumbai, where an equipped ambulance was waiting on the tarmac when we landed. Again, although the crew on the flight was very young, it handled the crisis with calmness and maturity — rare in such stressful situations. The captain apologised for the delay, but everybody knew how every minute of the delay went into attempting to saving a young life.

Akasa insiders tell me that the airline has a very open office atmosphere, with easy access for all to the top management — another factor that is a make-or-break in today's aviation landscape. I will end here by saying that if the airline continues determinedly on this path, India's flying public can hope for light at the end of the duopoly tunnel that the sector seems to have entered.

Anjuli Bhargava writes about governance, infrastructure, and the social sector. The views expressed are personal

{ CELESTE SAULO } SECRETARY-GENERAL, WORLD METEOROLOGICAL ORGANISATION

The world's water resources are under growing pressure and, at the same time, more extreme water-related hazards are impacting lives



GST reforms will leave a wonderful aftertaste

In his Independence Day address, Prime Minister Narendra Modi committed to next-generation Goods and Services Tax (GST) reforms by Diwali. From September 22, that promise will show up in grocery bills nationwide. This is the essence of these changes: It's a relief you can taste. The reforms build on continuity. GST created a single national market and revenue stability. With that foundation in place, the simplified rate structure centres on two slabs — the 5% and 18% ones. Ultra-pasteurised milk, packaged paneer and all common Indian breads are at 0% GST. Most processed foods, including biscuits, *namkeens*, breakfast cereals, and coffee, are at 5%. Key packaging, such as cartons and moulded paper trays, is also at 5%. The intent is to keep food affordable, provide clearer classification and rate certainty, and allow industries to focus on scale and quality. Crucially, these changes arrive as India's food sector enters a historic expansion, driven by rising incomes, urbanisation and a young, health- and convenience-seeking population. For households, the payoff is immediate. A wide basket at 0% or 5% lowers monthly spend without asking families to compromise on hygiene or nutrition. Lower indirect tax on everyday foods leaves more disposable income each month where it matters most — the recurring grocery basket. As competition adjusts prices, consumers can expect more choice in fortified, ready-to-cook and ready-to-eat options that fit modern routines. For MSMEs, a cleaner rate structure shrinks the arbitrage between informal and formal operations. Formalisation becomes a business decision rather than a leap of faith. A predictable 5% output tax, along with input tax credits, improves margins and cash cycles. The result is better bankability, cleaner contracts with organised retail and the confidence to serve larger geographies. This simplification also standardises contracts and pricing and speeds credit cycles, which helps MSMEs build inventory for peak demand and reduce stock-outs. Food processing ties incomes of farmers to the nation's nutrition. Affordable processed foods lift year-round offtake of milk, grains, fruits and spices, reducing wastage and supporting better price realisation. When processing across categories finds growth viable at the revised rates, primary producers benefit through predictable procurement, faster payments and more contracts with farmer pro-

ducer organisations and cooperatives. This creates a dependable flow from procurement to retail, making farm-to-factory-to-fork a reality. Predictability attracts capital. Two slabs and a simplified GST schedule reduce planning risk for domestic and global firms. A stable 5% on most processed foods improves India's cost position for co-manufacturing, private-label production and export-oriented lines. Lower tax on standard packaging trims unit costs and simplifies pricing decisions. This positions industry for capacity expansions, brownfield upgrades and new plants in districts that were not previously on investor shortlists. For exports and Brand India, lower costs translate into sharper prices. The lower, simplified rates on most processed foods and packaging improve price points and simplify paperwork — making snacks, condiments, ready-to-cook items and dairy derivatives more competitive abroad. Some may note revenue foregone in the short term. However, it is better viewed as a strategic investment in growth. It is an investment in India's households, whose increased purchasing power will drive demand; in our industries, which will reinvest savings in capacity, innovation and jobs; and in our nation's future, where the long-term dividends of growth, jobs and exports outweigh initial fiscal costs. When MSMEs formalise, more transactions move into the GST net, widening the tax base and boosting collections. The GST reforms will drive four major transformations in the food processing sector. First, they will democratise demand by making processed food affordable for a larger section of society. Second, they will help MSMEs formalise, finance and expand. Third, they will drive innovation, encouraging companies to launch healthier, tastier and more convenient products. Fourth, they will strengthen India's edge in global markets, enabling food exports to grow and Indian brands to become household names worldwide. This is why the current GST changes must be seen not as a technical adjustment but as a bold reform that embodies the government's commitment to ease of living, ease of doing business and ease of investing. They reflect our belief that when we simplify systems, empower industries and put people first, India does not just grow, it transforms.



Chirag Paswan

Chirag Paswan is Union minister of food processing industries. The views expressed are personal



The Indian flying public should rejoice that Akasa Air now shows promise of becoming a strong number three in a market that is veering towards a duopoly.

SHUTTERSTOCK

Monsoon pulse

Excess rain dampens pulses output prospects

India’s pulses output has been flat in recent years, not least due to the damaging effects of excessive rain, including late monsoon bursts. As reported by this newspaper, such excessive rain is likely to impact both the yields and quality of output of urad (black matpe) and moong (green gram) this year in key growing States such as Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka and Maharashtra. Tur (pigeon pea) output has not been hit as yet, but any late burst of rain in Karnataka, the key growing State, could create difficulties.



While there is no cause for alarm on the prices front now, as pulses imports are by and large duty-free and global output is robust, these output and yield uncertainties have once again brought to the fore India’s rising import dependency in pulses. Pulses imports at 6.8 million tonnes in FY25 were at a nine-year high. While the FY26 Budget has sought to push production in pulses through a procurement drive, there are several systemic issues to be addressed here. Pulses output rose from 16.3 million tonnes (mt) in 2015-16 to a high of 27.3 mt in 2021-22, only to taper off since then to 25.2 million tonnes in 2024-25. Given the rising population as well as endemic protein deficiency, this is a disconcerting situation. The government announced handsome increases in support prices to push up output after 2016, but a host of factors have stalled the initial interest in growing pulses in rainfed regions. Maize is emerging as the preferred dryland food crop.

Procurement agencies for pulses are unable to shore up market prices, perhaps because they are unsure of handling stocks. Pulses have a lower shelf life than foodgrains, and are prone to pest attacks. Maize, in contrast, has an assured demand owing to its varied industrial uses. The push for a better cooperative marketing framework in pulses is to be welcomed, because the production of most varieties is concentrated in a few States, whereas their main markets are distant. For example, urad is largely grown in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan but its demand lies in the southern States. Tur is in demand everywhere, but cultivated largely in Karnataka. Food processing initiatives to take care of stocks can be envisaged. It is, however, a fact that such steps have not visibly taken off the ground all these years. After all, pulses are grown largely in rainfed tracts, by small farmers who do not have a voice.

What makes matters worse for such growers, and even consumers, is that there is no clear information on the stocks of pulses — quite unlike the data availability in this respect for wheat and rice. It is perhaps a bit unfair to blame imports alone for poor farmgate realisation, when market information is scarce. Producers need better prices as well as yields. Since pulses are vulnerable to water retention, agriculture scientists need to come up with a response — particularly when erratic or late monsoon surges have become the norm. India’s pulses output must cross 30 mt soon. It is a nutritional imperative.

POCKET

RAVIKANTH



ANJU VIRMANI
REKHA HARISH
TCA AVNI

The GST Council’s recent decision to raise tax rates on ultra-processed and sugar sweetened beverages (SSB) marks a decisive step in India’s battle against preventable lifestyle diseases. The GST rate has been raised from 28 per cent to 40 per cent on aerated waters containing sugar, fruit-based carbonated drinks, and caffeinated beverages; and 18 per cent to 40 per cent on other non-alcoholic beverages. Fiscal measures such as high taxes are not about “punishing choice” but about correcting a market imbalance where the true social costs of consumption are often hidden. By imposing “sin taxes” on sodas, iced teas, energy drinks, and similar products at the highest slab, the Government has sent a strong message: India’s health comes first.

Efforts to regulate industries with harmful social consequences are never easy. Debates around the Promotion and Regulation of Online Gaming Act, 2025— which cracked down on money-gaming platforms — illustrate this challenge. Critics complained about “nanny state” overreach, loss of jobs, and the risk of an underground economy, while ignoring or underplaying the counterfactual: the devastating toll of unregulated markets on public welfare, whether through addiction, financial exploitation, or ill-health.

The same logic applies to sugary drinks, which are aggressively marketed and easily accessible (especially to children), even as ample evidence mounts about their devastating health consequences. A 2019 study in *The BMJ* showed that consuming more than four servings per day of ultra-processed food (UPF) increased the risk of all-cause mortality by 62 per cent. A 2023 study in *Lancet* reported that SSB and processed meats contributed the most to risks for cancer and cardio-metabolic diseases. The addictive properties of sugar, coupled with heavy advertising, make SSB particularly insidious. Unlike natural foods, these products are designed for “bliss points” that maximise repeat consumption.

INCREASING OBESITY

The costs — rising obesity, Type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, early deaths — fall not on corporations, but on families and public health systems. India is being visibly devastated by increasing obesity and its serious health and economic consequences, especially in children and adolescents. The trend is higher among the lower socio-economic sections, who are least able to cope with the consequences. ICMR-NIN Dietary Guidelines (2024) reveal the enormity



PICHUMANI K

Sin tax on sugary drinks, a healthy step

CORRECTIVE MOVE. The tax, which embeds the true social cost into the price, along with nutritional warning on labels and curbs on misleading ads will help improve public welfare

of the challenge: over 56 per cent of India’s disease burden is linked to unhealthy diets. Therefore, public health advocates have long championed the need for “sin taxes” on UPF (including SSB) which contribute little nutritionally but cause enormous harm. WHO, repeatedly emphasising that humans require no added sugar for nutrition, has observed that raising SSB prices by at least 20 per cent would proportionately reduce consumption.

The urgent need for action is reinforced by our consumption data. A recent PM Economic Advisory Council working paper analysing Household Consumption Expenditure Survey data, documented rising household spending on packaged processed foods across all income classes: for the bottom 20 per cent of rural households, expenditure share rose from 3.2 per cent (2011-12) to 5.5 per cent (2022-23); for bottom 20 per cent of urban areas: from 3.7 per cent to 6.4 per cent; for top 20 per cent rural households: from 4.7 per cent to 6.9 per cent; for top 20 per cent urban households: from 6.1 per cent to 8.2 per cent. This worrying diffusion of UPF into India’s dietary fabric imposes massive costs on family well-being, healthcare systems, and productivity.

The bold step taken by the GST Council aligns well with India’s

nutrition and health strategies to counter this. Raising taxes is not a revenue measure, it is a public health intervention. Standing against predictable industry pushback, the Government has signalled that India values its citizens’ long-term health over the short-term profits of corporations, affirming its commitment to Swasth Bharat, repeatedly emphasised by Prime Minister Modi. It reinforces the ongoing emphasis on promoting healthier diets, encouraging production and consumption of wholesome foods like millets and other organic produce.

SUGAR BOARDS

Flagship programmes like Poshan 2.0, Pradhan Mantri Poshan Shakti Nirman (PM-POSHAN), and the Eat Right India campaign have been scaled up to expand access to nutritious food and build awareness around balanced eating. To ensure nutritional awareness among the most vulnerable age group, the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights recently mandated sugar boards: informational displays in cafeterias and other common spaces in all schools, aiming to educate students about the risks of excessive sugar intake, and suggest healthier alternatives. By consistently improving health literacy, making healthy options affordable, and discouraging the consumption of harmful UPF, India is shaping a healthier future.

In this backdrop, taxation is a powerful corrective, embedding the true social cost of SSB into their price to empower consumers to make healthier choices and nudge markets towards

more responsible product innovation. However, more course correction is needed to tackle UPF in general, with emphasis on safer consumption of other nutrients of concern i.e., salt and fat, particularly in pre-packaged foods. Modi exhorting Indians to reduce cooking oil by 10 per cent is a welcome step. NAPI has been emphasising the need for stringent Front-of-Package Labelling (FOPL) nutrition warnings which surpass language barriers, and increased GST on foods high in fat, sugar and salt.

Tax corrections on foods are extremely difficult to implement, even in high income countries; in India the concerns over interfering with earnings of small-scale and cottage industries/ women/farmers make it an even more fraught task. However, this year’s Economic Survey has strongly recommended FOPL warnings, strengthening consumer protection efforts, tightening marketing regulations, and stronger curbs on misleading advertisements especially targeted at children.

International experience, from Chile to Mexico, has shown that taxation works best when combined with visible warnings and ongoing education. As part of multi-pronged efforts, this reform could mark the beginning of a generational shift in India’s dietary and health landscape.

Virmani is Director, Pediatric Endocrinology, Max Smart & Rainbow Children’s Hospitals, New Delhi; Harish is Member, Nutrition Advocacy in Public Interest, and former Prof & Head of Paediatrics, Government Medical College, Jammu; and Avni is Asst. Media Advisor, Ministry of Finance, Govt of India

Can recycling sops energise battery businesses?

The scheme should focus on operating expense support, so that firms are incentivised to scale once material recovery begins

Bharti Krishnan
DB Prabhu

The Government has approved a ₹1,500 crore incentive scheme under the National Critical Minerals Mission to boost domestic recycling of lithium-ion batteries, e-waste, and other mineral-rich waste streams. Spread over six years, the scheme is designed to attract ₹8,000 crore of private investment, create 270,000 tonnes of annual recycling capacity, and yield 40,000 tonnes of critical minerals every year.

India’s demand for battery-grade critical minerals is just 800 tonnes in FY25 but is projected to surge to nearly 2.6 lakh tonnes by 2047 as EVs and clean energy scale up.

The subsidy is only for extraction of critical minerals and not for intermediate steps like black mass production. Large recyclers can receive up to ₹50 crore, smaller firms up to ₹25 crore, with support for both capital expenditure and operating expenditure. The question is: can this scheme catalyse India’s young battery recycling ecosystem and create billion-dollar businesses, the way Redwood Materials or Ascend Elements did in the US?

India’s battery recycling industry is less than five years old. Unlike other waste streams, where informal

operators dominate, recycling batteries needs both technology and capital, so the formal sector leads. But battery collection still happens largely through informal channels.

A handful of players are active today including Attero, Lohum Cleantech, BatX Energies, Mini Mines, Exigo, with total refined output of less than 200 tonnes per annum. Most stop at producing black mass (battery powder) and are running pilot plants to prove refining and metal extraction. Refining technology is well established globally, but going from lab to market is tough. Recyclers must handle many different battery chemistries, obtain above 90 per cent yield, and produce materials that meet the quality of virgin supply. The process is hazardous and fire-prone, so even small accidents can shut operations down.

Capital intensity is another barrier. Setting up a 5,000 tpa refining plant can cost north of ₹100 crore. Working capital is also heavy, since the gap between buying scrap and selling refined material can stretch to three months. Prices are volatile too as they track virgin minerals, not scrap prices, which makes margins uncertain.

The unit economics of refining, however, are far better than just selling black mass. For example, 1 kg of battery scrap costs ₹100–150. Two kilos of scrap



BATTERY RECYCLING. A nascent sector

yield one kilo of black mass, which sells for around ₹300/kg, leaving almost no margin. But if refined, that same kilo of black mass can yield about 20 grams of lithium, worth up to ₹300, plus nickel, cobalt, and copper adding another ₹380–680. This makes refining the real value driver.

