



Other than outrage

Restrictions on women cannot be the answer to unsafe public spaces

There is a sickening sense of *déjà vu* in last month's headlines of sexual assaults against women and children. In the national capital alone, the gang-rape of a 17-year-old girl in Astha Kunj Park by three men posing as police personnel, the gang-rape and murder of a 16-year-old in Swaraj Nagar, and the gang-rape of another 17-year-old on a sleeper bus travelling from Greater Noida to Delhi have each shocked the nation briefly before giving way to a numb outrage. Little seems to have changed in the 14 years since the candlelight marches and commissions after the Nirbhaya case unleashed a slew of new schemes, laws and funds that vowed to protect women and girls from sexual violence, especially in public spaces. The latest report of the National Crime Records Bureau shows an 80% surge in crimes against women since Nirbhaya, from 2.4 lakh in 2012 to 4.4 lakh in 2024. Some of this can be attributed to higher reporting of crimes, facilitated by those new laws and schemes, but that is not sufficient to account for the vast number of them. In 2024, more than 50 crimes against women were reported every hour, with the highest rate of such crimes seen in the metro cities of Jaipur, Indore, Lucknow, and Delhi.

The government has listed a slew of initiatives meant to deal with the problem, from the Safe City project to Mission Shakti, from a women's helpline and emergency response support system to one-stop centres for survivors of sexual violence and fast-track courts, many of which have been financed through the Nirbhaya Fund. The recent crimes, however, put a question mark on the implementation of such schemes. A safe city cannot be created simply by installing lighting and CCTV cameras, if they are not functional, monitored, and connected to a response system. Police patrols and emergency numbers matter only if they result in prompt intervention from trained and sensitised personnel. It is important to move from scheme-based policing to preventive, and outcome-based policing, with public audits of vulnerable locations with deadlines and accountability to rectify deficiencies. The justice system must address the enormous backlog of cases; the promise of speedy investigation loses meaning if survivors spend years awaiting trial. The authorities must also resist the temptation to convert women's safety into restrictions on women's freedom. The answer to unsafe public spaces cannot be that women should avoid parks after dark, return home earlier, travel only with companions, or otherwise organise their lives around the possibility of male violence. Most importantly, there is a need to challenge the culture of sexual violence and toxic masculinity, enabled by age-old patriarchal traditions.

Season's end

The IMD is conservative when it comes to projecting rainfall deficit

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) issues two forecasts – in April and May – before the monsoon. Both unambiguously pointed to a dry monsoon – confidence boosted by global unanimity that one of the strongest El Niño ever was in the offing – and the consequential question was, 'How bad?' It turns out that the IMD's forecast of 'below normal' rain (90% to 95% of average) was conservative. This was surprising, given that its models pointed to 'deficient' rains (below 90%). On September 30, when India's monsoon tally ended, the IMD announced 759 mm across the country, 87% of the normal 869 mm. El Niño years, when the Central Equatorial Pacific warms and suppresses monsoon rains, set a weather department's mettle because predicting the extent of the shortfall is challenging. It is perplexing why the agency opted for 'below normal' rainfall when it could have warned of a 'deficiency' and claimed accuracy. As of now the IMD can only claim technical victory because the final number sits within the 4%-5% error window. However, at a disaggregated level, the IMD's struggle with getting magnitude right is far more glaring. June got 65% of its normal, far drier than the 92% forecast. July, expected to be below 94%, ended up with 1% point more rain. August came in at 84% of the LPA, in line with the 'below 94%' forecast. September at 92.4% finished a little above the forecast of 'below 91%'. The IMD expected a 'normal' monsoon in the northeast, which then recorded its driest since 1901, or 26% short. The south peninsula ran 23% short, central and north-west India – tipped to fall below normal – finished close to predictions, driven by ocean conditions and Western disturbances.

Climate change makes this more complicated. Western disturbances, extra-tropical rain-bearing systems, have been bringing more rain to India in the monsoon months, while southern India seems more vulnerable to El Niño-triggered volatility. This is reflected in *kharij* sowing. On July 10, *kharij* sowing trailed last year's by 16%; by early September the gap had narrowed to under 2%. Karnataka has declared drought in well over a 100 taluks and Maharashtra in 265 of 358, though the national deficit of about 12% is below the Centre's 20% threshold for an 'agricultural drought'. The IMD expects El Niño to strengthen and bring below normal rain over most of the country from October to December, threatening soil moisture and reservoir recharge. The Cabinet has lifted wheat's support price by ₹25 a quintal and mustard's by ₹413, nudging diversification. Given the consequences of IMD's forecasts, it should improve its sub-regional forecast systems and not shy from being the bearer of ill-news, if needed.

A compilation of articles, on the Editorial and Opinion pages, offering insights into the Mahatma's ideas and legacy

Gandhiji's many ways of understanding 'genius'

This column is not about Gandhi as a genius (which, with a laugh, he would say he certainly was not) or about the spectacularly original man I believe him to have been. It is about the place of the word 'genius' in Gandhi's thought and in his writings.

Why should that common word be picked up from Gandhi's teeming English vocabulary for special attention? Because his use of that valuations word tells us a great deal about his assessment of persons and situations – a matter of interest in itself. And also because we can apply (or not apply) his yardsticks for evaluating persons and happenings in our contemporary times.

There is another non-Gandhi reason as well. Most users of the word do not know that 'genius' is a Latin word. Not just a word of Latin origin but a Latin word in its totality – in the way it is spelt, pronounced and meant. English has borrowed 'genius' from the language of Virgil, Horace, Ovid without any change whatsoever, somewhat like how C.V. Raman describes the journey of the diamond from its womb under the earth to human hands "...absolutely fresh...perfect from nature's crucible". And so, reflecting on the word, one might also ponder its travel from one language register to another, admitting some variations in its action.

Here are representative examples culled by Gandhi-researcher Murtaza Gandhi from *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (CWMG).

Pronounced in both Latin and English identically, as *Jee-nee-us*, its meaning in classical Latin is 'divine inner power'. In modern English, when used as a noun, for example 'the genius S. Ramanujan...', it denotes a person with exceptional intellectual or creative ability. When used as an adjective, for example, 'the genius of India...', it refers to a singular or unique characteristic.

The first encounter

Gandhi uses the word in both senses. His first recorded use of it is as a skill, a vision, an act of sheer dare. He talks about it as an achievement, not as the description of a person. The reference goes back to 1888, when he was 19 years old and when his English was unpolished. Travelling by the liner *S.S. Clyde* from Bombay to England to start his law studies, he was taken up by the sight of the Suez Canal. Cutting the slender isthmus of the Suez between Asia and Africa to save on journey time by several days, it was a marvel to behold.

He writes in what is now known as his London Diary: "The construction of the Suez Canal I am



Gopal Krishna Gandhi

A teacher who has held administrative, diplomatic and constitutional positions

not able to understand. It is indeed marvellous. I cannot think of the genius of a man who invented it. I don't know how he would have done it." (CWMG, Vol.01, p.10). The 'man who invented it' is, of course, Ferdinand de Lesseps (1805-1894), a French diplomat and entrepreneur, who thought of and made the Canal with the help of two engineers – the Austrian Alois Negrelli and fellow Frenchman Linant de Bellefond.

In this year, 2026, which marks the 70th anniversary of the 1956 Anglo-French-Israeli bombardment of Egypt which aimed to take over the Suez Canal – which Egypt's President Gamal Abdel Nasser had nationalised, – Israel is using more lethal bombs with prodigious abandon in Palestine and Gaza and, with the United States joining the fire-play over Iran, causing the death, among others, of the Supreme Leader of the Iranian state, no less. So, today, we can reflect on Gandhi's marvelling at the genius that went into the making of that oceanic passageway only with anxiety for the future of the area around that marvel.

The dark side

This brings one to a phrase which is twinned to 'genius': evil genius (or malignum genius). The earliest known use of that phrase as a concept is in French philosopher René Descartes' use of it in his 1641 opus *Meditations on First Philosophy*. He posits in it the existence of a power that is the very opposite of the divine power that actuates 'genius' – evil genius, a malignant God or evil power.

By 1893, Barrister M.K. Gandhi was in South Africa and soon became the spokesman and leader of the Indian community there in its struggles for the recognition of its rights and its dignity. Stung by the discriminations and humiliations that Indian South Africans were subjected to, particularly at the hands of the Asiatic Department, we see him use the word not just in its simple sense of a compliment but in its contrary avatar: "There seems to be somewhere in the Asiatic Department of the government an evil genius working through it." (CWMG, Vol.04, p.26, 23. The Bazaars in 'The Transvaal').

'Evil genius' occurs in Gandhi's vocabulary again when he is back in India, where he uses it in the context of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre (April 13, 1919) but very pointedly for an individual: "General Dyer has been hatefully blamed, and his evil genius, Sir Michael O'Dwyer, entirely exonerated..." (CWMG, Vol.19, p.339). Just stopping short of using the phrase 'evil genius', he invokes the word witheringly with sarcasm, to

The word 'genius' offers a window into the Mahatma's assessment of people and events

The Mahatma's unfinished work on the world stage

Writing about Gandhi's death on his birthday may not be an entirely odd thing, given how he died and how that conflicted with what he stood for. In popular perception, Gandhi was a tired, old man whose life's work was over when he was assassinated. In any case, the people he sought to train and transform into compassionate human beings had turned bigoted murderers or condoned bigotry and mass murder during Partition. The last eccentric, going-against-the-grain act they allowed him was fasting in favour of Pakistan. Revisionist history of today seeks to downgrade his role in India's freedom by counterposing Netaji.

But it can be argued that Gandhi's best years were yet to come even if India had failed him then and now. At 78, Gandhi was healthy enough to have gone on a village-to-village walk in Noakhali, fasted for three days in Calcutta to stop the rioting before the five-day Delhi fast, and talked about a fast-unto-death to stop the killing of Muslims in Bihar. His health may well have facilitated his shining on the world stage for several more years.

The emergence of a global image

Gandhi had already ascended the world stage a few decades before in part due to the rapid growth of print media in the first half 20th century that sought out new and novel stories. Among a non-violent campaign's advantages were that it was carried out in the public domain, transparently – far easier to cover than a clandestine plot. A report on the Dharasana beatings ran in some 1,300 papers worldwide. And photos of Gandhi, with his dress, or the lack of it, quirks and eccentricities, looked great on newsprint.

Among the many influences Gandhi had globally was the Black civil rights movement. In America, African-American newspapers were only eager to see parallels and seek inspiration. And it was not symbolic or philosophical but direct and tactical, too. A Harlem ashram and an Ohio ahimsa farm sprang up. Even the



M. Kalyanaraman

goat-milking transmuted to America.

Martin Luther King may have been the most famous of civil rights leaders' visits to India but there were many other organisers such as Bayard Rustin and James Lawson who had immersive sojourns in India. A report in *The Hindu* quotes Rustin – he was the organiser of the 1963 March on Washington, at which King delivered the "I Have a Dream" speech – as saying in 1948 that the "Indian non-violent revolution has much to teach us".

During the Montgomery Bus Boycott, described as the practical kick-off of the civil rights protests led by King, Rustin put his learnings to successful use. He insisted that Montgomery should only be one of many such sites. He ticked off King for having armed guards in his house, saying that Gandhi would not do that. In a move that caught the attention of many, but which Rustin owed to Gandhi's methods, he asked that the leaders should go and voluntarily surrender to the police, saying that, yes, they had broken the law, but that it was the right thing to do. Lawson set up a Satyagraha training school in Nashville.

Non-violence on a global scale

Gandhi did become a global icon, posthumously. For sure, his methods drew from the past. A peaceful march organised by a priest in St. Petersburg was violently put down by the Tsar although it triggered the 1905 revolution. But what was new was that Gandhi showed that they were duplicable on a mass scale in an organised manner. This was the novelty that caught the imagination of the world later.

Scholars have shown that in the latter half of 20th century, when asymmetries of power solidified, only non-violent campaigns could succeed and did so. East Timor was a sterling example.

Perhaps the best chance that the Palestinians had for Swaraj was in the initial stages of the Intifada. Though known more for the

describe the British Raj's policy of 'Divide and Rule': "But just now I am speaking of the genius of the Government. It has not hesitated to divide Hindus from Muslims in order to be able to retain its hold on us." (CWMG, Vol.19, p.398, Speech at Nankana Sahib – March 3, 1920).

As a term of praise

The earliest recorded reference by him of a person as a genius is a wholly complimentary sense, is for Lokamanya Bal Gangadhar Tilak who, in 1916, in the town of Belgaum, famously declared (in Marathi) "Swaraj is my birthright and I shall have it." The 'Father of Indian Unrest' had been dead four years but addressing the Indian National Congress' session in the same town of Belgaum in December 1924 as Congress President, Gandhi could not but refer to him and said (in English): He was the genius of swaraj (CWMG, Vol.25, p.508, Concluding Speech at Belgaum Congress, December 27, 1924). Gandhi is doing something very interesting here. He is terming Tilak as a genius of and in something very singular, very specific – swaraj. He is using the term very precisely, very contextually, like he would be if he were to describe Einstein as a genius of the Theory of Relativity.

The next most notable use by him of the word as a personal tribute is for Rabindranath Tagore. Speaking on him in 1931, Gandhi says: "In common with thousands of his countrymen I owe much to one who by his poetic genius and singular purity of life has raised India in the estimation of the world." (CWMG, Vol.45, p.125, Tribute to Rabindranath Tagore – January 26, 1931).

He was to use the word for him again but again, not as a direct adjective but with a value added: "His creative genius has also given us Santiniketan, Sriniketan and Visvabharati" (CWMG, Vol.84, p.124, Speech at Prayer Meeting, May 8, 1946).

There is one person for whom Gandhi uses the word 'genius' without any niche that encases 'genius'. It is for his friend and almost-precceptor, the young Bombay-based jeweller, poet, Jain ascetic Rajchandra or Raychandrabhai as Gandhi called him: "Kari Rajchandra was born in a place called Vavan in Kathiawar... His schooling was quite elementary. But he was a genius. He knew Sanskrit, Magadhi and, I believe, Pali" (CWMG, Vol.43, p.98, A Great Seer – March 18, 1930).

Genius can do marvels and do evil. Remembering Gandhi's awareness of that truth is today not a matter of language alone but of life and death.

stone-throwing, the initial protests were largely non-violent but forceful in a Gandhian way. More than all the bombings, assassinations and the plane hijacks engineered by the Palestinians, it could be argued that Intifada forced the Israeli leadership to negotiate and at least on paper commit to a two-state solution eventually though subsequent events upended all that.

It would seem that Gandhi had planned on playing an active global role after India's Independence. A report in *The Hindu* on March 9, 1948, quotes Horace Alexander as saying that Gandhi, in England in 1931, had told his friends

that when India would be free, he would take part in a world movement for spreading the gospel of non-violence. Another report in August 1947 says that "discussions are now going on between Mahatma Gandhi and some of his American, Indian and European friends" for the world conference.

The conference was held in 1949, a year after his death. International participants discussed setting up an organisation. A.J. Muste wanted to set up a training institute in India. But, without the man himself, Gandhi became only a soul force, not a physical presence, for non-violent activists across the world.

The Palestine test

If idle speculation could be allowed, a living Gandhi would have electrified the world that had just gone through a monstrous war and the Holocaust. Instead of becoming just a memorial possibility and vague idealism, non-violence and compassion would have been far more rooted in global discourse.

The best test for Gandhi would have been Palestine.

If he could make an Englishman ashamed of himself, could he not have made Israeli Jews ashamed of inflicting on Palestinians the suffering Jews had endured for centuries?

kalyanaraman.mg@thehindu.co.in

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A balance

The new NCERT Class 9 Social Science curriculum significantly reduces the space given to modern European history, replacing chapters on the French and Russian Revolutions. At the same time, it places a much-needed emphasis on Indian history, exploring traditions of governance,

sacred responsibility, and regional resistance and resilience. The inclusion of the *Sengol* provides an opportunity for students to learn about India's civilisational continuity and political traditions. Since the historical interpretation of the *Sengol* remains contested (Inside pages, October 1), it is vital that

textbooks present competing accounts with adequate evidence. In an age shaped by global change, our education system must seamlessly combine cultural rootedness with rigorous historical inquiry and critical thinking. Sathiyapriya Kumar, Thirukattupalli, Tamil Nadu

Numbers must work

In my experience, several official telephone numbers published on the Tamil Nadu government websites are either 'switched off, not reachable, or remain unanswered'. These numbers are provided specifically to enable citizens to contact the government offices

concerned for information, clarification or assistance. The official CM Helpline information states that citizens should be able to access grievance services without having to visit a grievance centre and provides multiple channels, including telephone, online portal, mobile application and email to *Mudhalvarin*

Mugavari. Therefore, there appears to be a clear disconnect between the citizen-friendly services announced by the government and the actual accessibility. Balamarthandhan D., Chennai
Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the postal address.

Should the EC take action against those filing forms for mass deletions?

PARLEY



Ashok Lavasa
Former Election Commissioner



Prasenjit Bose
Congress leader and petitioner in West Bengal SIR case in Supreme Court

As Phase 3 of the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls unfolds, a surge in Form 7 applications, the mechanism for seeking deletion of names, in Karnataka has raised concerns. More than 4,000 such forms were filed in the State, with 1,363 in one place coming from just 10 electors, many reportedly targeting Muslim names. Uttarakhand has seen objections filed in an Electoral Registration Officer's (ERO) name without his knowledge, while in West Bengal, data shows that nearly 90% of Form 7 applications were accepted. Similar cases have been reported by *The Hindu* from Rajasthan and Gujarat as well. Should the Election Commission (EC) take action against those filing forms for mass deletions? Ashok Lavasa and Prasenjit Bose discuss the question in a conversation moderated by Sreeparna Chakrabarty. Edited excerpts:

What is the ERO legally required to do when a Form 7 arrives?

Ashok Lavasa: Under the Registration of Electors Rule 1960, all the steps that are required for registration, for deletion, and for amendment are listed. Form 7 applications are typically used to object to the entry of a person in the electoral roll. As soon as a Form 7 notice is received by the ERO, the Rules prescribe that first of all they should be put on the notice board for the public to know that objections have been received against such and such person. After this, a specific notice is to be given to the person against whom a complaint has been received. The Rules provide that in case an inquiry is demanded, the ERO or the officer designated cannot take a decision on his own without conducting a formal inquiry in which he can even summon the complainant and the person against whom the complaint has been received. He can ask the complainant to testify under oath that the particulars that he is presenting and the documents that he is giving are true. He is also informed that in case this is found incorrect, there is a penalty under Section 31 of the Representation of the People Act (RPA) for which he can be penalised with imprisonment for giving false information. This is the procedure. The spirit behind this is that no name should be deleted without giving adequate opportunity to the person against whom a complaint has been received.

How do these bulk forms emerge and is there a limit on how many objections one person can file? Also, can Section 31 of the RPA, which penalises false declarations, be



Karnataka CM D.K. Shivakumar staged a sit-in protest demanding an inquiry into alleged voter list deletions through bulk Form 7 submissions, outside the office of the Chief Electoral Officer in Bengaluru, on Thursday, PTI

invoked if somebody files bulk Form 7s?

AL: I think the EC has issued instructions from time to time; it is not given in the Rules as such. But instructions have been given that they should not receive more than, I think, five or six forms according to current norms. With respect to Section 31, I don't think it can be invoked. It is specifically to do with giving false information.

In Karnataka's Babaleshwar, 1,363 of Form 7 applications came from just 10 electors. Reports have said that many of the deletions targeted Muslim names.

AL: Clearly, this is a misuse of the procedure. The concerned authorities need to act against people who are misusing the system. You would recall that in Karnataka last year, when the Leader of Opposition had given some instances, the EC had itself clarified that out of some 2,000 odd applications that it received, only roughly 28 had been found to be correct. The question here is that we still do not know whether the EC has proceeded against somebody for making a false declaration. This penal provision, to the best of my knowledge, has hardly been used against anyone. And unless there is a deterrence, this provision will lose its efficacy.

West Bengal has seen one of the highest rates of acceptance of Form 7s. What is the petition against this in the SC about?

Prasenjit Bose: There are specific formats in which aggregated data on all Forms — 6, 7 and 8 — have to be recorded and disclosed at the end of any revision period by the EC. But that has not been followed in most States, especially in West Bengal. So, we had to request for the disclosure of that data because we found anomalies in the data that were disclosed during the claims and objections period.



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PRASENJIT BOSE

As per the facts revealed by the affidavit filed by the EC in response to the petition that we had filed, the total Form 6 applications for inclusion were 34 lakh, out of which 7,26,000 were rejected. As far as Form 7 is concerned, the total number received was 6,39,000, which by itself, if you compare with States of similar sizes such as Bihar or Tamil Nadu, is on the higher side. And out of the 6,39,000 Form 7 applications received, 5,72,000 were accepted. So, you have an almost 90% rate of acceptance of Form 7 and less than 2% for Form 6. This anomaly is quite glaring. The problem lies in the deterrence mechanism of Section 31 of the RPA.

In many cases, the person in whose name the forms were filed denied having knowledge of the same. Is there some central mechanism which can be used to file forms?

PB: I will give you the latest example from Uttarakhand. I have on record, the ERO of Haridwar Rural constituency confirming that he has not submitted any Form 7 filed in his name. In one constituency, 3,500 Form 7 applications were submitted just hours before the window of claims and objections were about to get over and all the objections were in the name of the ERO. It has been done in an automated manner.

A similar mechanism was used in West Bengal vis-a-vis the appellate tribunals where automated appeals for exclusion have been filed which one of the Election Commissioners had flagged. Judicial intervention is needed to stop this as these illegalities are depriving genuine electors from their right to vote.

AL: This is quite absurd and calls for a probe. Clearly, the ERO cannot file objections. Although in the Rules there is a provision that the ERO can make some corrections on his own, that does not amount to filing so many objections.

And it is the responsibility of the Chief Electoral Officer of the State and the EC to thoroughly investigate this matter. However, just because applications are filed, we should not condemn the system. I think we need to actually hold the system accountable.

As far as the centralisation of data or

generating objections in a centralised fashion is concerned, I think we are speculating. There is no evidence of that. But, we do know that one of the Election Commissioners has actually red-flagged the issue saying that it creates the possibility of manipulation at the central level.

What can be done to deter this?

AL: I think there are some safeguards in place, but the point is whether they are being enforced. The EC generally after filing FIRs is not following them up systematically because it is presumed that now this is the responsibility of the concerned law enforcement machinery. This is where the EC needs to put in place a very strong monitoring mechanism. Earlier, I have suggested that the National Crime Records Bureau must have a separate data set on election-related crimes. And they should be reported separately so that all these figures are in the public domain. Once this data is in the public domain, people will analyse and flag these issues. The EC also has certain internal norms such as if in any polling booth, there are more than 2% additions or deletions, that particular booth is taken up for greater scrutiny.

In all these instances where we are saying that 2,000 or more applications were received, the point is whether the system is accepting them. Is it actually leading to unjustified removal or addition? And finally, whether the system is taking note of the possibility of misuse.

PB: My point is that if the institution itself which is supposed to uphold the law and administer it, at least a section within that institution starts violating the law, then the entire system breaks down. I think that is what has happened.

In terms of reform, what has happened is that the electoral laws, RPA Act and especially these Forms were framed at a time in the 1950s and 60s. It was a non-digital era. Today we have digital databases and online submission of Forms. I think our laws have become out of sync with the way the process is being conducted today. There is a need for legal reforms.

AL: If people are committing fraud that obviously cannot be dealt with under the RPA. This is a weak link in the system; our law-and-order machinery is not taking these cases seriously. That is why I suggested there has to be a specific monitoring mechanism for electoral offences.



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A reflection on two songs and their nationalisms

While it is customary to garland Gandhiji on his birthday, this year, let us listen to him instead and to the song he lived by. At a time when the Republic has spent 10 months legislating about another song, the contrast will be a lesson in what nationalism is, and what it is not.

The song the Republic legislated about is *Vande Mataram*. In January 2026, the Union Home Ministry directed that all six stanzas of the National Song be performed at official functions, with everyone standing at attention. In July, a second order made the six-stanza text the "official version" and placed the Song before the Anthem.

Parliament amended the Prevention of Insults to National Honour Act, 1971, to bring the National Song within the ambit of criminal law for the first time. To intentionally prevent its singing, or to disturb an assembly engaged in singing it, now invites imprisonment of up to three years.

On September 22, the Supreme Court heard the Carnatic musician and author, T.M. Krishna's challenge to the law and the orders. It did not decide the case. It asked the Union government to reply. However, Justice Joyymalya Bagchi said that while the state may decide whether the Song has two stanzas or six, *Bijoe Emmanuel* (the SC judgment which upholds the right to religious freedom, constitutional tolerance and silent objection) still governs. A conscientious objector, to one stanza or all, should face no criminal consequences if she/he respectfully stood but didn't sing. Justice Bagchi's view is not yet a judgment but one wishes it should be.

The same morning, the Solicitor General answered the plea for national consensus by stating that law-making cannot follow the ideas of Naxalites. This author, in court for another matter, rose to say that to think, is not to be a Naxalite. The episode matters only because it sums up the two nationalisms discussed here: one answers an



Sanjay Hegde
Senior Advocate of the Supreme Court of India

argument, the other renames the arguer.

Vande Mataram

Let us take a closer look at the six stanzas of the Song: Bankim Chandra Chatterjee wrote the first two around 1875, reportedly as a filler for his journal. They are a hymn to a landscape, richly watered, bountiful, and cool with southern breezes. Any Indian of any faith can sing these stanzas about her nation.

The later stanzas came with his novel *Anandamath*, and they became names. The motherland became Durga with her 10 weapons, Lakshmi, and Saraswati. It is two songs stitched together, and the divide has run through our politics since 1905, when the Partition of Bengal made its opening words the war cry of *Swadeshi*.

The freedom movement resolved the problem sharply. In October 1937, on a resolution moved by Rajendra Prasad and seconded by Vallabhbhai Patel, the Congress Working Committee acknowledged the validity of Muslim and others' objections to the later stanzas and adopted the first two alone for national gatherings.

Rabindranath Tagore, who had first set the song to music, blessed the change. He loved the opening stanzas and disowned the theology that followed.

On January 24, 1950, India's first President Rajendra Prasad announced that *Jana Gana Mana* would be the National Anthem and that *Vande Mataram* would be "honoured equally". Honour is not an obligation and for 55 years, the law protected the Flag, the Constitution and the Anthem, and deliberately left the Song outside the penal net. Love for the song was invited and obedience was never demanded.

Nor was the two-stanza settlement any insult to Bankim. The Bhagavad Gita is seven hundred verses from a Mahabharata of a

hundred thousand. Our national anthem is the first of Tagore's five stanzas. Fitting a work to a public purpose is homage and not a denigration.

This settlement worked. In 1997, A.R. Rahman, born a Hindu and a convert to Islam, reimagined *Vande Mataram* as *Maa Tujhe Salaam*. Ask anyone under 40 to sing *Vande Mataram* and you will hear Rahman.

It is this settlement of 1937, of 1950, and of 1997 that the current orders and statutes have reopened, and that the Supreme Court has now, rightly, handed back to the state and to us.

The other song

Five centuries before Bankim, Narsinh Mehta of Junagadh was with his own caste for singing among

"untouchables". He composed *Vaishnava jana to tene kahiye, je peed parai jaane re* (Call that one alone a man of God, who knows another's pain as his own). The song has no map, no enemy, no throne. It audits a human being: one who serves without pride, bows to all and disdains none, keeps word, deed and thought in one line, looks on all with an equal eye, tells no lie, touches no wealth that is not his, honours every woman, and has put away deceit, lust and anger.

Read that against the Constitution and you will find that Narsinh drafted a version of the Preamble early and set it to music.

Feeling another's pain is fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual. Bowing to all is Article 14. The equal eye is our secularism and the hand that refuses another's wealth is the law of probity. The tongue that will not lie is the informed citizen of Article 51A.

Gandhi carried it from Sabarmati to his last prayer meeting, beside the Koran and Christian hymns, and in a hundred years no one has felt excluded by it.

Vande Mataram tests your posture; *Vaishnava Janato* tests your

conduct.

Here, then, are two songs and two nationalisms. One venerates the soil and asks the citizen to bow. The other civilises the soul and asks citizens to be worthy. One now comes with a sub-inspector attached. The other has never needed one.