VC INTEREST

Battery recycling solves two problems at once, handling growing battery waste and meeting mineral needs at home. That’s why the sector has already drawn venture capital. Lohum Cleantech has raised Series B funding, while BatX Energies, Metastable Materials, and Mini Mines have secured early-stage capital. Building refining plants requires more capital than VCs alone can provide. The likely path is that once startups show refining at scale, strategic

buyers like Reliance, Tata, Adani, Glencore, or CATL will step in.

Globally, there are many large recycling companies, both venture-backed unicorns and publicly listed. VC-backed unicorns include Redwood Materials in the US, which has raised more than \$3.8 billion to make cathode active material and copper foil, and Ascend Elements, which has raised \$1.5 billion and is building large CAM plants. Li-Cycle in Canada, once valued at \$1.6 billion, is now struggling due to cost overruns and technical issues at its Rochester facility.

Among publicly listed companies, Umicore in Belgium recycles catalysts, batteries, and e-waste to produce new materials, while GEM in China handles lithium-ion batteries, e-waste, and industrial scrap to produce cathode material and specialty alloys.

India’s new scheme should: Create a clear and transparent process for disbursing funds; focus more on operating expense support than capital expenditure, so companies are incentivised to scale once material recovery begins; provide a budget for R&D, open not only to recyclers but also to individuals and startups developing specialised technologies.

Krishnan, CFA, is founder FineTrain, and Prabhu is founder Respose Waste Management

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

Scale up AI

Apropos ‘India needs to step up its artificial intelligence game’ (September 18), the AI race is hotting up. The huge investments being made by countries such as the US and the UK should sound alarm bells in India. India has missed the initial race of developing LLMs and Generative AI. The country needs to encourage software companies and start-ups in scaling up their efforts to expand AI infrastructure and innovate, and also invite global tech companies to make big investments here. Else, India will remain an

exporter of talent, which will power the AI development in the West. India needs to leverage its top talent, to innovate and propel the country to the forefront in the AI race.

Kosaraju Chandramouli
Hyderabad

US-India trade talks

This refers to the editorial ‘Fresh winds’ (September 18). There has been some positive vibes coming from the US in resuming the bilateral trade talks with India. The US trade team must also take cognisance of India’s recent efforts

in curtailing the quantum of imports of Russian oil and initiate steps in lifting the unilateral penalty levied of 50 per cent tariff imposed on India. Also, the US must not bring in new rules and policies while trade talks are on.

RV Baskaran
Pune

Judicial uncertainty

This has reference to ‘New chapter in bankruptcy law’ (September 18). While the ruling on the IBC may seem flexible, it could seriously undermine the Code’s core objective: timely resolution. Allowing

creditors to file documents after a delay risks prolonging the already-burdened tribunal process, creating an environment ripe for further litigation and strategic manoeuvring. This judicial discretion can introduce uncertainty and erode the confidence of stakeholders.

PD Sankaranarayanan
Kumaramputhur, Kerala

Capex vital

This refers to ‘Consumption to capex’ (September 18). The GST reforms, which come into effect on September 22, should boost

consumption and investment demand and thereby employment, income, output in the Indian economy. However, if inventories are more than anticipated in firms, then the additional consumption demand will not stimulate fresh investment or employment. Also, if companies wish to enhance savings or retained earnings, their investments will be affected. Hence there should be sustained increase in capital expenditure from both the public and private sectors.

S Ramakrishnasayee
Chennai

Carbon meets capital

India-Japan pact can redefine climate diplomacy

Anil Trigunayat
Kaviraj Singh

When India and Japan signed their first Memorandum of Cooperation (MoC) under Article 6.2 of the Paris Agreement earlier this month, it was the first time India formally entered international carbon credit trading. For Japan, this marks its 31st Joint Crediting Mechanism (JCM) partnership. For India, it is the beginning of a new economic and climate diplomacy frontier.

The India-Japan JCM opens a pathway for project developers, industries, and investors to generate and trade emission reduction credits across borders. With the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC) finalising a detailed list of eligible activities, the market now has a clear playbook. For the first time, Indian businesses know where opportunities lie and how they can participate in global carbon finance flows.

In the short term, the agreement lowers the cost of green technology deployment in India, thanks to Japanese financial support, technology transfer, and capacity building. In the longer term, this partnership aligns with India's Net Zero 2070 pledge and NDC targets under the Paris Agreement, while simultaneously strengthening Japan's GX-ETS carbon trading system, set to fully launch in 2026.

THE RISKS

Yet, opportunities must be weighed against risks. The allocation of credits is one such challenge. India has its own domestic compliance carbon market in the making, and policymakers will have to carefully balance the export of credits under Article 6.2 with meeting national reduction commitments. Prolonged negotiations over revenue-sharing formulas and credit distribution could slow momentum.

Likewise, the operational complexity of Article 6 reporting — Initial Reports, Biennial Transparency Reports (BTRs), and registry alignment with UNFCCC — requires a robust monitoring, verification, and transparency framework. Here, Japan's extensive experience with its 30 other JCM partners could help India avoid early pitfalls, but it will also require deliberate institutional strengthening at home.

The establishment of India's National Designated Authority for



GREEN AGENDA. Setting the template ISTOCKPHOTO

Article 6 is a significant safeguard.

Strategically, the India-Japan partnership builds upon the broader Indo-Japan economic corridor — covering infrastructure, digital transformation, skill development, and green technologies. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, during his recent visit to Tokyo, underlined this synergy when he urged recreating the automobile success story in batteries, robotics, semiconductors, and green energy. Carbon markets can provide the financial underpinning to accelerate precisely these sectors.

For Indian businesses, the timing is fortuitous. With its abundant renewable potential, strong IT backbone, and growing expertise in MRV (monitoring, reporting, and verification), India could emerge as one of the world's largest suppliers of Article 6-compliant credits. But to do so, project developers and industries must move quickly, leveraging the clarity of eligible activities and the policy momentum now in place.

For Japan, this partnership secures a reliable pipeline of credits to balance its own commitments while deepening its green investment footprint in India. For India, it provides finance, technology, and global market access, while signalling that climate diplomacy can create win-win outcomes for both partners.

The bigger picture is clear. If implemented well, the India-Japan JCM could become a model for other bilateral partnerships under Article 6, positioning India as not just a participant, but a rule-shaper in global carbon markets. If bogged down by delays in regulation, weak verification systems, or poor credit allocation mechanisms, however, it risks becoming a cautionary tale. The difference lies in execution.

Trigunayat, a retired IFS officer, has served as the trade commissioner in New York; Singh is CEO & Director, Earthood

Big tech: Break 'em up or not?

ANTITRUST MOVE. US District Court verdict raps Google's dominance, but exercises moderation



ATANU BISWAS

In early September, a US District Court judge rendered a historic verdict favouring Google. In a 2020 "antitrust" lawsuit, the US Department of Justice (DOJ) and several States claimed Google had unfairly excluded rivals from the search engine market by making exclusive contracts with manufacturers such as Apple and Samsung.

According to the DOJ, Google used "anticompetitive tactics" to retain and grow its monopolies in search and search advertising for years, accounting for 90 per cent of all search queries in America.

In August 2024, the same judge ruled that Google violated Section 2 of the Sherman Act and held a monopoly with its search engine and related advertising. The DOJ demanded the termination of Google's multibillion-dollar contracts with Apple and other partners and advocated the sale of Google's popular Chrome browser and potentially its Android operating system.

In his present verdict, Judge Amit Mehta ordered Google to share data from its search engine with its competitors. Additionally, he prohibited Google from entering into or upholding exclusive distribution agreements for its products, such as Chrome, Google Assistant, and the Gemini app. However, he permitted Google to compensate

distributors like Apple and Mozilla for using Google as the default search engine in their respective browsers. Also, phone makers are allowed to promote other search engines.

GOOGLE'S DOMINANCE

Over the years, Google's dominance in the online search and advertising industries has infuriated proponents of free markets. They argue that the judge missed a chance to make a significant impact in a sector that has been suffocated by its biggest player.

The word "antitrust" has regained prominence recently. Today, three chemical companies control the supply of seeds and pesticides, which affects global agriculture; roughly 10 pharmaceutical companies control the manufacturing and distribution of the world's medicine; and a few tech giants govern every aspect of our lifestyles.

As history demonstrates, the emergence of populism, nationalism, radical politicians, and fascist governments may result from an inability to curb excessive corporate power.

Tim Wu, a professor at Columbia University, described in his 2018 book

Judge Mehta makes it apparent that he was reluctant to intervene in a field that is constantly changing due to AI advancements

The Curse of Bigness: Antitrust in the New Gilded Age how President Theodore Roosevelt and jurist Louis Brandeis dealt with the democratic dangers posed by the great trusts of the Gilded Age in American history, when a small number of businesses, or "trusts," controlled important infrastructure, such as railroads. The Sherman Antitrust Act of 1890 was passed but remained dormant for a decade until Theodore Roosevelt "activated" it.

The time is now to control economic structure before it controls us, argued Tim Wu. Also, Zephyr Teachout, an activist and anti-corruption scholar, believes that monopolies like Facebook, Google, and Bayer are undermining American democracy. However, Teachout has a solution: Break 'Em Up, the title of his 2020 book, "Foreword"ed by Bernie Sanders.

Many trustbusters, like Teachout, had long urged "breaking" Google's monopolistic practices to restore meaningful competition.

They claim that the present verdict will now establish a precedent and retrench Google's supremacy. But the court verdict is different.

Tim Sweeney, the CEO of Epic Games, said on X, "It's like a defendant robbed a number of banks and the court verdict found them guilty, then sentenced them to probation under which they may continue robbing banks but must share data on how they rob banks with competing bank robbers." Massachusetts' Senator Elizabeth Warren also remarked, "This ruling is a slap on the wrist for unlawful behaviour

that warranted the breakup of this tech giant." Overall, Google could escape for now. Understandably, Wall Street and Silicon Valley applauded. Interestingly, DOJ hailed the verdict as a "win" and referred to Mehta's suggested solutions as "significant," although it was well short of their demand.

THE AI FACTOR

If, however, it appears to be Google's "win," it might be due to some of its most formidable competitors: Judge Mehta makes it apparent that he was reluctant to intervene in a field that is constantly changing due to AI advancements, with companies such as OpenAI making Google defensive. In the verdict, he states that the emergence of AI "changed the course of this case." He acknowledged that the court is asked to gaze into a crystal ball and look to the future, which is "not exactly a judge's forte."

Incidentally, DOJ made its filing during Trump's first term. Perhaps one of the few bipartisan issues in today's "divided" United States is "antitrust." Under Biden's administration, prosecutors persisted with the case. Now, some States may file an appeal against Justice Mehta's ruling, and Google has stated that it intends to appeal also. And, for now, it's clear that despite the rapid changes in the AI-driven landscape, Google's stronghold was not breached because the verdict didn't "break 'em up."

The writer is Professor of Statistics, Indian Statistical Institute, Kolkata

Potential of cooked food distribution in UP

Kushankur Dey
Kriti Bardhan Gupta

Nutritional security of the child and mother gained traction in the National Nutrition Mission or Poshan. To this end, Take-Home Ration (THR), a pillar of the Supplementary Nutrition Programme of the Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS), offers fortified, calorie-counted, ready-to-cook, or ready-to-eat products to children and pregnant and lactating women.

While an annual expenditure of more than ₹13,500 crores, shared between the States and centre, has been spent on serving the THR to beneficiaries, their operational efficiency and financial viability remain a significant concern.

A study by Schwarz et al. (2018) suggests several areas of improvement, including recipe composition and formulation, production and distribution, and monitoring and accountability.

We further delve into these issues, considering the case of Uttar Pradesh, where women SHGs manage THR units under the aegis of the State Rural Livelihood Mission and the World Food

Programme. Since 2022–23, more than 200 THR microenterprise units have covered over a million beneficiaries in 40-odd districts of UP.

FINDINGS

First, the State follows a decentralized, women SHG-led model with localized production to enhance community participation and women's empowerment. Compared with best practices in Kerala, Odisha, Gujarat, and Telangana, UP lags in digital tracking, quality assurance systems, and community-based monitoring mechanisms. The state's THR units perform well according to national nutritional standards, such as the recommended dietary allowances of the National Nutrition Mission; however, they lack diversity and customization.

Second, procurement remains fragmented, with varying prices and quality of raw materials prevailing across districts. Many units rely on a limited number of suppliers and lack buffer stock management.

Third, economic viability assessment reveals that several THR recipes, such as Atta Besan Barfi premix for pregnant and lactating women and En-



FOOD SCHEME. Need for tweaks

ergy-Dense Halwa (EDH) for SAM children, are not profitable, and their share in the product mix is minimal. In contrast, the major contributory product is Atta Besan Halwa premix for 3 to 6-year-old children. The negative contribution margins of EDH and Atta Besan Barfi premix compel THR plants to depend on viability gap funds. Delayed invoice payments, fixed pricing on THR recipes, and outdated cost structures affect the financial viability of THR units.

Fourth, the energy-dense halwa improves weight gain and physical activity for most SAM beneficiaries. However, dry rations like dal and chana are preferred over EDH, as the taste of EDH is a constraint on acceptability.

Fifth, the fixed-term monthly wage

system seems to have transformed women's lives and livelihoods, while workplace safety, insurance coverage, leave entitlements, and increment-based remuneration call for policy attention.

We propose a few policy suggestions. First, district-level e-tendering platforms involving women SHGs and community-based organizations must be developed to procure raw materials.

Second, common machinery leasing centres can overcome the shortcomings of production facilities. The hub and spoke model can make the THR supply chain effective in that the hub must maintain at least a two-week buffer stock.

Third, the ICDS department, in association with the state rural livelihood mission, needs to internalize inflation-adjusted raw material costs into product prices.

Fourth, performance-linked solarization support and monthly training programmes for women working in the plant on hygiene, food safety, and machine handling can improve THR operational efficacy.

Dey and Gupta are Associate Professors of IIM Lucknow. Views expressed are personal.

thehindubusinessline.

TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

September 19, 2005

India set to forge energy alliances across S. Asia

India is looking at the possibility of emerging as a regional energy hub in South Asia. It has plans to set up bilateral grids with some of the neighbouring countries and forge sectoral alliances with others. While a strengthening of the existing grids with Nepal and Bhutan is being planned, bilateral electricity interconnections with Myanmar for exchange of power is high up on the agenda.