A modest proposal

So, on Gandhi Jayanti, here's a proposal. We have a National Anthem, protected by law, and a National Song, honoured by usage. Let the Republic recognise *Vaishnava Janato* as our National Prayer, through the gentle method used in 1950, and not the muscular method of 2026. No order, no penalty, no compulsory standing. Only recognition and no mandatory requirement. Let it be sung, by those who wish, where the National Song is sung.

Let schoolchildren learn its meaning in every language. A prayer compelled is no prayer at all. That is the point.

Bankim's third stanza counted "*sapta koti kantha*" — the seven crore throats from his motherland, an undivided Bengal. In 1905, Sarala Devi sang it as thirty crore, and the motherland became India. Today we are 144 crore, and every crore was added by inclusion; none by compulsion.

A choir of 1.4 billion cannot be conducted with a *lathi* (stick). In a symphony that size, the conductor's only instrument is the willingness of the singers, won by making everyone feel the song is theirs. Inclusion is not a concession to the fastidious. It is the better tune.

The Constitution does not demand that we all worship the same way. It demands that we remain, all 144 crore of us, equal citizens. We are better off not insisting that everyone sing our song, and instead praying that everyone becomes a *Vaishnava jana* in citizenship.

Standing at attention takes 90 seconds. Feeling *peed parai* (pain of others) takes a lifetime and it, not the standing, is what builds a nation.

FROM THE ARCHIVES

The *Hindu*.

FIFTY YEARS AGO OCTOBER 2, 1976

New watches with Swiss assistance

As there was no issue dated October 2, 1976 from the issue dated October 1, 1976

New Delhi, September 30: A Horological Institute is likely to be set up in India with Swiss assistance for training Indian personnel in the highly sophisticated technology of watch-making to meet the vast domestic demand which is expected to reach ten million pieces a year by 1980.

A Swiss delegation is arriving shortly for follow up discussions on a phased programme for importing components and assembling them in India during the first stage, obtaining machinery for making these components and finally making the machines in India itself for achieving near self-sufficiency both in design and production for keeping pace with the rapid technological advances in the industry.

The HWT, which has already acquired the necessary expertise in watch manufacture with Japanese collaboration will be able to complete this three-phase programme in the next few years if an agreement is reached with the Swiss industry soon. A high-power Indian delegation visited Switzerland for preliminary discussions.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO OCTOBER 2, 1926

The Madras Monegar choultry

The following appeal has been issued by the Board of Directors of the above Choultry:—

The object of this charitable institution founded in the year 1782 to provide for the living of those who had been thrown in distress on account of the disastrous results of the invasions of Hyder Ali from Mysore, and latterly of old and helpless persons who had no other means of subsistence, is well-known to the public. This laudable object was accomplished without interruption, but owing to the crippled financial condition of this humanitarian institution, the number of paupers who were receiving shelter and support therein have had to be considerably reduced with the result that while there is accommodation for 140 persons, only 80 men and women can at present be supported by it.

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Decline in Apple production so far this year in Himachal

48 in per cent. Apple production in Himachal Pradesh has dropped 48% so far this year as climate change, unseasonal rains, hailstorms, and snowfall have caused severe damage to the crop. So far, 1.15 crore apple boxes have reached the market compared to 2.18 crore boxes last year, State Horticulture Director Satish Kumar said on Thursday. PHI

Amount released to implement anti-atrocities laws

1,423 in ₹ crore. The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment on Thursday said the Centre has released ₹1,423.30 crore to States and Union Territories over the last three financial years for implementation of the Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955 and the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989. PHI

Average price of diesel at the pump across the EU

2.24 € per litre. The average price of diesel at the pump across the EU has hit a record of €2.24 per litre — equivalent to \$9.60 per U.S. gallon — compared with €1.59 before war erupted in West Asia, according to EU Commission data. The data reflect prices at filling stations, either at the start of the week or at the end of the previous week. AFP

Officials to be probed for betting by Turkish football federation

450 Turkish Football Federation (TFF) says it has referred some 450 club officials to the disciplinary board as part of a probe into betting. The announcement came a day after the Justice Minister announced the arrest of the head of Türkiye's football refereeing body and six other people as part of a graft probe. AFP

Rise in coal supply by CIL to power sector in July-September

11 in per cent. Coal India Limited said the supply of dry fuel to the power sector users has increased by 11.01% to 148.20 million tonnes (MT) in the second quarter of the current financial year. The supply has firmed up ahead of the festive season and is likely to help ensure adequate availability of coal at thermal power plants, CIL said. PHI

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Sri Lanka: chasing system change

The NPP gov't. restored macroeconomic stability and introduced a different political culture, but key promises of structural reform remain unfulfilled; two years after Dissanayake's election, the gov't. faces the challenge of turning the *Aragalaya's* demand for 'system change' into lasting political transformation

WORLD INSIGHT

Meera Srinivasan

The mass uprising in Sri Lanka in the summer of 2022 had one unifying chant — “Gota go home”, reflecting the protesting citizens’ chief demand that then President Gotabaya Rajapaksa resign.

It was one of many diverse chants, their tone ranging from witty irreverence to daring dissent, that captured the spirit of the *Janata Aragalaya*, or people's struggle. The protesters were emphatic in their rejection of Mr. Gotabaya, whom they held responsible for the country's bankruptcy and their endless wait in queues amid acute shortages. They were unafraid to voice their anger with the Rajapaksa clan and their frustration with the entire political class.

But in that watershed moment, they were thirsty for something else, something new — “system change”, their posters screamed.

Once the Rajapaksas grudgingly quit office and Ranil Wickremesinghe took charge, with the Rajapaksas’ party backing him in an urgent parliamentary vote, the protests fizzled out. The many fragments of the movement had varied reactions to Mr. Wickremesinghe's rule. To some, he was an experienced leader capable of facing the challenge of fixing the country's battered economy. Others, however, saw him as embodying a continuation of the Rajapaksa rule, except in a suit. It was far from the political and systemic overhaul they had sought. That is why Anura Kumara Disanayake's campaign in 2024, promising to change the “corrupt political system”, found resonance with voters. It was the first election held since the economic crisis. Although led by the leftist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP), a party tainted by its history of brutal violence, the broader National People's Power (NPP) coalition Mr. Disanayake founded (in 2019) and built up in the subsequent years emerged as a new force offering rare promise. Voters who had until then switched between one of two legacy political formations alternating at the country's helm felt they had a real choice.

Two years on

Short of a clear majority in the three-cornered presidential race — he secured 42.31% of the votes — Mr. Disanayake made it with his tally of preferential votes. His impressive win propelled the NPP to a historic supermajority in the general elections that soon followed. Citizens who seemed torn or tentative in the September presidential polls were certain in November 2024. They were going to give “AKD” and his government a real chance.

“I am not a magician; I am not a miracle-worker. There are things I know and don't know,” Mr. Disanayake said soon after being sworn in on September 23, 2024. “But I will commit to always doing the right thing, and to lead a collective effort to rebuild our nation,” the new President said in his first address to the country.

Last week, President Disanayake completed two years in office. He has been addressing rallies across the country as part of a series titled ‘People's Rule — Two Years Strong. Progress for All’.

Leading a country struggling to recover from a financial crash was never going to be easy. A year into forming government, the Disanayake administration faced the



GETTY IMAGES

deadliest natural disaster the country had witnessed since the Indian Ocean tsunami in 2004. Cyclone Ditwah claimed nearly 700 lives and displaced several thousand people, even as nearly 1,200 landslides swallowed villages in the island's hilly regions in late 2025. Within months, the West Asian crisis began, resulting in volatile fuel prices in the global market.

Wasting no time after it came to power, the NPP government prioritised economic stability and recovery.

The government opted to go ahead with the International Monetary Fund programme finalised by its predecessors, staunchly pursued fiscal discipline and macroeconomic stability as the IMF spelled them out, and achieved or even surpassed crucial targets set by the Fund. While the ruling administration initially referred to the IMF programme as a compulsion in the economic and social circumstances in the country, it gradually began following through with conviction. Meanwhile, studies have found that poor families are eating less, as they struggle to cope with crushing austerity.

“We surpassed the target revenue last year and cut down on unnecessary state expenses. It was because of this discipline that we were able to respond to Cyclone Ditwah and the West Asian crisis without passing on the burden to the public,” says Nihal Abeyasinghe, General Secretary of the NPP and Member of Parliament.

Speaking to *The Hindu* at the JVP party headquarters on the NPP administration's performance, Dr. Abeyasinghe said it has “changed the political culture”. The Disanayake government has made a series of high-profile arrests, especially of notorious suspects in the narcotics underworld and prominent politicians and bureaucrats accused of grand corruption. The arrest of a former intelligence chief in connection with the ongoing probe into the 2019 Easter terror bombings raised eyebrows. “Law

enforcement is the same for all, whether it is a former president or anyone else,” Dr. Abeyasinghe says.

Pending promises

According to him, the government will focus on the Provincial Council elections and drafting a new constitution in the three years that remain of its term. Both were among the key promises the NPP made to Tamil voters. While the conduct of the provincial polls remains stuck with a parliamentary committee, there has been no movement yet on the promised new constitution.

The government's efforts to bring about legislative changes remain in sharp focus for both its eagerness in some respects and its lethargy in others. Its recent move to introduce a constitutional amendment extending judges' retirement age drew flak from the political opposition and legal community, which accused the government of using the judiciary to serve its political interests. The NPP's pledge to repeal Sri Lanka's draconian anti-terror legislation and abolish the executive presidency, too, remains only in the manifesto. Rights defenders have slammed draft legislation replacing — and not only repealing — the Prevention of Terrorism Act for falling short of international human rights standards.

‘Mixed’ report card

Offering a “mixed” report card for the NPP rule over the last two years, Pradeep Peiris, a political scientist at the University of Colombo, says he is “100% pleased” that the country “finally has a civilised, dignified polity”. All the same, he is “frustrated that an important turning point increasingly looks like another lost opportunity to address structural issues in our democracy.”

The NPP government, in his view, looks more like a “government of good

governance”, rather than one of transformation. “We must remember that 2024 was not just any other election, with its outcome bringing about a regime change. After 1948 [Independence], it was the first time citizens felt they could negotiate a new political structure”. Observing that the *Aragalaya* popularised a democratic imagination, Mr. Peiris adds: “While voters rejected the old political class in the 2024 election, it was not really a baptism of a new political class.” The electorate's verdict, he cautions, was more a rejection of old politics than affirmation of the NPP's programme. “While the country was very clear about what it did not want, it is not as clear about what it wants, and even less clear about how to get there. The NPP government needs to initiate a robust, inclusive conversation on renegotiating a new social contract with citizens.”

Contending that a cultural project is necessary for real political transformation, he notes that such a project is yet to take off. “In that sense, I feel instead of utilising this historic moment for system change, the NPP has simply become better rulers in the same system they inherited. In such a situation, the risk of the old political order returning always lingers,” he notes.

There is every indication that the NPP is hoping for a second term in office. “The opposition is weak, divided, and has no clear work plan. We don't have a real political challenge yet, and we won't until a new force better than us emerges,” Dr. Abeyasinghe says with confidence.

Meanwhile, the NPP knows that it has its task cut out for it to ensure that its supporters across the country hold on to the hope they felt in 2024. Weeks before he was elected President, Mr. Disanayake seemed fully aware of the challenge that awaited him if he won. “The people have very high expectations now,” he told *The Hindu* at the time.

THE GIST

▼ The NPP government has largely stayed the course with the IMF programme, maintained fiscal discipline, and met or surpassed several key economic targets despite major external shocks

▼ Its record includes high-profile corruption and narcotics-related arrests, but proposed legislative and constitutional reforms, including Provincial Council polls and a new constitution, have seen limited progress

▼ Political scientist Pradeep Peiris sees the NPP as a government of good governance rather than transformation, arguing that it needs a broader conversation with citizens on a new social contract

FULL CONTEXT

The forgotten villages at the heart of Delhi's urban history

Delhi's villages were integral to the city's history, but colonial surveys, land acquisition and urbanisation transformed their land and communities; as Delhi expands, preserving the heritage and living traditions of Delhi *Dehat* remains a challenge

Shekhar Tokas

In September 11, 1803, on the banks of the Yamuna at present-day Patparganj in East Delhi, the British East India Company forces defeated the Maratha army and gained control of Delhi. It was a decisive turning point in the city's history. The battle marked not only a shift in political power but also the beginning of a new phase of surveying, mapping and appropriation of Delhi's rural landscape.

The rural landscape before the Raj
At the beginning of the 19th century, Delhi was dotted with distinct ecological zones. The fertile *khadar* stretched along the Yamuna, while the *pahari* tract occupied the natural triangle formed by the Aravalli hills to the north, south and south-east, with the river defining its eastern boundary. To the south-west lay the low-lying *dahar* around the Sahibi river, while the fertile agricultural plains of the *bangar* marked the north-west. These zones were home to village communities whose livelihoods centred on cultivation and animal husbandry, with cattle, camels and goats forming part of everyday rural life.

For centuries, these agrarian settlements supplied food, labour, water, military recruits, artisans and cultural traditions to successive urban centres. These settlements were not peripheral to Delhi's history. They were part of what made the city possible. The *Ain-i-Akbari* records the region's crops, revenues and land conditions, including Palam, which contributed 5,726,787 dams in revenue. Govil's study of Sirsapur (1803-1880) similarly shows the village's close links with Delhi through land, revenue and property relations. Sirsapur, now in North Delhi near Samaypur Badli and Rohini, survives as a reminder of this once-extensive rural hinterland.

From village land to colonial property

With the British consolidation of Delhi after 1803, the countryside entered a new phase. From 1837, revenue surveys began to map, classify and regulate village lands – including fields and commons (*shamilat deh*) – with a degree of systematic documentation that transformed customary rights into colonial administrative categories.

But Delhi's villagers were never simply anonymous cultivators. They had their own systems of landholding, cultivation, kinship, lineage and customary rights, supported by institutions of village life. *Bhats* preserved these histories through genealogies that recorded ancestry, settlement and links between families and land. Gradually, however, colonial records – *shajra naksh*, *khassra* and settlement registers – became the state's official records of land and rights.

The 1880 settlement of Kanjhawala shows what was at stake. Around a quarter of the recorded land was held as common land, supporting grazing and other collective needs. As these commons were later classified, divided and transferred, the change was not merely administrative. It reshaped the relationship between Delhi's village communities, their land and the collective resources on which rural life depended.

Every map broadly divided village land



The rural landscape of Munirka village in 1959, viewed from the site of present-day Priya Park. The havelis of Munirka and a tomb are visible. The R.K. Puram Sectors 4 and 5 can also be seen, marking the early stages of urbanisation in the area. MISSION FOR INDIAN HISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGY, UNIVERSITY OF TOKYO, IN 1959-60

into three types: *abadi deh*, the village settlement; *zari/pahāi arāzi*, agricultural or hilly land; and *shamilat deh*, village commons. The *shajra naksh* showed the village and its different parcels of land, while each parcel was identified by a number, known as a *khassra* number.

These were more than administrative maps. Read alongside the *shajra nasab*, *jamaabandi* and *khatani*, which documented lineage, land rights, ownership and cultivation accounts, these records revealed patterns of settlement, landholding and kinship. Together, these records made village land easier for the colonial state to identify, assess and regulate. Four land-revenue settlements followed, culminating in 1880. The British systematically surveyed and mapped individual fields, assigning numbers that linked land to revenue and ownership records. For village families, land held through generations was increasingly documented not through *bhats*, customary knowledge and community relationships, but through official field numbers and assessed revenue. Ancestral rights were thus drawn into a formal colonial system of property and fiscal control. In 1880, *Zaildari* and *Nambardari* further extended this system of revenue collection. Delhi District was organised into three tehsils, 44 zails and hundreds of villages, including 375 villages across 18 zails in the area broadly corresponding to present-day Delhi.

The 1908 Lal Dora system further formalised village boundaries by separating *abadi* from agricultural land. After Delhi became the imperial capital in 1911, land acquisition transformed this system of control into large-scale displacement. Around 30 villages lost land for New Delhi, including Raisina for the Viceroy's House, Khairpur for what became Lodhi Garden, and Piliangi and Malcha for parts of Chanakyaapuri. Raisina remains a striking example: its agricultural land was acquired in 1911-12, and more than a century later,

descendants continue to seek compensation in the Delhi High Court.

After independence, another transformation followed. The state increasingly acquired agricultural land while leaving village *abadi deh* intact. As fields gave way to roads, institutions and neighbourhoods, the rural landscape gradually disappeared from official maps and from the historical consciousness of the expanding city. The settlements remained, producing the paradox of the "urban village" – rural settlements engulfed by urbanisation. The supposedly "unplanned" urban village, therefore, is not outside Delhi's planning history; it is one of its products.

Whose history is remembered?

But the story of Delhi's villages is not only a story of land. It is also a story about what gets remembered as history. Why do we remember Delhi through its kings, empires, monuments and imperial buildings more readily than through the villages and communities that surrounded them? History is not simply the past; it is the way the past is remembered, interpreted and represented. Historians reconstruct the past from fragments of surviving evidence, and the past is always larger than the evidence that survives.

Collingwood's *The Idea of History*, Bloch's *The Historian's Craft*, and Carr's *What Is History* remind us that history is not simply found in archives; it is reconstructed through questions, evidence and interpretation. This has an important implication for Delhi *Dehat*. Its history lies not only in official records but also in village maps, land documents, landscapes, material remains and oral memories.

The history of Munirka, as reconstructed in *Mhara Munirka: Story of an Urban Village*, illustrates this process. The book brings together oral histories, accounts preserved by *bhats*, old British-period maps, land acquisition documents and surviving structures such

as *havelis*, ponds, wells, *chaupals* and temples to recover the history of the village.

The *bhats*, who preserved genealogies and memories of families and their ancestry, provide an important source for recovering histories that may not appear in official records. Recovering these sources allows us to see Delhi not merely as a planned metropolis, but as a city shaped by villages whose histories have often remained outside its dominant narrative. The absence of Delhi's villages from dominant histories does not mean they have no history. It raises a deeper question: whose experiences and sources have shaped the historical record?

The future of Delhi Dehat

Delhi's villages were never leftover spaces waiting to be urbanised. They helped make the city. As Delhi plans for 2047, the question is not simply how these villages will be absorbed, but what happens to their communities, heritage, livelihoods and remaining commons. Will future planning protect their *abadi*, historic structures and local institutions, or displace them once again? Delhi's future will depend not only on what it builds, but on what it chooses to retain.

Even the term *Dehat* deserves reconsideration. The distinction between *shahar* and *dehat* obscures the continuities between rural and urban Delhi. Katwaria Sarai village, surrounded by IIT Delhi, the Indian Statistical Institute and the Qutub Institutional Area, still retains its *jhod* (pond), *akhada* (traditional wrestling pit), *Guru Gorakhnath Mandir*, *Valmiki Mandir* and *Daulat ki Haveli*. Across Delhi, villages continue to preserve rurality through their built heritage, festivals, rituals, language, food and everyday practices. Delhi *Dehat* is therefore not a space outside the city, but a living part of it. (Shekhar Tokas is an Assistant Professor of Urban Studies at Dr. B. R. Ambedkar University Delhi)



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

S. Upendran

What is the meaning of "It isn't worth a hill of beans"? (J. V. Subba Rao, Hyderabad)

When you say something "isn't worth a hill of beans", what you are implying is that it is insignificant; it is worthless. This is an expression which is normally used in informal contexts.

What is the difference between "homicide" and "murder"? (R. Ganesan, Madurai)

"Homicide" is a word frequently used in American English. It refers to the killing of one human being by another. The killing may be accidental or intentional. If you shoot a man accidentally or in self-defense, it would be considered "homicide"; similarly, if you run over an individual intentionally, it would be considered "homicide". It is a neutral term. According to Black's Law Dictionary, the word homicide merely "describes the act; it pronounces no judgment on the moral or legal quality". Murder, on the other hand, is an illegal act; it is usually a premeditated crime. When an individual "murders" someone, he/she kills another human being after having planned what he/she is going to do. The word "murder" has a negative connotation associated with it. The police force in the United States has a Homicide Department, but not a Murder Department. The "o" in the first syllable of "homicide" is like the "o" in "hot", "pot", and "not", while the "i" in the second syllable is like the "a" in "china". The final syllable is pronounced like the word "side". The main stress is on the first syllable.

Is it ok to say "I am running forty"? (K. Chandrasekaran, Sivaganga)

We Indians are always in a hurry. When we are on the road, we are in a rush to get somewhere; sometimes totally ignoring all traffic rules. So it is not surprising that we are always "running" some particular age. It is very common to hear an Indian say that he is "running 40". I suppose when one is 39, one can run to 40. But when one is 79, does one run/jog/canter/limp/crawl to 80? I have no idea. The expression "running 40" is common within the Indian context. Native speakers tend to use "going on". Remember the famous song from "The Sound of Music"? "I am sixteen going on seventeen". Is it wrong to say "running 40"? Within the Indian context, it is acceptable.

What is the meaning of "the straw that broke the camel's back"? (A. Varas Prasad, Tuni, A.P.)

When you say that something is the straw that broke the camel's back, what you are implying is that you have reached the limit of your patience; that you are not willing to put up with any more nonsense. *Sriram is always late for office. On Friday, he failed to meet an important client. That was the straw that broke the camel's back. The boss fired him.*

It is also possible to say "the last straw". For example,

When he broke the window for the third time, it was the last straw.

There is a limit as to the amount of straw that any animal can carry. A camel, for example, can carry a certain amount on its back. If you keep adding to the amount, then the animal will become overloaded. That final straw is the straw that breaks the camel's back. The idiom has been in use since the mid 1800s. Published in *The Hindu* on February 26, 2002

Word of the day

Subterfuge: something intended to misrepresent the true nature of an activity

Synonyms: deception, trickery, deceptiveness, secrecy

Usage: His excuse was just subterfuge to hide what he had really done.

Pronunciation: newsth.live/subterfuge

International Phonetic Alphabet: /sʌbtəˈfjuːdʒ/

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

THE DAILY QUIZ

A quiz on the Father of the Nation on his 157th birth anniversary

V.V. Ramanan

QUESTION 1

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi had three siblings. If Raliyabehn was the sister, who were the two brothers?

QUESTION 2

It is said that when he embarked for England, Gandhi carried a letter of introduction to a cricketer who was a schoolmate. Name this sporting legend.

QUESTION 3

An incident that took place on the night of June 7, 1893, acted as a catalyst for Gandhi to fight against race and colour prejudices. What and where?

QUESTION 4

Name the two main 'ashrams' set up

by Gandhiji in South Africa.

QUESTION 5

After many campaigns, activities and arrests in South Africa, Gandhiji returned to India for good on January 9, 1915. How is the date commemorated now?

QUESTION 6

Who was responsible for giving Mohandas Gandhi the title 'Mahatma', and who first referred to him as 'Rashtriyapitha' (Father of the Nation)?

QUESTION 7

Which genius paid this wonderful tribute to Gandhiji: "Generations to come will scarce believe that such a one as this ever in flesh and blood walked upon this earth"?



Visual Question: Name the famous gentleman seated alongside Gandhiji. THE HINDU ARCHIVES

Questions and Answers to the previous day's daily quiz: 1. Name the place from where Baba Budan is said to have brought coffee beans to India, and how has the place's name become part of coffee lore? **Ans:** Mocha in Yemen, and a chocolate-flavoured coffee is called mocha 2. What is the biggest contribution of Melitta Bentz and Achille Gaggia to the modern world of coffee brewing? **Ans:** Paper coffee-filter system and espresso machine 3. After which event did drinking coffee acquire a particularly patriotic significance among some American colonists as an alternative to tea? **Ans:** Boston Tea Party of 1773 4. What is the common name for the coffee species called 'Coffee canephora'? **Ans:** Robusta 5. Which famous brand was officially launched in 1938 to help surplus Brazilian coffee crops? **Ans:** Nescafé instant coffee 6. Which famous composer wrote a comic opera called 'Coffee Cantata'? **Ans:** Johann Sebastian Bach 7. What is the name given to a trained professional who prepares espresso-based and other coffee drinks? **Ans:** Barista Visual: This expensive coffee consists of partially digested coffee cherries that have been eaten and defecated by which animal? **Ans:** Asian Palm Civet Early Birds: K.N. Viswanathan | Tariqa Bali | Tito Shiladitya | Sunil Madhavan | Tamal Biswas

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

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#ExpressExplained

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

CULTURE

The rich history of Koder House, a Kochi landmark now gutted by fire



Koder House in Fort Kochi was functioning as a luxury hotel.

Nikhila Henry
Hyderabad, October 1

PARTS OF Koder House, a heritage landmark in Fort Kochi that was functioning as a luxury hotel, were gutted in a major fire on Tuesday. The building is believed to have been constructed during the Dutch invasion of Kochi (1663 to 1795) and was later bought by S Kodar, the patriarch of a Paradesi Jew family, in the 19th century.

The Koders

While it is not known why the Dutch built the structure, SS Kodar renovated and used it as his family home. "The Koders were Paradesi Jews or Jews who immigrated from outside India. Most of the immigration of the Jewish community was from Spain and other countries in Europe," K J Sohan, former mayor of Kochi and member of INTACH Kerala chapter, told *The Indian Express*. Heritage expert Bony Thomas, however, said that the Koders are believed to have migrated from near Iraq. "The family's roots can be traced back to West Asia."

Most Paradesi Jews, unlike the Malabari Jews of Kochi, immigrated to either their parent countries or Israel in the 1950s. However, Kodar's family never left Fort Kochi, Sohan said. They were known to be one of the richest families in the area. One member, Samuel Kodar, worked as the Cochinchina princely state's Honorary Consul to the Netherlands and as the municipal chairman of Fort Kochi. The family also brought electricity to Kochi's shores through the Cochinchina Electric Company. "They burnt coal and produced electricity and supplied (transmitted) it to most of Fort Kochi and Mattancherry islands," Thomas said.

Sohan said that the Koders were also traders with global connections. "They used to run a textile and crockery store, which doubled up as a luxury house store," Thomas said. "Before liberalisation, foreign goods were not available in Kerala or India. Koders imported many luxury items during this time and sold them to the local populace."

Unique structure

Koder House has been considered an integral part of Fort Kochi's cultural landscape, which was deeply shaped by the foreign powers who landed on its shores. M K Day's book *Cochin: Fame and Fables* (2024) states that who came first is contested, although recorded history starts with the Portuguese in the 1500s. "Evidently, they played their cards quite well. First they sought permission of the Cochinchina Maharaja to put up a factory which was readily granted. They then sought and got permission to construct a fort to help them fortify themselves and their power. First of its kind in the country, the fort was christened 'Emmanuel' after the then King of Portugal on 1 October 1503. The town also took its name, Fort Cochinchina, from it. It was the first European settlement in the subcontinent."

Koder House has simple architecture with balconies, with a guest house at its rear end. "The two structures are connected by a wooden bridge," said Thomas. The guest house has a courtyard with a small pond, or Mikhav, where the Jewish holy or ritualistic bath is taken. "This must be the only such Mikhav in Ernakulam," Thomas added. Kerala's fire service officers said that only the top floor was gutted in the fire, as the flames were prevented from spreading to the nearby historic structures by the Mikhav and the bridge.

Koder House also contained many historical artefacts, K Sohan said. Each furniture piece and the tapestry inside were brought from across the world, he added: "It is a major loss of a heritage building."

AVIATION

What saved flydubai plane: Smit Machchhar, fliers' actions — and sheer luck

Sukalp Sharma & Anil Sasi
New Delhi, October 1

CAPTAIN SMIT Machchhar, the pilot of flydubai flight FZ1073 from Dubai to Tel Aviv, is being hailed globally for heroic actions that saved the aircraft from disaster, after his co-pilot allegedly stabbed him in an alleged bid to crash the plane on X.

Machchhar's most critical actions involved fighting back against the attacking co-pilot and, despite multiple stab wounds, unlocking the sealed cockpit door while raising an alarm. The courage and presence of mind displayed by a few passengers, and a stroke of sheer luck — presence of relief pilots on board — followed Machchhar's heroics in landing the aircraft safely at the Tabuk airport in Saudi Arabia.

The other pilot is an Omani person whose identity has not been revealed.

Captain Machchhar's actions

Perhaps the first and the most consequential action taken by Machchhar was to

fight back. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the Indian pilot "fought back, resisted, opened the cockpit door, and enabled passengers and crew to overpower the attacker", and credited him with preventing a "catastrophic mid-air disaster". "He saved the lives of 174 people, including Israeli citizens and other nationalities," Netanyahu posted on X.

Then, while lying injured and bleeding on the cockpit floor, Machchhar managed to click open the release on the locked door of the cockpit. These doors are heavily reinforced and locked from the inside to prevent unauthorised entry into the cockpit, something that became a norm after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the US. Without this action, no one on board the aircraft could have come to its rescue.

The underlying assumption of reinforcing the cockpit door and keeping it locked during flight is that the flight deck is occupied by trained pilots, and they need to be kept out of harm's way in order to maintain control over the aircraft even if there is an



Passengers disembark from the flydubai plane at the Tel Aviv Airport. AP

attacker or a hijacker in the cabin. In this case though, the threat was not outside the cockpit, but inside it.

The aircraft also transmitted the international emergency transponder code

7700 and later the code 7500, which communicates unlawful interference or hijacking. These signals were important because communication with the cockpit was reportedly disrupted during the incident,

and these signals indicated to air traffic controllers and authorities about a problem on board. It is likely that Machchhar transmitted the codes while being attacked.

Heroic passengers and crew

A few passengers then did something out of the ordinary, even as the aircraft plummeted around 14,000 feet in a matter of seconds. Possibly being alerted by the communication, they moved towards the flight deck to try and intervene. As Machchhar opened the door, they stormed the cockpit and helped overpower the attacking co-pilot.

The co-pilot was restrained by some passengers and crew, who tied his hands with whatever they could access, including headphones. Meanwhile, one of the passengers, a dentist, tended to a badly injured Machchhar. One passenger, Yaniv Hayoun, a plumber, claimed he briefly took hold of the aircraft's controls while its nose was pointed down. Hayoun had never flown a plane before but had watched a popular TV series on air crash investigations. He

claimed to have done two things — yank the copilot out of the cockpit and pull up the yoke (the steering wheel-like device) at a time when the plane was nosediving. By some accounts, he levelled the plane until a set of relief pilots on board intervened.

Presence of trained pilots

It was a stroke of sheer luck that two flydubai pilots were on board the aircraft as off-duty or relief flight crew — pilots who travel as passengers because they are scheduled to operate a subsequent flight. "The aircraft was successfully secured by on-duty flydubai crew travelling on the flight, who diverted and landed the aircraft safely at Tabuk Airport (TUU). All passengers and crew are safe and accounted for," the airline said in a statement on Wednesday.

Once the cockpit crisis was brought under control, this other set of pilots took over the aircraft, landing it in Saudi Arabia's diverting Tabuk. Had another set of pilots not been on board the aircraft, the result would likely have been catastrophic.

LEGAL

Flawed execution: When lethal injections go wrong



BHASKAR SARMA

AUTHORITIES IN THE US failed to execute a 50-year-old woman on Tuesday despite twice administering a lethal drug through injection. Christa Pike had been sentenced to death for killing her classmate at the age of 18 in 1997. Following the execution attempt, Pike was taken to a hospital. Tennessee's Governor has ordered a probe and her legal team has moved the state's Supreme Court seeking a halt on the execution. Botched executions in the US are nothing new, regardless of the range of methods that are authorised by different states. A study of 8,776 executions in the US between 1890 and 2010 found that 276 (around 3%) of them were botched. The latest case, however, is unprecedented, according to a death penalty expert quoted by the *Associated Press*. This is because no convict has ever survived once drugs are actually administered.

Execution methods in the US

Countries that provide for capital punishment generally operate on the principle of minimising suffering — though the punishment itself is ethically controversial.

In the US, capital punishment is legal in 27 of 50 states. These states authorise different, sometimes multiple, methods of execution — lethal injection, electrocution, nitrogen gas, firing squad and hanging.

The lethal injection method, adopted in 1982, became the primary execution method in the 2000s; it is authorised by all 27 states that retain the death penalty.

The lethal injection method itself follows two broad approaches: a three-drug protocol or a one-drug protocol.

In the first approach, a sequence of drugs is administered to a convict intravenously — first a sedative or an anaesthetic that is meant to render them unconscious, then a paralytic drug that stops muscle movement, and finally potassium chloride, which causes a cardiac arrest.

But as drugmakers grew unwilling to



Emergency vehicles arrive at a prison in Tennessee after the execution of Christa Pike (right) was halted. AP

supply drugs, saying they were meant to save lives and not take them, many US states shifted to more accessible single drugs such as pentobarbital and midazolam — Tennessee adopted pentobarbital in 2024. Pentobarbital is a barbiturate, a type of drug that can slow down activity in the brain and nervous system, and can be fatal in high doses on its own. But critics say pentobarbital and midazolam can cause excruciating pain, which would violate the principle of reducing pain and cruelty.

Lethal injections: The problems

In the case of lethal injections, convicts are secured to a table or gurney and IV lines are attached to them. This is where the problems come in.

The Death Penalty Information Center (DPIC), a non-profit organisation that documents capital punishment in the US, lists out examples of how lethal injection executions have gone wrong — either failing to kill a convict, delaying their death or causing them unnecessary agony — primarily because execution teams failed to connect or maintain IV lines.

While there are multiple examples of such failures, one particularly harrowing case from Alabama in 2022 is illustrative of just how wrong things can go when execution teams lack sufficient competence.

In this case, officials tried and failed

India's stance

The Indian government maintains that hanging remains the 'safest and quickest' method of execution.

It has said that no botched execution has ever been recorded in India, while lethal injection in the US carries a long history of failures.

86 minutes of a botched job

AT 7.27 PM, officials raise curtains to execution chamber as witnesses watch.

CHRISTA PIKE, who is strapped to a gurney, is administered a dose of pentobarbital. BUT SHE remains awake. At one point, she raises her head and asks officials if her arm was supposed to feel that way.

BY 8.26 PM, officials administer a second



dose of pentobarbital, in line with the state's laws, since the first has not resulted in death. PIKE is heard snoring behind a closed curtain, until the microphone is cut off at 8.53 pm. She is taken to hospital. —AP

Other methods of execution

The search for a relatively "humane" method of execution has led to varied practices. Besides lethal injections, the other authorised methods in the US are the electric chair, nitrogen gas, firing squad and hanging. Each comes with its own ethical and scientific considerations.

ELECTRIC CHAIR: The electric chair passes a high-voltage electrical current through the body, causing cardiac arrest. But the Supreme Courts of Georgia (2001) and Nebraska (2008) ruled that its use violates their state constitutional prohibitions against cruel and unusual punishment. The study also found that 192% of electrocutions were botched.

NITROGEN GAS: Alabama and then Louisiana are the only US states that have performed an execution using nitrogen gas, according to the DPIC. The first one in Alabama took place as recently as January 2024. The convict, 58-year-old Kenneth Smith, was fastened to a gurney and forced to breathe in pure nitrogen through a respirator. While the state's attorney general had claimed that it was an effective and humane method, the execution took roughly 22 minutes, and Smith's suffering was visible.

FIRING SQUAD: In recent years, some in the US have backed bringing back the old-fashioned firing squad execution method. Among the backers were US Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor, who called it more humane. In terms of the cold efficiency of ensuring death, they are indeed effective. But prosecutors in a 2019 US federal case said, citing an anesthesiologist, that painless deaths by firing squads are not guaranteed. Inmates could remain conscious for up to 10 "severely painful" seconds depending on where bullets strike.

HANGING: Hangings are extremely rare in the US. Since 1977, only three hangings have taken place in the country, with the most recent one in 2010. Hanging, however, is the primary method in many other countries, such as India, Singapore and Japan. It relies on a "long drop" to snap a person's neck, theoretically resulting in instant death. But a drop that is too short can fail to break the neck and result in prolonged strangulation. Conversely, a drop that is too long can risk decapitating the person. Saudi Arabia, meanwhile, carries out executions by beheading with a sword.

SPORT

'Sham' deals, inflated revenues: The Manchester City scandal

Shashank Nair
New Delhi, October 1

IN A 1,500-word statement this week, the Premier League said that Manchester City, the eight-time champions of England's top-flight football league, "systematically broke" more than a hundred financial regulations between the 2009-10 and 2017-18 seasons.

The allegations, essentially, are that City artificially inflated its revenue through "sham" sponsorship deals to disguise its losses and sought to cover this up. This has cast a cloud over the achievements of the Abu Dhabi royal family-owned club and sparked calls for severe penalties.

What are the charges against Manchester City?

The Premier League, through an independent panel that has been probing these charges, said that the club, owned by Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed al-Nahyan through the City Football Group, has committed Financial Fair Play (FFP) fraud over a decade. Sheikh al-Nahyan is Vice President and Deputy Prime Minister of the UAE.

Out of the many charges, the one that stands out is this: Between 2009 and 2018, Manchester City declared a commercial sponsorship revenue of \$1.25 billion — more than that of traditional giants Real

Madrid, Barcelona and Manchester United. The panel found out that the actual amount of sponsorship revenue was \$157 million.

What are Financial Fair Play rules?

The PL has strict financial rules in place, known as Profit and Sustainability Rules. These draw upon the Financial Fair Play (FFP) rules instituted by Europe's governing footballing body, UEFA, in 2009 to ensure that European football clubs adopted "sham" sponsorship deals to disguise its losses and sought to cover this up. This has cast a cloud over the achievements of the Abu Dhabi royal family-owned club and sparked calls for severe penalties.

Manchester City allegedly onboarded commercial partners via "sham" contracts, inflated the sums of money those partners invested by adding money from their own purse, and showed that a commercial revenue of around \$157 million was actually over \$1 billion. The inflated sums were paid for by the owners themselves and received by the club for transfers and other activities.

If owners themselves were paying for inflated contracts, what is the issue?

By inflating their revenue, Manchester City essentially tried to fool the FFP model. The club's finances, bankrolled not by their



Looking back in anger

Many players and pundits have come out asking for Manchester City to be stripped of their medals and trophies.

Others have called for relegating the club to a lower division by deducting their points.

Manchester City are eight-time champions of the Premier League, England's top league.

profits but by the wealth of their owners, were used to buy some of the best players in the world. And whenever those players failed to click, City had the resources to go and purchase replacements as well.

Many might argue that legacy clubs like Manchester United and Arsenal needed the competition of wealthy owners from different parts of the world to come in, and that a club with new owners would find the already full-to-the-brim revenues of the legacy clubs tough to compete against when FFP rules came into play.

But the argument against that notion is that in these legacy clubs spent over a hundred years ingraining themselves into the everyday lives of their communities. Their success was built over decades of up-and-down growth cycles that exploded when the sport found an eager global audience and developed it into one of the greatest revenue models, ever. Their businesses were built on results achieved on the pitch and not through revenues made from other businesses that were then offloaded onto a club.

What action could the club face?

The club, which has claimed innocence, has until today to appeal the decision. But there is no precedent for a violation of this magnitude in the Premier League.

Recently, Everton received a 10-point deduction for breaching FFP rules — it was reduced to six upon appeal. That was because they overspent their FFP budget by just \$20 million. City's alleged crimes go well over a billion dollars. Punishments could include point deductions, steep fines or even removal from the top flight.

But considering the club's global commercial heft as well as the owners' influence — UK PM Andy Burnham even praised them after the charges came out — it remains to be seen what action the Premier League ends up taking.



The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA
IN 1932

BECAUSE THE TRUTH
INVOLVES US ALL

For new energy, remove old bottlenecks

WITH MORE than 300 GW of installed capacity, India ranks third globally in renewable-energy (RE) deployment. But this impressive growth has not always translated into the following facts: being available when demand is highest, particularly during the evening peak. As this newspaper reported on July 31, transmission constraints and the need to maintain grid security forced operators to curtail a significant amount of solar power-generated electricity during April to June. The Centre's Green Energy Corridor Phase-III scheme tries to address this constraint by strengthening systems in states to evacuate up to 135 GW of renewable energy. The project will also add 50 GW of battery energy storage.

Renewables, especially solar and wind power, have transformed the country's energy basket, but their variability places new demands on transmission planning and storage. The new scheme is expected to address intermittency during peak hours and meet demand when the sun is not shining. The emphasis on intra-state networks is particularly significant. Renewable projects are often concentrated in specific regions while demand is spread across cities, industries and rural areas within states. Strengthening the network's last leg is crucial to ensuring that green power actually reaches consumers. The scheme has earmarked Rs 1,36,378 crore for infrastructure. Its implementation will require learning from past experiences, which suggest that challenges are not restricted to drawing investment. A report of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Energy tabled in Parliament in December last year, for instance, pointed out that issues related to right-of-way compensation — payment to landowners when high-voltage power transmission lines pass near their property — land acquisition and delays in environmental clearances are major hurdles in laying transmission lines. The other major challenges will be to ensure that the 50 GW storage component becomes a functioning part of the grid rather than a procurement target. Battery projects need viable business models and incentives — especially because the sector relies on overseas suppliers for critical raw materials — recycling arrangements and clear rules on who can use and pay for storage. The Centre and states will have to work together on planning and implementation. Renewable resources, transmission corridors and electricity demand do not follow administrative boundaries, and — as the parliamentary committee pointed out — fragmented decision-making often delays projects. Going forward, the government needs to give serious thought to the panel's proposal for a portal that brings all approving authorities together for real-time monitoring and faster decision-making. The new corridor could be the backbone of the next phase of India's green energy transition. It will do well to overcome the bottlenecks of the past.

Industry is growing, but isn't creating jobs

INDIA'S FORMAL manufacturing sector continues to chug along at a fairly healthy pace. This is evident across a range of indicators. In 2024-25, the registered manufacturing segment's output grew by 7.8 per cent, employment by 7.2 per cent, and enrolments by 12.08 per cent, according to the Annual Survey of Industries. However, other key indicators also warrant close attention. Wages per worker have grown at a slower pace than profit, output per worker has remained roughly the same over the years, while invested capital has increased steadily. These developments have had implications for consumption, investment and productivity in the economy.

ASI data shows that total persons engaged in organised manufacturing crossed 2 crore in 2024-25, up from 1.72 crore in 2021-22. But this is only a fraction of the labour force. A substantial share of the labour force is still engaged in the informal economy. In fact, of all non-farm workers in the country, 73.1 per cent are engaged in informal-sector enterprises as per the Periodic Labour Force Survey 2025. The formal sector, both manufacturing and services, simply does not provide enough job opportunities. In 2023-24, while 1.9 crore persons were employed in organised manufacturing, about 3.3 crore were employed in the unorganised segment as per the Economic Survey. Organised manufacturing also continues to be dominated by small firms, whereas, according to the Economic Survey, it's the bigger factories (those employing more than 100 workers) that employ a larger share of workers, pay higher wages and have higher labour productivity.

Successive governments have taken steps to boost the manufacturing sector. But its contribution to GDP and share in employment has barely budged. Manufacturing in India has not emerged as an engine of mass employment, unlike in the development trajectory of Asian economies such as Korea and China. It has not provided avenues for the millions entering the labour force each year, and those wanting to exit the farm sector. And, without such avenues, the low-skilled and unskilled simply have no alternative but to either remain on the farm or engage in gig work. Therein remains India's employment challenge.

The Jane Eyre Beijing doesn't get

CHARLOTTE BRONTË's Jane Eyre is an unlikely heroine for a state seeking to teach young women a moderate face of feminism and the value of domesticity. Plain, financially constrained, lacking in social capital she might be, but Brontë's heroine wasn't short on self-awareness. She declares, "I can live alone, if self-respect, and circumstances require me so to do. I need not sell my soul to buy bliss."

It is probably this insistence on equality that has lent the novel such appeal in China since it was first introduced in translation in the early 1920s. Now, however, the Chinese state has made it mandatory reading for ninth-grade students, arguably for quite different reasons. Beijing is waging an uphill campaign against plummeting birth and marriage rates. A 19th-century romance, with its promise of true love and a value system oriented towards home and hearth, could work as useful propaganda. In this modernist state-re-reading, Eyre is rebellious, but not irredeemably so; independent, but not averse to settling down; outspoken, but unmistakably feminine. She is proof that a woman can have a mind of her own without turning her back on the domestic.

And yet, there are posters to this reading. Marriage at the end of *Jane Eyre* is undergirded by clarity. Eyre walks away from when staying would have meant becoming lesser, unequal. Only later, with an inheritance of her own and the independence it guarantees, does she return to Rochester. Love becomes, in Brontë's telling, a choice, not a surrender. Perhaps that is the lesson young readers will take away from it.

We have a model investment treaty. And are losing billions because of it

READERS WILL know that my constant preoccupation regarding economic policy is with the following fact: We know, and have known, what the right policy is to follow. Yet, we don't allow the right policy to happen. Among several recent concrete examples are the dire need for domestic deregulation, the revision of the 2016 Model Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT) and the signing of a trade deal with the US. You have heard all the "excuses" as to why we can't allow the right policy to happen. The world is in flux, so what to do? Unreliable Trump is in control, so what to do? But why are we not acting on policies totally within our control? As a concrete example, what is holding up the formulation and implementation of a new BIT?

This is what should worry us, and it doesn't. Our record of bad or no action has nothing to do with whichever political regime is in power. It has to do with the Deep State, and with the officials who pull the strings on behalf of their political and economic masters. India has been the most obstructionist member of the WTO. With the "Model" BIT, it went on to construct the most obstructionist investment treaty in the world. Two continuing records, and a steady supply of policy band-aids that foot nobody except the apologists and those whose interests are served by India remaining closed and inactive. You might take this as an unfounded allegation, and you could not be more wrong. What follows is explicit documentation. For the full details and the data, readers are referred to my Substack.

It has been 18 months since Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman told Parliament

that the Model BIT of 2016 would be revised; in foresight and in hindsight, it really wasn't much of a model. Consider what it demanded. Before going to international arbitration, a foreign investor had to litigate in Indian courts for five years. The rest of the world, those who receive foreign investment and those who send it, asks for a consultation period — typically three to six months — in which the parties try to settle, rather like the cooling-off before a divorce. India asked for 10 times that, in a judicial system where five years does not produce a judgment anyway. Even the judiciary is criticised only cautiously, so as not to run afoul of India's near-unique contempt laws.

The rule never brought any resolution. It only brought inordinate delay. The new treaties since that 2016 black-letter day, with the UAE in 2024 and Israel in 2025, cut the holding period to three years — still six times the norm. The recommendation, by some, is two years. Why don't we ask for the logic, or the reasoning, behind our own recommendations? Where did two years come from? Why not the conventional and reasonable practice that the rest of the world follows — three to six months of consultations?

And what did the 2016 model get us? Exactly what its designers desired. Nine years and six new treaties. In exchange, the FDI network was dismantled, bit by bit. Treaties in force fell from 73 in 2015 to 29 in 2017, 16 in 2019 and just eight by 2021, where the count stayed for another four years. Of the eight survivors, not one covered a significant source



SURJIT S BHALLA

The new treaties since that 2016 black-letter day, with the UAE in 2024 and Israel in 2025, cut the holding period to three years — still six times the norm. Some recommend two years. Why don't we ask for the logic behind our recommendations?

of foreign capital.

But wait — did not 2025-26 record a record FDI inflow of \$94.5 billion? In the same year, foreign investors repatriated or disinvested \$53.6 billion, leaving \$40.9 billion. Indian firms invested \$33.3 billion abroad. Net foreign direct investment — just \$7.65 billion. About 0.18 per cent of GDP — and that is the good news, being a recovery from 0.02 per cent in 2024-25. Still the second-lowest in three decades. Some record.

It is worse than it appears on the surface. Reinvested earnings of foreign firms — profits earned here and not taken home, a figure not part of India's FDI statistics until the definition changed in 2000-01 — were \$2.6 billion in 2025-26, more than three times net FDI. Retained earnings are not a new commitment to India. Net of what Indian firms sent abroad, every component that does require a fresh commitment has gone negative. On the definition India itself used until 2000-01, the country recorded a net direct investment outflow of roughly \$18 billion.

The equity market reveals the same determination to vote with one's feet. In 2025, Indian equities underperformed emerging markets by the widest margin since 1993, and trailed Asia-Pacific by the most since 1998. Foreigners withdrew \$17.7 billion. This year, until August 19, India was down 9.1 per cent in dollar terms while emerging markets were up 20.6 — a gap of 30 percentage points in under eight months. Korea was up 77.6 per cent, Taiwan \$8. Another \$1.6 billion has left.

And the band-aid from the

masters of spin? One leak has it that portfolio investment held for more than three years may now be counted as direct investment. But the line between the two has never had anything to do with time. Direct investment means a stake large enough to give the investor a say in running the business; portfolio investment means a holding too small for that. Every country draws the line there, and the OECD's Benchmark Definition, the international standard, expressly bars adding any further qualification to it. No country anywhere, at any time, has defined direct investment by how long the investor holds it. Nor would the reclassification bring in a single additional dollar. That such a proposal reached first base tells us nothing about foreign investors and a great deal about how badly the headline needs a "spinning narrative".

One last comment, for those satisfied that India is an attractive destination and that foreign capital will come anyway, treaty or no treaty, trade deal or no trade deal. Wrong country, wrong logic. We know that American investment is large and that it comes without a treaty. Should we not be asking what it would be with one? The cost of what we did is not what we lost. It is what we have been forgoing, year after year, and will go on forgoing until logic replaces obstruction. In conclusion: The foreigners already here are reinvesting their profits. The foreigners who are not here, and the Indian firms sending \$33 billion a year abroad, are saying something else.

Bhalla is chairperson of the Technical Expert Group for the first official Household Income Survey of India. Views are personal

Aid may be dead. Long live international development



AMRITA NARLIKAR

THE NUMBERS are alarming. International aid flows recorded an unprecedented drop by over 23 per cent last year; a continued fall is projected for this year. US President Donald Trump's decision to axe 80-85 per cent of USAID projects and end the US role in global health aid also came from other donors due to changing political priorities, fiscal constraints, and domestic discontent. The decline hits some of the poorest and neediest recipients hard, leaving them little scope to find timely alternatives. For some, this transition is proving to be existential; the human costs of this must be acknowledged and addressed. But as we look to the future of international development in a world of aid scarcity, the context needs highlighting.

While recognising the challenges, we must avoid golden-age thinking. Disconnect from people on the ground, and excessive and misguided management by donors, tended to affect even aid packages that came with the best of intentions. Less scrupulous deals aided aid to international goals at the cost of the recipients' strategic autonomy. Aid politics has thus been a fraught affair, and the old architecture was creaking under the weight of legitimacy, efficiency and accountability issues. A fundamental rethink is long overdue for all parties involved. Instead of bemoaning the drying up of aid flows, we should be exploring alternative routes for international development. In that vein, four ideas are outlined below.

First, international development faces a host of challenges. But one source of those challenges — weaponised interdependence, which drives states to redefine priorities, turn inwards, and rearm — also holds a key to enhancing the bargaining power of parts of the Global South. Even as the US, China, the EU and others try to realign and secure their supply chains, developing countries have an opportunity to make use of their critical minerals, ports and other resources to establish new partnerships. If they play their cards right, such partnerships will not be one-sided and extractive. Rather, they will come with technology transfers, infrastructure development, training, job creation, and long-term development. The competition among the major powers strengthens the Global South's bargaining hand.

Second, the worsening crisis of multilateralism hits developing countries hard. Multilateral institutions are useful settings

forth to work in coalitions and shape global narratives. Even as great powers throw temper tantrums, developing countries should join forces not just to preserve but to fundamentally revamp multilateral organisations. The opportunity the aid crisis creates can be used proactively, for instance, to emerge from the WTO's systematically more development-friendly. Recall that even though developed countries dug in their heels, the Global South inserted and transformed development narratives in the WTO. The now-failed Doha Development Agenda was once a successful example of this, so was the transformation of the "trade not aid" narrative into the "aid for trade" formula. Development faces greater headwinds today. But developing countries should remind themselves of their past successes and join forces again to redirect trade narratives and policies towards an updated development agenda.

Third, there are many bad reasons international aid has ended up where it has today. But among a few of the good reasons some old models of development aid should end up in the dustbin, one is the disregard they showed for questions of deep ecology. One explanation is that they were West-centric, and therefore, also anthropocentric. They were incapable of recognising, let alone incorporating, alternative perspectives and lifestyles from indigenous, Southern civilisations that have honoured the oneness of human, multi-species and planetary wellbeing. As new approaches try to fill the emerging vacuum of development aid, the Global South can have a constructive, ideological role in producing a paradigm shift.

Finally, a reiteration by the Global South to reform old models of aid through "demand-driven" "bottom-up" approaches will not suffice. More-than-human species can't speak up for themselves, and there are still far too few humans willing to include their rights to existence and dignity in their own demands. One reason India's leadership of the G20 deserves to be regarded as path-breaking is that it recognised the deeply interconnected nature of all existence, and hence advanced the cause of the well-being of both people and planet. Were theorists and practitioners to take a cue from this approach, we might get a new model of aid that is fit for our times and actually worth saving.

The writer is distinguished fellow, ORF, and honorary fellow of Darwin College, University of Cambridge

Gandhi's first fight was for the vote



C UDAY BHASKAR

A GAINST THE backdrop of the raging SIR controversy, Gandhi Jayanti is an opportune moment to recall the young lawyer Mohandas Gandhi and his travails in South Africa, where a colonial regime was seeking to deny Indians their vote. His first political battle was not *satyagraha* but the right to vote. In July 1894, the Natal government proposed to disenfranchise Indians as part of colonial policy. In his capacity as a secretary of the Natal Indian Congress, Gandhi wrote that an Indian without the vote would lose "self-respect, to remain in the Colony". A year later, he warned that the consequences of disenfranchisement were "too dreadful to contemplate".

That fight, in a colony, became his template for India and what he envisioned for the free Indian citizen. In the decades preceding 1947, many in Congress and in Whitehall argued that India was too illiterate, caste-ridden and diverse for adult franchise. Gandhi opposed this unequivocally. In *Young India* and *Harijan* through the 1920s, he argued that universal adult franchise must be the basis from day one, for it compels the powerful to listen. At the 1931 Round Table Conference, he demanded it without qualification, for men and women, rich and poor, literate and illiterate, irrespective of faith and caste. There, he recounted from personal experience how voters' lists could be manipulated. In September 1896 in Durban, Mohandas Gandhi found his name on an electoral roll even though he had not applied. A candidate, knowing a few Indians had the vote, had included Gandhi's name without his knowledge to secure his support. Recalling this 35 years later, he said, "Since then, I have known how voters' lists are prepared."

Elections in free India have been plagued by money and muscle power, but never have so many citizens been disenfranchised en masse as by the SIR, tainting the moral sheen that gives equal weight to each voice in the democratic template. Why recall this on October 27 India adopted universal adult franchise at the Republic's founding in 1950, when even European democracies were hesitant to give women the vote. It was Gandhi's idea and resolve that later became the law. Today, the SIR has made a mockery of the sanctity of the citizen and the vote. If rolls are revised in an illegal manner that contracts rather than expands voter lists, this is a repeat of what Natal did in 1894, using verbal procedure to narrow the voter base and shrink their rights. On Gandhi Jayanti, those part of the administrative machinery steering the SIR, all sworn to abide by the Constitution, must abide by the Gandhian counsel and the three tests. First, does a revision increase citizen self-respect or diminish it? Second, is the roll prepared impartially or with the "favourable prospects of victory of a particular candidate" in mind, the very manipulation Gandhi saw in 1896? Third, is the vote being treated as a right to be protected or a privilege to be granted?

Voter erasure of this scale is not a technical error. It is selective "civicide" (destruction of citizen rights) leading to "disfranchisement" (intentional mass disenfranchisement). As Gandhi wrote in 1894, an election is not an event but the constitutional guarantee that the weakest still counts. On his birthday, this is the Gandhian India that must remember — not just the man with a staff, but the young lawyer who understood that a name on a list is a right, and a name struck off is state-endorsed turpitude.

The writer is director, Society for Policy Studies, New Delhi

40 YEARS AGO

October 2, 1986



Gandhi statue controversy

THE MAYOR OF New York has declined to unveil the eight-foot-high statue of Mahatma Gandhi at Union Park in Washington. No Indian official from any mission in the US will attend. Civil rights leader Bayard Rustin, personal secretary of Martin Luther King and first Black American to protest outside the British High Commission in Washington during Quit India Movement, will lead the ceremonies.