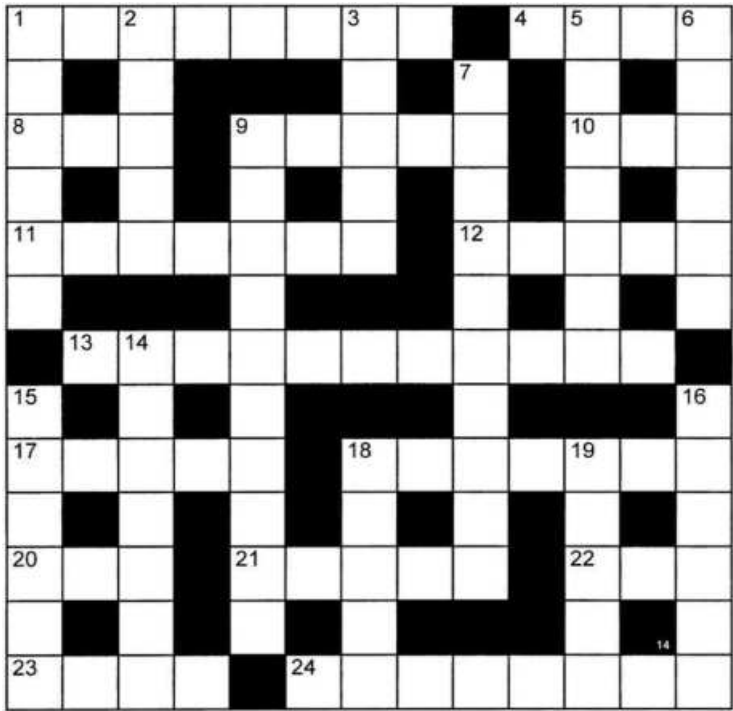
IFFCO in Rs 2,180-cr deal to acquire Oswal Chem units

The Indian Farmers Fertiliser Co-operative Ltd (IFFCO) will acquire the diammonium phosphate (DAP), nitrogen phosphorus potash (NPK) and phosphoric acid facilities of Oswal Chemicals and Fertilisers Ltd in Paradeep for Rs 2,180 crore.

TRAI rejects move to issue directive on access charge

The Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) has rejected the Union Government's move to issue a policy directive on the Access Deficit Charge, saying that it would have a "definite" effect on the regulator's independence. TRAI has told the Government that such a move would shake the confidence of the investors in the telecom market.

BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2786



EASY

ACROSS

- Flying-machine (8)
- Decorate with ribbons etc (4)
- To wit, namely (abbr) (3)
- Five-shilling piece (5)
- Masculine address (3)
- Ornamental headdress (7)
- Something additional (5)
- Assumption, opinion (11)
- Type of bird; high waterproof boot (5)
- Curious (7)
- Grain, whisky (3)
- Rabble (5)
- Firearm (3)
- Simple (4)
- Got the better of (8)

DOWN

- Specially skilled opinion (6)
- Shaving device (5)
- Be buoyant (5)
- Italian rice dish (7)
- A human being (6)
- Unrestrained (10)
- A plot (10)
- Remove clothing (7)
- Deviate from course (6)
- Wrote; enclosed (6)
- Cooking, heating apparatus (5)
- Darkness (5)

NOT SO EASY

ACROSS

- It flies out of rift a car creates (8)
- Neat half of a triple-hulled craft (4)
- In short, to wit, six go to zoo opening (3)
- Larger form of 11 for five bob (5)
- A knight's honorific for a schoolmaster (3)
- Toe affected by corn when it's worn on top (7)
- Something in addition to tax re-established (5)
- Assumption of various pious points (11)
- Snipe, say, at a high boot (5)
- Street on a stretch of open country is not known to one (7)
- Every enquiry needs this sort of grass (3)
- Mob will sound exultant on the day (5)
- Rev up noisily and one may be fired (3)
- It isn't difficult to put a yes in such a way (4)
- Beaten by fate, perhaps? Indeed! (8)

DOWN

- Counsel giving VC idea of change (6)
- It cuts the below that arises about the last letter (5)
- Milkman's vehicle won't go under (5)
- Rice dish to stir, too, in such a way (7)
- One who will die for malt, or blend of it (6)
- Not bound to break tenet Freud formulated (10)
- A plot that cheats robbery on the high seas (10)
- Sort of uniform one will take off (7)
- Do time around the West, but don't go straight (6)
- Was an author shut in? (6)
- Heating apparatus one broke up (5)
- Thing to be altered between dusk and dawn (5)

SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2785

ACROSS 1. Fictional 5. Dew 7. Soap 8. Agitated 10. Overseer 11. Thaw 13. Natter 15. Window 18. Jack 19. Stripper 22. Initials 23. Plea 24. Tie 25. Condiment

DOWN 1. Festoon 2. Crave 3. Nugget 4. Late 5. Ditched 6. Widow 9. Usher 12. Civil 14. Tactile 16. Warrant 17. Stolon 18. Joist 20. Pulse 21. Fisc



Troubled transition

Interim government in Nepal must resist illegitimate demands

After violent protests that left 74 dead, Nepal's elected government has fallen, with its Parliament dissolved and former jurist Sushila Karki leading an interim government until the 2026 elections. While the Gen Z protesters had legitimate grievances including poor governance, entrenched corruption and intolerance of critical views, seen in the ousted CPN-UML-led government's banning of 23 social media websites – the transition itself was blatantly unconstitutional, violating Article 76 of Nepal's 2015 Constitution which permits dissolution only after failed Prime Minister appointments. Yet, considering the exigent circumstances, there is little purchase for judicial review of the steps taken last week. Notably, the President did not dissolve the upper house, the National Assembly. More troubling were the protesters' egregious actions which included burning Parliament and the Supreme Court (destroying vital documents). Nepal is expected to suffer severe economic losses besides governance issues due to the destruction of property and documents. The targeting of democratic institutions suggests an assault on Nepal's post-Constitutional order – institutions established after the painstaking constitution-writing process that followed the much-needed ending of a decade-long civil war in 2006, overcoming an anachronistic and discredited monarchy and which included marginalised sections beyond Kathmandu valley's power structures – even if there was half-hearted or ineffective implementation of the Constitution's spirit and letter.

The interim government must bring the criminals to justice as any inaction will lead to a normalisation of violence threatening all institutions that were set up to fulfil the promises of deeper democratisation and Nepal's transformation into a republic. Even if Gen Z protesters claim that impostors carried out the violence, their continued reliance on online forums, such as Discord, for decision-making reveals immaturity and an unrepresentative nature. The reliance on online forums, which feature anonymity, frivolity and impersonation, and the fact that there is no guarantee that these views are representative of the many marginalised groups suggest that giving into the demands from these unaccountable groups uncritically could be hazardous. The failures of mainstream leaders – the K.P. Sharma Oli-Sher Bahadur Deuba-Pushpa Kamal Dahal troika and their coteries – cannot justify discrediting democracy or the polity itself, as some protesters have made it out to be, echoing anti-social and destructive pro-monarchic elements. One outcome is that the entrenched leadership of mainstream parties could be compelled by party members to give way to fresh blood. Meanwhile, the interim government must protect Nepal's institutions and constitutional achievements while building the stage for free and fair elections – this is the surest path to safeguarding the promise of a democratic, plural and republican “Naya Nepal”.

Holistic approach

India needs a multi-pronged strategy to deal with stubble burning

The Supreme Court of India has broached the possibility of prosecuting farmers, caught setting fire to their fields, to prepare for winter sowing or *rabi* crop. ‘Stubble burning’ is a major contributor to air pollution in Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Haryana, particularly in October and November, when the southwest monsoon has receded and adverse meteorological conditions trap toxic particulate matter emissions from vehicles, industry, garbage burning and agricultural waste. While the causes and the ways to reduce particulate matter pollution from agriculture are known, the efforts by the Centre to tackle the long-standing problem have been half-hearted. The creation of the Commission for Air Quality Management (CAQM), a central body with the power to reach out across the borders of Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan, was a positive step and an acknowledgement that air pollution in one State cannot be tackled without the cooperation of others. However, the four-year-old statutory body has failed to exercise its powers in a manner that is independent of political pressure. Take the example of its recent order to ban the sale of petrol and diesel in the National Capital Region to ‘end-of-life’ vehicles, from July 1. A public outcry in Delhi and its political leaders – largely on technical grounds – and the Court's intervention, forced its implementation to November this year, that too beginning with parts of the NCR that are not a part of the Delhi municipalities. In stubble burning too, the CAQM has not been able to impress upon the judiciary that stubble burning was due to recalcitrant farmers, limited enforcement by Punjab and Haryana and the structure of agricultural economics that left the average, debt-ridden farmer with little choice. In recent years, it has emerged that Punjab has been claiming a reduction in farm fires when it was in fact increasing. The CAQM chose not to disclose this.

In the absence of a transparent mechanism to evaluate and address an issue and being cowed down by imagined political repercussions, it is not surprising that suggestions such as to “jail farmers” to act as a deterrent to others are being bandied about. While no section of citizens – farmer or industrialist – can be considered to be above the law, creating better incentives, enforcing existing laws and being transparent about what is realistically achievable are more advisable steps than ‘carrot and stick’ approaches.

The publication, in February 2024, of a household consumption survey by the National Sample Survey (NSS) Office, after a gap of over a decade, has made it possible to estimate the poverty rate in India. One such estimate, released by the World Bank in April 2025, has received the most attention. It points to the poverty rate being very low by now. To quote the World Bank, “Over the past decade, India has significantly reduced poverty. Extreme poverty (living on less than \$2.15 per day) fell from 16.2 percent in 2011-12 to 2.3 percent in 2022-23....” (‘Poverty and Equity Brief: INDIA’, 2025). If this is indeed an accurate description, it would be a source of satisfaction, for it suggests that extreme poverty has virtually disappeared from the country.

The ‘thali meal’ as a consumption metric
The conventional approach to poverty measurement, pioneered by the Government of India over half a century ago, entails first determining the income that would enable food intake of a specified caloric value, and then classifying those with less as poor. This is a physiological approach, and has some merit. But there could be other approaches, based on the consumption of goods, for instance. One such approach would recognise that humans are likely to approach food from an angle wider than just its calorie content, taking into account the energy it provides, which calories measure, nourishment, and the satisfaction it gives. We believe the *thali* meal reflects this thinking, making it a natural choice to measure food consumption in real terms.

As a combination of carbohydrates, protein and vitamins, the *thali* is a balanced and self-contained unit of food consumption in south Asia, even if the nomenclature may vary across it. With this in mind, we have estimated the number of *thalis* the monthly expenditure reported in the Household Consumption Expenditure Survey of 2024 would translate into. The rating agency, Crisil, has estimated the cost of a home-cooked *thali*, comprising rice, *dal*, vegetables, *roti*, curd and salad, as ₹30. Adopting this price, we found that in 2023-24, up to 50% of the rural population and up to 20% of the urban population could not have afforded two *thalis* per day at the food expenditure recorded. If two *thalis* a day is taken as the minimum acceptable standard of food consumption, our estimates point to much greater food deprivation in India than conveyed by the poverty figures from the World Bank.

A crucial reason why our findings differ is that



Pulapre Balakrishnan

is Honorary Visiting Professor, Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram



Aman Raj

is an independent economist based in Patna, Bihar

Expanding the Public Distribution System to ensure desirable levels of consumption of pulses by eliminating subsidies for those whose food consumption exceeds a reasonable norm will be an ideal step

we do not assume that all of a household's income is available for spending on food. A household needs to spend on rent, transportation, telephony, health maintenance and education to just remain in the workforce. Now, expenditure on food ends up as the residual. Therefore, we have based our estimates on the actual expenditure on food.

It tends to be assumed that the Public Distribution System (PDS) deals effectively with food deprivation. To assess this, we have computed the value of food consumption including the imputed value of supplies received via the PDS – both purchased and free of cost. With the value of consumption thus adjusted, the proportion of the population that cannot afford two *thalis* declines to 40% in rural areas and 10% in urban areas. Notably, food deprivation remains very high in the former even with subsidised food.

The role of PDS

To understand how the PDS can be leveraged to alleviate food deprivation, we estimated the subsidy per person across expenditure classes. What is interesting is that both PDS purchases and free food availed of by sections of the population that can afford more than two *thalis* a day are high. For instance, in rural India, the subsidy received by an individual in the 90%-95% fractile is 88% of the subsidy received by an individual in 0%-5% fractile, even as the first has a consumption expenditure more than three times greater, and going by our own *thali* index does not require further support. By contrast, in urban India, the subsidy regime is strongly progressive. But here too about 80% receive subsidised sales from the PDS and also free food, even when they too can afford more than two *thalis* per day.

Based on the data on food deprivation and the structuring of the food subsidy regime we make a proposal on how policy should evolve. This data point to what needs to be done and how it can be achieved. First, there is scope for restructuring the food subsidy, raising it at the lower end of the distribution and eliminating it altogether at the upper. However, we learn from the most recent consumption survey that there is a constraint to be faced: cereals consumption is almost identical for individuals in the 0%-5% fractile and the 95%-100% fractile.

This suggests that the desired level of consumption of cereals, both rice and wheat, has been reached, for the richest can afford to purchase all the cereals that they desire. While it points to the success of the PDS, in that it has

equalised the consumption of a staple food, at the same time, it points to the limits to using the PDS in its present form to end food deprivation. Not only has cereals consumption very likely reached its desired level across the population but also it constitutes only 10% of the average household's expenditure.

It is unreasonable, from considerations of both logistics and expense, to expect that a government can distribute the entire food basket to any section. There is a middle path though, and that is to expand the distribution of pulses through the PDS. In a further comparison of the consumption patterns at the two ends of the distribution, we find that unlike in the case of the cereals, the per capita consumption of pulses in the 0%-5% fractile is exactly half of that in the 95%-100% fractile.

Pulses consumption

The PDS can be leveraged to equalise the primary food consumption across the population. The expansion of the PDS to ensure desirable levels of consumption of pulses – for many Indians, the only source of protein and a very costly food item – is both desirable and feasible. The financial aspect can be addressed by restructuring the PDS. The per capita consumption of rice and wheat in the 0%-5% fractile implies that the PDS entitlement of rice and wheat is well above what is necessary for a significant number.

Expanding the subsidy regime to supply cereal to 80 crore people, as done by the central government in January 2024 and the particularly large entitlement of rice given to those below the poverty line in some States, do not reflect need. Also, they come at a cost to the economy, given the alternative uses of public funds. Trimming the current entitlement of cereals to levels indicated as needed by the recent consumption survey at the lower end of the distribution and eliminating it altogether at the upper end would also require lower stocking requirements for the Food Corporation of India, with substantial gains.

We have proposed an expansion of the PDS in the direction of the food most needed by the least well-off, namely pulses, accompanied by the elimination of subsidies for those whose food consumption exceeds a reasonable norm, such as two *thalis* a day. Right now, the PDS is both unwieldy and ineffective, as it spreads resources thin. Our proposal will render it compact, enabling the equalisation of primary food consumption in India by raising that of the poorest household to the highest level observed in the economy, a globally significant outcome.

India needs more focus to reach SDG 3, a crucial goal

In June this year, India secured its best-ever position in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Index, ranking 99 out of 167 nations in the 2025 edition of the SDG Report. This marked a significant improvement from its rank of 109 rank in 2024, reflecting steady progress since 2021. India has demonstrated advancement in areas such as access to basic services and infrastructure. Yet, the report also flagged pressing challenges in key sectors, particularly health and nutrition, where progress has been uneven, especially in rural and tribal communities.

There is still ground to be covered
In this backdrop, it is critical to ponder over SDG 3. Its goal is to “ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages”, and is one of the most crucial, yet demanding, goals in India's SDG journey. It encompasses specific targets that India has committed to achieve by 2030. Despite gains in some areas, the overall trajectory indicates that India is not on track in most targets. For example, the Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) – the number of mothers dying after childbirth per 100,000 live births – stands at 97 deaths per 100,000 live births, higher than the 2030 target of 70.