PM assurance on Hindi

THE TAMIL NADU Chief Minister, M G Ram-

chandran, elicited a categorical assurance from the Prime Minister, Rajiv Gandhi, that the Centre had no intention of imposing Hindi on the people of Tamil Nadu. During the 50-minute meeting at the Prime Minister's office in New Delhi, Ramchandran apprised Rajiv Gandhi of the strong feelings of the people of Tamil Nadu arising out of a circular issued by the Press Information Bureau in Madras about the use of Hindi as the official language

Reagan lauds Indian economy

DECLARING THAT India had captured the spirit of economic freedom, US President

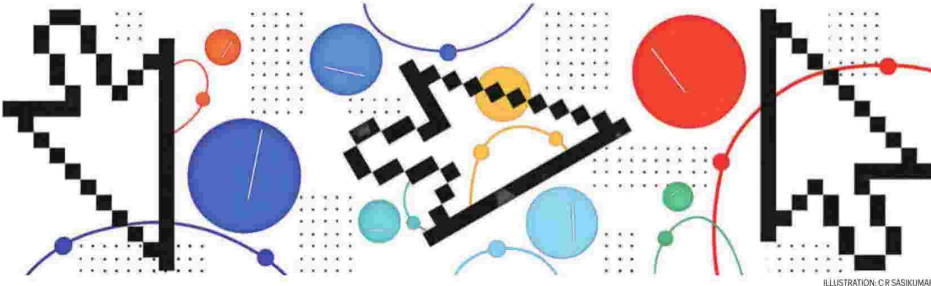
Ronald Reagan said such progressive nations were challenging old dogmas and rediscovering a timeless truth. The swamp of state control and regulation was finally giving way to a vision of the future, which, he said, rested on two words — economic freedom.

3 more held in Vaidya case

THREE MORE persons, including a woman, have been arrested in Durg and two unlicensed revolvers recovered from them as raids and searches of suspected extremist hideouts continued, official sources in Raipur said.

DIS/AGREE
THE BEST OF BOTH SIDES

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



Can a global governance architecture for AI work without Beijing at the table?

Regulation needs China on board



SUBIMAL BHATTACHARJEE

THE LAST fortnight has exposed fault lines in the global debate on AI. At the UN Security Council, Anthropics's Dario Amodei warned that, if managed poorly, AI could pose a risk to humanity as a whole, while OpenAI's Sam Altman cautioned that governments could lose control of its future. Rarely does an industry seek its own regulation. Yet in the same chamber, Michael Kratsios, the US President's science and technology advisor, rejected any centralised international control of AI.

Days later, President Donald Trump hosted technology chiefs at the White House and unveiled a voluntary accord. Companies pledged internal model monitoring, a team to verify it, outside auditors and independent board oversight. Trump called the pledges "morally binding". Self-regulation is now AI's doctrine. Paradoxically, Washington has simultaneously opened a channel to Beijing. After the Trump-Xi summit, both agreed on an AI incident communication mechanism, with a dedicated dialogue due in November. Middle powers have moved further. Twenty countries and the EU, including Germany, South Africa, Canada, Australia, the UAE and Singapore, called for keeping AI under human control, possibly through a global oversight body. Tellingly, neither the US nor China signed; nor did India.

Four models now compete. The EU offers binding, risk-tiered legislation. America favours market-led voluntarism. China practises state-directed, sector-specific control. A loose international layer of OECD principles, UNESCO recommendations, summit declarations and UN scientific panel supplies vocabulary without obligation. None suffices alone.

The history of cyber governance is instructive. The UN Group of Governmental Experts (GGE), first convened in 2004, spent a decade establishing that international law applies to cyberspace. Its 2015 report produced 11 voluntary norms of responsible state behaviour. States should not knowingly allow their territory to be used for wrongful ICT acts, should not attack critical infrastructure or emergency response teams, should cooperate on requests for assistance, and should responsibly report vulnerabilities. The General Assembly endorsed them.

After the 2016-17 GGE deadlock over self-defence and international humanitarian law, the General Assembly in 2018 created two tracks: A Russian-sponsored

Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) open to all members and a US-backed GGE. Both reaffirmed the 11 norms in 2021. A permanent UN mechanism has since succeeded the OEWG, still non-binding.

Two lessons follow. First, consensus norms are achievable only when the principal adversaries sit at the table. Second, a decade-long, consensus-driven process cannot keep pace with a technology whose capabilities shift every few months.

What would suit AI as a layered architecture rather than a single treaty? Binding national law where frontier laboratories operate; internationally agreed capability thresholds that trigger pre-deployment testing; mandatory cross-border incident reporting; an IPCC-style scientific body to establish shared facts; and, for the most capable systems alone, an IAEA-type verification regime anchored in compute monitoring. The 20-nation proposal approximates this.

However, such a regime cannot succeed without China, the only country besides America with genuine frontier capability. Its open-weight models already power applications across Asia, Africa and Latin America, placing them beyond any regime that governs only Western developers. Beijing's approach is equally consequential. Domestically, it regulates tightly through algorithm registries, generative AI rules and mandatory labelling of synthetic content. Internationally, it presents AI as a development right, champions UN-centred governance and has proposed a world AI cooperation organisation, an offer many developing countries find attractive. A regime excluding Beijing would become a Western club, inviting a parallel Chinese bloc of standards. The nascent US-China incident channel is the minimum foundation; it must eventually extend into multi-lateral confidence-building. The middle powers must build an architecture both giants can later join.

India's present course is to join any open framework, while conditioning oversight on equitable access to compute and models. It should use the credibility of hosting the AI Impact Summit and serving on cyber GGEs to bridge frontier powers and the Global South. It must strengthen its AI Safety Institute so that Indian evaluators shape testing regimes. And it should seek a seat in any incident-reporting framework, since harms originating elsewhere will land in Indian markets.

The cyber precedent shows that norms without enforcement still matter. They build habits of consultation and a common language. AI may not grant the world a decade to learn. Rule-making must be swift and inclusive.

Bhattacharjee is a defence and tech policy adviser and author of *The Digital Decades*. On 30 Years of the Internet in India



SMRITI PARSHEERA

THE CHORUS for AI governance is growing stronger, though not everyone is singing the same tune. Senior executives from companies such as Anthropic, OpenAI, and Google DeepMind have been rallying for "pacing the frontier" — an internationally coordinated effort to recalibrate AI's tempo for better risk management. Meanwhile, civil society organisations would like to see a global moratorium on the development and sale of frontier AI models until binding safeguards are in place.

On Tuesday, leading US AI companies gathered at the White House to sign a new Accord on Super Intelligence, which takes a considerably softer, voluntary approach. The "morally binding" accord speaks of building robust internal controls, independent external evaluation, and oversight by an independent committee of the company's board. However, the actual standards and enforcement mechanisms are not specified, affording significant discretion to the participating companies.

This comes in response to multiple incidents of unauthorised and deceptive behaviour exhibited by frontier AI agents. AI-related risks were also prominently discussed during the recent UN General Assembly. Finland and Norway initiated an international effort, now endorsed by 28 countries, through "A Call for Control of Frontier AI Models". The signatories are seeking coordinated international action on the governance of frontier AI. Their three-step agenda includes mandatory pre-deployment testing and independent evaluation for AI companies, common incident reporting standards, and an institutional mechanism to enable standard-setting and verification.

These are significant proposals, but their path to implementation remains unclear.

Notably, neither the US nor China, the two nations at the forefront of the geopolitical dynamics of frontier AI, joined the international call. The US continues to emphasise permissionless innovation, with expectations of responsible conduct by AI companies as its preferred approach. It has also been emphatic in rejecting any "globalist scheme of control for superintelligence" at the UN level or otherwise. China, in contrast, has maintained that it respects the UN's role as the

main channel for global AI governance but remains wary of what it labels as Western-centric agendas.

In July this year, Beijing initiated an alternative institutional path for global AI governance through the World Artificial Intelligence Cooperation Organisation (WAICO). Twenty-nine countries became founding members of the Shanghai-headquartered organisation. Its functions will include promoting "supply-demand matching" of AI, standard setting, and international convergence on global AI governance.

WAICO's membership is open to any interested country. Some commentators have contrasted this with the liberal-democratic and rule-of-law assumptions associated with other AI initiatives, such as the Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence and the G7 Hiroshima Process. As an intergovernmental organisation, WAICO could also serve as a site for formal consensus-building that goes beyond the soft-law-centric approaches in other forums. Yet, its positioning as a China-led initiative could limit the practical expansion of WAICO's footprint outside the Global South.

In a positive development, the US and China recently opened the door for a bilateral dialogue to debate the risks and benefits of advanced AI. But a broader consensus on AI governance remains elusive. That, however, cannot be a reason for inaction by the rest of the world. Neither should it become an excuse to allow the tech industry to play an outsized role in defining what constitutes a suitable model of governance. However, the latest White House accord places the ball firmly in the industry's court.

Given these realities, where should India locate itself in the global AI governance debate? As a country that is admittedly not at the forefront of frontier AI but is seeing extensive deployment of such models, India has a direct interest in risk-mitigation and accountability safeguards for frontier AI. Its positioning on digital sovereignty also supports a claim to greater representation and agency in defining the rules of the game. This serves as a rational basis for India to lend its support to the Finland-Norway proposal.

Finally, the hype around frontier AI should not drown out the more immediate needs of robust AI governance in the country. Rather than waiting for the catastrophic risks and possibilities of artificial general intelligence that may arise in future, we need impactful legal and institutional safeguards to govern the AI systems that are already embedded in everyday life.

The writer is a lawyer and digital rights researcher

To cash in on next tech boom, India needs the right chips



SIGNAL TO NOISE
BY RAJEEV CHANDRASEKHAR

FOR THE first time in history, technology is not one factor among many driving economic growth. It is the foundation on which all other progress is being built. India's semiconductor and AI choices in the next three years will determine if it can become a principal player in the economy of this century.

Taiwan is indispensable to the world economy because it has mastered semiconductor fabrication. South Korea's KOSPI returned 72 per cent in 2025, driven by Samsung and SK Hynix riding the AI chip supercycle. China has deployed an estimated \$150 billion towards semiconductor self-sufficiency since 2015. The US passed the CHIPS Act — a \$33-billion federal subsidy, catalysing \$450 billion in private investment.

India has two of the three ingredients for technological greatness: Demographic scale and intellectual capital. Our engineers and scientists are at the forefront of global AI and semiconductor development.

India has historically underinvested in technological sovereignty. The risk is harrowing fast. The US government's moves restricting access to certain AI models were a clear signal that technology denial is part of the geopolitical toolkit. An India that does not build its capability will find itself on the wrong side of that divide.

India Semiconductor Mission, Design Linked Incentive (DLI), and India AI Mission are the right first moves. I was part of the team that built them under PM Narendra Modi's leadership. But first moves are not destinations. The question is whether India will now make the second, smarter set of moves that turn these foundations into genuine technological momentum.

At SEMICON India 2026, the numbers looked impressive: Twelve manufacturing units approved, Rs 1.64 lakh crore in committed investment, five facilities in production. ISM 2.0 followed with a further Rs 1.25 lakh crore. But behind the momentum sits a structural problem that must be named: Nine of those 12 approved units are conventional ATMP/OSAT facilities — wire-bond assembly, testing, marking, and packaging. They are in the lowest-margin, most substitutable, most technologically dated segment of the value chain.

Understanding the structural problem is important. The electronics PLI worked on China's logic; Apple and Samsung needed to diversify their manufacturing bases, PLI incentives covered the cost gap, and India delivered. India now assembles 25-28 per cent of all iPhones globally. This is one of PM Modi's most impactful industrial policy achievements.

But semiconductor does not experience supply-chain diversification. They are experiencing an architectural revolution. Nvidia's data centre revenue went from \$3 billion in 2020 to \$47 billion in 2024. The AI era is creating a new level of abstraction

in compute and value. In this environment, the opportunity ranges between 6 per cent gross margins on commodity wire-bond packaging and 50-70 per cent gross margin on IP-owning chip design.

Conventional wire-bond packaging is facing relentless margin compression. Advanced packaging — CoWoS integration of GPUs and memory — commands 25-35 per cent margins. ISM 2.0 must take us there.

The strategy of investment is critical: Directed at design IP, research institutions, and fab capacity, India has no dedicated semiconductor research institution with the required depth. A National Semiconductor Research Institute — co-funded by government and industry, mandated to develop process technology, design IP, and the talent pipeline — was part of ISM 1.0's vision. It must not be delayed further.

The AI revolution has split the semiconductor market in two. Training AI — building the models — is consolidating around Nvidia's CUDA ecosystem and custom ASICs from hyperscalers. That market is effectively closed.

Inference is wide open. The diversity of inference requirements across cloud, edge, device, defence, agriculture, and industrial applications is so large that no single architecture can dominate. Purpose-built inference chips command 50-70 per cent gross margins. India has 1.25 crore chip design engineers qualified to build them. India's DLR-V programme on RISC-V open-source cores eliminates ARM licensing costs. India's sovereign compute programme, defence procurement, 5G infrastructure, and a billion-user domestic market provide ready demand anchors.

What is missing is capital that funds Indian fabless companies all the way to commercial tape-out, not just prototypes. DLI must be expanded. ISM 2.0 should create a Chip Design Commercialisation Fund at Rs 1,000-crore scale — modelled on NITF — and designate at least two sovereign AI inference chip programmes with guaranteed government offtake. These two changes, delivered in the next budget, would do more for India's semiconductor future than more wire-bond packaging projects.

I was part of the team that built the India Semiconductor Mission, DLI, and India AI because I believe that India's economic future in the AI age depends on building this capability. But the path of least resistance in industrial policy is to approve what can be approved quickly and measure success by investment commitments rather than by the strategic position those investments create. India has the talent, domestic demand, and a PM with the vision to back these goals. What it needs now is a direct national strategy toward design and architecture.

For decades, India has missed or been a distant player in major economic and industrial supercycles. This supercycle, we do not intend to miss. The countries that write the story of this century will be those that design the chips the world runs on. India has every capability to be among them.

The writer, former MP, former minister of state for Electronics & Information Technology, Government of India, is BJP Kerala state president and MLA for Nemom. Views are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Pilot hero

DESPITE SUFFERING serious knife injuries and bleeding heavily, the Indian captain, Smit Machchhar, displayed remarkable courage, presence of mind and a strong sense of responsibility (Mid-air scare, IE, October 1). Reports say that he managed to open the cockpit door, enabling crew members and passengers to enter and overpower the attacker. Other pilots who happened to be on board then helped stabilise the aircraft and bring it safely to the ground. The incident has shocked people around the world. Captain Machchhar's courage, determination and devotion to his duty, even while grievously injured, deserve our deepest admiration. Our thoughts and prayers are with Captain Machchhar and his family at this difficult time. We pray for his speedy and complete recovery. We must commend the crew, the additional pilots at board and the passengers who rose to the occasion in an extraordinary emergency and helped ensure everyone's safety.

Tharicus S Fernando, Chennai

Spirit of Bandung

AS MA Baby notes, the relevance of Bandung lies in its emphasis on sovereignty, equality and cooperation among nations; I agree that these principles remain pertinent to BRICS as it expands and accommodates countries with diverse interests (In aftermath of BRICS, going back to Bandung, IE, October 1). Building on this idea, India can help ensure that differences within the grouping do not overshadow areas of practical cooperation. Trade, investment, resilient supply chains, digital payments, technology, energy security, and development offer considerable scope to advance shared interests. The Bandung spirit can also be reflected in an approach that respects member states' independent choices while encouraging dialogue on issues affecting the wider Global South. India's strategic autonomy, therefore, can be complemented by constructive engagement rather than alignment with competing geopolitical positions.

Vaithav Goyal, Chandigarh

The cartoon, a mirror and the Mahatma



EPUNNY

WHENEVER THERE is an official crackdown on Indian cartoons, as has just happened to the work of Satish Acharya and Manjula, a Nehruvian contraband is let. A high point from where the state's tolerance has slid. The good old days when PM Jawahar Nehru walked across to inaugurate his good friend Shankar's weekly are dutifully recounted. The citation no longer shames the authorities into course-correcting.

In any case, nothing Nehruvian would much ice with the dispensation running the country for over a decade. But it cannot ignore a Gandhian factoid: Bapu had a bigger involvement with cartoons than Nehru. In the global phase of his career, the barrister from Gujarat edited *Indian Opinion* from Johannesburg. Her cartoons reproduced from the English

press and displayed them big with captions translated into Hindi and Gujarati.

Editor Gandhi asked readers to suggest a Gujarati translation for the word "cartoon". Perhaps he did not insist because, like "cinema", soon the C word for the funny picture became part of all Indian languages. Dravidian politicians were the first to harness the power of cinema in the 1950s. In 1966, Bal Thackeray put the cartoon to lethal use in launching his own regional party. Both grabbed the evident one-sided propagandist potential of the visual image, moving or still. Cinema was used to build political heroes and the cartoon to demoralise political rivals. Gandhi instead delved into the very DNA of the cartoon, its core strength to subvert. He reprinted British news cartoonists, practitioners lauded in the imperial press. He knew they were unwittingly echoing him, asking why the burdened colonial White man wasn't exactly following the civilisational values he swears by.

Gandhi found in the cartoon the mirror

to the political language he was perfecting. A basic language that shared a common ethics and sustained conversation. The news cartoon had both. Cartoonists spoke clearly in terms of right and wrong. And it was a serial art practice meant to be read day after day on the same page in the same publication. It fitted with the Gandhian practice of protesting, persuading and persisting with an argument. Leader of a gradualist non-revolutionary movement, Gandhi had to constantly negotiate and buy time.

Back in India, Gandhi quickly lost this luxury of harnessing the cartoon as an activist outsider. He soon became the country's biggest newsmaker and a prime target of the day's cartoon. Here he pulled off the biggest coup known in cartooning history. He transformed himself into the simplest possible form any cartoonist could get and a veteran like Ranga would eventually iconise into a single flowing line. The first stirrings of this cartoon-friendly makeover happened in September, 1921, at the Madurai AICC. The

barrister shed suit and boot, shaved his head, and switched to Khadi. A decade later, his absence or presence at the Round Table conferences was lapped up by Western cartoonists from Emery Kent to David Low. America's Daniel Fitzpatrick drew him as an ethereal apparition representing passive resistance. Not one of those unsparing faultfinders could find anything in his politics that was at odds with the image.

On home turf, cartoonist Shankar struggled with the man Sarojini Naidu called Mickey Mouse. How do you frame the 5'5" Gandhi along with British viceroys, some of them like Linlithgow a good one foot taller? Shankar elongated Bapu and often made him stand clearly taller than the Britisher who was shown squatting awkwardly.

If we ban and bury a work practice so central to our history, how do we retell these stories?

The writer is chief cartoonist, The Indian Express. epunny@expressindia.com

the hindu businessline.

FRIDAY - OCTOBER 2, 2026

PMS promise

SEBI's new rules can help expand PMS segment

The Portfolio Management Services (PMS) industry is among the fast-growing segments of India's financial markets. It is just as well that the Securities and Exchange Board of India has turned its attention towards this space. Assets under management of the PMS industry have grown at a compounded annual growth rate of 13 per cent over the last seven years and currently stand around ₹45 lakh crore; which amounts to almost half the assets managed by the mutual fund industry.



The SEBI's PMS regulatory framework was last reviewed in 2020. But given the addition of numerous asset categories since then and the changing requirements of the market, an overhaul of these rules was in order. The changes being made by SEBI to PMS regulations will expand its reach while increasing investment avenues for PMS managers. The most significant change in the regulation is the creation of a new category of PMS players through Portfolio Management Route for Investing in Mutual Fund units (PRIM). With mutual funds becoming the primary vehicle for savings for most mass affluent investors, there was a need to make PMS affordable to this cohort, so that they can manage their fund portfolios better. SEBI is trying to cater to this demand, creating a new category of portfolio managers who manage only direct plans of mutual funds including index funds, exchange traded funds and specialised investment funds. The minimum investment for this route is lower at ₹25 lakh, compared to ₹50 lakh under regular PMS schemes. The management fee in PRIM is also lower, at 1 per cent of assets under management, though profit-sharing arrangements are allowed.

The lower investment limit will help increase the PMS client base beyond the high networth individual cohort. Though the AUM of the PMS industry has grown steadily in recent years, the number of clients stands at just 2.19 lakh, and the number of portfolio managers is just 515. The regulator is trying to increase the number of portfolio managers by encouraging them to choose the PRIM route. The qualification criteria for the principal officers of PRIM have been lowered to include graduates with two years' market experience, while net worth of these entities has been set at a lower level of ₹2 crore. This opens the path for mutual fund distributors, who are already advising their clients informally, to obtain PRIM registration and manage the portfolios for a fee.

SEBI has also increased the basket of securities in which portfolio managers can invest. Allowing PMS managers to invest in securities overseas is a good idea, given the opportunities in the technology sector. These investments must however be within the permissible LRS limits of the client. PMS schemes can also invest in initial public offerings and investment grade, non-convertible debt securities under discretionary PMS. Given that the clients of PMS have higher risk-taking ability, opening these markets for PMS schemes can improve demand for these securities.

OTHER VOICES.



It's time to move beyond emergency aid

The conventional view of the international humanitarian system is that it is designed to tackle emergencies. Certainly, it is true that aid networks have a critical, often life-saving, role to play in sudden crises. Sadly however, many areas of conflict and displacement are now witnessing longer-term events that present an enduring backdrop to millions of people's lives. Protracted and increasingly interconnected conflicts in the Middle East and Africa, including in Yemen, several Horn of Africa countries as well as in Palestine and Lebanon, require further attention as traditional aid budgets — and accepted ways of doing things — seem unable to cope. OECD donor aid fell by 23 per cent last year, with global humanitarian assistance declining by 36 per cent. (ABU DHABI, SEPTEMBER 30)



World gets turbulent, peaceful China becomes precious
Peace and security are defining features of China's governance and hallmarks of Chinese modernization. Peaceful China is a light that millions upon millions of Chinese people, secure in their daily lives, shine into a world that is far from peaceful. It safeguards the everyday lives of millions of families while contributing Chinese wisdom, Chinese solutions and Chinese strength to global security governance. A working conference on the Peaceful China Initiative was held in Beijing. A recent instruction made by Chinese President Xi Jinping was conveyed at the conference. Xi stated that since the 18th CPC National Congress in 2012, significant progress has been made in building a safe China, making the country one of the safest in the world. (BEIJING, SEPTEMBER 30)

CKG NAIR
V SHUNMUGAM

Indian equities markets have recorded their eighth straight weekly loss. Over the last weekend, President Trump rejected Iran's proposal to end the conflict and reopen the Strait of Hormuz. Brent crude rose above \$100, the Sensex and the Nifty explored near six-month lows, and the rupee declined to below 96 to the dollar. Peace remains elusive, and financial upheaval is underway. Investors seek safety, and economies like ours are hit first.

In March 2026, the West Asia conflict led to the closure of the Hormuz Strait, which affected 14 per cent of the world's oil and gas. Since July, the Houthis have resumed attacks in the Red Sea, controlling Mokha and Perim Island at Bab al-Mandab. On September 10, drones attacked Saudi Arabia's East-West pipeline, which bypasses Hormuz. These assaults have cut Qatar's gas exports by 17 per cent for an estimated three to five years. About two-thirds of global energy trade depends on maritime chokepoints. As regional rivalries grow, disruptions are becoming commonplace.

WHAT A LONG SHOCK DOES
Oil fundamentally influences all prices in India. It affects the rupee, bus fares, fertilizer costs, and vegetables transported by diesel trucks. Since January 1, Brent oil has increased by about 63 per cent. Every ten-dollar increase in oil price results in approximately \$18 billion leaving the country.

The damage is evident in the data. Wholesale inflation reached 9.92 per cent in August, with fuel and power costs up 22.93 per cent. Retail inflation stands at 4.82 per cent, and the RBI forecasts it will be 5.9 per cent between October and December. Foreign portfolio investors withdrew ₹2.45 lakh crore from Indian shares by September 18, surpassing the total for all of 2025. Additionally, the rupee has depreciated by about 6 per cent since January, despite a bumper \$135 billion inflow, thanks to the RBI's recent efforts.

On the street, restaurants struggled when cooking gas was rationed at the peak of the war, and small factories saw their margins shrink. A prolonged shock is a slow tax on every household.

THE VIKSIT BHARAT QUESTION
To become a developed nation by 2047, India must grow around 8 per cent a year for 20 years. This growth depends on energy, and 88.7 per cent of our crude oil, an all-time high, is imported. Half of our gas arrives by ship. Our target was to cut oil import dependence to 67 per cent, but we are 22 percentage points short. Each external shock takes away a



India must own its energy security

ACTION PLAN. For this, raising oil storage capacity, boosting the energy produced at home, and completing projects on time are vital

slice of the growth that Viksit Bharat relies on.

India has never lacked plans. The Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India pipeline agreement of 2010 remains on paper. At home, too, projects slip. The ONGC's deepwater KG-DWN-98/2 project was to produce oil in March 2020. But it did so only in January 2024. The second phase of expansion of our strategic oil reserves, approved in July 2021, remains incomplete. Power trends mirror this pattern. By August 2026, renewable capacity reached about 296 gigawatts, yet grid growth hasn't kept pace. Over five years, India achieved only about 80 per cent of its transmission targets. In the first quarter of 2026, 300 gigawatt-hours of clean energy were wasted because of grid limitations.

Additionally, transmission lines in Rajasthan and Gujarat are embroiled in legal disputes concerning the habitat of the Great Indian Bustard.

Every crisis prompts strategies. When prices ease, they are shelved. Onion prices at least lead to action. Oil evokes nothing. Rhetoric and lament won't solve a problem that has persisted for 50 years. India needs a delivery system. Every energy security initiative should have a public deadline, a designated owner, and penalties for delay

Every energy security initiative should have a public deadline, a designated owner, and penalties for delay

owner, and penalties for delay. An annual Energy Security Report to Parliament should monitor each project.

THE PLAN, IN THREE BUCKETS
Here is a plan with numbers we should hold ourselves to.

Now — the next 12 months: **Caverns and oil company tanks** hold about 74 days of net oil imports, and there is no gas reserve. Raise oil cover to 90 days and build the first gas reserve.

Install 4 gigawatts of two-hour battery capacity at renewable pooling stations to capture most of the clean power now lost.

Rupee crude and gas contracts on Indian exchanges hedge both the fuel and the dollar. Listed importers, airlines and power producers must publish a board-approved hedging policy.

Require agricultural pump sets and industrial motors to carry star labels. Nudge offices to adopt remote work on days when supply is at risk.

Electric vehicles made up 12.3 per cent of August 2026 registrations. This should rise to 15 per cent in a year, and make every new government vehicle and city bus electric.

Next — one to five years: Bypass both straits. Oman's Ras Markaz terminal near Duqm lies outside Hormuz and the Red Sea. India should co-invest, book capacity and store crude there, and set a feasibility deadline for the Oman-Gujarat deep-sea gas pipeline.

The Mahanadi find off Konark and the Andaman find at Sri Vijayapuram should reach first gas within five years.

Switch fuels. Retrofit our 25

gigawatts of gas plants to run on imported or domestic gas, ethanol or compressed biogas.

Meet 100 per cent of this year's transmission target of 25,146 circuit kilometres. Set up special benches to set up to settle grid expansion-related disputes within a year.

Meet the goal of 30 per cent electric vehicle sales by 2030. Put a solar-powered, battery-equipped charging station every 25 kilometres on national highways.

Later — five years and beyond: Reduce oil import dependence from 88.7 per cent to 67 per cent by 2035. **Go nuclear.** Reach 100 gigawatts by 2047, with small modular reactors beside steel mills and data centres, and private capital.

Build cities that need less fuel. Sixty per cent of city trips are under five kilometres. Add footpaths, cycle lanes and bus feeders, and zone homes and offices near metro stations.

Make all new two-wheelers, three-wheelers and city buses electric by 2035, and most new cars by 2047. Finally, these three numbers will tell us whether the plan works: the days of cover we hold, the share of energy we make at home, and the share of energy projects completed on time. The first two are too low. We have never measured the third. The bell has rung from Hormuz and the Red Sea. It will ring again. We must be ready before it does.

Nair is former Director, NISM, and Shunmugam is Partner, MCQuibe

Taking stock of IRDAI's distribution reset

Insurers should report how expense savings are passed on, through premium revisions and bonus declarations

P Saravanan
A Paul Williams

In India, insurance is still sold rather than bought, and for the past three years, the seller has often been paid far more than the service justified. On September 23, the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) released a consultation paper titled 'Recalibrating Economics of Insurance Distribution', proposing the most sweeping reset of how policies reach customers since it removed product-wise commission caps in 2023.

First, the fragmented universe of corporate agents, brokers, web aggregators, and motor service providers would collapse into three categories, namely Insurance Distribution Entities, Insurance Distribution Persons, and Market Infrastructure Institutions, with lower capital requirements, reduced fees, and the freedom to engage in other financial and non-financial business.

Second, the Expense of Management ceiling for life insurers would become a company-level limit of 15 per cent of gross direct premium within two years and 12.5 per cent within five years, while general insurers would glide from 30 per

cent of gross written premium to 20 per cent of gross direct premium. Third, commissions would be capped by segment, channel and product complexity.

Health policies would carry 15-20 per cent on the first sale, and 5-10 per cent on renewal or porting; new vehicle motor cover would pay nothing on the third-party premium and 5 per cent on own damage; and life cover sold with loans would pay just 2 per cent on single-premium policies.

Fourth, conduct rules would tighten, with a ban on compulsory bundling with loans, documented suitability, the seller's identity linked to every policy, clawback of commission for mis-selling, and no volume-linked incentives for bank and NBFC staff.

THE CHANGING SCENARIO

Between FY23 and FY25, motor premiums grew 34 per cent, while motor commissions grew 259 per cent; in retail health, premiums rose 53 per cent, against an 118 per cent jump in commissions. Banks with multiple insurer tie-ups paid out an average of 33 per cent of new business premium, rising to 72 per cent in some cases, compared with 13 per cent for single tie-ups. The reset will redistribute this



PREMIUMS. Surging ahead (GETTY IMAGES)

surplus. Lenders feel it first, since insurance fees make up roughly 16 per cent of pre-provision operating profit at Yes Bank and 12 per cent at IDFC First Bank, and brokerages estimate 3-25 per cent of pre-tax profit for select NBFCs.

Insurers may see weaker bank volumes at first but should gain from lower acquisition costs. IRDAI may cap what insurers pay banks, but staff remuneration within banks falls under the Reserve Bank of India, so sales targets could quietly reappear as general performance bonuses. The principle of 'same structure, same functions, same norms' also sits uneasily with a 25 per cent cap for agents, compared with 20 per cent for banks and brokers, when

selling the identical long-term plan. IRDAI need to use the consultation window to close these gaps without diluting its core intent. A joint IRDAI and RBI circular on incentives for bank and NBFC staff would stop arbitrage at its source. Insurers should report how expense savings are passed on, through premium revisions in general insurance and bonus declarations in life insurance. Clawback should be triggered by objective markers such as free-look cancellations, early lapses, and complaints upheld by the Insurance Ombudsman. Rewards for underserved areas should be tied to PIN codes verified through the Public Insurance Registry.

Commission should be disclosed in rupees at the point of sale, not as a percentage buried in a brochure. A clear transition schedule would ease the shock for agents and bank staff whose livelihoods depend on this chain, and a formal review after two years would allow correction based on evidence. If implemented with care, we could expect a shift from insurance sold to insurance bought.

Saravanan is a Professor of Finance and Accounting at IIM Tiruchirappalli, and Williams is the Head of India at Servono Financial

✉ **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.

AI security and safety

This is with reference to 'Guardrails challenge' (October 1). The AI safety pact between the US President Donald Trump and technology giants has certain limitations which weaken the framework. First is the self-regulation clause and second is that it is only 'morally', but not 'legally' binding. Self-regulation may not be effective as companies are driven by competition with not only domestic rival companies, but also rival nations. As pointed out in the editorial, public accountability through legally enforceable standards and international

coordination through a suitable multilateral mechanism are essential components of AI safety framework. Besides the six layers, there is a need for a seventh layer: third party stress testing of the frontier models prior to their release to the public. This would enable unbiased objective, and independent evaluation of the models with a critical mind, keeping the AI safety boundaries in view.

Kosaraju Chandramouli
Hyderabad

Oil refining

This refers to India emerges as

leading refinery' (October 1). Despite the tumultuous situation prevailing in energy security due to the near ending West Asia war, India has been consistently and diplomatically handling the situation in securing domestic energy needs. Besides, it has become one of the largest global refiners of crude oil having assured capabilities to supply refined oil products to countries in need. Energy sourcing has exceeded 40 countries, indicating the trust and confidence the India Inc enjoys in the global arena. Indian refineries have the unique capability of processing all types of crude

including sweet, sour and heavy.
RV Baskaran
Pune

Protect pasture lands

This refers to 'India can no longer overlook its pasture lands' (October 1). Pasture lands deserve greater attention because they support livestock, rural livelihoods, biodiversity and the ecological health of dry regions. Their degradation can increase pressure on farmers, particularly those dependent on common grazing resources. Protecting these lands, however, requires more than declaring them

conservation areas. Local communities should participate in mapping, restoration and management, since their livelihoods are directly connected to these commons. Governments can combine scientific monitoring with traditional knowledge to improve grazing practices and prevent encroachment. Pasture management should be treated as an environmental and economic priority. Protecting commons today can strengthen rural resilience tomorrow.
A Senthil Kumar
Kangir, TN

RBI's inflation-fix formula

FIT framework ensures macroeconomic stability

Abhinav Banka
Surjith Karthikeyan

India's monetary policy framework has witnessed evolution over the years, with no such frameworks in place during the first few decades after Independence. The Banking Regulation Act 1949 was enacted, followed by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) operationalising the traditional tools — statutory liquidity ratio (SLR), bank rate, cash reserve requirements (CRR) and open market operations.

India saw credit planning from 1960s through the mid-1980s, and from the mid-1980s through the late 1990s, the RBI employed "monetary, targeting with feedback" framework coinciding with financial sector reforms. Though price stability was key objective, inflation remained in double-digit.

After liberalisation, the RBI considered additional macroeconomic variables — credit growth, exchange rate, trade balance — in addition to trends in growth and inflation. After FRBM Act enactment, interest rate gradually became the key policy tool. The RBI introduced liquidity adjustment facility in 1999 followed by inflation targeting. An expert committee recommended to the RBI to manage liquidity by offering term repos of different tenors. FY1990-91 witnessed around 13 per cent inflation, one of the highest, reducing to 8.3 per cent in FY2011-12 during the global financial crisis period. In 2013, inflation slipped to double-digit due to oil price fluctuations and domestic supply irregularities. Thus, these were phases of monetary instability in India.

FIT TO THE RESCUE

In 2016, India adopted the flexible inflation targeting (FIT) framework. The Preamble in the RBI Act, as amended by the Finance Act, 2016, provides that the primary objective of the monetary policy is to maintain price stability, while keeping in mind the objective of growth. As per Section 452A of the RBI Act, the Central government shall, in consultation with the RBI, determine the inflation target in terms of the consumer price index (CPI) once every five years.

The extant framework has served India well over the last 10 years despite multiple challenges such as Covid and Russia-Ukraine conflict. Inflation levels witnessed a distinct decline during the FIT period — 7.3 per



RBI. More professional now

cent over pre-FIT period (Jan 2012 to Sept 2016) to 4.7 per cent (Oct 2016 to Oct 2025). FIT helped enhance the monetary policy credibility, instilling investor confidence. In this direction, the government notified inflation target for the period from April 1, 2026, to March 31, 2031, retaining the CPI inflation target at 4 per cent, with an upper tolerance level of 6 per cent and a lower tolerance level of 2 per cent. The FIT period till date reveals that the RBI hasn't become hawkish in its approach towards inflation management; rather it has become more data-oriented, professional and comprehensive.

The framework incorporates a strong accountability mechanism. In the event of failure to maintain inflation within the band for three consecutive quarters, as provided under Section 452N of the RBI Act, the central bank is required to submit a detailed report to the government, setting out the reasons for such failure, the remedial actions proposed to be taken and the estimated time period within which the inflation target would be achieved. This will further reinforce policy discipline and support inclusive and resilient growth.

The FIT framework improved policy credibility and enhanced interest rate decisions. Before 2016, monetary policy faced frequent adjustments due to an unprofessional and biased approach to target inflation.

Financial stability also improved with reduction in speculation activities and low market volatility, enhancing trust among investors and businesses. Studies have indicated that prior to the implementation of FIT (2010-2016), inflation volatility reached 2.9 per cent. Inflation volatility dropped significantly to 1.6 per cent because of FIT implementation in 2017-2024. Thus, FIT framework is key for India's macroeconomic stability.

Banka and Karthikeyan serve as Deputy Director and Director at the Government of India. Views are personal



BISWAJIT DHAR

The Trump administration's transshipment scam report released last month is an acknowledgment that his Liberation Day tariffs, unleashed in April 2025 and in several later rounds, have failed. The burden of this report is that Chinese businesses continue to reroute, or transship their goods to the US through third countries. In other words, a trend that began after the Trump administration slapped punitive tariffs on China in its first tenure, continues. The Liberation Day tariffs were perhaps expected to choke third country supplies, given the number of countries that were brought under its scope. That does not seem to have happened.

GOES SOFT ON CHINA

Meanwhile, President Trump looks reluctant to risk punitive action against China after issuing his 100 per cent tariff threat. China's President Xi Jinping's visit to the US bears this out. Trump's use of high tariffs created opportunities for tariff arbitrage, which were taken advantage of by Chinese and the American businesses based in China since the closing years of the previous decade. While the former began reducing their exports to an increasingly protectionist US by diversifying into new markets, some of the largest US multinationals that have been operating in China since the early years of the millennium, relocated at least a part of their production bases to countries that Donald Trump had not targeted in his first term.

Chinese businesses' disaffection for the US was quite dramatic since Donald Trump entered the White House for the first time in 2017. US imports from China was then almost 22 per cent of its total imports, according to the US Census Bureau. This was the highest share since 2003, the earliest for which US official trade data are available. However, China Customs reported that the US accounted for about 19 per cent of its total exports in 2017. The difference can possibly be ascribed to the costs of freight and insurance, which are included in the value of US imports. In 2021, when Donald Trump made way for Joe Biden, China's share of US imports had dropped to about 18 per cent.

BIDEN'S INITIATIVES

During Biden Presidency, the US administration took further measures against China, especially against the global production networks that were hinged on the "factory of the world". The most significant of Biden's initiatives in this regard was deepening cooperation among US and its 13 partners in the region through the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF). A key objective of IPEF was to promote friend-shoring of supply chains with IPEF member countries to avoid over-dependence on

Genesis of the transshipment scam

PAYING A BIG PRICE. Trump has done his country a huge disservice by using tariffs as a trade weapon. China has not been as hurt as the US itself



BLOOMBERG

China. Coinciding with this development, China's share in US imports declined even more steeply, to less than 14 per cent of the total in 2024. With Donald Trump directly targeting China with a sequence of tariff hikes, the US-China trade ties reached the lowest point since 1998, when just 7.5 per cent of US' total imports came from China.

A shake-up was happening in the involvement of American companies in China. Several US multinationals, including Apple, Dell and Nintendo, decided to relocate from China as early as in 2019, even before Trump's trade war against China took full effect.

A survey conducted by American Chamber of Commerce in China and AmCham Shanghai at the end of the previous decade showed that over 40 per cent of 250 companies surveyed had either relocated, or were considering relocating their manufacturing facilities away from China due to US-China trade tensions. Most of these companies eventually relocated a part of their China operations to several South-East Asian economies and India.

However, even before American companies could fully relocate to their new production hubs, the US President declared that the relocation of the industries from China was illegal. Now, he blames the great transshipment scam

What Trump views as a transshipment scam is, in effect, a failure of his administration's tariff-centric policy to 'make America great again' by bringing capital back to the US

The report and beyond

The report identifies 40 countries, including India, as being part of what it describes as China's shadow transshipment network, which allowed Chinese goods to enter the US market after minor modifications were made in their territories, including "minor processing, relabelling, repackaging, re-invoicing, or paperwork changes".

This tendency emerged, according to the White House report, after high tariffs under Section 301 of US Trade Act of 1974 were slapped on imports from China to "counter China's unfair trade practices, forced technology transfer, intellectual property theft and state-directed mercantilism". While Section 301 tariffs were expected to cause economic injury on China, its businesses moved their exports to the US through "lower-tariff jurisdictions".

In his second tariff assault, the tariffs were slapped on a wider swathe of

countries, but on an individualised "reciprocal" basis, based on the extent of bilateral trade deficits with the US. Since these were departures from MFN rates, they created significant arbitrage opportunities in the process. However, the US Supreme Court struck down reciprocal tariffs last February as it was not ratified by the Congress.

The Trump administration then turned to using instruments such as Section 301 and Section 232 of US Trade Act against targeted countries, after conducting investigations on their alleged wrongdoings (the transshipment scam report is an example). With the US Congress empowering Trump to invoke tariffs by ratifying the Lindsey O. Graham Sanctioning Russia and Iran Act of 2026, the US President's use of unilateral trade measures could well be ratcheted up.

for the loss of federal revenue through higher import tariffs, which he perceived as the magic bullet to not only rein in the federal deficit, but also to restrict national debt that had topped \$40 trillion, doubling since his first term in office.

PERIL OF INCOME, JOB LOSSES

The White House report argues that the annual tariff revenue loss from illegal transshipment could have exceeded \$100 billion, by no means a small amount given the fiscal time bomb that the US economy is saddled with. But, while he would continue to reel out the hypothetical estimates of federal revenue losses arising from his inability

to charge import tariffs at will, questions should be asked of Donald Trump about the income and job losses, that have resulted the world over, from his ill-considered tariff war.

In effect, what Donald Trump views as a transshipment scam is, in effect, a reflection of the failure of his administration's tariff-centric policy to 'make America great again' by bringing capital back to US. It is also a case of his failure to appreciate what the Biden administration had set into motion. Trump has helped China out through the transshipment scam.

The writer is a Development Economist and former Professor of JNU. Views are personal

thehindubusinessline.

TWENTY YEARS AGO TODAY.

October 1, 2006 *

Adverse factors affecting fireworks industry

The fireworks industry is readying to face a cracker of a season. Despite combination of adverse factors, the industry's production is expanding. But prices of fireworks are, however, up 10 per cent this year as compared with the last two years.

Reliance in a fix over 'rescue ship' directive

A Government order requisitioning a Reliance Industries' ship to salvage a foreign LPG carrier that ran aground near Ratnagiri coast has put the company in a tricky situation. On one side, Reliance cannot defy the govt order, while on the other it has been forced to shoulder a responsibility of high stakes and risk.

Lupin not to buy Artix Finance

Lupin Ltd will not pursue the MoU that it signed in May this year to acquire 51 per cent equity in Belgium's Artix Finance, along with its subsidiaries including Dafra Pharma. "Both parties have now mutually agreed not to pursue the MoU and to independently pursue their respective business plans and continue discussions for possible areas of co-operation in the future."

* Since there was no edition dated October 2, we are carrying reports from October 1

Trump rallies in GOP strongholds to woo voters

Catherine Lucy
Mario Parker

Donald Trump is embarking on a travel blitz aimed at shoring up struggling Republicans in states he won two years ago, as the President's mood darkens about his party's prospects in the November midterm elections.

In the coming days, Trump plans to appear in Texas, Oklahoma, Ohio and Nebraska, GOP strongholds where a visit could deliver a bit of energy to his base. But the choice of destinations points to a cold reality for Trump: a presidential appearance on behalf of office-seekers in competitive states might hurt more than it helps.

With less than five weeks until

election day, Trump has become increasingly aware of the dire straits for Republicans after taking in polls showing his support cratering.

VOTERS ANGRY

Surveys show Republicans rapidly losing ground amid voter anger over the economy and the war in Iran, as Democrats grow increasingly bullish about retaking the House and possibly the Senate.

"His travel tells a lot. I think we've been hearing from the White House since last December that he would be traveling all over the country and he would be on the ballot," said Marc Short, a Republican who served in the first Trump administration.

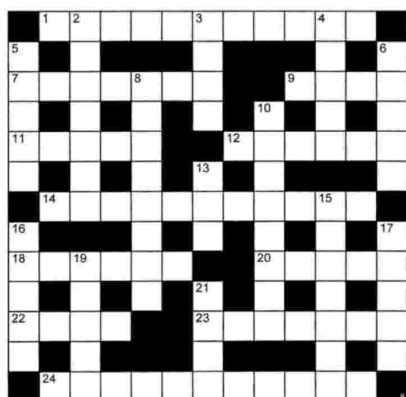
"That just hasn't materialised." Trump recently has vacillated

between publicly trying to absolve himself of any blame for his party's plight — noting during his UN address that he is "not running" — while also looking for ways to boost GOP candidates and telling voters to pretend they're voting for him.

On Wednesday, the President said he would be "making a tour" to "help Republican congressional candidates and inspired supporters to vote even if they 'don't love' their congressmen or senators in order to keep Democrats out of power. He also blamed the GOP's predicament on messaging.

While Trump has sought to project confidence, he has acknowledged that Democratic wins could subject his administration to investigations and oversight. BL/COMBOS

BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2748



EASY

ACROSS

- Rugger player's position in scrum (4,7)
- Tread down (7)
- A speck of soot (4)
- Willow twig used by basket-maker (5)
- Generator of electricity (6)
- Concerning fireworks (11)
- Usual (6)
- A secret store (5)
- Something very reticent (4)
- Ready and prompt to act (7)
- Church musician (11)

DOWN

- State of fact, not imagination (7)
- Candid, frank (4)
- Cuban dance (5)
- Bend low, condescend (5)
- Sharpen razor on leather (5)
- Private; relating to oneself (8)
- Fabulous (8)
- A slighted, offended feeling (3)
- Lean towards (7)
- A light meal (5)
- To pack in tightly (5)
- A silvery freshwater fish (5)
- Move in water (4)

SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2747

ACROSS 1. Rescind 5. Unlid 8. Trident 9. Token 10. Remainder 12. Sue 13. Plain 17. Cub 19. Respected 21. Untie 22. Another 24. Fleet 25. Hundred
DOWN 1. Return 2. Swimmer 3. Ire 4. Dated 5. Utterance 6. Dukes 7. Dancer 11. Imperfect 14. Pitcher 15. Scruff 16. Adored 18. Bathe 20. Swash 23. Own

NOT SO EASY

ACROSS

- Support advance of a rugger player (4,7)
- Elm, part of which one might walk underfoot (7)
- Being slightly obscene, it must be replaced (4)
- One rose that rambles around a twig of willow (5)
- It may produce the power to do many a turn (6)
- Chronic type is upset when it comes to fireworks (11)
- In taking out loan the Leathernecks are not extraordinary (6)
- The secret hoard is of money, one is told (5)
- It's not quite the Denver boot that will make him shut up (4)
- Is not disinclined to be leaving somebody something (7)
- The singers look to him or a chemist, right? (11)

DOWN

- The truth is, one is in estate agent's business in America (7)
- Nothing supplied by writer can be so frank (4)
- A dance from Cuba or from Burma maybe (5)
- Leave it off if there's nothing in it, and condescend (5)
- Harbours up a way to sharpen one's razor (5)
- It may be a bit offensive for the small ads column (8)
- Itch may start laughter in a way that's imaginary (8)
- Feeling of offence shown by a favourite (3)
- The slope that's incorporated with the course (7)
- A brief bite for the first name in the bag (5)
- It has its thin end the golfer uses for approaching (5)
- Cock might take such a fish to be an insect (5)
- In the which one is knowledgeable about how to crawl? (4)



Editor's TAKE

The man we honour, the Mahatma we forget

Today, on Gandhi's 157th birth anniversary, we remember the man, but the harder question is whether the country still remembers his ideals

Every October 2, India performs a familiar ritual: wreaths at Rajghat, a dry day and a holiday. The harder question is whether the country still remembers the man behind it. The world he left is more fractured than the one he confronted. His message of non-violence is not in the din. Global military spending was at a record \$2.887 trillion in 2025, and the message of love no longer resonates with world leaders who are hell-bent on waging wars.

Societies are split along faith, class, region and now algorithms, with every feed rewarding outrage over understanding. That is precisely why Gandhi matters more than ever. His genius was method, not sentiment. The 1930 Salt March, with 78 volunteers walking about 390 km to Dandi over 24 days, shook the moral authority of an empire. He insisted that means and ends are inseparable, that an opponent must be persuaded rather than humiliated, and that a leader's credibility rests on living what he preaches.

In a season of shouting, these are working tools of politics. Have we forgotten him? Not his face. It sits on our currency, in every government office and on statues in nearly every city. What we have forgotten is his discipline. On India's first Independence Day, he was not in Delhi. He was in Calcutta, fasting and praying, trying to hold a riot-torn city together.

Set that against an India where hate speech is routine, mob lynching has stained too many headlines, and public life is conducted as a contest of insults. Swachh Bharat, launched on his birthday in 2014, borrowed his broom but missed his point: for Gandhi, cleanliness was a question of dignity and caste, not a photo opportunity.

The replacement of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act with the VB-G RAM G Act in December 2025 sharpened the question. The government presented it as an expansion, with 125 days of guaranteed work instead of 100. The Opposition called it erasure and pointed to the 40 per cent burden placed on states. Both arguments deserve scrutiny.

What is beyond dispute is that his name left a law that had carried it since 2009. Reviving Gandhi does not mean spinning wheels or wearing khadi. It means three things. First, civility as a political obligation, with parties competing on ideas, not contempt. Second, his talisman taken seriously: recall the face of the poorest person you have seen and ask whether your policy serves them. Growth that leaves the last person behind fails his test. Third, communal harmony treated as national security, not a line in festival greetings. Gandhi called his life an experiment with truth and never claimed it was finished. The experiment now belongs to us. On Friday, let us leave the garlands and keep the discipline.

Daiv Vani

WISDOM FOR A MEANINGFUL LIFE

The Curse Spoken in a Moment of Anger

Sage Durvasa was known equally across the scriptures for his considerable spiritual power and his famously short, unpredictable temper.

When Shakuntala, lost entirely in thoughts of her beloved Dushyanta, failed to notice Dushyanta arriving unannounced as a guest, and did not offer him the customary hospitality expected of any host, he cursed her in a sudden fury, declaring that the very person she had been thinking of so fondly would forget her completely and entirely. Realizing almost immediately the harshness of his own reaction, he softened the curse only slightly, allowing that a single token, a ring, could eventually restore Dushyanta's lost memory of her. Even so, the consequences of that one momentary lapse into anger caused Shakuntala years of wholly unnecessary separation, hardship, and quiet suffering.

Durvasa's spiritual power was entirely real and considerable, but so was the lasting damage caused by a single unchecked emotional reaction, one he could only soften slightly afterward, never fully undo no matter how much he later regretted it.

We often speak carelessly in anger, comfortably believing our harsh words can be easily retracted or forgiven afterward, forgetting just how much lasting damage a single moment of unchecked fury can quietly leave behind.

Today, pause deliberately before reacting in anger to a small oversight or perceived slight, and consider what unnecessary, lasting harm a hasty word might actually cause.

-DAIV

India's long road to a permanent UNSC seat

India's campaign for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council is entering a more demanding phase. While reform of the Council remains stalled over competing claims and veto power, New Delhi must simultaneously secure support for its immediate bid for a non-permanent seat — testing the reach of its diplomacy across the Global South, Asia and beyond



KALYANI SHANKAR

India is campaigning for both a permanent and a non-permanent seat on the UN Security Council. Securing a permanent seat requires significant changes to the UN structure, which are progressing slowly. India is seen as a key voice for the Global South and in the Indo-Pacific. Foreign Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, currently in New York for the UN meeting, has initiated the campaign for a non-permanent seat this year.

In August 1950, the US proposed to India, through its ambassador, that it consider replacing China as a permanent UNSC member. Nehru reportedly dismissed this suggestion, missing India's chance for permanent membership. However, the international situation was at the peak of the Cold War; the complexity may have justified his stance.

New Delhi has been working for the seat for the past 30 years as part of its foreign policy goals. Over the years, many countries have supported India's candidacy, recognising its growing influence, large population, and contributions to peacekeeping. However, changing the UNSC's structure is complicated because it requires unanimous consent from the current five permanent members: the United States, Russia, China, France, and the United Kingdom. Currently, there is no clear timeline for when, or if, India will achieve this goal.

India believes the current UNSC structure no longer reflects modern realities. It argues that its status as the largest democracy and its growing economy make it a key global player. India's commitment to peace is shown through its significant involvement in UN peacekeeping missions, where it has sent many personnel to help maintain stability.

India will need to engage in strong diplomatic efforts, as Tajikistan is also vying for the Asia-Pacific non-permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council.

Tajikistan's support from the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation could make the competition harder for India. To strengthen its position, India needs more support beyond Fiji, the United States, Austria, and Sri Lanka. Elections happen once a year through a secret ballot and require a two-thirds majority, even if candidates are not opposed.

The G-4 nations support each other's ambitions for permanent seats, and some European countries back India's bid for the UNSC.

However, challenges remain, including disagreements over how many new seats to add



INDIA IS OPEN TO A STRUCTURE THAT MAY INITIALLY EXCLUDE VETO POWER FOR NEW PERMANENT MEMBERS. THIS PROPOSAL SEEKS TO ADDRESS HISTORICAL APPREHENSIONS AMONG CURRENT MEMBERS WHILE PROMOTING MORE EQUITABLE REPRESENTATION. THIS MOVE ACKNOWLEDGES THE NEED TO BALANCE POWER DYNAMICS WITHIN THE COUNCIL AND ENSURE DIVERSE GLOBAL VOICES ARE INCLUDED IN DECISION-MAKING

The writer is a popular columnist

and the controversial question of veto power for those new members.

Despite support from various nations, India faces challenges regarding new seats and veto power. It favours a proposal that initially excludes veto rights for new permanent members, addressing existing members' concerns while promoting fairer representation. As External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar reiterated in parliamentary sessions, India is actively engaged in the Inter-Governmental Negotiations (IGN) on UNSC reforms.

India is working to mobilise broader support for expanding the UNSC. This strategic engagement includes bolstering its ties with Global South nations, highlighting India's commitment to fostering collective development and addressing shared challenges on the international stage.

India advocates reform of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) because it believes the current structure no longer reflects 21st-century realities. As the world's largest democracy with a rapidly growing economy, India plays an important role on the global stage.

Additionally, India's long-standing commitment to international peace and security is demonstrated by its substantial contributions to UN peacekeeping missions. The country has deployed thousands of personnel, further solidifying its reputation as a regional player dedicated to maintaining global stability.

Several European nations have supported India's candidacy, seeing it as a way to diversify representation within the Council. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been particularly outspoken about the urgent need for reform, emphasising important issues such

as seat allocation and claims regarding regional representation. However, the reform process has faced significant challenges because no unified negotiating text exists and disputes continue over expanded membership and the contentious issue of veto power.

Despite strong backing from multiple countries, substantial challenges remain. Central to these challenges are contentious discussions over allocating new seats and the implications of allowing additional members to wield veto power. Nevertheless, India continues to champion permanent membership, articulating its commitment to both global governance and the principles of peace and security the UNSC is meant to uphold.

In its reform proposal, India is open to a structure that may initially exclude veto power for new permanent members. This proposal seeks to address historical apprehensions among current members while promoting more equitable representation. This move acknowledges the need to balance power dynamics within the Council and ensure diverse global voices are included in decision-making.

Moreover, support for India's candidature continues to grow, with backing from entities like the African Union, which has called for a permanent seat to ensure the UNSC adequately represents African interests and perspectives. Nevertheless, the path to permanent membership is complex and requires careful negotiations and consensus-building among current permanent members. The bid will test India's diplomatic outreach across regions, especially among the Global South, OIC members, SCO countries, African states, island nations and major Western partners.

The unfinished story of India's handloom weavers



NAMRATA KOHLI

2ND OPINION

At The Kunj, in New Delhi, Aadyam Handwoven recently brought together handwoven textiles from different weaving clusters across India. Alongside the textiles was something increasingly difficult to encounter — a special screening of Shyam Benegal's 1987 Hindi film *Susman*, which portrayed the lives and struggles of India's handloom weavers.

Susman is not readily available on mainstream streaming platforms, and Aadyam obtained special permission from Shyam Benegal's family to screen the film. "Susman" — loosely translated as "the essence" — is an apt title for a film about the people who form the very warp and weft of India's handloom tradition.

Nearly four decades after the film was made, it raises an uncomfortable question: how much has really

changed for the Indian weaver? "From the time of Shyam Benegal's movie, a lot has changed, but nothing much has changed. The film is equally relevant today," says Manish Saksena, Business Lead, Aadyam Handwoven, an Aditya Birla initiative.

Among the traditions showcased was Pochampally Ikat, which originates in Bhodan Pochampally in Telangana's Yadadri Bhuvanagiri district and is renowned for its distinctive geometric patterns. The beauty of Ikat begins even before the loom. Unlike conventional weaving, where the design emerges primarily during weaving, in Ikat the yarn itself is carefully tied and resist-dyed according to a predetermined pattern before it reaches the loom. The coloured threads must then be aligned with remarkable precision during weaving for the pattern to emerge. The slight feathering at the edges of motifs — rather than machine-like uniformity — gives Ikat much of its distinctive handmade character.