Even the under-five mortality rate remains at 32 deaths per 1,000 live births against the target of 25. In developed countries, it ranges between two and six deaths. Life expectancy now is only 70 years, falling short of the target of 73.63 years. Out-of-pocket health-care expenditure continues to burden families at 13% of total consumption, nearly double the targeted 7.83%. Even immunisation coverage, though commendably high at 93.23%, has not yet reached the universal target of 100%.

There are multiple reasons for these gaps. They include, first, lack of access to quality health care partially due to poor infrastructure and economic factors; second, non-economic factors such as poor nutrition, hygiene and sanitation and other lifestyle choices and, third, cultural



Rahul Mehra

is National Representative of India, UNESCO Chair for Global Health and Education, and Executive Chairman, Tarang Health Alliance

Compulsory health education in schools is one measure that can help close the gap

practices and stigma around physical and mental health. These cultural practices and limited awareness often prevent communities from accessing even the health-care services available to them.

If India is to accelerate progress on SDG Goal 3, a three-pronged approach is essential and one that focuses on treatment and prevention of diseases. The first is providing Universal Health Insurance to the population. World Bank studies show that countries with robust insurance systems have lowered catastrophic health-care expenditure while ensuring greater equity in access. The second is to have high-quality primary health centres across the country and coordination of primary, secondary and tertiary care.

The World Health Statistics 2022 by the World Health Organization highlights that strong primary systems help in detecting diseases earlier, reducing hospitalisation costs, and achieving better long-term outcomes. This will also require harnessing the transformative potential of digital health tools. Telemedicine and integrated digital health records can bridge access gaps, especially in rural and underserved regions. Evidence from the Lancet Digital Health Commission shows how digital platforms have improved maternal health care and vaccination tracking in several low and middle-income countries, offering lessons that India can adapt.

Health education at the school level

Prevention of diseases is more cost-effective than treating them. To prevent diseases, we need to provide health education to all schoolchildren. Children need to be educated about healthy nutrition, good hygiene and sanitation, reproductive health, road safety, and on mental health topics.

At this young age, they need to improve their health behaviour and not just their knowledge. The health habits they develop at this age will be maintained as they grow to be adults. When girls

become mothers, they will be more educated about their health and advocate this for themselves and their family. Over the long term, the school health education initiative has the potential to reduce MMR ratio, under-five mortality and deaths due to road accidents. At the same time, it can increase life expectancy and immunisation rates.

Finland's school-based health reforms in the 1970s, which wove lessons on nutrition, hygiene and lifestyle into the curricula, played a central role in reducing cardiovascular disease rates in the decades that followed. In Japan, compulsory health education has been linked to improved hygiene practices and longer life expectancy. A structured and progressive curriculum in India can achieve similar results.

Need for concerted actions

Therefore, closing the SDG gap requires action by policymakers to individual actions. Policymakers need to embed health education in school curricula while simultaneously investing in universal health coverage and primary health care.

All parents have an important role to play in the health education of youth. They can review their child's school curriculum and determine whether topics on physical, mental and social health are being covered. If not, they should push for it by communicating this to the department of education.

India's improved SDG ranking is encouraging. But it should not obscure the reality that only 17% of global SDG targets are currently on track to be achieved by 2030. Educating its youth about healthy behaviour, supported by stronger health-care systems, can act as the foundation for sustainable progress. And while 2030 is an important milestone to reach, the true vision lies further ahead – building a healthier and stronger India. A government that devotes its attention to embedding health education in school curricula can help achieve the goal of a Viksit Bharat 2047.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Jews and Israel today
The Jews have been the most persecuted race — the Holocaust is the darkest chapter in human history. Therefore, one would expect that the Jews would inherently imbibe qualities of empathy and tolerance, given their sufferings in the past. However, it seems that the oppressed have turned oppressor with renewed force. How else can one explain the atrocities that Israel is perpetrating in Gaza? Even today, German children are taught about

the shameful role that the Germans played in the annihilation of Jews during the World War, lest they forget. Similarly, let the people of Israel pause for a moment and rethink on how history will judge them for the genocide in Gaza. They may soon have to contend with the possibility that their victimisation during the Second World War will be relegated to the last pages of history in the aftermath of their actions. **Sharada Sivaram,** Kochi, Kerala

India's inexplicable and continued silence on the genocide in Gaza reflects its narrow-mindedness, and its strange unwillingness to challenge executive decisions on foreign policy. As the world grapples with the mounting toll of the Gaza conflict, India's role as a silent bystander is growing increasingly untenable. The Prime Minister of India and the External Affairs Minister may frame their diplomacy as pragmatic, but history will judge them as moral

failures. The cost of complicity — both for Palestine and for India's global standing — is far too high to ignore. The question now is whether India will continue down this path of strategic expediency or rediscover the courage to condemn the genocide in Gaza — which it ought to do so. The answer will shape not only the fate of Palestine but also India's legacy in the global order. **R. Sivakumar,** Chennai

A loyal BSNL customer
I have been a long-standing BSNL customer, for nearly 20 years. The only reason my family and I (nearly 75 members) have continued with BSNL is out of our conviction to support a Government of India enterprise and promote its services. We have encouraged others in our circle to use BSNL despite its known limitations. Although BSNL has officially launched eSIM, it is still not available in Kerala. Even more concerning is the

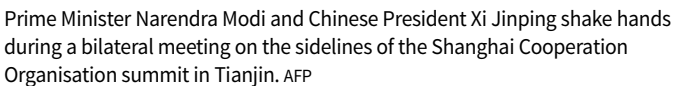
explanation by customer-care representatives — that eSIM facilities are not available for long-standing customers. This policy shows a disregard for loyal customers. In the absence of BSNL's rollout of eSIM services, I am left with no choice but to consider porting my number to another operator. **Akhil S. Karun,** Kochi, Kerala
Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the postal address.

Should India overlook boundary issues while normalising ties with China?



Earlier this month, Prime Minister Narendra Modi concluded his much-anticipated visit to China. Mr. Modi attended the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit and also held talks with Chinese President Xi Jinping on the sidelines of the summit. The two leaders decided to restart bilateral trade and air connectivity, and underlined the importance of peace and tranquility along the border. These decisions were significant as they were made five years after the deadly border clashes between the two neighbours in the Galwan Valley in Ladakh; and months after India launched Operation Sindoor against Pakistan (at the time, China supported the Pakistani military forces). Both leaders reaffirmed that the two countries were “development partners and not rivals, and their differences should not turn to disputes,” the Ministry of External Affairs said in a statement after the meeting. Should India overlook boundary issues while normalising ties with China? Vivek Katju and Antara Ghosal Singh discuss the question in a conversation moderated by **Kallol Bhattacharjee**. Excerpts:

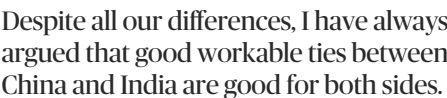
Vivek Katju: In 1988, during Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's visit to China, India and China decided to normalise ties in other sectors even as they attempted to resolve the border issue. In a way, this constituted a departure from the past. The crucial point was that peace and tranquility had to be maintained along the Line of Actual Control (LAC). While India wanted the border issue to be resolved (as part of normalising ties), China was more reluctant to do so (and wanted to set the issue aside for the time being). In the 1990s too, both countries agreed to maintain peace and tranquility (along the LAC). In 2020, the Galwan incident, which demonstrated China's aggressive approach, upset this arrangement. That didn't mean that there weren't previous incidents which constituted serious setbacks to the normalisation process, but those paled in comparison to what happened in 2020. In the last five years, both sides, through diplomatic and military arrangements, have tried to restore the system that prevailed in the 1990s. So, when you ask whether the border issue is holding us back, I think we had moved past that in 1988 and in the 1990s. And one last point: if you see the Indian and Chinese readouts of the Modi-Xi Jinping meeting at the SCO margins, you will find a distinct difference in how the two sides describe the salience of the border issue.



Antara Ghosal Singh: My understanding is that it is not an either-or situation. The overall positive turn in China-India ties is not really a sudden development or a knee-jerk reaction to the current turmoil in international politics or the recent downturn in India-U.S. ties. India-China relations have been showing signs of improvement since early last year. Both sides have been sending some positive signals towards each other. As I gather from Chinese sources, the 2024 Border Patrol Agreement was a key icebreaker. Since the Galwan clash of 2020, India has been consistently demanding that the Chinese Army withdraw to the pre-April 2020 positions and restore India's patrol rights in the disputed areas. From that perspective, India sees the restoration of patrolling points, even in Demchok and Depsang, as a diplomatic victory. Many Indian strategists have acknowledged this fact. Importantly, the Chinese side feels that they have not really suffered any loss in this agreement because it is a border patrol agreement and has nothing to do with the demarcation of sovereignty. The agreement means that two years after achieving disengagement at four places through the creation of non-patrolled buffer zones, now two more places, as demanded by the Indian side, are being disengaged through cross-patrolled buffer zones. That is the Chinese understanding from what I read.

Do you see a situation where the normalisation of relations could be disrupted by, say, a Galwan-2 in the distant future?

VK: Of course, that will disrupt relations – and disrupt them badly. In the Indian strategic community, China now looms large. China has always loomed large, but I think for historical



ANTARA GHOSAL SINGH

reasons, Pakistan occupied a principal place. But today, I do believe, despite Pakistani terror and despite China's consistent support for Pakistan, there is a realisation that China is India's main threat and will continue to be so. Now, there are new formulations that suggest that India and China can be partners and not rivals. What I understand is that China is aspiring for primacy in the world. It no longer considers India to be on par with it. It believes that India is just another South Asian country it has to deal with. If you see (Chinese Foreign Minister) Wang Yi's remarks, after his meeting with (Deputy Prime Minister of Pakistan) Ishaq Dar, that part is made clear. A journalist noted that Pakistan was the Minister's final stop after visiting three countries. Mr. Wang said it was the final stop – and the most important one. That speaks volumes.

There has been a shift in India's appreciation of China. But we cannot overlook the enormous infrastructure development, especially in the military area of the Tibetan Plateau. Why is this being done? And what will that lead to? It will lead to India having to spend a fair amount of its own financial resources in ensuring that the LAC infrastructure is fortified and that the LAC is well garrisoned throughout the year. I think that is also a Chinese objective.

I don't think it will be wrong for me to say that China shows no interest in really resolving the border issue. Yes, the special representatives are going to meet, but are they going to make any headway? What does the history of the last 30 years show? And why did Galwan happen? No one has been able to come up with an authoritative reason for why it happened.

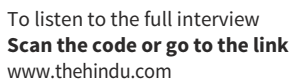
AGS: If you look at Chinese sources, you will find many theories (behind what prompted China's action in Galwan). The most popular one is the dilution of Article 370 (of Jammu and Kashmir; China protested against the move). Another argument is the competition between China and India in terms of manufacturing. It was during COVID-19 that the first round of the China-U.S. trade war took place and there was this feeling on the Chinese side that India was collaborating with the U.S. to take away China's position in the global supply chains. That caused a lot of panic within Chinese strategic circles. Ambassador Katju also mentioned that India is

often looked down upon by China; that is true. For a long time, China has chosen to believe that India is a retreating image in its rear view mirror. But it was during that time in 2020 when they started to realise that things can change and that India, a country with 1.4 billion people, can be a competitor. There is this weird 'India is a threat' theory. If you look at Chinese discussions on various platforms, you can see how they are concerned about India's economic growth and India's demographic dividend, particularly at a time when China is facing a population crisis. There is also a prevailing mood in China that it should not let Chinese industries invest in India; that it should impose various export controls; and that it should not let India develop and be a competitor to China. So, there is a change in perception within China as well, on the India issue. All these insecurities played a role in what happened in 2020.

Can the two tracks of the normalisation of India-China relations, and China's plans for South Asia, as seen in the recent Kunming trilateral featuring Pakistan, China and Bangladesh, be in harmony with each other?

VK: Of course not. I have reached the conclusion that China believes that India, if not now, then in later years, can be a rival and that it must be tackled. The way China is moving in South Asia establishes that too. Earlier, they were entering into bilateral ties. Now there are trilateral mechanisms. There is an Afghanistan, Pakistan, China mechanism. They are trying for a Bangladesh, Pakistan, China mechanism. Soon, I think they would want a mechanism involving all South Asian countries, including us. They will know that we might not take part in it.

AGS: They have their cards against us and we have our cards against them. But despite all our differences, I have always argued that good workable ties between China and India are good for both sides. We are aware of China's manufacturing prowess and how dependent India and the world is on Chinese manufacturing. The Economic Survey 2024-25 highlighted China's overwhelming manufacturing dominance in various sectors, including electric vehicles and critical minerals. It also stated how China's overall manufacturing output, which is nearly 45% of the global total, is at a level never seen before since the U.S.'s or the U.K.'s at their industrial peak.



Landing in the midst of a 'revolution'

Journalists tend to go to the midst of rage-filled streets to report and record events, even if they are not there on work

Ramya Kannan

What are the chances of landing in the lap of a "revolution", completely unintentionally? In the Indian subcontinent, there is a pretty high chance, given what we have seen in recent years. After the uprising in Sri Lanka against the fall in the island nation's economic fortunes, and the protests in Bangladesh against the job quota system, the guarantee of peace in the region is shaky. The possibility of flights getting disrupted, arson and looting on the streets, curfews shutting down cities for days on end, and a palpable fear everywhere is not that remote.

For a journalist, there is also a measure of headiness. As vulgar as it may sound, even an unintended encounter with chaos counts as ecstasy for a reporter – to be amidst such a crisis and report on it. Something in our DNA takes us to the midst of rage-filled streets to report and record events, even if the purpose of visiting the place is different.

Who could have imagined that in the five-odd hours that it took to hop on to a flight in Chennai and hop off – first in New Delhi and then in Kathmandu – that things would fall apart so rapidly in Nepal? Protesters had initially turned up with flowers and books. They sang songs, demanding that the ban on social media be lifted. However, the situation deteriorated after reports of deaths began trickling in. The first few reports from the Himalayan kingdom stated that the number of dead stood at 19, and included a child.

Despite this, there is no panic among those who were already on the ground in Kathmandu and not part of the protests. Conference mates in the city lend assurance, recording how other people had arrived by air without any issues and how there are no disruptions on their side of the city.

On the first evening (September 8), everything seems fine. The airport is milling with people walking about normally. That the quotidian routine went on un-

disrupted is falsely calming. There are never-ending traffic jams on the way from the airport. This changes drastically overnight.

The next morning dawns with the smell of smoke. Thick, grey columns rise to blur the blue of the distant Himalayas. Protesters have set government buildings, institutions, and homes of politicians on fire. They have occupied a couple of media houses. The youth burn property in the middle of the road, unnerved by shoot-at-sight orders. On the sidelines of the “revolution”, and roads, people stand fearlessly, watching the burning piles. As can be expected during such a mass upheaval, bystanders mutter: “This government needs to go.” There is no fear on the main roads, but no cheering either. Pictures shot then tell the ambivalent side story of this South Asian equivalent of the Arab Spring.

That changes that evening: the youth cheer and give each other high fives and take out a victory march, a show of mostly testosterone. They sit on bikes, waving flags, sticks, even a rifle, yelling "victory". It seems to some that the protests have quickly ended.

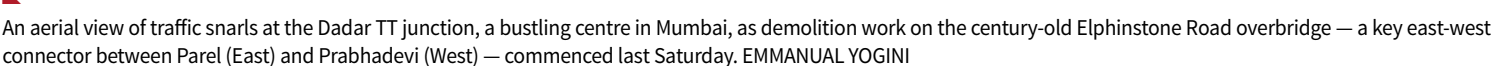
The next day dawns in sharp contrast. There is a calm and a curfew in place. The annoying hoots of pigeons holed in the eaves of buildings replace the sounds of the previous day's raucous victory cries. Every shop is shut, and army pickets are within viewing distance on both sides of the winding roads. Army trucks whizz past, their sirens blaring. Hotels lock their gates and gently warn visitors against venturing out.

But that is for everyone else to follow. The journalist DNA drags one by the nose to the empty streets, the army pickets, into the centre of action. A video shot on an empty street seems disquieting. But for a journalist responding to the news, there are adrenaline hits with every photo and video recording history being rewritten, mostly in swirls of smoke.

ramya.kannan@thehindu.co.in

PICTURE OF THE WEEK

Moving slowly in a fast-paced city



FROM THE ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO SEPTEMBER 19, 1975

Proposal for flood relief stamp to raise Rs. 100 crores

New Delhi, Sept. 18: The Government is examining a proposal to raise Rs. 100 crores for flood relief in Bihar, Orissa and Uttar Pradesh from the issue of a special stamp, the use of which will be obligatory while posting letters. Such special stamps were issued at the time of the Bangladesh crisis to augment resources.

Since the issue of special stamps alone may not net in the projected Rs. 100 crores, it is proposed to ask the State Governments to introduce certain additional levies on stamp papers for registration of documents, motor vehicles taxation, etc.

The Centre, deeply perturbed over the extensive damage caused by the floods, particularly in Bihar, is examining various proposals for effectively coming to the rescue of the flood-affected States. The special stamp and additional levies proposal is, however, likely to face some resistance from the other State Governments, though they did not object to the issue of the Bangladesh stamp.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO SEPT. 19, 1925

Wire-nail industry

Calcutta, Sept. 18: Giving evidence before the Tariff Board to-day, Mr. Khusrum, proprietor of the Punjab Wire-nail Factory, Amritsar, said that they could not run their factory at a profit nor compete with the foreign-made articles unless protection was granted. He pointed out that many of the articles made by them, such as panel pins, tacks, etc., were already subject to a duty of 10 per cent whilst they paid about 35 per cent customs duty on the wires imported for manufacturing such articles in India.

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Number of ‘illegal’ structures targeted by demolition drive

700 The Gandhinagar civic administration and other authorities launched a mega demolition drive on Thursday to clear encroachments on 1 lakh square metres of government land along the Sabarmati riverbank, said a senior police official. PTI

Life-term serving prisoners released by West Bengal since 2011

840 West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday said that the State government has released 840 prisoners serving life-term since 2011. She also announced that an additional 45 inmates are now being released following due legal process. PTI

Maldives’ government bonds to India to be repaid

50 in \$ million. India on Thursday said it has rolled over, for one more year, \$50 million Maldives’ government bonds as “an emergency financial assistance” to the archipelagic nation. The deadline for the repayment was extended once again “on the request of Maldives government.” PTI

Water tax owed by companies to the Odisha government

3.7 in ₹ thousand crores. As many as 42 industrial houses have owed water cess to the Odisha government till March, the Assembly was informed. CM Mohan Charan Majhi said they draw water from Mahanadi, Kolab, Bramhani, Baitarani, Indravati, Rushikulya and Subarnarekha rivers. PTI

Estimated costs of climate-related health risks by 2050

1.5 in \$ trillion. The World Economic Forum report assessed climate-driven health impacts in four of the most affected economic sectors: food and agriculture; the built environment; health and healthcare; and insurance. PTI
COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

Follow us facebook.com/thehindu X.com/the_hindu instagram.com/the_hindu

Why did India condemn Doha strike?

How does India's reaction differ from its past responses? Why is Qatar treated differently from other countries? What role do India-Qatar ties play? Why has India stayed largely silent on Gaza? What does this mean for India's West Asia policy?

EXPLAINER

Suhasini Haidar

The story so far:

India's condemnation of Israel's bombing in Doha last week as a “violation of sovereignty” is a shift from its more muted positions on previous Israeli operations in other countries, leading some to wonder if there's a larger change in New Delhi's stand on the crisis in West Asia. However, experts said that while the strong wording of the statement denotes growing distress over mounting civilian casualties in the war in Gaza, India's intervention has more to do with its close ties with Qatar and the Gulf region than with an assertion of principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity. This has become particularly important, given New Delhi's concerns over the Saudi-Pakistan mutual defence agreement signed in Riyadh on Wednesday.

Why did India criticise the Doha strike?

On September 16, India referred to the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) bombing on September 9 of a home in Doha where leaders of Hamas gathered to discuss the United States' latest ceasefire proposal, as actions that “threaten peace, stability and security” in the region and worldwide. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu defended the strike, which killed five, saying that it was “justified” as Qatar “harbours and funds” Hamas operatives.

“India is deeply concerned about the recent attacks in Doha and their impact on the security situation in the region. We unequivocally condemn the violation of the sovereignty of Qatar,” said India's Ambassador to the UN Mission in Geneva Arindam Bagchi, speaking at the UN Human Rights Council, also invoking the UN charter and international law.

“Any escalation must be avoided, and respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of States must be upheld,” Mr. Bagchi added, in a statement that built on an earlier statement by the Ministry of



A damaged building, following an Israeli attack on Hamas leaders, in Doha, on September 9. REUTERS

External Affairs, and another statement issued after Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke to Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamin Bin Hamad Al Thani on September 10, expressing “solidarity with the Qatari people”.

How does this differ from India's past reactions?

The statements are in stark contrast to New Delhi's reactions to Israel's bombings of several other countries in the region, including Lebanon, Yemen, Tunisia, Syria, and Iran.

When Israel bombed the Iranian Embassy in Damascus last April, the MEA had expressed some “concern”, as it had when Israeli forces attacked a UN Peacekeeping post in southern Lebanon, but remained largely silent over other Israeli attacks on other countries. When Israeli intelligence detonated hundreds of pager bombs against Hezbollah in Beirut in September 2024, Indian Army Chief General Upendra Dwivedi called the operation a “masterstroke”. On Iran – a country with close ties with India and where investments such as the Chabahar port are at stake – the government's reactions have been more puzzling. In June, India called for dialogue after Israeli

and U.S. strikes on Iranian nuclear facilities, which Iran responded to. However, New Delhi disassociated from a statement issued by the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) days later, which condemned the strikes on Iran. In a subsequent flip-flop, India signed on to the SCO joint declaration on September 1 that “condemned” Israel and the U.S. for the June strikes.

Why is Qatar treated differently?

“India's ties with the other countries mentioned are not the same as ties with Qatar, with its large Indian diaspora and personal relations at the highest levels between PM Modi and the Qatari Emir,” explained former Ambassador to the UAE and Egypt, Navdeep Suri. “Eventually, in an age of ‘transactionalism’, this is not as much about values and principles as about the bilateral relationship with each of these countries, including Israel,” he told *The Hindu*.

The MEA declined to respond to a question from *The Hindu* on why the Modi government has taken conflicting positions on the issue. Experts said a number of reasons explained the varied statements, from geopolitical to regional and bilateral. According to former

Ambassador and author of *West Asia at War*, Talmiz Ahmad, India's response to the attack on Qatar had “no larger strategic purpose” but focused on Qatar being a “crucial supplier of gas”.

He also pointed out that Israel's attack on Qatar had put Gulf countries that house U.S. military bases and count on the U.S. to guarantee security “on notice”, indicating a “fundamental geopolitical shift in the region”, which India may need to take note of.

“The message Israel has given is that every Arab country, every Gulf country, is within their target zone and put them all on notice. Israel has now ended the process of normalisation and made it clear that ties with other West Asian countries are not a priority over its operations. Thirdly, Israel has shown that the U.S. is no longer a guarantor of security for these GCC countries,” Mr. Ahmad said, speaking at a seminar organised by the India-America Friendship Association on Tuesday.

The alarm among Gulf countries was visible at an emergency joint session of the Arab League and the Organisation for Islamic Cooperation (OIC) conference in Doha this week, which condemned Israel's actions, even as the Gulf Cooperation Council committed to building a “joint defence mechanism” to deal with future threats.

What does this mean for India's broader West Asia policy?

In addition, experts said India's silence on Gaza – where more than 65,000 have been killed, including at least 20,000 children, in Israel's incessant bombardment of Gaza, including the latest offensive against Gaza City – is straining its ties with the Arab world. In a rare response to media queries on August 27, the MEA called the killing of journalists and civilians by the IDF “shocking and deeply regrettable”. India also voted in favour of a UNGA resolution endorsing the two-state solution for Palestine on September 12, indicating that, despite the steadfast relationship with Israel, the Modi government's shifts may indicate that it needs to factor in the rest of the region as well.

THE GIST

India condemns Israel's bombing in Doha as a ‘violation of sovereignty’ and expresses concern over regional peace and security.

The strong stance reflects India's close ties with Qatar and the Gulf region rather than a shift in principles on sovereignty.

India's silence on Gaza and varied reactions to other Israeli strikes show a careful balancing of strategic, regional, and bilateral interests.

Why are Maharashtra's onion farmers protesting?

Is the government's buffer stock policy hurting farmers?

Vinaya Deshpande Pandit

The story so far:

Since September 12, thousands of farmers from Maharashtra, India's largest onion-producing State, have been holding a phone protest. The main reason for the agitation is the distress caused by the fall in market prices of onions. Farmers are demanding immediate government intervention and aid of ₹1,500 per quintal. Experts say the problem is systemic. Maharashtra has produced more onions than needed this year, and the quality of stored Rabi onions has deteriorated, lowering market prices. They argue that the government must streamline onion exports, establish a uniform export policy, build trust among importers, and hold discussions with key buyers to secure stable markets.

Why are farmers protesting?
At present, farmers say they earn only

₹800 to ₹1,000 per quintal for their onions, while the production cost stands at ₹2,200 to ₹2,500 per quintal. The Rabi onions stored by farmers in the hope of better rates are deteriorating, forcing them to sell at even lower prices. At the same time, the government has released its buffer stock in the market at cheaper prices, further dragging down rates.

“NCCF and NAFED should be stopped from selling their stocks in cities across the country,” one of the key demands put forth by the Maharashtra State Onion Producer Farmers' Organisation said. National Cooperative Consumers' Federation of India Ltd. (NCCF), a major consumer cooperative in India; and National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India Ltd. (NAFED), the apex cooperative organisation for promoting and developing the cooperative marketing of agricultural produce for the benefit of farmers, jointly procure, store and

thereafter sell the onions in the market as a part of the Government of India's price stabilisation policy.

How is the onion price stabilisation policy affecting the farmers?

India's onion price stabilisation policy focuses on maintaining a strategic buffer stock under the Price Stabilisation Fund (PSF) to manage price volatility. The government procures onions to build this buffer, and during periods of high prices or lean supply, they are released from the stock into major consumption centres through outlets and mobile vans to ensure affordability for consumers and prevent hoarding.

However, at present, farmers are still sitting on the stocks of Rabi onions and are trying to sell them in the market.

At a time when their produce is receiving a market price lower than the production cost, the prices are brought down further due to the NAFED and

NCCF stocks.

What solutions are farmers and experts proposing?

According to government data, 25.25 lakh tonnes of onions were exported in the year 2022-23, a significant surge compared to previous years. But within two years, exports fell by more than half – in 2024-25, only 11.47 lakh tonnes were exported. “There is an urgent need to restore competitiveness and secure India's position in global onion markets. Bangladesh and Sri Lanka were the two main importers of Indian onions. Today, both of them have looked away from us. The government needs to have a stable export policy. Any flip-flops lead to a loss of credibility for the country in the international market,” an exporter who did not wish to be named said.

Farmers and exporters want the government to incentivise exports, as India is one of the leading growers of onions in the world. During the flux in the government's export policy, countries like China and Pakistan have taken over India's export market, farmers said.

Meanwhile, the Andhra Pradesh government has announced procurement of onions at ₹1,200 per quintal, a base price considered crucial to protecting farmers. One of the suggestions given to the government of Maharashtra is to emulate the Andhra model and incentivise the onion farmers.

THE GIST

Farmers in Maharashtra, India's largest onion-producing State, are protesting as market prices have plunged to ₹800–₹1,000 per quintal, far below their production costs of ₹2,200–₹2,500.

They demand stable export policies and a halt to buffer stock sales that further drag down market rates.

ABSTRACT



GETTY IMAGES

How the DeepSeek-R1 AI model was taught to teach itself to reason

Reinforcement learning alone, with the right design, could produce reasoning behaviour that was previously thought to require human examples; DeepSeek-R1 shows signs of reflection, verification, and adaptability without supervised fine-tuning

Vasudevan Mukunth

The story so far:

For many decades, one of the great challenges in artificial intelligence (AI) has been teaching machines to reason. Reasoning goes beyond memorising facts or completing sentences. It's the ability to follow steps, reflect on mistakes, and adjust strategies until the right answer is found.

Humans use reasoning for everything from solving maths problems to writing computer programmes, from negotiating their daily lives to deciding whom to vote for. Large language models (LLMs) such as GPT-4 or DeepSeek-V3 have surprised scientists by showing signs of reasoning when scaled to large sizes. Another method, called chain-of-thought prompting, where the model is nudged to “think step by step”, has also boosted performance.

But both these approaches come with limits. Training models to reason usually demand human-made examples. E.g., people show an AI model how to solve problems and the AI learns to copy the method. This is slow, expensive, and introduces human biases. It also caps the AI's creativity because the model can't explore problem-solving methods that humans didn't think of.

In a paper published in *Nature* on September 17, the DeepSeek-AI team reported that it was able to reach its model, called just R1, to reason by asking an ambitious question: what if we allowed the model to teach itself to reason without showing it human examples first? That is, they found that R1 could develop new forms of reasoning using reinforcement learning, a method of trial and error guided only by rewards for correct answers.

What is reinforcement learning?

The team's aim was to make the model smarter at maths and coding, as well as to

uncover how reasoning behaviours might emerge naturally when a machine is given the proper incentives.

DeepSeek researchers began with V3 Base, a large language model similar to other state-of-the-art systems. Instead of using the usual supervised fine-tuning, where humans provide the reasoning steps, they applied 'group relative policy optimisation', a reinforcement learning method designed for efficiency.

In this setup, the model, called R1-Zero at first, was asked to solve mathematical and algorithmic problems. For each attempt, it had to produce two parts: a reasoning process inside `<think>...</think>` tags and a final answer inside `<answer>...</answer>` tags. The only reward came from whether the final answer was correct, judged by rule-based systems like answer keys or code compilers. No one told the model how its reasoning should look.