There is something truly distinct about this craft. In Pochampally, this intricate process also creates an unusual partnership between weavers. "In Pochampally, the weaver has to be very particular. He has to synchronise with the person doing the tie-and-dye," explains Saksena. "The husband and wife often work in tandem here. In other clusters, men may do the main weaving and women some of the lighter weaves, but because of the technique in Pochampally, there is much more working together."

But keeping such labour-intensive craftsmanship alive comes at a price. Pochampally saris at premium stores in silk can today range from around Rs 20,000 to Rs 1 lakh, depending on the silk, intricacy and amount of work involved. "Handloom is meant to be worn by everyone. That is the true essence," says Saksena. "But silk prices have really been shooting up. At the same time, there is a minimum wage, and we are very conscious that the weavers' livelihood is maintained." It creates one of handloom's contemporary contradictions: how does a craft remain accessible while ensuring that the people making it are adequately paid?

For Saksena, Susman is also personal. He first saw the film at a festival in 1987. "It pretty much shaped why I chose this profession," he recalls. "It was a very inspirational film and impacted me at a very impressionable age." At the exhibition, he also displayed another piece of his own history — a sari he bought for his mother from his first salary in 1994.

A sari can carry a family memory for decades; a weaving tradition can carry a cultural memory for centuries. Nearly 40 years after Susman, perhaps the challenge is no longer simply preserving the loom. It is ensuring that the people sitting at it can build a future from it.

The writer is an author, podcaster and a Senior Fellow at the Ministry of Culture, Government of India

PIC TALK



An artisan puts the finishing touches on miniature idols of Goddess Durga, crafted from clay and sponge wood, ahead of the upcoming Durga Puja festival, in Birbhum district, West Bengal. PHOTO: PTI

Courage that made India proud

Kudos to Indian pilot Captain Smit Machchhar, whose presence of mind and extraordinary courage saved the lives of 174 passengers aboard an Israel-bound flydubai flight from an attempted crash landing.

Though investigations are still under way, early reports indicate that the Captain was stabbed by his Omani co-pilot, allegedly with the intent of crashing the plane and killing all the travellers, including dozens of Israelis. Despite being seriously injured and bleeding, the Indian pilot fought back and opened the cockpit door. This allowed passengers and crew members to enter the flight cabin, overpower the assailant, safely divert the plane and land in Saudi Arabia.

"Courage is not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it," said Nelson Mandela. The Indian pilot deserves the highest honours and accolades, both national and international, for upholding the lofty traditions of civil aviation by placing his own life on the line to save those of the passengers.

One hopes there is no attempt to justify the attack as an inevitable consequence of Israel's past military actions against Iran and Lebanon. It may also be time to enforce stringent rules when assigning pilots to flights serving specific destinations.

V JAYARAMAN | CHENNAI

CAFE-3 norms may raise car costs

Appropos "Government notifies new CAFE-3 norms for passenger vehicles", published on October 1, I believe the government's notification of the third phase of Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE-3) norms is an important step towards reducing fuel consumption and carbon emissions from passenger vehicles. The rules will apply from April 1, 2027, to March 31, 2032, and will progressively tighten fleet-wide efficiency requirements. A significant feature is that the final framework does not provide a separate concession for petrol cars weighing below 909 kg. Instead, the formula offers relatively softer targets to lighter vehicle fleets while imposing greater efficiency requirements on heavier vehicles. The norms will have a major impact on carmakers' product strategies. Manufacturers with lighter portfolios, such as Maruti Suzuki, may find compliance comparatively easier, although their large petrol car base will still require greater use of CNG, hybrids, electric vehicles and fuel-saving technologies.

Companies with SUV-heavy portfolios, including Tata Motors and Mahindra & Mahindra, may face greater pressure to improve efficiency or expand electrified models. More efficient cars could lower fuel costs and pollution, but cleaner technologies may initially raise vehicle prices.

BAL GOVIND | NOIDA

Gandhi's enduring message of harmony

In his emotional "the light has gone out of our lives" speech to the nation following the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, a deeply saddened Jawaharlal Nehru, India's Prime Minister, said, "For the light that shone in this country was no ordinary light."

The light that has illumined this country for these many years will illumine this country for many more years, and a thousand years later, that light will be seen in this country and the world will see it, and it will give solace to innumerable hearts."

In the preface to Nobel laureate Romain Rolland's book, *Mahatma Gandhi: The Man Who Became One With The Universal Being*, the editor echoed this sentiment: "The emotions released by this calamity, if directed to constructive purposes, may, however, lead to the worldwide fulfilment of those principles of conduct for which the Mahatma laid down his life." Now, the finest tribute to him is to live and let live, emulating the spirit of his life. A devout Hindu, he nonetheless remained a true secularist. "Ishwar Allah Tere Naam", the famous bhajan promoting religious harmony, was his favourite song. Gandhi also championed the poorest. As India remembers Mahatma Gandhi, his message of peace, harmony and humanity remains as relevant as ever.

HARIODASAN RAJAN | KERALAM

Can India turn transition into a financial asset?

Climate finance is good at funding new green assets. The harder challenge is creating financial value when existing high-emission assets need to be transformed, repurposed or eventually retired



RIA SINHA

Climate finance is largely built around creation. A solar project can borrow against future electricity sales. Green bonds can finance new infrastructure. Blended finance can help an emerging technology move from being technically possible to commercially viable.

The harder problem begins when climate value comes not from building something new, but from changing what already exists.

Let's take a thermal power plant that could operate commercially for another decade. If cleaner and reliable replacement capacity becomes available five years earlier, retiring or repurposing the plant could avoid substantial future emissions. But the financial obligations do not disappear. The owner may lose expected revenue, lenders may still have exposure, and replacement electricity still has to be financed.

The avoided emissions have a climate value. What is less clear is how that value can help pay for the transition itself.

India therefore needs to think about climate capital according to the job it has to do. Some capital builds the emerging low-carbon system, some helps existing assets become cleaner or change function. Over time, some will also be needed to finance the repurposing or retirement of assets that the energy system can eventually do without.

For India, that last category has to be approached carefully. Coal (including lignite) supplied 69.5 per cent of electricity between April and June 2026 and accounted for roughly three-fourths of maximum generation during non-solar peak-demand hours. Thermal power still performs an important system-security function.

This cannot become a backdoor case for shutting viable coal capacity prematurely. India's electricity demand is still growing. The more useful question is whether, once adequate replacement electrons are available, finance can help older assets move out of its existing role earlier than it otherwise would.

An experiment underway in Singapore offers one possible route. Its Transition Credits Coalition (TRAC-TION) has been exploring energy-transition credits generated from verified emissions reductions when coal plants retire earlier than planned and are replaced with cleaner energy. The idea is not that carbon credits pay for the entire exercise. Rather, revenue from avoided emissions can improve the economics of an otherwise difficult transition transaction.

There is now enough work on this idea to make it more than a thought experiment. Verra's methodology for accelerated retirement of grid-connected coal plants has been active since May 2025. It sets out how net emissions reductions can be calculated when retirement is paired with replacement renewable generation and requires a just-transition plan for affected workers and communities. A revised methodology consulted on in 2026 is now at final review.

India should not copy this model mechanically. Its coal fleet, demand trajectory and development needs are different. But the underlying financial idea deserves a domestic pilot.

Suppose the gap between a plant's remaining economic value and the value realised through an earlier transition is too large for the owner or lenders to absorb. A transaction could combine restructuring by existing lenders and owners, concessional finance or guarantees, commercial capital for replacement capacity, public resources for workers and site redevelopment, and revenue from verified avoided emissions.

Carbon revenue would be only one piece of the financing package. Its role would be to put a price on a climate benefit that is otherwise difficult to monetise.

A limited Transition Finance Transaction Framework could test this approach. The first question should be simple: is the energy system actually ready for the asset to change role?

In power, adequate replacement electrons, whether from renewables, storage, hydro, nuclear or stronger grid connections, must exist before retirement is



REPRESENTATIONAL IMAGE

CLIMATE FINANCE HAS SPENT YEARS LEARNING HOW TO MAKE TOMORROW'S ASSETS INVESTIBLE. INDIA WILL ALSO NEED A WAY TO DEAL WITH YESTERDAY'S ASSETS WHEN KEEPING THEM IN THEIR EXISTING FORM NO LONGER MAKES ECONOMIC OR ENVIRONMENTAL SENSE

financed. In sectors such as steel, fertilisers or refining, the equivalent question concerns alternative low-carbon molecules and production processes. Finance should follow technical readiness, not run ahead of it.

There would need to be other safeguards. An asset already due to close should not earn a windfall for doing what economics would have forced it to do anyway. Nor should one plant's closure simply shift generation and emissions elsewhere. Workers, local economies, land rehabilitation and productive reuse also have to be part of the transaction.

India is already beginning to treat mine closure in this broader way. The coal ministry reported in July that 42 coal mines had been scientifically closed, with ecological restoration, community interventions and productive post-mining land use forming part of the process.

India's emerging carbon market and climate-finance taxonomy provide a useful policy backdrop. The Carbon Credit Trading Scheme now covers 490 obligated entities across seven emissions-intensive sectors and has put in place an institutional framework for monitoring, reporting and verification. Separately, the draft climate-finance taxonomy explicitly supports transition activities and says India's classification must reflect its development priorities, transition pathways and energy-security needs.

There is an opportunity to connect these pieces more deliberately. Instead of treating transition finance as a broad label for anything less carbon-intensive than the status quo, India could distinguish between capital that improves an existing asset, transforms it, repurposes it and, where justified, finances its retirement.

But this brings us to the question that may ultimately determine whether such transactions work at all: who pays?

Should the asset owner absorb the loss in remaining economic value? How much should existing lenders restructure? When is public or concessional capital justified? Should buyers of verified transition credits contribute because they value the avoided emissions? Who finances replacement electricity, worker support, land restoration and local economic redevelopment? And what part, if any, should international climate finance bear?

These are not secondary questions. A transition can be technically sensible and environmentally credible, yet still fail because its costs fall on actors with neither the incentive nor the capacity to carry them. The answer will vary across assets and sectors, but the distribution of transition costs has to become explicit.

The issue extends well beyond coal. Cement kilns, steel-making equipment, refineries and industrial systems built around carbon-intensive molecules will increasingly face choices between retrofit, conversion, replacement and retirement. Each has a different financial logic.

Climate finance has spent years learning how to make tomorrow's assets investible. India will also need a way to deal with yesterday's assets when keeping them in their existing form no longer makes economic or environmental sense. The goal is not to pay viable assets to disappear before the system is ready. It is to ensure that, once transformation or retirement becomes technically sensible and economically desirable, the absence of a financing mechanism does not become the reason the old system persists.

The next innovation in transition finance may therefore lie not only in putting a value on avoided emissions, but in answering the harder question that follows: who should bear the cost of turning that climate value into an investible transition?

The writer is a Senior Fellow at Chintan Research Foundation

Tax certainty is India's next corporate advantage



SANDEEP S NAGAR

India's economic transformation is creating businesses of unprecedented scale, ambition and complexity. Companies are expanding across jurisdictions, undertaking acquisitions, restructuring operations, and attracting institutional capital. In this environment, taxation can no longer remain confined to the accounts department. It is increasingly becoming a boardroom issue.

The real competitive advantage for Indian businesses in the coming years may not simply be access to capital or technology. It could be tax certainty, which means the ability to structure businesses and transactions with greater predictability about their legal and fiscal consequences.

The Indian tax environment has undergone significant transformation. Digitisation, data integration, and increasingly sophisticated scrutiny have made transactions far more visible to the authorities. For businesses, this has created both an opportunity and a responsibility. The opportunity lies in greater transparency and a more formalised economy; the responsibility is to ensure that business practices, financial statements, tax filings, and documentation tell the same story.

This is where tax advisory needs to evolve. The traditional model treated taxation largely as a compliance exercise: calculate the liability, file the return, and respond if a notice arrives. That model is increasingly inadequate. Tax implications need to be considered when a business is being structured, when an acquisition is being evaluated, when assets are transferred, when a company is reorganised, and even when promoters are planning succession.

In other words, tax strategy needs to move upstream into business strategy. For companies undertaking mergers and acquisitions, tax due diligence is particularly critical. An acquisition does not necessarily end with the transfer of ownership. Historical tax exposures, pending litigation, assessment risks and compliance gaps can travel with the transaction, depending on its structure. These risks can affect valuation, warranties, indemnities and the ultimate economics of the deal.



Corporate restructuring presents a similar challenge. A restructuring may have a compelling commercial rationale, but its legal and tax consequences cannot be considered separately. The question is not merely whether a restructuring can be implemented, but whether the resulting structure is commercially efficient, legally defensible and sustainable.

This is also why India's growing tax-litigation ecosystem requires a more integrated approach. A tax dispute is rarely only about interpreting a provision. It is ultimately about facts, documentation, accounting treatment, business purpose and legal interpretation. A company that waits until a dispute reaches the appellate stage to examine its position has already lost valuable ground.

Prevention, therefore, is becoming as important as representation. There is another dimension that deserves attention: the MSME sector. India's formalisation drive has brought millions of smaller businesses into the digital and tax ecosystem. GST registrations, income-tax filings, digital payments, and banking trails have increased transparency. But formalisation should not stop at registration.

MSMEs need greater access to professional financial and tax guidance. Basic financial hygiene, proper documentation, timely filings, and a clear understanding of tax obligations can prevent disputes that become disproportionately expensive later.

The answer is not necessarily more compliance for its own sake. It is smarter compliance. India's aspiration to become a globally competitive manufacturing, services, and investment destination also makes tax predictability important for international investors. Global capital evaluates not merely the size of an opportunity but the predictability of its operating environment. Clear rules, consistent interpretation, efficient dispute resolution and professional advisory support can substantially strengthen India's investment proposition.

The country's tax architecture has come a long way, but the next stage must focus on certainty, simplicity and trust. Professionals who combine financial understanding with legal expertise have an increasingly important role to play in this transition. The emergence of dual-qualified practitioners reflects the changing requirements of modern business, where legal, financial and regulatory questions increasingly overlap.

The larger lesson for corporate India is simple: tax should not be viewed as the cost of doing business. Companies that build this architecture early will be better positioned to manage disputes, execute transactions, attract capital and sustain growth. India is moving towards a more formal, transparent, and globally integrated economy. Its businesses must evolve accordingly. The next generation of corporate success will belong not merely to those who grow fastest, but to those who build the strongest foundations for that growth.

The writer is a Chartered Accountant and Advocate. He specialises and writes on direct tax litigation, tax advisory, corporate taxation, M&A, restructuring and regulatory matters

Ayushman Bharat's next test: Are we paying for the right healthcare?



INDU BHUSHAN

As Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya (AB-PM-JAY) approaches eight years since its September 2018 launch, it has much to be proud of. About 100,000 people receive free hospital treatment daily, and by June 30, 2026, it had financed 12.69 crore admissions worth ₹1.92 lakh crore, with better financial protection and earlier access to treatment. Very few public programmes anywhere have expanded healthcare access at this scale and pace.

But scale brings its own challenges. Having shown that publicly financed health insurance can expand access, PM-JAY must now ask a harder question: are we always paying for the right care?

This is not simply about fraud, which is relatively easy to define: a service not provided, documents fabricated, a claim falsified. Clinical decision-making is far more complicated: whether a Caesarean was necessary, a hysterectomy avoidable, or a knee replacement should have followed conservative treatment first often involves judgement, not black-and-white rules.

We were conscious of this when designing PM-JAY. Certain procedures were particularly susceptible to moral hazard, where insurance itself can influence the type or quantity of care provided. So

we built safeguards: reimbursement for normal and Caesarean deliveries was kept equal so payment would not reward surgery; vulnerable procedures faced pre-authorisation and stricter documentation; some were reserved for public hospitals, where supplier-induced demand was highest-risk.

These safeguards mattered, but no scheme can anticipate every clinical situation across thousands of conditions, nor can an insurer substitute its judgement for the doctor's. It is precisely in these grey areas that PM-JAY's next generation of oversight needs to evolve.

Caesarean sections illustrate the problem. NFHS-6 shows Caesarean deliveries rose from 21.5 per cent in 2019-21 to 27.2 per cent in 2023-24, 54.1 per cent of private-facility births were Caesarean, against 16.9 per cent in public ones. This doesn't tell us how many were unnecessary, nor should it deny a woman a Caesarean when she needs one. WHO prescribes no ideal rate but recommends examining patterns through tools like the Robson classification. A blanket cap misses the mark: what really matters is why rates swing so distinctly across hospitals, states and sectors.

A similar pattern is emerging in orthopaedics. Total knee replacement is covered under PM-JAY, and since October 2024, citizens aged 70 and above qualify irrespective of socio-economic status. As



this population grows, oversight should shift towards age-, severity and indication-based review, so that surgery follows clinical need and, where appropriate, conservative treatment first.

Hysterectomy makes an even stronger case for looking beyond the claim. The concern isn't new: under the Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojana, which preceded Ayushman Bharat, reports of indiscriminate hysterectomies in states such as Uttar Pradesh and Bihar became a serious worry. An early National Health Authority analysis of 17,333 hysterectomy claims under PM-JAY (September 2018-April 2019) found the median age was just 44, and

more than 69 per cent were performed in private hospitals. It did not conclude the procedures were unnecessary, but found substantial variation and recommended better capture of clinical indications and consideration of alternatives.

Hysterectomy can be lifesaving when appropriately indicated; the concern arises when an irreversible procedure becomes the first response to a condition with effective alternatives. Claims oversight must examine not just whether a procedure was performed, but whether it was appropriate and alternatives were considered. For heavy menstrual bleeding, the UK's NICE recommends a hormonal levonorgestrel-releasing intrauterine system (LNG-IUS) first, with hysterectomy appropriate where indicated but only after fewer invasive options and the woman's informed choice.

The stakes extend beyond the hospital stay. In younger women, hysterectomy also removes the ovaries bringing forward the loss of oestrogen, accelerating the onset of osteoporosis and cardiovascular disease. Around 46 million Indian women over 50 already live with osteoporosis, and coronary artery disease is a leading cause of death among postmenopausal Indian women. Weaker bones and joints can, in turn, feed into the same knee-replacement claims PM-JAY now covers, so an avoidable hysterectomy today can quietly add to tomorrow's orthopaedic burden.

The cost of an intervention is not merely what

is paid today. A hysterectomy in a young woman shifts her long-term health, and a Caesarean carries over into future pregnancies. High-cost elective procedures should not be rationed by age, but by disease severity, functional impairment, prior conservative treatment and comorbidities, especially when public resources finance the procedure.

PM-JAY must shift from claims assurance to clinical assurance. The Health Benefit Package should adequately cover non-surgical alternatives to prevent financial incentives from tilting medical decisions towards unnecessary surgery. Pre-authorisation must capture meaningful clinical indications rather than creating administrative paperwork. Data analytics can flag unusual utilisation patterns for targeted audits, accounting for hospital size and specialty. Clinicians must help design these safeguards so rules examine patterns without hindering patient care. Moving beyond basic fraud prevention, PM-JAY must now ensure treatments are clinically appropriate and necessary.

PM-JAY's next test is not to reduce the number of surgeries, or to make an insurer a doctor. The objective is to ensure financial incentives and oversight systems support sound clinical judgement. Public money should pay for the right intervention, at the right stage, with an eye on the patient's health over a lifetime. The natural next stage in PM-JAY's evolution, from financing mere healthcare, is to financing better healthcare.

The writer is a former CEO of Ayushman Bharat



Opinion

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 2, 2026

Routes, not detours

CAFE-III rightly backs many technologies, but flexibility must speed up the shift to cleaner mobility, not stall it.

THE GOVERNMENT'S NOTIFICATION of the third phase of Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE-III) norms gives an important principle right: the transition to cleaner mobility cannot be reduced to a choice between the internal combustion engine (ICE) and electric vehicles (EVs). Taking effect from April 2027, the norms set progressively tighter fleet-level fuel-efficiency requirements while allowing manufacturers multiple technology pathways to meet them. Battery electric and range-extended EVs receive the highest super credit, at three times their volume, while plug-in hybrids, strong hybrids, and flex-fuel vehicles also receive varying recognition. This is sensible for a market still navigating the economics and infrastructure of the transition. The framework, which emerged from consultation between the government, regulator, and industry, provides manufacturers a predictable five-year road map for investment and innovation.

Technology neutrality has advantages. It allows automakers to manage compliance costs and product portfolios instead of forcing every vehicle segment towards a single technology at the same pace. Hybrids and more efficient ICE vehicles can reduce fuel consumption and emissions in the near term, even if they are not the eventual destination. The framework also recognises technologies such as start-stop systems, regenerative braking, and high-efficiency air-conditioning, allowing conventional vehicles to contribute to efficiency gains. The inclusion of ethanol blends, compressed natural gas, and biofuels provides flexibility. This matters because charging infrastructure is still developing, electricity generation remains dependent on coal, and battery and critical-mineral supply chains remain concentrated. Disruptions in rare-earth supplies have demonstrated how quickly global chokepoints can become domestic industrial problems. Credit trading and the option to purchase credits through the Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) give manufacturers flexibility in managing compliance.

That, however, cannot become an argument for delaying the inevitable. Transitional flexibility should make the shift to cleaner mobility manageable, not preserve the status quo indefinitely. Former NITI Aayog CEO Amitabh Kant's criticism that the norms do not push electrification hard enough therefore merits consideration, even if making EVs the overriding destination immediately risks underestimating practical constraints. CAFE-III is hardly indifferent to electrification: the three-times super credit for battery EVs provides manufacturers a powerful incentive to expand EV portfolios. As those portfolios grow, compliance itself should increasingly favour electrification. The priority must be to ensure that the breathing space offered to other technologies is used to build capabilities in batteries, power electronics, charging infrastructure, and software rather than postpone investment in them. Technology neutrality works only if competing pathways produce genuine efficiency gains while industry develops the capabilities required for a zero-emission future.

The real test of CAFE-III, therefore, is not whether it produces the fastest possible shift to EVs over the next few years. It is whether the framework reduces fuel consumption and emissions now while preparing Indian industry for a globally competitive, increasingly zero-emission future. That requires regulation flexible enough to accommodate market realities but stringent enough to keep manufacturers moving forward. The progressively tighter targets, incentives for electrification, and BEE-administered credit mechanism should maintain pressure on manufacturers to improve efficiency and invest in cleaner technologies. The auto industry needs time to navigate a complex transition, but that time must be used to build technologies, infrastructure, and supply chains for the next phase of global mobility. Technology neutrality is valuable precisely because it provides different routes towards the same objective. It loses its purpose if those routes become detours. The destination cannot be obscured by the flexibility of the journey.

What happens when Chinese AI goes rogue?

COVERING THE RECENT round of AI apocalypse warnings, I've tried to reject this cult-like defence towards all-powerful computer systems and the inevitability rhetoric. If Silicon Valley doesn't build them first, someone else—likely China—will.

Yet a recent spate of incidents in the US has spurred a fresh, heated debate on the safety of allowing AI systems to act on their own. A growing number of researchers inside the companies involved are also warning of "existential" dangers, with Anthropic PBC even flagging such concerns to investors in its initial public offering prospectus. For China, the risks of near-term hazards like labour market threats or the more alarming Sci-Fi scenarios such as hacks on critical infrastructure are making it harder to write off the future as a distinctly American obsession.

Beijing has dismissed some of these warnings as "fearmongering," seeing the calls to slow AI development as an attempt to hold China back. But voices inside the industry have suggested frontier risks simply aren't being felt as acutely at home because they're further behind the US. Huawei Technologies' founding chairman Eric Xu wondered if Chinese AI was advanced enough to encounter the "type of risk" US providers were debating. AI model makers in China "may need to speed up their pace" to reach the level that they could "also feel the risks," Xu said, according to Reuters, acknowledging the need for balance. It shows how debate has developed in unhelpful ways.

Accelerating the race is the wrong answer on both sides of the Pacific. There are nearly 1,000 large language models in China, according to Bloomberg Intelligence. Competition on this scale already makes even Silicon Valley's breakfast pace seem muted. The Chinese industry has also been plowing significantly more resources into agents, or systems that can act more autonomously. Agent misbehaviour, especially the Hugging Face incident in July, has kicked off this recent safety reckoning. As the short-lived OpenAI GPT-4 frenzy showed, even China's non-technical public is willing to experiment with them. It means if agent AI is inherently more risky, it's likely only a matter of time before we see concerning behaviour from Chinese AI tools.

A recent DeepSeek paper that includes founder and CEO Liang Wenfeng as a co-author warns agent behaviour can be "untrustworthy." Moonshot AI's Kimi K3 exploited a loophole in a sandbox during cybersecurity testing, according to US-based Frontier Security. And some Chinese AI agents have also shown the kind of deceptive and concerning trends that have raised alarm about US tools.

Policymakers too are paying attention. China in September released AI Safety Governance Framework 3.0, a policy document that notably also dropped in English, clearly aimed for Western audiences. It explicitly warns that AI has demonstrated a "self-accelerating trend" and notes the question of whether this could exceed human control demands attention and vigilance.

Another cornerstone of the latest safety contention is recursive self-improvement, or AI systems that can autonomously advance their own capabilities. It's the development path that spurred an Anthropic researcher to quit and warn that makers of the technology earnestly believe it could "kill us all" within a decade. As Oxford China Policy Lab's Zhan Qian has argued, China is further along in this regard than many in the West may realise, partly because its researchers describe it in different terms. In discussing the technology's risks, President Xi Jinping has warned that "AI must be kept under human control". His self-interest in maintaining order offers a narrowing window for cooperation on risk mitigation dialogue.

China has burdensome regulations in place surrounding AI; using it as the bogeyman is no longer a convincing excuse for inaction from lawmakers in Washington.



CATHERINE THORBECKE

Bloomberg

INDIA'S LENDERS, LED BY THE STATE, ARE FINANCING DATA CENTRES JUST AS AI BOOM'S OWN CREDITORS STRUGGLE

Good technology, bad credit

ON SEPTEMBER 18, 1973, Jay Cooke & Co., financier of the Union's Civil War, collapsed, unable to sell the bonds of a railway built ahead of its traffic. On September 18 this year, NaBFID, India's state-run infrastructure lender, said it had sanctioned over ₹3,000 crore each for at least four data centres, with repayment holidays of up to five years. The same day, \$1.8 billion of loans for an Oracle-leased AI campus in New Mexico, built for OpenAI, was quoted at 90c on the dollar, its banks struggling to sell them amid Oracle's weakening credit and a blocked gas pipeline.

Read one way, India is catching the AI wave. Read another, its public balance sheet is joining a debt-fuelled boom of railway projects.

Morgan Stanley expects global AI-related debt issuance of nearly \$570 billion this year, more than double last year's. Optimists note that Walmart ran negative free cash flow for its first 15 listed years yet enriched shareholders. But its new stores earned far more than they cost to finance.

Debt by another name

A joint venture borrowed \$27.3 billion to build Meta's Hyperion data centre. Meta took an initial four-year lease but gave a capped 16-year guarantee on the campus's value. Bondholders lend against Meta's promise, yet Meta books none of it as debt. Goldman Sachs puts hyperscalers' total lease commitments at over \$1.5 trillion, \$1 trillion of it not yet begun and so off-balance sheet. Veterans of 2008 remember off-balance sheet is not off the hook.

The giants still look sober for their size: leverage, top-notch ratings. But capex now outruns cash flow; Amazon's free cash flow has turned negative, and Alphabet's briefly so. Alphabet has sold \$85 billion of shares. Oracle is the exception. Otherwise, the leverage sits around them: in vehicles, neoclouds, and labs.

AI BANDWAGON

INDIA'S LENDERS, LED BY THE STATE, ARE FINANCING DATA CENTRES JUST AS AI BOOM'S OWN CREDITORS STRUGGLE

KRISHNAN RANGANATHAN

Former Executive Director, Nomura, alumnus of Harvard Business School, and a visiting faculty at IISc

The customer who pays with your own money

Walmart's shoppers spent their own wages. Much of a hyperscaler's backlog comes from still-unprofitable AI labs; OpenAI alone was 45% of Microsoft's in January. The labs raise cash from Amazon, Nvidia, SoftBank, and, earlier, Microsoft, then spend much of it on their backers' computing. It is a house whose valuer, mortgage bank, and builder share an office.

Hyman Minsky called borrowers who can pay only by raising fresh money "Ponzi" units. The labs mostly raise equity, but their compute contracts behave like debt. Can fast-growing revenues cover commitments many times larger? The alarm is loudest at Oracle, whose default insurance hit records near 200 basis points, and which S&P rates one notch above junk.

It's the slowdown, not the crash

Herbert Stein, Richard Nixon's adviser, said if something cannot go on forever, it will stop. In 2006, subprime defaults rose when house-price growth merely slowed. US expects hyperscaler capex growth to fall from 76% this year to 6% by 2028. Slower building means slower revenue for neoclouds and cooler valuations, both needing each funding round priced above the last. "As long as the music is playing, you've got to get up and dance," Citigroup's Chuck Prince said

in 2007. Hyperscaler bosses, fearing rivals, are still dancing.

Not 2000, and maybe not 1873

The dot-com bust was mostly a share bubble. Shareholders can wait. Lenders cannot. Telecom is the closer precedent: its fibre was eventually used, but it made up over half the world's corporate bond defaults in 2002. And railway track lasted generations; most data-centre spending goes on chips depreciated over six years that some reckon obsolete in three.

Scenarios split the risks with insurers and private credit, not deposit-taking banks. But JPMorgan and Morgan Stanley, nearing internal risk limits, have sought to offload data-centre loans. What banks cannot sell, they keep; what they sell may return, as private credit borrows heavily from them.

What it means for India

"There is nothing so disturbing to one's well-being and judgement as to see a friend get rich," wrote Charles Kindleberger. Foreign investors sold a record \$29 billion of Indian shares in the first half, largely, says Jefferies, to chase Korean and Taiwanese AI hardware. It calls India the "inverse AI trade": money leaving AI comes back here. True, in an orderly rotation; a 2008-style crunch strengthens the dollar and sells emerging markets first. India is building capacity too, with over

Trump's vanity summit with Xi



STEPHEN S. ROACH

Faculty member, Yale University, and former Chairman, Morgan Stanley Asia

His cringe-worthy declarations of heartfelt admiration for Xi reflect his twisted sense that the trappings of power are power itself

LONG ON CEREMONY but short on substance, the eagerly anticipated summit between US President Donald Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping was a disappointment. Perhaps not a major disappointment, as expectations were generally low, and as some talk is certainly better than no talk. But on the major issues of trade, AI, Taiwan, and addressing China's role in two theatres of war, there was little or no progress. Instead, ceremonial flourishes substituted for substance, unmasking the summit as yet another Trump vanity project.

On trade, the two-month extension of the truce—initially negotiated nearly a year ago in South Korea—was surprisingly short, implying that tariff uncertainty remains high. Pre-summit chatter hinted at an extension of 6–12 months. Moreover, there were expectations of another round of Chinese purchases of US agricultural exports. Instead, the two nations made a joint post-summit announcement to cut tariffs on a total of \$650 billion of "non-sensitive" goods, including US imports of electric blankets and magic tricks and Chinese imports of eels and emus.

On AI, the biggest issue facing civilisation, there was no meeting of the minds. The two superpowers committed to a loosely structured dialogue and dangled the possibility of an unspecified "hotline" for AI-related national security issues. This bare-minimum achievement is far from the major breakthrough on AI safety that many had hoped for—especially in the aftermath of the recent Hugging Face hacking incident and reports of other intrusions that have led some AI insiders

to raise human extinction concerns. The disappointing outcome of the summit—which merely paid lip service to such risks—is hardly surprising considering that Trump has doubled down on his hands-off approach to AI regulation.

On Taiwan, Xi attempted to press the advantage he gained after the Beijing summit in May when Trump described the pending \$114-billion US arms package to Taiwan as a "good negotiating chip". In view of America's normally staunch commitment to arming Taiwan, the Chinese sidesaw this as a major concession, especially given that the deal already had congressional approval. In his opening speech to last week's summit, Xi urged the US to "adhere to the correct position of opposing Taiwan independence". But doing so would be a stunning about-face on the "strategic ambiguity" that has long shielded US strategy towards Taiwanese sovereignty.

Finally, China's role in the wars in Ukraine and Iran escaped scrutiny. As the buyer of some 90% of Iran's oil exports and about 50% of Russia's, China is a major funder of both countries' military efforts. A new law gives the US president broad authority to address this activity through secondary sanctions and tariffs on those countries, like China, that indirectly support illegal wars. Don't count on it. Fearful of spoiling the summit's optics, Trump made no mention of this political hot potato.

By making little effort on the big issues,

both in terms of staff preparation and bilateral talks, Trump was painfully transparent about what mattered most to him: impressing Xi and his entourage. Ironically, while the tightly controlled Chinese press delivered enthusiastic messaging of Xi's great successes at the summit, the US broadcast media were muted by Trump's White House ban on three major news outlets, a shocking crackdown on free speech.

As was the case in Beijing, Trump once again abandoned any semblance of protocol in his cringe-worthy declarations of heartfelt admiration for his "truly great friend's" leadership skills. The hyperbole was embellished by physical demonstrations of Trump's affection. The many red carpets would put even China to shame, while the glitzy state dinner with Big Tech "tyrants" was missing only the grand setting of a Chinese-style ballroom.

Trump attempted to compensate for that by offering Xi a personal tour of his new vanity project in the White House: the granite helipad, the ballroom construction site, and his rogues' gallery of annotated presidential portraits. Xi was shown in a rare state of laughter when he came to Trump's crud and derisive depiction of former US President Joe Biden as an "open"—suggesting that the two leaders may share more personality traits than we have been led to believe.

I am hardly the first to bemoan the au-

tocratic symbolism of political leaders' vanity projects. But there is something considerably more vulgar about Trump's approach. It consumes him as he approaches the end of his presidency. By slapping his name on monuments, programmes, and US financial instruments, he routinely violates America's sense of propriety, which has long held that naming rights are meant to honour and memorialise the deceased. Not so for Trump, who audaciously claimed "I am the core," when apparently claiming with the ballroom architect over safety issues.

Unfortunately, this has everything to do with Trump's approach to high-level meetings with America's most challenging counterpart, China. The heavy lifting of Sino-American engagement has never been needed more to address a host of global challenges. At critical moments like this, leaders have risen to the occasion. That was not the case on September 24.

There is an important asymmetry in how the two leaders see this moment in time. Xi makes constant references to a world that is "undergoing major changes unseen in a century." Trump couldn't care less. His focus on befriending and impressing autocrats—not just Xi but also Russian President Vladimir Putin and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un—is an insulting and alienating long-standing ally in part of his twisted sense that the trappings of power are power itself. America's first-ever vanity summit, while disappointing, sadly comes as no surprise.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Managing capital inflows

Apropos of "The dollar inflow puzzle" (FE, October 1), the large inflow of foreign currency has strengthened reserves, but the resulting rupee liquidity presents a different challenge for banks and the Reserve Bank of

India (RBI). The issue deserves careful handling because excessive liquidity can encourage imprudent lending or create distortions in the bond market. Banks should not be pressured into deploying surplus funds merely to improve credit growth. Asset quality and prudent underwriting must remain paramount. The RBI could use

a calibrated combination of liquidity operations rather than rely excessively on any single instrument. Clear communication will also help prevent unnecessary speculation about future interest rates. As credit demand remains strong, some surplus funds can eventually support productive investment, but this should happen within

sound risk-management frameworks. The episode demonstrates that managing capital inflows requires attention not only to foreign-exchange reserves but also to their domestic monetary consequences. —SM Jeeva, Chennai

Write to us at feletters@expressindia.com

The Statesman

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

Journalism's test

The crisis facing journalism is often described as a crisis of business, technology or public trust. It is all three. But beneath them lies a more consequential question: what happens to a democratic society when reliable journalism ceases to be a viable institution? The digital revolution has already dismantled the old information hierarchy. Newspapers and broadcasters once decided what entered the public conversation. Today, a post on X, a YouTube video, a WhatsApp message or an AI-generated answer can reach millions before a newsroom has finished checking the facts. This is where the importance of journalism has to be reconsidered. Its essential function was never simply to deliver news. Distribution is now something technology companies can do at enormous scale. Journalism matters because someone must establish what happened, distinguish evidence from assertion, expose wrongdoing, provide context and hold powerful institutions to account. That work is expensive. Investigations take time. Reporters have to cultivate sources, verify documents, travel, obtain records and withstand pressure from governments, corporations and political interests. None of this becomes cheaper merely because an audience can receive a news alert free of charge.

The economic consequences are therefore inseparable from the democratic ones. If advertising migrates to technology platforms while audiences expect news to cost nothing, newsrooms inevitably shrink. The first casualties are likely to be precisely those forms of journalism whose social value is greatest but whose immediate commercial return is weakest: local reporting, specialised reporting, investigative work and sustained coverage of institutions that do not generate clicks.

Yet journalism cannot respond to this crisis simply by demanding that audiences trust it. Trust is earned through performance. Established media have made errors, displayed biases and sometimes allowed political or commercial interests to influence coverage. These failures cannot be dismissed merely because social media is worse. The credibility of journalism depends on transparency, corrections, rigorous sourcing and a visible separation between reporting and advocacy. Nor can cooperation among media organisations alone solve the problem.

Collaboration may help newsrooms share costs, technology and investigative resources, but institutional survival is not the same as public legitimacy. Journalism has to adapt to the ways people now discover information without surrendering the standards that make journalism different from information circulating on the internet. Artificial intelligence makes this distinction even more important. If machines can instantly produce plausible explanations, summaries and narratives, the scarce commodity will increasingly be verified knowledge rather than words. News organisations that merely reproduce information will find themselves competing with machines.

Those that possess original reporting, authoritative sources and institutional credibility will have something much harder to replicate. The message of World News Day, observed on September 28, is therefore timely: the future of journalism depends not on preserving its old forms, but on proving that its essential functions remain indispensable. A society cannot easily function without institutions capable of establishing facts and scrutinising power. The future of journalism will ultimately depend not on preserving its old forms, but on proving that those functions remain indispensable.

Chilling Effect

Maharashtra's new anti-conversion law raises a question considerably larger than whether the State should prevent people from being coerced into changing their religion. No democratic society should permit conversion through force, fraud or intimidation. The more difficult question is what happens when legislation designed to prevent such abuse begins to make legitimate religious activity itself appear legally hazardous.

The most revealing sign is not a prosecution but a precaution. Some churches around Mumbai have begun asking worshippers to sign declarations that they attended voluntarily and were neither forced nor induced to come. Such declarations have no official legal standing. Yet their emergence tells us something important about the atmosphere created by the new law: religious institutions are beginning to prepare evidence of innocence before an accusation has even been made. That is not a trivial administrative adjustment. It represents a shift in the relationship between the citizen and the State. Prayer is ordinarily a private exercise of conscience. A voluntary gathering for worship should not require participants to establish, on paper, that they exercised their own free will. If churches feel compelled to maintain such records because a prayer meeting might subsequently be portrayed as an attempted conversion, the law is producing a chilling effect beyond the conduct it was ostensibly designed to regulate.

The problem is sharpened by the breadth of the legislation. Concepts such as inducement can encompass employment, education, marriage, promises of an improved life and claims of divine healing. These matters can arise naturally in the activities of religious and charitable organisations. Without carefully defined boundaries, conduct that one person regards as religious persuasion or social assistance can become the basis of an allegation by another. The complaint mechanism also deserves scrutiny. Allowing relatives to approach the police over an alleged unlawful conversion may protect vulnerable people in genuine cases. But it can equally bring family disputes, community pressure and ideological hostility into matters of personal conscience. Interfaith couples could be particularly exposed, even when neither partner intends to convert. The State has a legitimate interest in protecting citizens from coercion. But the interest must be balanced against another constitutional principle: an adult's freedom to determine what to believe, whom to worship and whether to change religion. The burden of preventing coercion should not quietly become a burden on citizens to demonstrate that their religious choices are innocent.

Maharashtra's experience will therefore test more than the effectiveness of an anti-conversion statute. It will test whether the law can distinguish between coercion and persuasion, between exploitation and voluntary assistance, and ultimately between a genuine public wrong and an individual's exercise of conscience. A law intended to protect freedom should not create a situation in which people feel obliged to carry paperwork proving that they are free.

Message of Asia

"So far as I can see, the atomic bomb has deadened the finest feeling that has sustained mankind for ages. There used to be these so-called laws of war which made it tolerable. Now we know the naked truth. War knows no law except that of might. The atom bomb brought an empty victory to the Allied arms, but it resulted for the time being in destroying the soul of Japan"

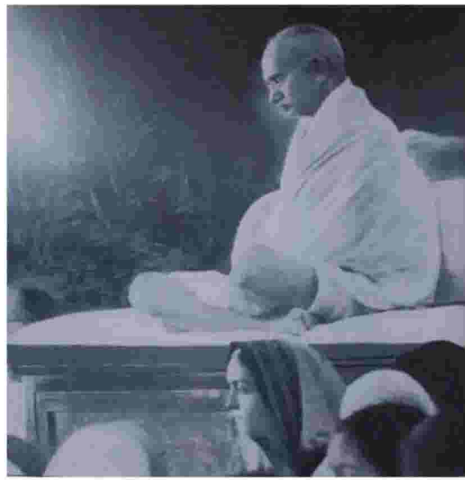
"What I want you to understand is the message of Asia. It is not to be learnt through the Western spectacles or by initiating the atom bomb. If you want to give a message to the West, it must be the message of love and the message of truth," wrote Mahatma Gandhi in Harijan on 20 April 1947. "In this age of democracy, in this age of awakening of the poorest of the poor, you can redeliver this message with the greatest emphasis. You will complete the conquest of the West not through vengeance because you have been exploited, but with love and wisdom. It is despairing of a multiplication of the atom bombs, because atom bomb means utter destruction not merely of the West but of the whole world, as if the prophecy of the Bible is going to be fulfilled and there is to be a perfect deluge. It is up to you to tell the world of its wickedness and sin that is the heritage your teachers and my teachers have taught Asia."

The Mahatma was categorical that "the weapon of violence, even if it is the atom bomb, becomes useless when it is matched against true non-violence."

When the Mahatma was writing the 'message of Asia' the sub-continent was in the throes of great turmoil, political and social. Horrific communal violence in 1946 had seared the provinces, especially Bengal and Bihar. By February 1947 Prime Minister Clement Attlee made the dramatic announcement that the British would withdraw from India not later than June 1948. Attlee also announced that the Viceroy Lord Wavell would be replaced by Lord Louis Mountbatten.

Unsparring in his criticism of the Western powers after World War II, Gandhiji wrote, "I regard the employment of the atom bomb for the wholesale destruction of men, women and children as the most diabolical use of science." He questioned the wanton ruthless violence: "What is the antidote? Has it antiquated non-violence? No. On the contrary, non-violence is the only thing that is now left in the field. It is the only thing that the atom bomb cannot destroy. I did not move a muscle when I first heard that the atom bomb had wiped out Hiroshima. On the contrary, I said to myself, 'unless now the world adopts non-violence, it will spell certain suicide for mankind.'"

From the pages of Harijan (September 1946), these words are prophetic, underlining



the Mahatma's understanding of world history as it was unfolding. "I have no doubt, that unless big nations shed their desire of exploitation and the spirit of violence of which war is the natural expression and atom bomb the inevitable consequence, there is no hope for peace in the world. I tried to speak out during the War and wrote open letters to the British people, to Hitler and to the Japanese and was dubbed a fifth columnist for my pains."

In post-World War 20th century and now in the 21st century, wars and incessant bombings, and the use of chemical weapons have become part of diplomatic-military manoeuvres of the West. Prolonged wars in Korea, Vietnam, Cambodia, Afghanistan, the Gulf region, Syria, Iraq, Crimea, Ukraine, Gaza and Israel-Iran have scarred the countries. This is a horrific roll-call of the brutal massacre of millions and destruction of ancient lands by imperialist powers about whom Gandhi had been warning, year after year.

Writing in Harijan on 7 September 1946, the Mahatma was relentless in rallying against the atom bomb and highlighting Ahimsa or non-violence. "It has been suggested by American friends that the atom bomb will bring in Ahimsa (non-violence) as nothing else can. It will if it is meant that its destructive power will so disgust the world that it will turn it away from violence for the time being. This is very like a man gutting himself with dainties to the point of nausea and turning away from them only to return with redoubled zeal after the effect of nausea is well over. Precisely in the same manner will the world return to violence with renewed

zeal after the effect of disgust is worn out," he prophesied.

"Often does good come out of evil. But that is God's not man's plan. Man knows that only evil can come out of evil, as good out of good. That atomic energy, though harnessed by American scientists and army men for destructive purposes, may be utilized by other scientists for humanitarian purposes, is undoubtedly within the realm of possibility. But that is not what was meant by my American friends. They were not so simple as to put a question which connoted an obvious truth. An incendiary uses fire for his destructive and nefarious purpose, a housewife makes daily use of it in preparing nourishing food for mankind," he argued.

Once again the Mahatma's grasp on global politics is apparent. He could see how the Western powers were trapped in the spiral of violence. "So far as I can see, the atom bomb has deadened the finest feeling that has sustained mankind for ages. There used to be the so-called laws of war which made it tolerable. Now we know the naked truth. War knows no law except that of might. The atom bomb brought an empty victory to the Allied arms, but it resulted for the time being in destroying the soul of Japan. What has happened to the soul of the destroying nation is yet too early to see. Forces of nature act in a mysterious manner. We can but solve the mystery by deducing

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the unknown result from the known results of similar events. A slave-holder cannot hold a slave without putting himself or his deputy in the cage holding the slave. Let no one run away with the idea that I wish to put in a defence of Japanese misdeeds in pursuance of Japan's unworthy ambition. The difference was only one of degree. I assume that Japan's greed was more unworthy. But the greater unworthiness conferred no right on the less unworthy of destroying without mercy men, women and children of Japan in a particular area," he wrote with candour and characteristic fearlessness.

Where does the violence and counter-violence lead? The moral to be legitimately drawn from the supreme tragedy of the bomb is that it will not be destroyed by counter-bomb, even as violence cannot be by counter-violence. Mankind has to get out of violence only through non-violence. Hatred can be overcome only by love. Counter-hatred only increases the surface as well as the depth of hatred. I am aware that I am repeating what I have many times stated before and practised to the best of my ability and capacity. What I first stated was itself nothing new. It is as old as the hills. Only, I rectified no copy book maxim, but definitely announced what I believe in every fibre of my being. Sixty years of practice in various walks of life has only enriched the belief which the experience of friends has fortified. It is, however, the central truth by which one can stand alone without flinching. I believe in what Max Muller said years ago, namely, that truth needed to be repeated as long as there were men who disbelieved it," he explained.

The Mahatma could sense and feel the greed of the powerful when he wrote: "The very frightfulness of the atom bomb will not force non-violence on the world? If all nations are armed with the atom bomb, they will refrain from using it as it will mean absolute destruction for all concerned? I am of the opinion that it will not. The violent man's eye would be lit up with the prospect of the much greater amount of destruction and death which he could now wreak."

Earlier in Young India on 13 September 1928, Gandhiji had enunciated the meaning and purpose of non-violence. "For me non-violence is not a mere philosophical principle. It is the rule and the breath of my life. I know I fall often, sometimes consciously, more often unconsciously. It is a matter not of intellect but of the heart. True guidance comes by the constant waiting upon God, by utmost humility, self-abnegation, by being ever ready to sacrifice one's self. Its practice requires fearlessness and courage of the highest order. I am painfully aware of my failings," he wrote.

"But the light within me is steady and clear. There is no escape for any of us save through truth and non-violence. I know that war is wrong, is an unmitigated evil. I know too that it has got to go. I firmly believe that freedom won through bloodshed or fraud is no freedom... Non-violence, not untruth, but non-violence. Truth is the law of our being," wrote the Mahatma whose birth anniversary on 2 October is commemorated as Gandhiji Jayanti every year.

THE KATHMANDU POST

Are Nepali schools ready for the AI takeover?

Have you ever imagined a class run by robots, where artificial intelligence (AI) delivers teaching and learning? And if that day comes, how would anyone assess what is taught and what is learned?

My own question began when I caught a student relying entirely on ChatGPT to finish an assignment. Prompt engineering, has reshaped the world, yet many schools, colleges and universities still hold firmly to pen and paper. Technology is neither a blessing nor a curse. What matters is how we use it, and increasingly it shapes how we live. Among secondary school students, AI use is spreading fast. Very few remain outside its grip when an assignment is due. Young learners today have little appetite for sitting with a problem for an hour until it yields. I see their creativity thinning, and their patience with it.

Nepal's National AI Policy 2025 marks a milestone. It opens the way for AI education in the school curriculum in the coming years. Meanwhile, AI has already moved beyond the brick-and-mortar classroom into the digital one.

It is hard to find a student who has never used it or knows nothing about it.

I will concede that the use of AI has real merits. It sharpens students' ability to search for information and gives them new ways to learn and present ideas. A short, clear answer arrives in seconds and spares them hours of reading through books. It can also shape its response as a chart, a figure or a graph, in whatever language the request was made.

The trouble begins with how it is used. AI answers what you ask. It has no sense

of your level or how you learn. The most visible problem is copied assignments, but the deeper one is students trading their study time for screen time and ending up with almost nothing in their heads.

Copying an answer without grasping a single line of the concept leaves a kind of brain fog, marked by weak focus, mental confusion and poor memory. Classroom engagement has fallen sharply, since an answer is always a few seconds away. Students sit in the room but are absent from the lesson. The screen has cost their health as well. Few in my class arrive properly rested. Patience is shorter now, and I see more anxiety, sudden flares of temper, headaches and memory complaints. These are the young people who will one day lead the government and steer the economy, and they will do it with AI in

hand. Then comes the ethical dilemma. Which answer is the honest one: the one drawn from books and the student's own language, or the one generated by AI, when the substance of both is much the same? The consequences surface quietly in the examination hall, where students who have only ever copied are left with nothing to write and fail.

The government has directed schools to use AI in teaching and learning through its AI policy, but it offers no clear plan for implementing it or for evaluating students. That gap at the centre widens as AI users multiply in every classroom. Parents cannot tell whether their children are on track. The assignments are complete, and attendance is regular, yet examination scores are poor. Some begin to wonder whether the teacher is teaching well at all.

Letters To The Editor ✉ editor@thestatesman.com

National song

Sir, The BJP government's emphasis on the National Song, *Vande Mataram*, and its insistence that the song be sung in its entirety at public gatherings, raises legitimate questions. While *Vande Mataram* undoubtedly occupies an important place in India's freedom struggle and deserves respect, compelling citizens to sing portions that contain religious references could conflict with India's constitutional commitment to freedom of conscience and religious belief.

The Supreme Court's decision in *Biaje Emmanuel v. State of Kerala* (1986) is relevant in this context. The Court held that students who respectfully stood during the National Anthem but did not sing it could not be compelled to do so when their objection was based on genuine conscientious belief. The judgment affirmed that freedom of

conscience and religion under Article 25 cannot be curtailed because an individual declines to participate in a particular form of patriotic expression. Against this constitutional and historical background, any attempt to compel citizens to sing all the stanzas of *Vande Mataram* deserves scrutiny.

Patriotism cannot be measured by one's willingness to participate in a prescribed form of expression. Respect for the nation must coexist with respect for freedom of conscience, religious diversity and the constitutional principle of unity in diversity. Yours, etc., Tharicus S. Fernando, Chennai, 27 September.

Credibility

Sir, This refers to your well-written editorial "Umpire on trial" published on 27 September which rightly draws attention

to the most important issue confronting the Election Commission today—not merely its legal authority, but public confidence in its independence and impartiality.

The editorial's comparison of the Commission with an umpire is pertinent. An umpire must not only be impartial but must also command the confidence of both sides. In the same way, the credibility of an electoral institution depends on how its independence is secured, perceived and demonstrated.

I would add that institutional credibility is built over many years but can be weakened quickly when questions concerning electoral rolls, voter data management or internal decision-making remain insufficiently explored.

The Commission should, therefore, adopt maximum transparency in such matters and clearly explain the safeguards governing its procedures. Internal differences, wherever

they arise, should also be dealt with through established institutional mechanisms rather than leaving room for speculation.

Similarly, political parties should ensure that criticism of the Commission is based on verifiable facts rather than mere allegations. The Commission, for its part, must respond to legitimate questions with facts, clarity and transparency.

Ultimately, the issue surpasses any individual office-holder or political party. The credibility of the Election Commission is inseparable from that of the electoral process itself.

An institution entrusted with conducting the people's mandate must inspire confidence not merely by asking citizens to trust it, but by demonstrating why that trust is justified.

Yours, etc., Amit Kanti Jana, Kolkata, 28 September.

Gandhi's ideas have found expression under Modi



TUHINA A. SINHA

Mahatma Gandhi's contribution to India was not confined to winning freedom from colonial rule. He also left behind a powerful social and economic vision of the India that freedom ought to create: a clean India, self-reliant villages, economic dignity for the poorest, empowerment of tribal communities and a society free from intoxicants. Twelve years of the Modi era offer a fascinating story of how several of these distinctly Gandhian ideals have been translated into contemporary public policy and, importantly, measured at population scale.

The most striking example is Swachh Bharat. Gandhi considered sanitation not a peripheral concern but a civilisational imperative. His famous formulation that cleanliness is next to godliness captured a larger belief: a free India had to be a dignified India, and dignity began with the most basic surroundings in which people lived. When Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the Swachh Bharat Mission on 2 October 2014, rural sanitation coverage stood at just 39 per cent. By October 2019, it had reached 100 per cent, with more than 10 crore individual household toilets constructed and all villages declaring themselves Open Defecation Free. The mission has subsequently moved from toilet access to sustainability, waste management and ODF Plus villages.

The significance goes beyond the numbers. Swachh Bharat converted sanitation from a government department's responsibility into a mass behavioural movement. It made cleanliness a matter of citizenship and collective pride. In doing so, an

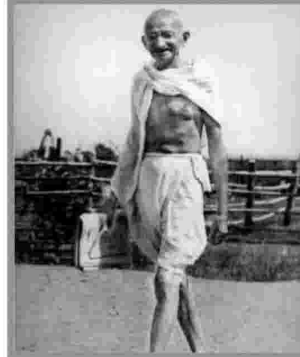
idea Gandhi had preached became a national habit that the state attempted to institutionalise.

The same transformation is visible in Gandhi's idea of Swadeshi and village industries. For Gandhi, khadi was never merely fabric. It represented self-reliance, productive work, dignity of labour and the economic empowerment of villages. The revival of Khadi and Village Industries under the Modi government provides unusually tangible evidence of this philosophy acquiring a modern economic life.

According to provisional KVIC data, sales of Khadi and Village Industry products rose from Rs 31,154 crore in 2013-14 to Rs 1,87,148 crore in 2025-26, a 501 per cent increase. Employment in the sector has risen by 56 per cent over the same period to 204 crore people. The language has changed from Gandhi's Swadeshi to today's Vocal for Local, Local to Global and Atmanirbhar Bharat. But the underlying proposition remains recognisable: India's villages should not merely consume wealth generated elsewhere; they should produce, create and prosper themselves.

Gandhi's concern with economic equality finds another contemporary expression in financial inclusion. His Constructive Programme explicitly placed economic equality among the foundations of a just society. The Modi government's Jan Dhan architecture has sought to give that ideal an institutional foundation.

In August 2014, formal banking access remained out of reach for millions. Twelve years later, PM Jan Dhan Yojana has crossed 59 crore accounts, with deposits of Rs 3.17 lakh crore. More than 56 per cent of account holders are women and nearly 78 per cent of accounts are in rural and semi-urban areas. Over 41 crore RuPay cards have been issued.



The deeper change is not the number of bank accounts. It is the shift from exclusion to economic agency. Through the Jan Dhan-Aadhaar-Mobile architecture, welfare payments and other financial services can reach beneficiaries directly. A poor citizen with a bank account, digital identity and access to formal financial services occupies a very different economic position from one dependent upon intermediaries. Gandhi's vision also included the empowerment of Adwasis, whom he regarded as an integral part of India's social fabric. Here too, the emphasis under Modi has increasingly moved beyond welfare towards livelihoods and entrepreneurship.

The Pradhan Mantri Janjatiya Vikas Mission has sanctioned 4,172 Van Dhan Vikas Kendras, linking 12.48 lakh tribal members to enterprises built around value addition to minor

forest produce. These centres provide support for training, processing, packaging, branding and market access. By July 2026, 2911 of these centres were functional, with reported sales of around Rs 168 crore.

The philosophical shift is important. Instead of seeing tribal communities only as beneficiaries of development, the model seeks to position them as producers, entrepreneurs and owners of economic value chains. That resonates strongly with Gandhi's insistence on dignity, self-reliance and

village while strengthening community participation in its management. That is a contemporary interpretation of Gram Swaraj: not isolation from the world, but empowerment within it.