Over thousands of training steps, the model learned by trial and error. If an answer was wrong, the path that led there was discouraged; if it was right, the path was reinforced. Importantly, the researchers also tracked how the model's thinking time, i.e., the number of tokens it used in its reasoning section, changed. Strikingly, the model began writing longer and more reflective reasoning chains on its own, sometimes including phrases like “wait” or “let's try again”, revealing an ability to self-correct.

Was there human intervention?

To address weaknesses such as poor readability and mixing English with Chinese, the team built R1 from R1-Zero. This process included adding incentives for consistently using one language, supervised fine-tuning with both reasoning and non-reasoning data. The final model thus inherited the raw reasoning power of R1-Zero while also becoming easier to use and safer.

The results were striking. On the American Invitational Mathematics

Examination (AIME) 2024, a tough competition that usually the smartest high-school students attempt, R1-Zero's accuracy jumped from just 15.6% at the start of training to 77.9% by the end. With more tuning, it reached 86.7%, surpassing the average performance of human students.

At a certain stage, R1-Zero began using the word “wait” more often in its reasoning, just like a human might have when a mistake is spotted. The researchers said this meant the model wasn't blindly following a path but actively rethinking steps when something seemed off. In effect, reinforcement learning had coaxed the AI into behaviours that resembled reflection and verification, both elements of reasoning.

The ultimate R1 model was even stronger: it was good at maths and coding as well as on benchmarks for general knowledge, answering questions, and following instructions. Compared to its predecessors, R1 was also more consistent with its choice of language and better aligned with human preferences for helpfulness and safety. When evaluated with frameworks like AlpacaEval 2.0 and Arena-Hard, which test how well a model follows instructions, R1 improved by 25% and 17%, respectively, which are considered large.

What are the pros and cons of reasoning?

Many large language models, including widely used systems like ChatGPT, often demand large amounts of computational resources during testing. R1, on the other hand, could adapt how much it “thought” depending on the task's difficulty. Simple problems were met with short reasoning chains, while harder ones led to longer, more elaborate chains. This dynamic allocation avoided demanding power on questions that didn't warrant it. However, reinforcement learning itself is energy-intensive.

Taken together, the findings confirm

that reinforcement learning alone (with the right design) could produce reasoning behaviours that were previously thought to require human examples. This could change the way we think about how intelligence might grow in artificial systems. For instance, in the future, researchers could build verifiers that check answers and let the model figure out its own strategies. If the answer to a maths problem, a computer programme or a factual question can be reliably checked, then reinforcement learning can do the rest. This could speed up progress while reducing human labour and bias.

Indeed, traditional LLM training pipelines bank heavily on large human-labelled datasets – people writing question-answer pairs, reasoning steps, preference judgments, etc. They are expensive and often assembled under exploitative labour conditions. If machines can be taught to reason using reinforcement learning alone, the demand for human-annotated data can shrink, thus also reducing pressure to source cheap labour worldwide. However, the study paper also acknowledges that tasks without clear ground-truthing still rely on human-labelled data for reward models. So human input is not eliminated; only its scope may shrink to areas where no reliable verifier can be built.

A model that learns to reason will also demand better reward signals for open-ended tasks like writing, which is difficult, as well as stronger safeguards as it becomes capable of generating dangerous or manipulative content. In fact, watching a machine develop reflective behaviour (pausing, checking, revising, etc.) raises questions about how far such systems can go. If reasoning emerges from incentives rather than instructions, could creativity or deeper forms of understanding emerge in the same way?

Time will tell – unless DeepSeek-R1 figures it out first.

THE DAILY QUIZ

Actor and director Robert Redford died at the age of 89 on September 16. How well do you know his work?

Radhika Santhanam

QUESTION 1

This film is centred around a scandal that brought down the Nixon government. Redford played one of the journalists who broke the story of the scandal. The journalist worked for *The Washington Post*. Name the film and the journalist.

QUESTION 2

Karen Blixen, also known by her pen name Isak Dinesen, was a Danish author. Her best-known book was about her life in Kenya. Redford starred in the film that was based on this book. Name the film, also starring Meryl Streep.

QUESTION 3

Redford's final appearance on screen was in an American superhero film

based on the Marvel comics. Name the film.

QUESTION 4

One of the leading film festivals in the world was named after a character played by Redford. Name the festival and the film that features this character.

QUESTION 5

This film, directed by Redford, dramatised the rigged TV shows of the 1950s.

QUESTION 6

Redford said about a famous song that was part of one of his films: “When the film was released, I was highly critical: How did the song fit with the film? There was no rain. At the time, it seemed like a dumb idea. How wrong I was, as it turned out to be a giant hit.” What is the name of this famous song that was also used in the background of a montage in Spider-Man 2?



Visual Question:

Redford was nominated at the Academy Awards for Best Actor for his performance in this film. Name the film.

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

1. This person was the first democratically elected Prime Minister of Nepal. **Ans: Bisweshwar Prasad Koirala**
 2. Considered the key founder of the communist movement in Nepal, this person played a major role in the struggles against the autocratic Ranacracy in Nepal, which ended in 1951. **Ans: Pushpa Lal Shrestha**
 3. The younger brother of the person mentioned in Question 1, this leader played a prominent role in the 1990 Jan Andolan. **Ans: Girija Prasad Koirala**
 4. A prominent Communist leader, this person was also actively involved in Jan-Andolan I. **Ans: Madan Bhandari**
 5. This former Prime Minister of Nepal is considered one of the key architects of the process of electing a popular Constituent Assembly to rewrite its Constitution and in the transformation of Nepal from a constitutional monarchy into a republic. What is his connection to Jawaharlal Nehru University? **Ans: Baburam Bhattarai. He completed his PhD at JNU**
- Visual: Identify the two prominent Nepali leaders in the picture. **Ans: B.P. Koirala and former king Tribhuvan**
- Early Birds:** Anubhav Gupta | Pranab Biswas



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

Upendran

“COME on in! Where is Suresh? I thought he was coming with you.”

“He is on his way. He should be here briefly.

“You mean ‘shortly’, don’t you?”

“Is there a difference between ‘shortly’ and ‘briefly’?”

“Yes, there is. If something happens or is done briefly, it happens or is done for a very short period of time. For example, the villain smiled briefly before pulling the trigger.”

“Is it O.K. to say, Anita looked up at me briefly before walking on?”

“Sounds good to me. Here’s another example. The old woman paused briefly before continuing to speak.”

“Don’t pause now. Tell me what ‘shortly’ means.”

“It means ‘in a little while’. For example, the Principal will be with you shortly.”

“Good God! I don’t want to see the Principal now. How about this? The Manager informed us that the movie would begin shortly.”

“Excellent! Yesterday, I returned home shortly after 6 o’clock.”

“Meaning a little after 6-00?”

“That’s right. Now tell me, what...

“... how do you pronounce b.o.n.k.e.r.s?”

“The ‘o’ in the first syllable sounds like the ‘o’ in ‘pot’, ‘hot’ and ‘lot’. The ‘e’ in the second syllable is like the ‘a’ in ‘China’.”

“So it’s pronounced BONKERS with the stress on the first syllable!”

“That’s right. By the way, the final ‘s’ is pronounced like the ‘z’ in ‘zoo’ and ‘zip’. Do you know what ‘bonkers’ means?”

“I haven’t a clue.”

“‘Bonkers’ is a slang expression meaning to be slightly silly or mad. For example, girls went bonkers when they saw Amir Khan.”

“Can I say, my uncle Govind is bonkers?”

“You certainly can. One can also be bonkers about someone or something.”

“Does it mean you are mad at someone or something?”

“Not ‘mad at’, but ‘mad about’ someone or something. In other words, you like the person/thing very much. For example, Karthik’s sister, Amala, is bonkers about Shah Rukh Khan.”

“My cousin Chandira is bonkers about noodles.”

“Bonkers about noodles! I hate noodles.”

“You hate noodles! I pity you.”

“You don’t ‘pity on’ someone, but ‘pity someone’. For example, I pity Govind for being such a fool.”

“I pity the people who were put on election duty.”

“That’s a good example. I pity the candidates who lost their deposit.”

“You pity politicians! You must be bonkers. But tell me, when do you say ‘pity on’?”

“You usually ‘take pity on’ someone or something. The hunter took pity on the deer and set it free.”

“Our physics teacher took pity on us and postponed the test.”

“He took pity on his wife and helped her clean up the mess.”

“I hope that was just an example. My physics teacher doesn’t have a wife to take pity on.”

“I thought he was married.”

“Are you kidding! Any woman that marries him must be bonkers.”

Published in The Hindu on March 3, 1998

Word of the day

Veracity:

unwillingness to tell lies

Synonyms: honesty, truthfulness, credibility

Usage: *I admire the veracity of her statements.*

Pronunciation: newsth.live/veracitypro

International Phonetic Alphabet: /vəˈræʒəti/

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



CONTRAPUNTO

Most people don't mind paying for the Royals as long as those Royals live a miserable, thwarted existence full of horrible compromise

- RACHEL PARRIS

Don't Pomp Up

UK royally flattered Trump. Democracies should find virtue in simplicity

On Wednesday, while *BBC* aired Brazil prez Lula's view that Trump isn't "emperor of the world", the British establishment tried hard to convince him otherwise. Charles and Camilla showed him around Windsor Castle, gave him a horse-carriage ride, and fed him at a state banquet in St George's Hall. That's part of playing "royal" in the 21st century, whether you are raja of an erstwhile Indian state, making a living off a hilltop castle-turned-hotel, or the Windsors, maintained at the expense of the British public. Royalty – gun salutes and bearskin hats – is little more than theme park entertainment now. And the customer – Trump, in this case – must be satisfied. By the look of it, Trump was pleased as punch with his royal treatment, and a day of pageantry helped UK net \$204bn worth of US investment promises. Mind you, they are only promises.

For UK, which was already a distant second economically – with less than a third of US GDP – by the time of the first US presidential visit in 1918, royal charm offensives, such as the one unleashed on Trump, are a necessity. Without colonies, it's just a small, ageing island state. It's already slipped to sixth place in terms of nominal GDP, behind India, and the economy has remained lacklustre since Brexit. So, good for it that Trump and many other world leaders still hanker for the trappings of royalty. But considering that WWII and the age of empires ended 80 years ago, simplicity should have become the reigning virtue by now.

But you have to be cut from a different cloth to resist the lure of royal validation. It's hard, but not impossible, as Gandhi showed by striding into Buckingham Palace in his loincloth and shawl in 1931, leaving Churchill snarling: "half-naked fakir". Centuries before Gandhi, Marcus Aurelius, himself an emperor, had warned against outward pomp and appearance. A state that holds pomp and show dear, although democratic in principle, reveals its admiration for autocratic tendencies. The king must be bigger than his subjects. If they walk, he must ride a horse, and if they are saddled, he must procure an elephant. That's the principle of one above all. But in a democracy, the leader is one among equals, and adopting the ceremonials of a bygone age risks contaminating new ideals. Gandhi was ahead of his time, but 80 years is long enough for the rest to catch up with him.

Saudi-Pak Sunni Axis?

New defence pact seems insurance for Riyadh against Tel Aviv. India shouldn't worry

Saudi Arabia and Pakistan signing a strategic mutual defence agreement has got regional players, including India, taking note. The agreement states that any aggression against either country will be treated as aggression against both. Coming on the heels of Israel's attack on Qatar and the subsequent Arab-Islamic summit hosted by Doha, the Saudi-Pak pact is being viewed by many as Riyadh's insurance policy. After all, Gulf Arab states have long relied on US for security, hosting multiple American bases and military personnel. But as Qatar found out last week, that wasn't enough to deter a strike from Israel against Hamas negotiators meeting in Doha.

Hence the enhanced Riyadh-Islamabad security cooperation. The two sides anyway long had military-to-military training and exercises. But the two big questions are will Riyadh now fall under Islamabad's nuclear umbrella, and will the Saudis directly come to Pakistan's military aid should the latter have another conflict with India. On both counts the answers are probably no. First, the pact doesn't seem to specify nuclear assistance to Riyadh. Second, India-Saudi strategic relations have grown tremendously over the last few years with Modi visiting Riyadh for the third time in a decade this April. Given this dynamic, it's unlikely that the Saudis will jeopardise their relations with New Delhi for Islamabad's sake.

At maximum, the deal is a backstop for both Riyadh and Islamabad. But what's interesting to note is the latter's supple diplomacy since the conflict with New Delhi this summer: Pakistan has managed to get into Trump's good books. China is an all-weather ally. Türkiye aided it during India's Op Sindoor. And now the pact with the Saudis. But even though this does show that Pakistan isn't diplomatically isolated, it doesn't solve its fundamental economic and governance problems. Pakistan is still seen as a basket case, albeit with nuclear arms. Diplomacy, however, will see countries pursue their own interests. India should do the same and focus on its own strengths.

Kathmandu, mon amour

A naive and sentimental lover's lament for a lost ill-starred romance

Jug Suraiya



For more than 20 years Kathmandu was our favourite getaway. Our Kathmandu connection began in 1970 when Bunny and I first visited it, largely thanks to the ardent advocacy of Desmond Doig, editor of *JS* magazine, and my boss, who was an unofficial ambassador-at-large for the Himalayan kingdom and its capital.

And we fell in love with Kathmandu. We fell in love with the glowing warmth of Nepali hospitality and the beaming smiles of the people. We fell in love with the city's teeming, winding, alleyways dotted with ancient Hindu and Buddhist shrines, and full of unexpected twists and turns, like a magical tale in a storybook.

We fell in love with its cosmopolitan comingling of ageless East and wanderlust West, of long-haired hippies haunting Freak Street and yellow-robed lamas chanting Om Mani Padme Hum under fluttering prayer flags. We loved the cavernous Kashtamandap temple said to have been built in the 12th century from the wood of a single tree, and from which Kathmandu is said to have derived its name.

We loved its Thamel district, crammed with second-hand bookshops and cafes like Vishnu's Chai And Pie Palace and Mike's All-Day Breakfast. We fell in love with its surrounding frieze of the eternal snows of the Himalaya.

We formed close friendships with Kathmandu people. Like Brian, who took us river rafting on the Trishuli river to his tented camp called Brigand's Bend, and Caroline, whose restaurant served the best Quiche Lorraine we'd ever tasted.

Like all love affairs, ours with Kathmandu had its heartbreaks. The palace massacre of 2001, the great earthquake of 2015, which left the country devastated.

The recent political earthquake that struck Nepal, changing it perhaps beyond recognition, has brought home to me a sense of complicity, a betrayal on my part.

I'd seen Kathmandu as a Never-Never Land of escapist romance, blinding myself, willfully, to the reality of the volcanic anger seething within at the corruption and callousness of the ruling elite which erupted with fiery intensity. As Kathmandu smoulders in the embers of revolt, smoke gets in my eyes.

Abhishek Kadiyala



On Thursday, Trump announced the resumption of India-US trade talks after a brief stalemate in Aug. His usual strategy of layering new demands on top of his central trade objectives suggests that this fresh round of negotiations will not be confined to tariffs or market access, but will bring new points of contention into the conversation.

During negotiations with Canada and EU, he added digital regulations to the agenda. With Japan, he raised allegations of currency manipulation and demands for rice import. In the case of India, he has already targeted India's imports of Russian oil as a pressure point. Going forward, three further issues could potentially be employed to create pressure on India: counterfeit pharmaceuticals, nuclear liability, and immigration.

A US House report published in June identified counterfeit pharmaceuticals and their manufacturing ingredients from India (and China) as a significant concern for the health of American citizens. India and China account for nearly 80% of API manufacturing. Pharmaceuticals remain one of the largest US imports from India, which are currently exempt from tariffs. In 2022, Indian companies accounted for more than 40% of the US drug market – a figure that has only grown by 2025.

The report specifically flagged counterfeit GLP-1 drugs and ingredients imported for their manufacturing as detrimental to the health of US citizens. India is not among the big exporters of GLP-1 drugs to US but it supplies a significant amount of API to manufacture GLP-1 in US.

Any move to frame this issue as a matter of "border security" could result in harsh non-tariff measures impacting Indian pharma. In line with Trump's tactics, this would be accompanied by a public campaign portraying India as compromising the health of US citizens, thereby undermining the credibility of India's pharma industry, which is rapidly expanding its footprint in the American market.

For India, it is also important to recognise that a sustained attack on our pharma industry is unlikely because US social security programmes rely heavily on cheap Indian pharmaceuticals, which is why these are exempt from the tariffs. As the Oct 1 deadline for the US budget approaches, there are increasing talks of a govt shutdown because of disagreements

over budget allocations for social security programmes. An attack on Indian pharma during this time would only worsen the situation.

India's stringent nuclear liability framework is another potential friction point. After the 2008 India-US nuclear agreement, New Delhi passed liability laws that hold both operators and suppliers accountable in the event of an accident. These measures are politically sensitive, rooted in the memory of the Bhopal gas tragedy. However, these have also prevented US companies from exporting to India due to the risk of liability. This has limited their market access to a soaring energy market. India's growing energy demand and recent GOI willingness to discuss civil-nuclear relations, as reflected in the 2+2 intersectoral dialogue, could further bring this issue to the fore.

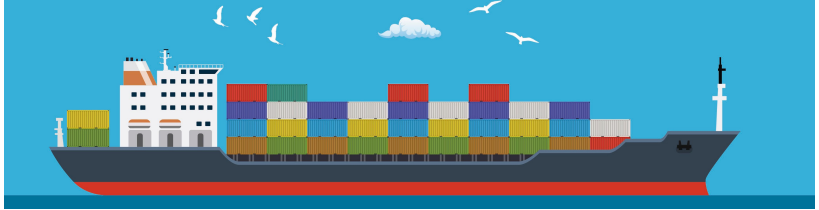
Immigration, encompassing both student and worker visas, represents a

Somnath Mukherjee



It was the best of times, it was the worst of times – Dickens encapsulated the vibes of the Industrial Revolution better than anyone else. A somewhat similar vibe is resonating across India's geo-economic landscape today. Trump and his advisers dominate the airwaves, but scratch the surface and the picture is maddeningly more complex than Trump's "dead economy" outrage.

India's macro-economic markers (inflation, external account, fisc) are currently at levels deemed near-ideal. There's also a long-awaited sovereign ratings upgrade and 7.8% GDP growth for Q1 FY2026. But high frequency indicators tracking consumption trends, credit growth and corporate



third potential friction point, with the MAGA base opposing not only illegal immigration but also legal migration channels.

Trump administration has already implemented stricter visa procedures, including expanded requirements for in-person interviews, revocation of student visas over minor misdemeanours, and new rules ending "third-country" visa stamping. Non-immigrant visa holders are required to return to their home countries for renewals, significantly raising the cost and time spent on visa renewal for Indian students and workers in US.

But restrictions on H-1B and F-1 visas face practical constraints too. US businesses rely heavily on skilled Indian workers and universities depend on Indian students. If counterfeit pharmaceuticals, nuclear liability, and immigration do indeed become Trump's tactical levers in a broader negotiation strategy, for India each of these issues carries its own domestic sensitivities. How New Delhi navigates these potential pressures may well determine the trajectory of trade relations in the months ahead.

The writer is a Research Analyst at Takshashila Institution's Indo-Pacific programme. Views are personal

results all show deep (and deepening) slowdown across the board.

At 25%, tariffs are manageable. At 50%, pretty much the entire affected basket is uncompetitive. At worst, it will wipe out India's trade surplus with US. The most affected sectors – textiles, gems and jewellery – are massive jobs sinks. So even successful reshoring will leave many jobs redundant in an economy already struggling with a formal employment problem.

Trump is an offensive-sounding catalyst, but the ease with which the rails have come off Indo-US relations shows the "hesitations of history" were based on firm foundations. Even if he is now softening towards India, no political constituency in US (including the India Caucus) really pushed back on his attacks. And it isn't about a maverick president carrying the day. When it comes to wars in West Asia and Ukraine, the Deep State has effectively turned Trump towards its positions, even though he got elected on a premise of stopping both wars.

Even if Russian oil trade was really the reason for the extra 25%

'Blue Economy Is Our Frontier Of Green Growth'

Science minister Jitendra Singh writes about harnessing the full power of India's oceans



For a nation as vast and diverse as ours, the journey to becoming a developed country, 'Viksit Bharat' by 2047, requires us to look at every resource and every available opportunity. And our greatest untapped resource lies in the vast blue ocean that surrounds our country.

Blue Economy is our new frontier for growth, a pathway to prosperity, sustainability, and national strength. It is a powerful concept that includes everything from traditional activities such as fisheries, ports, and shipping to cutting-edge new fields such as marine biotechnology, eco-tourism, renewable ocean energy, and deep-sea exploration.

Earth sciences ministry defines Blue Economy as "comprising the entire system of ocean resources and man-made economic infrastructure in marine, maritime and onshore coastal zones within India's legal jurisdiction, aiding the production of goods and services with clear linkages to economic growth, environmental sustainability and national security".

With a revised coastline stretching now over 11,098km and a vast Exclusive Economic Zone spanning 2.4 sq mn km, India is exceptionally well-placed to build a \$100bn growth engine through a sustainable use of ocean resources – creating jobs, supporting coastal communities, protecting marine ecosystems, and strengthening our global maritime presence.

We are now in Blue Economy 2.0, focusing not just on traditional sectors but also the emerging, high-potential areas that will define our future. For example, the Deep Ocean Mission is helping our scientists explore the deep sea using the Matsya 6000 submersible, aiming to find

strategic resources and create new technologies for the future. The Sagarmala Programme is modernising our ports to make our trade more efficient and our businesses more competitive. For our coastal communities, the Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana is a flagship scheme to bring a 'blue revolution' to our fisheries sector.

But our vision goes far beyond this. It empowers people and protects our planet. It includes creation of new opportunities for women's empowerment, by encouraging them to lead in sustainable fields like seaweed farming and eco-friendly tourism, providing them new income streams and a greater voice in their communities. It includes investments in our youth, offering them training and skills for new Blue Economy jobs, from marine engineering to data analytics. We are nurturing a new generation of blue-collar innovators and entrepreneurs.

To support innovation, GOI acts as a catalyst for private investment and innovative startups, which form the Blue Economy core. We create a business-friendly environment where young, energetic companies can develop solutions in areas like smart fishing, green port logistics, and marine biotechnology. Our focus on tech and startups is a key part of our plan to build a self-reliant India, which not only consumes but also creates.

We are encouraging clean and green activities, such as sustainable fish farming and the restoration of mangroves and coral reefs, which act as natural barriers against climate change and rising sea levels. In places like Lakshadweep, India's first ocean thermal energy plant is

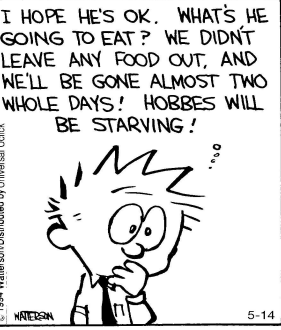
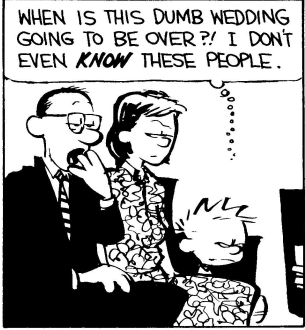
demonstrating how innovation can provide both clean electricity and drinking water. Our Harit Sagar Guidelines are a clear commitment to making our ports green, aiming for zero carbon emissions and the use of clean fuels.

India is also taking a leadership role in global ocean governance. During our G20 presidency, we launched the Chennai High-Level Principles for a Sustainable Blue Economy, setting a global framework for responsible ocean development. We are strengthening partnerships with other developed countries and multilateral agencies for science-based decision-making in the interest of oceans and people.

We have also signed the historic Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction agreement, reaffirming our commitment to protecting marine biodiversity on a global scale. Most recently, India participated in the UN Ocean Conference in Nice, France, where we launched the SAHAV Portal, a pioneering digital platform to enhance coordination, knowledge sharing, and transparency across Blue Economy initiatives such as Marine Spatial Planning.

The journey to Viksit Bharat is a shared one and Blue Economy is a national commitment to responsibly harness the full power of our oceans. By empowering our people, protecting our nature, and investing in science and technology, we are building a maritime future that will benefit all Indians. As we look ahead to 2047, building a New India that is prosperous, inclusive, and ecologically secure, the tide is with us, and we are ready to ride it towards a brighter future.

Calvin & Hobbes



When Skies Gather Their White Robes To Retreat

Partha Sinha

When the first drops of rain touch the earth, it is not only the parched soil that responds. The mind too is stirred. Something hidden begins to move. The dust of summer settles and in its place rises a stillness – a stillness that demands we pause and listen to ourselves.

Too often we reduce monsoon to *chai*, *pakodas* and Kishore Kumar. Pleasant rituals, no doubt, but not the truth of this season. Monsoon is not entertainment. It is revelation. It does not merely flood streets; it floods the mind with memories, questions, and longings that lie dormant through the hard summers of our lives. That is why our tradition gave rains

not just poems, but ragas. Megh, Malhar, Miyan ki Malhar – each one is a philosophy in sound. Megh moves in deep, contemplative notes, slow arcs of descent and ascent, like clouds gathering weight before breaking. Malhar is more restless, weaving sharp oscillations, the way lightning splits the sky. Miyan ki Malhar combines both – gravitas of thunder and the release of downpour. To hear these ragas is to realise that music can carry weather inside it. They remind us that rain is not only water; it is also mood, emotion, even metaphysics.

The poets knew this. Kalidas's cloud-messenger was not merely a plot device –

it was the recognition that clouds carry not just water, but yearning. Tagore's rainy-day songs were not about puddles on the ground but puddles in the soul. Kabir heard in the meeting of cloud and earth the same joy as the meeting of seeker and the Divine. The rain enters the imagination not as scenery but as presence.

Beyond potholes and traffic jams, beyond floods and disruptions, lies this deeper truth of monsoon: it is not only about greening of fields, but also about greening of thought. When skies darken, the inner world too becomes fertile. Ideas germinate. Questions rise. Even sorrows, long unacknowledged, ask for their turn to speak.



THE SPEAKING TREE

Sacredspace



Yesterday is but a dream, tomorrow is only a vision but today well lived makes every yesterday a dream of happiness, and every tomorrow a vision of hope.

Kalidas

Fed in focus

Just lower interest rates may not aid capital flows

The outcome of the Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) meeting of the United States Federal Reserve is always closely watched by financial markets across the world, but the interest this time was much higher than usual. In terms of policy action, the Fed decided to lower the target range for the federal funds rate by 25 basis points to 4-4.25 per cent on Wednesday, as was widely expected by financial markets. However, there was significant interest in how the FOMC voted on the policy decision and the future expectations. White House Economic Adviser Stephen Miran was confirmed by the Senate on Monday to the Federal Reserve board, just in time to be able to attend the FOMC meeting, which began on Tuesday. Mr Miran is now on leave from the White House and may go back to that position once his term expires. This is an unusual position in modern central banking, and particularly for the Fed. As many in the market had anticipated, Mr Miran dissented from the majority and wanted a deeper 50-basis-point cut.

Nevertheless, Mr Miran's presence is not the only unusual thing for the Fed at the moment. In fact, his position at the Fed is part of a bigger plan. The Fed and its chairman, Jerome Powell, have been under attack from US President Donald Trump for not lowering interest rates quickly enough. Mr Trump also attempted to remove Lisa Cook, one of the Fed governors. However, the courts have allowed her to continue in her position and participate in the FOMC meeting. Mr Trump is seeking to have a greater say in the workings of the Fed, if not directly control it. A lot in financial markets over the medium term will depend on how this plan goes.

An independent central bank has long been the centrepiece of the US financial system, which has a far-reaching significance for global financial markets and capital flows. A loss of confidence in the Fed or the broader US markets can quickly unsettle global financial markets with longer-run consequences. The Fed will thus be watched much more closely by global financial markets. In terms of near-term possibilities, the projections released by the Fed suggest that it could cut the federal funds rate by 25 basis points each in the two remaining meetings this year. This would be followed by another cut next year. The decision to reduce the policy interest rate has been explained by the weakness in the labour market. In terms of inflation outcomes, the projection for 2026 has been increased by 20 basis points to 2.6 per cent over the June projection, which is much higher than the Fed's medium-term target of 2 per cent.

It remains to be seen how the impact of tariffs plays out in terms of inflation outcomes. Potential stickiness in inflation outcomes could become challenging for the Fed in the coming quarters. However, for now, financial conditions should be expected to ease. The yield on 10-year US government bonds, for instance, has come down by over 20 basis points this month. Theoretically, relatively easy global financial conditions should help improve financial flows to India. However, capital flows in the coming months will also be determined by the progress in trade negotiations between India and the US. A favourable trade deal, along with lower interest rates in the US, will significantly reduce uncertainty for the Indian economy and financial markets in the near term.

Israeli impunity in Gaza

US support counters growing global censure

The overwhelming vote at the United Nations (UN) General Assembly last week in support of a two-state solution between Israel and Palestine without the involvement of Hamas has set a fresh marker of global condemnation of Israel's assault in Gaza. The New York Resolution, moved by France, was endorsed by 142 votes, with 10 against (including the United States and Israel) and 12 abstentions. It comes ahead of the UN summit, scheduled for September 22, and is expected to preface recognition of the Palestinian state by American allies France, Canada, Australia, Belgium, and Portugal. The United Kingdom has confirmed that it will recognise Palestine after United States (US) President Donald Trump's state visit. Germany, with its complicated history with Israel, has endorsed the New York resolution but will not support Palestinian statehood.

The irony of this flurry of international condemnation, including from India and the Abraham Accord signatories, is that it has not deterred Israel or its sponsor, the US. Even after Israeli Defense Forces conducted an airstrike on Qatari capital Doha, targeting the Hamas leadership, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Binyamin Netanyahu met in Jerusalem for talks to cement the countries' alliance. Meanwhile, the Israeli assault on Gaza City continues unabated, displacing thousands of Palestinians, even as Israel's illegal expansion of settlements in the West Bank stays the course. Meanwhile, the much-anticipated meeting of the Arab League and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation to support Qatar following the Israeli strike ended with an anodyne statement of criticism. In fact, the Qatari leadership, chief interlocutor for the Israel-Hamas peace negotiations and host to the largest US military bases in the region, has held talks with Mr Rubio for an enhanced defence cooperation agreement.

All of this reflects current global geopolitical realpolitik. In the 1970s, the Arab nations could wield real economic power by imposing an oil embargo in response to US support for Israel in the Yom Kippur War. Today, the US is self-sufficient in oil, the sole global hegemon, and the world's largest arms supplier. The US accounts for about 70 per cent of Israel's arms import. It also accounts for 50-70 per cent of arms import by Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the United Arab Emirates — states that have also borne the brunt of Palestinian refugees. Just as Washington's long equivocation over the apartheid regime in South Africa in the interests of obtaining uranium supplies had helped sustain a racist establishment for four decades, staunch American bipartisan support — which is admittedly fraying — has enabled Israel to inflict human rights abuses on Palestinians with impunity for seven decades.

The suggestion that Israel may change its policies if the US were to halt or scale back military aid is open to doubt. Growing radicalisation of Israelis under Mr Netanyahu's long leadership is likely to ensure its continuance. But the vortex of global condemnation suggests that without a realistic policy of co-existence, Israel may not enjoy a lasting peace in the land it claimed for itself.



At the pleasure of the government?

Unlike government servants, arm's-length regulators need protection from Executive interference, as recent US events warn

Recent reports from the United States indicate that President Donald Trump has attempted to fire Governor Lisa Cook of the Federal Reserve. This action is unprecedented and has prompted a lawsuit from Ms Cook, who has refused to step down. The legality of the move is being (apparently successfully) challenged, as the law allows the President to remove a governor only "for cause". The Trump Department of Justice had earlier initiated a criminal investigation against her, and Mr Trump has claimed that's sufficient grounds to sack her.

These events serve as a timely reminder of a foundational principle of governance in democracies, namely the separation of powers and its obverse, checks and balances. While this spectacle is uniquely American, the underlying debate it ignites — about democratic accountability versus institutional autonomy — is one that resonates deeply in India.

The notion that "democratic accountability" justifies conferring such unfettered power on the Executive is not just incorrect, but also shows inadequate understanding of modern structures of governance. Before looking at the modern structures, it is useful to note that in India we have built a constitutional framework that is designed to prevent such concentration of power.

Our system recognises distinct and separate spheres of authority, each with its own forms of accountability. The Executive is accountable to the Legislature, which in turn is accountable to the people through elections. The Judiciary, a separate branch, is accountable for its actions through a rigorous, if sometimes slow, process of judicial review and, in

extreme cases, parliamentary impeachment. The Executive's power to appoint judges does not extend to the power to remove them at whim. This crucial distinction is the very essence of judicial independence.

We see the same design in the context of other "guardian institutions" like the Election Commission of India, the Comptroller & Auditor General (CAG) of India and the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC). When it comes to removal, the first two are on a par with Supreme Court judges. UPSC members can be removed by the President on grounds of misbehaviour only after the Supreme Court (SC) has conducted an inquiry and reported that the member ought to be removed.

The Constitution does not explicitly refer to what is called the "fourth branch" of government in other parts of the world and statutory regulatory authorities (SRAs) in India. However, the principles noted above apply equally to SRAs. SRAs are created by Parliament to perform specific functions that require expertise, continuity, and political neutrality. As markets developed and the need for consumer protection became stronger, arm's

length agencies were created by enlightened Indian parliamentarians. By design, SRAs like the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi), and the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (Trai), are not appendages of the government of the day. In fact, very often, they regulate entities owned by government.

Their operational autonomy is not a matter of choice, it's a structural necessity. Consider the role of the RBI. Its primary objective is to maintain monetary stability and manage inflation. This often requires it



AARTHIKAM
CHINTANAM
K P KRISHNAN

Next game changer: High-speed rail

India is ripe for a massive new infrastructure thrust, one that should be as transformative and rejuvenating for the economy as the National Highways Development Project and the renewables initiative have been. And that, indubitably, is a high-speed rail (HSR) mega-programme. India's per-capita gross domestic product (on a purchasing power parity basis) is now on a par with that of countries that pioneered HSR several decades ago — pointing to the fact that this is the right time for India to make the leap from conventional rail to HSR.

The case for prioritising HSR has also gained salience after August 18, when the Prime Minister convened the finance, commerce, and railways ministers, along with leading economists, to craft a fresh agenda for boosting economic growth. India has repeatedly shown that bold infrastructure dreams can become reality when propelled by political will, bolstered by associated policies and anchored by strong institutions. HSR must move beyond a one-off project (bullet train) and become the next national programme.

For decades, traditional trains have been India's arteries, moving over 23 million passengers daily along with vital freight. But with ₹60,466 crore in passenger subsidies, HSR can ease this burden by drawing new aspirational travellers willing to pay much more for speed and comfort. The Railways also urgently needs to compete effectively with affordable air travel and inter-city luxury coaches.

However, for HSR to deliver on its promise, certain priorities are non-negotiable. Dedicated lines are essential: mixing high-speed trains with slower passenger or freight traffic would dilute both speed and reliability. India must look beyond its broad-gauge legacy and embrace standard gauge, the global norm that enables easier technology transfer, stronger vendor partnerships, and seamless international compatibility. This would also allow India to open up avenues for exporting indigenous HSR technology, components, and rolling stock.

Securing long-term sustainable financing will be a critical challenge. The Mumbai-Ahmedabad Bullet Train corridor costs roughly ₹250 crore per km, whereas metro-rail today costs approximately ₹500 crore per km (average of elevated and underground). Yet metros are able to tie up financing because states co-invest, recognising the gains from rising land values around stations and other associated economic benefits. HSR, thus, should not continue to be funded by the Centre alone, but embrace cities and states as co-developers.

There is then the uncomfortable point that much of the Railways' innovative development agenda has been historically stymied by the conservatism of a Railway Board-managed hierarchy. HSR, going forward, should be run by the standalone High Speed Rail Corporation, adopting modern management practices, thereby bypassing the difficulties of trying to reform the existing and entrenched railway administration. This is much like the National Highways Authority superseding the timeless public works departments!

Further, indigenisation is essential to make HSR a self-reliant and globally competitive venture. Targeting localisation in rolling stock and components would reduce import dependence and nurture a strong supplier base. HSR should thus be positioned as integral to industrial policy, fostering a new manufacturing ecosystem, lowering costs, and deepening technical know-how. The Integral Coach Factory and BEML are already developing indigenous high-speed HSR rolling stock based on Vande Bharat designs.

Every kilometre of HSR provides five times the capacity of conventional rail and can play a crucial role in developing Tier II and III cities, relieving the pressure on the metros. The transformative power of HSR is not only in the trains themselves, but also in the stations that punctuate their journeys. Around the world, stations have acted as the nuclei of new economic geographies. A study by the London School of Economics and the University of Hamburg found that



INFRTALK
VINAYAK CHATTERJEE

The cultural cassette



SAURABH SHARMA

What's paranoia for one is pronia for another. For example, Sony's Betamax VCR, which debuted in 1975, transformed the movie-making business radically. Bookend this development with the present-day Netflix-and-chill reality. In short, it would be no exaggeration to say that making sense of the evolution of the media industry is challenging given the sheer scale and the short span of its transformation.

Nevertheless, the Oxford University

Press series titled *Media Dynamics in South Asia*, edited by Adrian Athique, Vibodh Parthasarathi, and S V Srinivas, is attempting to address this challenge. Ishita Tiwary's first book, *Video Culture in India: The Analog Era*, is a part of this series.

Ms Tiwary is assistant professor, Cinema, at Concordia University. She begins the book with a 1989 issue of *TV and Video World*, which declared the 1980s the "Video Decade" because of the way videos "transformed India's social landscape". To be sure, videos weren't as radical for the Indian masses but it certainly impacted elite culture.

The author has meticulously contextualised the discourse around video cultures. She was "struck" by the "shrill moral panic and paranoia" triggered by the advent of the video. Coming to India in 1982 with the Asian Games, videos provided an opportunity "to

project the image of a modern India to an international audience in the post-Emergency era."

The first chapter, "Screening Conjugalities: The Affective Infrastructure of the Marriage Video", begins with the descriptions of Vishal Punjabi-directed *Heartbeats* (2013), centralising the introduction of videos to memorialise a marital ceremony. Ms Tiwary notes the "temporal 'liveness'" that helped in the "emergence of a new form of intimate spectatorship that transformed the experience of familial and conjugal spaces". Invoking arguably the most popular hit among the middle class population of the Hindi heartland, the Sooraj Barjatya-directed *Hum Aapke Hain Koun* (1994), the author notes how a unique "performativity" entered the production of marriage videos.

Discussions with the heir of the Delhi-based Prem Studios inform this chapter, offering an insight into videos as the "close-up" medium. What Ms Tiwary also highlights is the gaze that manufactures an illusion of beauty, an

"idealised portrait of heterosexual romance". The caveat, as she points out, is that the clients control not only what gets captured but also how everything is put together.

Throughout the book, there's a lament for limited access to the transitional phase that has shaped contemporary visual culture. The second chapter attempts to fill this gap by offering a biography of Hiba Films. Its owner, Nari Hira, also owned Magna Publications, and released the magazine *Stardust*, which Hira treated "as a promotional tool for his advertising business".

Hira was a game changer who brought cinema to the living room. He shook the industry, provoking debates on distribution, piracy, broadcast-casting and censorship laws. While only "a handful of Hiba Films survive today", Ms Tiwary writes, the production house's legacy survives — from its portrayal of

"self-assured and intelligent women" to "the otherness of video as a medium of intimacy" that it signalled.



Video Culture in India: The Analog Era
by Ishita Tiwary
Published by Oxford University Press
226 pages ₹1,395

inspire — what's permissible to show so as to not incite the public and disrupt law and order, and most importantly, who should shoulder the responsibility. She

to take politically unpopular decisions, such as raising interest rates to curb inflation, even if such a move slows down economic growth in the immediate term and is disliked by the ruling dispensation. If the Executive could fire the RBI governor for disagreeing on interest rate policy, the central bank would lose its credibility and the ability to act in the long-term interest of the economy. The markets would quickly see through this façade, leading to a loss of investor confidence and, ultimately, economic instability.

Likewise, decisions on access to the securities markets, regulation of mutual funds, mergers and acquisitions, allocation of spectrum, among others have been consciously kept away from day to day politics and entrusted to expert SRAs.

The Indian legal framework, while not as explicitly clear on the removal of all regulatory heads, generally reflects this principle. However, only one piece of SRA legislation — namely, the Competition Commission of India Act — has an explicit requirement of a SC inquiry similar to that required before the removal of a UPSC member. In practice, however, we have not had a situation similar to the recent events in the US.

The argument that democratic accountability demands executive control over these bodies is a specious one. True democratic accountability is not about the Executive having absolute power. It is about holding all agencies, including SRAs, accountable for their performance within a system of checks and balances. SRA accountability has to be designed, as recommended by the Financial Sector Legislative Reforms Commission (FSLRC), on multiple pillars.

Like any body-corporate, SRAs need to be first accountable to a carefully constructed board. India has a long way to go on this. Regulatory boards, like listed company boards, need a large number of directors independent of government. Orders of all SRAs need to be appealable before an expert tribunal. Legislative actions of SRAs need to be subject to detailed scrutiny by parliamentary committees. The full institutional accountability of SRAs should be to Parliament based on the annual report of the SRA and comprehensive audits by CAG. Independent researchers and academic critics constitute the last of these pillars.

The erosion of institutional independence is a slow and insidious process, often masked by the rhetoric of efficiency and accountability. The US case serves as a cautionary tale. It demonstrates what happens when the lines between the Executive's political agenda and a regulator's technical function are blurred. The damage is not just to the institution but to the economy and the public's trust.

In India, we have, for the most part, had a strong tradition of institutional independence. However, recent years have seen increased political pressure on regulatory bodies. We must resist the temptation to centralise power and instead strengthen the institutional safeguards that ensure our regulatory authorities can do their jobs without fear or favour.

The independence of the "fourth branch" is not a luxury, it is a vital pillar of our democracy and a non-negotiable prerequisite for a stable and prosperous India.

The author is an honorary senior fellow at the Isaac Centre for Public Policy, and a former civil servant

cities connected to HSR networks recorded GDP gains at least 2.7 per cent higher than neighbouring cities without such connections.

The potential for HSR to create a new-age skilled workforce is already being seen. The National High Speed Rail Corporation Limited has, at its Surat facility, started training 1,153 personnel in bullet train track construction and operations & maintenance (O&M). This single project is reported to be generating 90,000 jobs during construction, 4,000 direct O&M jobs, and 20,000 indirect jobs. Supporting this effort, the HSR Training Institute in Vadodara can train 3,500 staff across rolling stock, civil works, electrical, signalling, telecom, and train operations.

Recognising all these, The Infravision Foundation (TIF), in partnership with the Confederation of Indian Industries' Rail Transportation and Equipment Division (CII-RTED), convened a high-level roundtable in New Delhi on August 18 to deliberate on the future of HSR and also release TIF's research paper "The Case for Developing HSR Corridors in India".

There are numerous studies that document the economic turbocharging provided by the highway development programme and renewable thrust; both in terms of direct and indirect benefits to jobs and multiplier effects. A fifteen-year programme for HSR covering, say, 10 corridors of average 700 km will mean an investment requirement of around ₹20 trillion at today's prices. Using the well-established multiplier of three for such infra projects, the benefit to the economy will be to the order of ₹60 trillion over the next 15 years. Looking ahead, HSR would represent more than just faster travel, it would reshape India's economic landscape. If highways stitched India together in the 2000s and renewables powered its leap in the 2010s, HSR could well define the next big chapter in India's growth story.

After all, a nation poised to become the third-largest economy must take pride in having a modern railway system.

The author is an infrastructure expert. He is also the founder & managing trustee of The Infravision Foundation. Research Inputs from Vrinda Singh

also underlines how *Newstrack* emerged as a reaction to the state broadcaster Doordarshan's policies in the late 1980s. Given how the "material infrastructure of *Newstrack* helped craft a visual grammar that was distinct from state television", it was equally important to thoughtfully engage with how media nexuses and nepotism informed video culture in India.

One of the most interesting chapters in this volume is "The Afterlives of the Video Pravachana: The Cult of Rajneeshes". To work on this part, Ms Tiwary had to join Osho ashrams. Reading this chapter, one realises that Rajneesh understood the mechanics of communicating and projecting an image via the visual medium. He knew far better than anybody else that he couldn't sell sex as meditation and enlightenment as entertainment without creating an aura. There would, thus, be no Sadhguru without Rajneesh's flamboyance.

The reviewer is a Delhi-based writer and culture critic.
On Instagram/X: @writerly_life

Support me by **joining my private channel**

AND GET EARLIEST AND RELIABLE SOURCE TO READ NEWSPAPERS
DAILY.

- | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <u>1) Times of India</u> | <u>6) The Hindu</u> |
| <u>2) Hindustan Times</u> | <u>7) Live Mint</u> |
| <u>3) Business line</u> | <u>8) Financial Express</u> |
| <u>4) The Indian Express</u> | <u>9) Business standard</u> |
| <u>5) Economic Times</u> | <u>+All Editorial PDFs</u> |

Click below to

Join