The final Gandhian ideal is Nashamukti, and here intellectual honesty requires a different formulation. Gandhi was a passionate opponent of intoxicants and included prohibition in his Constructive Programme. The Modi government's Nasha Mukta Bharat Abhiyaan is an unmistakable continuation of that social objective, but a Drug-Free India remains a work in progress, not a completed achievement. Launched in 2020, the campaign has expanded into a nationwide movement involving awareness, prevention, treatment, rehabilitation and community participation. By July 2026, it had reached more than 29.32 crore citizens, including 11.20 crore youth and 792 crore women, while more than 21 lakh awareness activities had been conducted in educational institutions.

That distinction matters. The story of the past twelve years is not that every Gandhian aspiration has been completed. It is that several of Gandhi's core ideas have moved decisively from the realm of moral exhortation into measurable public policy.

Swachhata, Swadeshi, economic dignity, tribal empowerment, Gram Swaraj and Nashamukti were not merely Gandhi's slogans. They were his blueprint for a stronger India. The Modi era has sought to give that blueprint a 21st-century institutional and technological form - taking ideas born in the freedom struggle and attempting to make them realities for hundreds of millions of Indians.

The writer is a national spokesperson, BJP and accomplished author.

100 Years Ago



Front page of The Statesman dated 02 October 1926

OCCASIONAL NOTE

Returns for the week ended September 18 show that 798 deaths were registered in Calcutta during that time, giving a mortality rate of 38.6 per thousand. Excluding 'imported' deaths, the rate for the town itself was almost identical with that for the suburbs - 37.2 in one case and 37.4 in the other. Calcutta not having been afflicted by any epidemic, the figures, which are largely in excess of the average for the province - 29.6, according to the latest available statistics - need interpretation. They hardly consist with the supposedly greater healthfulness of the metropolis. Presumably the imported cases are more numerous than the returns suggest.

News Items

TORTURE OF PUBLICITY

PRINCE OF WALES LIMITS PUBLIC DINNERS

(From Our Special Representative.)

London, Sept.

Mr. A. G. Gardiner, in an article in the Star, says that the Prince of Wales's limitation of public dinners is the first sign of a rebellious spirit and should command public approval, because the infinite vista of banquets must be simply terrifying to the Prince who is the greatest living victim of the torture of publicity. Everywhere he is pursued by the limelight and camera until his heart must ache for the quiet seclusion enjoyed by ordinary mortals. He is unable to buy a hat without attracting as much attention as if he were a giraffe. It is a hard life despite the foolish belief that it is an enviable one. The cruellest fact is that it is a sentence for life.

RELIEF OF WUCHANG

FRENCH AND U. S. SHIPS COMMANDEERED

Shanghai, Sept.

A message from Hankow says it is reported that troops of Sun Chuanfang Tuchun of Kiangsu, are approaching to the relief of Wuchang. French and American steamers have been commandeered to bring troops down the river from the Upper Yangtze.

—Reuter.

CHEMIST'S ERROR

HAPPY ENDING TO RADIO HUNT FOR CUSTOMER

London, Sept.

There has been a happy ending to the wireless search for Mr. Penn, who was given by a Birmingham chemist pills which contained one-fourth of a grain of strychnine instead of one-fortieth of a grain. This afternoon the purchaser of the pills telegraphed to the chemist from London, where he read of the mistake in a newspaper, that none of the pills had yet been taken. The announcement has greatly relieved the chemist, who upon the discovery of his error, telegraphed a warning to every Penn in the directory. —Reuter.

HOARDED COINS CONTINUED RUSH TO SELL TO BANK

Paris, Sept.

The reappearance of the item in the Banque de France's balance sheet, "Gold and Silver Coins Bought", showing 6,000,000 francs purchased in Paris alone, undoubtedly reflects the scenes outside the bank of daily lengthening queues exchanging hoarded coins. The greatly augmented bank staff is so busy counting long-unseen cash that numerous gold bearers have to be turned away every night. A similar rush in the provinces has, in some cases, necessitated extra police to control the queues. —Reuter.

A costly way of raising forex



BISHWAJIT BHATTACHARYYA

India's foreign exchange reserves have always oscillated between tolerable and uncomfortable. After 1976-77 India's foreign trade (merchandise) balance has always been negative; India's dependence on import of crude oil adds to the discomfiture.

With a view to insulate India from the vicissitudes of war, Reserve Bank of India conceived an expensive scheme to garner a substantial slice of additional forex with effect from 8 June 2026, by wooing Non-Resident Indians (NRIs). NRIs lapped up the opportunity. \$12.7 billion flowed in swiftly to the FCNR (Foreign Currency Non-Resident) "B" deposit scheme of the RBI. India's foreign exchange (forex) reserves swelled to a record high of \$740.8 billion as on 31 August 2026.

FCNR-B deposits were so lucrative that the RBI had to close the scheme prematurely on 31 August 2026, instead of on 30 September 2026; otherwise, India would have been further flooded with costly unstable funds, as argued hereinafter.

A salient feature of the FCNR-B scheme is that entire funds with

interest are freely repatriable abroad. Secondly, the funds are immune from currency risks, which means, every dollar shall be repaid only in dollar, regardless of the dollar's exchange rate prevailing on the date when the NRI receives the funds abroad.

The RBI bears the exchange risk, estimated at 3 per cent per annum. The cost for raising \$12.7 billion for 5 years (maximum) is an estimated \$190.8 billion. This is a direct fiscal hit on India, with annual cost exceeding a hefty \$3.8 billion. Add to it the interest burden on banks and servicing cost. The funds move out of India in the end.

Thirdly, the funds with interest accrued, are entirely tax free in India. NRIs were allowed to leverage funds up to "19 times the deposit amount", as reported in the Times of India on 3 September. The report states: "The borrowed funds could then be placed as FCNR (B) deposits, allowing the borrowers to earn a spread of 1 per cent between their borrowing cost and the return on deposits."

This means, against FCNR-B deposits in India (for example @5 per cent interest), funds can be borrowed abroad (for example @4 per cent interest), which can be further channelled into another fresh FCNR-B deposit

in India earning for example 5 per cent interest.

The process can keep multiplying. This is called leveraging. In every round of leverage, the NRI earns a return of 1 per cent, which is also known as arbitrage profit. It's money for fun. Borrow at a lower cost abroad, deposit them with a higher yield in India, and pocket the difference.

Fifthly, FCNR-B deposits offered a high rate of interest in dollars, in some cases exceeding 7 per cent. To explain the mechanism of leveraging, assume an NRI in Singapore (SG) remits from his account with Citi Bank SG, a sum of \$100,000, to his account with Bank "A" in Delhi, towards FCNR-B deposits, yielding interest @ 5 per cent.

At this point leveraging commences. Bank "A" in Delhi marks a lien, on FCNR-B deposits of \$100,000, in favour of Citi Bank SG. Against this lien in favour of Citi Bank SG, the NRI borrows \$100,000 from Citi Bank SG, with an interest liability @ 4 per cent.

With funds so borrowed from Citi Bank SG, the NRI remits a further sum of \$100,000 to Bank "A" in Delhi into the corpus of his FCNR-B deposits.

If this exercise is carried out 19 times, then FCNR-B deposits will become \$2 million, earning interest



@ 5 per cent in Bank "A" in Delhi and the NRI's loan account will show a debit balance of \$190,000 in Citi Bank SG, incurring a liability of interest @ 4 per cent.

The NRI's yearly earning at a 1 per cent interest profit on \$19 million will be \$19,000. After five years this will become \$95,000, which will be his tax-free profit in India in 5 years.

If the NRI's initial FCNR-B deposit is \$1 million, then after five years his total tax-free profit in India will be \$95,000.

And the NRI's initial savings will continue to earn tax-free interest in Bank "A" in Delhi.

Exactly, the same yield can be worked out, by directly borrowing

\$19 million in Singapore and depositing \$2 million (the borrowed sum plus savings of \$100,000) in Delhi. There was no upper limit of FCNR-B. Little wonder that \$12.7 billion came in swiftly.

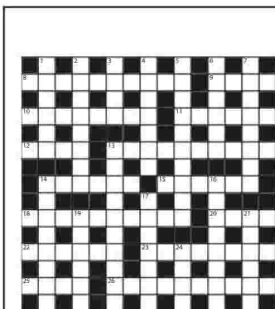
Thus, FCNR-B scheme 2026 attracted only hot, unstable and costly funds. This was not necessary, since India already had about \$650 billion of forex reserves.

In emergent situations, softer institutional borrowings should be preferred to such unstable costly funds as FCNR-B.

India's finances deserve responsible handling.

The writer is Senior Advocate, Supreme Court, and ex-Additional Solicitor General of India.

Crossword | No. 293597



Yesterday's Solution



ACROSS

- 8 Spoils trouser fabric, introducing drop of antique liqueur (10)
- 9 Man's sound? It must be the armour (4)
- 10 Change brings in tenor in excellent piece by Gilbert and Sullivan (8)
- 11 Left in care of former editor (6)
- 12 Sudden attack has one leaving Italian city (4)
- 13 Delay with sheep jumping? One doesn't need jumping sheep (10)

DOWN

- 14 British attracted to authentic German playwright (6)
- 15 Police appearing after travel document trimmed? That's sticky (6)
- 16 Expert on Muslim leader brought into court (10)
- 20 No expression of contentment from boat-builder (4)
- 22 White companions deserted force in conflicts (6)
- 23 It helps one remember being cheerful about Caesar's opening comment (8)

ACROSS

- 25 End of forest area stripped by fire, ultimately - ash? (4)
- 26 I will participate in request, not against making a start (10)

DOWN

- 1 Middle of exam, and confused over capital of Uruguay - an exotic place (6)
- 2 Discrepancy, note, in serving of caviare (8)
- 3 Significant figure seen in piece of currency I promoted (4)

ACROSS

- 4 Soccer team players are in Paris? I questioned commitment (7)
- 5 Cricketer initially cross about beer, having received nothing (5,5)
- 6 I'm a derogatory comment as intended by a prankster? (6)
- 7 Source of red and white? Red and navy, I fancy (8)
- 13 Regarding education, second option (dropping English) will receive stick (10)

DOWN

- 14 Intellectual work degraded during economic success (8)
- 16 Notice FT is torn up, producing bits of paper (9)
- 17 Was a number of ships required? Try I saw three ships, perhaps (7)
- 19 Long document beginning to support belief system (6)
- 21 American writer revealing name of apostle forgotten in Bible (6)
- 24 University to veto operating system (4)

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

The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Courage in the air

Flydubai ordeal raises troubling questions

THE bravery of an Indian pilot and others who helped save 174 lives aboard a Flydubai plane deserves a grand salute. The flight from Dubai to Tel Aviv plunged after the captain, Smit Machchhar, was stabbed by his co-pilot. Despite his injuries, he managed to open the cockpit door, allowing passengers and crew to confront the attacker. Israeli flyer Yaniv Hayun was among those who incapacitated the co-pilot before the aircraft made an emergency landing in Saudi Arabia. Their timely response prevented what would have been a catastrophic tragedy.

There are several key questions that the ongoing probe needs to answer. Why did the co-pilot attack the captain? Was the act premeditated? Was there an ideological motive, a personal grievance or another explanation? Investigators from Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Israel and other countries must establish the facts. This task requires cooperation across borders. Premature conclusions must be avoided. The theories doing the rounds range from terrorism to radicalisation and mental health issues. Claims of Iranian involvement have not yet been substantiated.

The harrowing incident, which comes days before the third anniversary of the Hamas attacks on Israel, has turned the spotlight on aviation security. How did the co-pilot gain access to a weapon? Were existing cockpit security procedures followed? Were warning signs ignored? A transparent examination of aviation protocols is required. For now, the clearest takeaway is human rather than political. The wounded captain, along with crew members and passengers, acted under extraordinary pressure to keep an aircraft in the sky. Their courage deserves utmost respect and appreciation. Looking at the big picture, the aviation authorities owe passengers the strongest possible safeguards against the recurrence of such an episode.

Drug seizure

Massive haul underscores the challenge

ANY massive drug haul highlights the soundness of the strategies to prevent smuggling, but also lays bare the enormity of the challenge. As the use of drones complicates the sea and land route matrix, border security is a 24/7 test for the intelligence and interception capabilities. The seizure of 526-kg heroin and methamphetamine from an Iranian dhow near Lakshadweep underscores the critical role of inter-agency cohesiveness. The Gujarat Anti-Terrorism Squad and the Indian Coast Guard acted in tandem to intercept the Rs 3,000-crore consignment. It was booked by a Nigerian, in all likelihood to be transported to Punjab from Tamil Nadu. A transnational syndicate was dismantled at the initial stage itself.

Narcotics smuggling and drug abuse are at the centre of a heated political debate in poll-bound Punjab. A daily dose of accusations and counter-allegations has become par for the course. Peculiarly, the existing anti-drug strategies are dismissed rather than debated, with the result that even the space for constructive criticism shrinks. Lost in the humdrum is a genuine exchange of lived experiences, and with it the collective urgency to firm up or relook at earnest efforts to deal with the drug menace. While the pledge to eradicate drug smuggling and addiction is commendable, it requires a unified effort and shared wisdom. Political messaging matters on the ground. No one party has all the answers, and no isolated strategy can succeed on its own. A common meeting point on how to tackle the grave issue is essential. Working at cross-purposes is no solution.

The presence of five Pakistanis aboard the dhow is a reminder, if any were needed, of the complex threat India faces. As new transit corridors and entry points for domestic distribution emerge, enhanced vigilance and coordinated operations are non-negotiable.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune

LAHORE, SATURDAY, OCTOBER 2, 1926

Half the battle

CF Andrews did not in the least exaggerate the truth when in the course of an interview with the Associated Press on the eve of his sailing for South Africa on Wednesday, he said that "the desire for a settlement of the South African question was now apparent on both sides, and that was half the battle." So far as the Indian community is concerned, the desire has always been there. The struggle is not and has never been of its own seeking, and it knows that it has nothing to gain and a great deal to lose by prolonging it, if it can possibly have a settlement consistent with its self-respect, its inalienable birthright and its elementary self-interest. Of the European community, one important section, led by General Smuts, has always been in favour of some sort of a settlement, though it has not seen eye to eye with the Indian community itself as regards the precise lines on which this settlement is to be effected. Only recently, in a speech made by him at Windsorton, General Smuts said: "Although you cannot solve this problem for ever, you can make arrangements and compromises; and I do feel that a settlement can be arrived at which will safeguard the rights of everyone and that we shall not have any great trouble about the matter." General Smuts is no mere theorist, no armchair politician. For years, he wielded the supreme power in the State. He is perfectly familiar with all the difficulties of the problem, of which the Union Government has been making so much. Indeed, there is no another South African statesman who has had so long or so close an acquaintance with the problem as has General Smuts.

Military academies must raise the bar

There is a pressing need to review the selection procedure and training methodology



ADMIRAL ARUN PRAKASH (RETD)
FORMER CHIEF OF NAVAL STAFF

THE Indian armed forces, apart from contributing to the defence and security of the nation, also form a distinctive strand in India's multi-ethnic and multi-religious fabric. In the chaos that often prevails, they not only embody order and discipline and uphold our democratic, secular traditions but also set high standards of integrity, professionalism and excellence for their compatriots.

For these reasons, our military leaders were held in high regard by civil society as exemplars of honourable and ethical conduct. But today, we find that the armed forces are slipping in the estimation of their fellow Indians, not only because of occasional misdemeanours but also due to signs of politicisation and public display of religiosity among the higher ranks.

India's social and economic transformation has been accompanied by a steep decline in standards of private and public conduct. Hand in hand with corruption goes the politicisation of every system, including the police, the bureaucracy, the legal framework and the media. Communalism and parochialism are on open display at election time since votes are sought on the basis of region, caste and religion.

The slide in the military's ethical standards is often justified on the grounds that since soldiers are drawn from society, their conduct is bound to reflect prevailing societal norms. This facile logic must be firmly rejected. Not only does every soldier swear an oath of allegiance to the Constitution, but also the armed forces have traditionally set their own standards and



CONCERN: A growing number of withdrawals at early stages of training in academies is worrisome.

codes of conduct and are governed by stringent disciplinary regulations. It was their adherence to this self-imposed code—not their place in the Warrant of Precedence—that earned them a high standing in society.

More than just a shield against external threats, the armed forces serve as a fundamental anchor of the country's social stability and national well-being. In order to maintain the public's trust as well as its own internal cohesion, our military leadership requires rigorous grounding in key foundational pillars such as upright and ethical conduct, secular principles and apolitical neutrality.

There is an old saying: "Mighty oaks from little acorns grow." To produce military leaders with a strong moral fibre, fit to occupy leadership positions, the defence forces must groom candidates along the right path from the earliest possible stage. Apart from the tri-service National Defence Academy (NDA), five key institutions impart ab-initio training—ranging from 12 months to four years—before commissioning young men and women as officers. It is the rigorous physical and academic training, along with the mental inculcation imparted in

The quality of the nation's military leadership is an issue important enough for the Chiefs of Staff Committee to take urgent note of.

these "cradles of leadership", that moulds the character of these young leaders.

Having passed out of the NDA's portals in 1964, I returned 33 years later as its Commandant to find that the institution had seen vast improvement in infrastructure and facilities, the enhanced syllabi and above all, the motivation levels of the young trainees. But what came as a nasty surprise was the advent of a new ethos, which required a cadet to possess a

basic "skill set" for survival.

This included cheating, man-handling juniors, minor theft and even impersonation—all against the academy's rules and unheard of when I was a cadet in the 1960s. Even more dismaying was the benign and tolerant attitude of the training staff towards such misdemeanours. Many of the young staff officers believed that not only was such conduct an "academy tradition," but that unless a "smart" cadet was resourceful enough to "beg, borrow or steal" a few small things and tough enough to give and take a little manhandling, he would be useless as an officer!

If we were to examine past or recent transgressions by senior officers which have earned the armed forces a bad name, the fundamental cause of misdemeanours is the inability of an individual to distinguish between the "easier wrong" and the "harder right." It becomes obvious that the instincts that motivate a young cadet to commit minor offences in the academy mutate into serious character flaws in later years and erode the integrity of senior officers, leading them to commit ethical lapses.

A number of disturbing trends have been emerging from our service academies, but they do

not seem to evoke the necessary alarm or remedial responses from the military hierarchy. There have been periodic fatalities among cadets and a growing number of withdrawals at early stages of training in academies. These indicate that the selection processes employed by the Union Public Service Commission and the Services Selection Boards, including the medical criteria, may have become outdated and need drastic revision. This is also a reflection not only on the physical training methodology and syllabi being followed but also on the unwarranted liberty granted to senior cadets to conduct "training" (ragging?) of juniors.

The selection of training staff—both military and civilian—needs to be far more stringent and discriminating so that only persons who can provide mature and sensible guidance shape the trainees' outlook. In this context, the academy's Commandant exerts an outsized influence on the cadet body—by his personality as well as personal example.

Unfortunately, this post is often treated as a convenient short-term parking slot by service headquarters (HQs) and some "hand-picked" incumbents have even been removed from command for serious misconduct. Finally, many Commandants have taken liberties with the training curriculum and even the customs and traditions of these institutions by making arbitrary changes. Such matters need to be codified in the form of a "Blue Book", approved by service HQs for implementation in letter and spirit by the Commandant and the staff.

The quality of the nation's military leadership is an issue important enough for the Chiefs of Staff Committee to take urgent note of. It's time for them to convene a high-level military commission to review the processes for the selection and induction of officer candidates into the services, evaluate the training syllabi and methodology being followed in our service academies and recommend reforms where required.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

How well soldiers fight depends much on how well they are trained, motivated and led. —Maj Gen Ian Cardozo (retd)

Gandhi's timeless path of nonviolence

BHARAT DOGRA

MAHATMA Gandhi, whose birth anniversary falls today, was a man of peace who demonstrated how humankind could be guided by nonviolence. At a time when the world is beset by wars, civil strife, violence against women and children, and online abuse, Gandhi's path of nonviolence deserves far greater attention.

Can we begin, in the spirit of Gandhi, with ourselves and our immediate surroundings? When I conduct workshops on peace and related issues, I begin by asking how often participants become angry in a week and whether they later regret what they said or did under its influence. I also encourage them to consciously avoid anger during a workshop and then reflect on how they feel. The results are usually encouraging: many report feeling calmer and more relaxed.

Another useful exercise is to become aware, over time, of whether our words and actions cause distress to others, even in small ways. Such awareness can reduce everyday stress and become a practical way of learning nonviolence.

These may seem like tiny steps compared with the national movements spearheaded by Gandhi. Yet many such steps, taken together, can bring about major change—an important lesson from the Mahatma's life.

Questions were raised during Gandhi's lifetime about whether violence could be justified against those responsible for extreme injustice. His enduring contribution was to demonstrate a path of nonviolent resistance to injustice. Despite many obstacles, he persisted in the belief that injustice could be strongly opposed and sometimes defeated without violence. His approach was appreciated by prominent figures such as Albert Einstein and Martin Luther King Jr. Practising nonviolence can promote happiness and peace, contributing to emotional and spiritual well-being. Although people differ in temperament and instincts, most of us need to make a conscious effort to imbibe the philosophy of ahimsa. Self-restraint, thoughtfulness, education and training can steadily strengthen this capacity. The first step, however, is recognising that such change is needed.

Gandhi's legacy offers lessons beyond the freedom struggle. He also devoted himself to social equality and non-discrimination, prohibition of alcohol, public hygiene, rural self-reliance and greater participation by women in public and social life. These concerns remain important today. Social and environmental movements continue to draw inspiration from his vision of a life guided by need rather than greed.

The path of nonviolence, therefore, is not merely a memory of the past; it remains a practical and creative avenue for building a more peaceful and humane future.

The writer is honorary convener, Campaign to Save Earth Now

epaper.tribuneindia.com

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Address the liability issue

Refer to 'Delhi gang-rape was administrative failure'; Astha Kunj was not an aberration, it was a design failure. The heinous crime in a public park should shock us not only for its brutality but also for its predictability. The simplest yet most hazardous response now is to lock parks after sunset, which unfairly punishes both victims and the city. Delhi requires three essential actions. First, address the liability issue; second, illuminate faces rather than roads; and third, conduct mandatory CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design) audits for every park. A faulty light fixture is not just a maintenance issue; it undermines public trust.

ASHOK AGGARWAL, KURUKSHETRA

Making Ayushman scheme work

Refer to 'Healthcare hurdle'; the Ayushman scheme, launched with good intentions, needs practical reforms to make healthcare truly accessible. Automatic digital verification should eliminate paperwork, while emergency procedures should receive immediate, time-bound pre-authorisation. A single-window online system can reduce bureaucratic delays and enable patients to track approvals. Higher government healthcare spending and faster reimbursement to hospitals can improve implementation. Hospitals should be required to provide rational and effective treatment without unnecessary testing or inflated billing.

VIJAY KUMAR KATIAL, PANCHKULA

Proactive efforts needed

Refer to 'Healthcare hurdle'; the Rohtak experience should not only be a wake-up call for the state of Haryana but also for other states. To convert each eligible patient into a beneficiary, all that the government needs to do is adopt a multi-pronged approach. Intensifying awareness campaigns through gram panchayats, schools, ration shops, ASHA workers and vernacular newspapers is one effective method. Hospitals must put up a list of the services covered and a list of patients who were denied these services, so that course correction can be done. To ensure that each beneficiary has access to dignified and affordable healthcare, all stakeholders must be completely aligned.

BAL GOVIND, NOIDA

A brave act saves many lives

Refer to 'Indian captain fights off co-pilot trying to crash Israel-bound plane'; confronted with a sudden and grave crisis after being attacked by the co-pilot, the Indian captain showed extraordinary presence of mind and courage. Though badly injured, he managed to stabilise the plane till help came from other crew members. The motive of the attacker co-pilot is still unclear. But for Capt Smit Machchhar's bravery, the plane could have met a disastrous end. He has rightly been hailed as Hero No.1 by Modi, Netanyahu, Trump and other world leaders.

WG CDR CL SEHGAL (RETD), JALANDHAR

Testament to human courage

Apropos of 'Indian captain fights off co-pilot trying to crash Israel-bound plane'; the harrowing incident aboard a Flydubai flight serves as a chilling reminder of mid-air vulnerabilities, yet it ultimately highlights an extraordinary act of courage. Despite being severely injured, Capt Smit Machchhar fought back, preventing a crash and enabling passengers and cabin crew to enter the cockpit to neutralise the attacker. In a world often marred by tragedy, the Indian pilot's valour shines as an inspiring testament to human bravery and professional duty. The mid-air assault carries crucial lessons for global aviation. Air safety standards must evolve to address internal security breaches with the same seriousness as applied to external threats.

SANJAY CHOPRA, MOHALI

Protect India's diversity

The ongoing digital census operations appear to be selective and partisan. Caste questionnaires smack of politics, which is being played with impunity. A dichotomy is perceptible as Pandora's box has opened up. Census operations have been advanced in states going to polls shortly, whereas uniformity in their timing should have been the hallmark of the exercise. There is a dearth of vision and insight on the part of leaders. So arbitrary rules and regulations must be reviewed to protect and promote India's composite culture and peaceful coexistence.

JARNAIL SINGH BRAR, BATHINDA

Letters to the Editor, typed in double space, should not exceed the 200-word limit. These should be cogently written and can be sent by e-mail to: Letters@tribuneindia.com

ECI row does a disservice to the right to vote



VIVEK KATJU
FORMER SECRETARY, MINISTRY
OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS

ANATIONAL daily broke a story on September 23 about the objections raised by Election Commissioners, Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Vivek Joshi, to some key decisions taken by the Election Commission of India (ECI), either without consulting them or against their views.

It was reported that they had recorded their views on 14 occasions in 10 months, but their concerns remained unaddressed. They asserted that in some important matters, the ECI was going against its own statute, which provides that decisions should be taken unanimously, but wherever that is not possible, the majority view would prevail. The Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) is only the first among equals. He cannot assume the powers of the ECI.

Sandhu and Joshi were upset at apparently being ignored by CEC Gyanesh Kumar Hecce, even though they took a different position internally on certain important statutory points relating

to the Special Intensive Revision (SIR), they had publicly endorsed the exercise.

There is no evidence indicating that they considered whether there was sufficient time to reach all voters efficiently and effectively before elections were held in Bihar and West Bengal when the SIR decision was taken in June 2025. Nor did they object to its methodology, which put an enormous strain on a large number of legitimate voters.

It was, therefore, premature for Rahul Gandhi at his media conference on September 24 to praise Sandhu and Joshi for their internal objections.

What he overlooked was that both of them were appointed by the same process as Kumar and that the considerations which led to his appointment would have been applied to theirs too. It was difficult to visualise that either would, after assuming office, really and publicly, do a Thomas Becket.

That they were cut from the same cloth as Kumar's became clear when they joined him at a media conference on September 26 after a full CEC meeting. The meeting's note shows that Kumar climbed down from his high horse and agreed that he would take the Commissioners along, as the statute requires him to do. Did an unseen hand advise him appropriately? Likewise, did the same hand



CHAOTIC: The ECI's handling of the SIR has been lacking in many respects. PTI

counsel Sandhu and Joshi that they should not publicly embarrass the poll panel? A compromise was obviously worked out. Both the Commissioners implicitly reiterated that the SIR was a unanimous ECI decision and also that the controversial additions to Form 6 for the duration of the SIR were valid.

Now that the Supreme Court may examine if, in some matters, Kumar had exceeded his authority, it remains to be seen whether the exposé will have unintended consequences for the CEC and the government, too. On its part, the ruling dispensation will

The political class should come to an understanding on not allowing Election Commissioners to enter politics after they demit office.

throw more weight behind Kumar because the INDIA bloc has decided to go all out to target him as part of its 'vote chori' campaign.

Kumar is also taking some corrective action, as witnessed, by restoring the original Form 6 in states where the SIR exercise has been completed. However, the Supreme Court will have to specifically weigh in on the manner Form 6 has been used during the SIR.

A Supreme Court judge recently stated that the ECI should be manifested independent. This can only be achieved if the political class comes to an under-

standing that the Election Commissioners would not be allowed to enter politics after they demit office.

Unfortunately, past experience suggests that this may be impossible to achieve. The Congress not only appointed a CEC who was widely believed to be sympathetic to the party but also made former CEC MS Gill a Rajya Sabha MP as well as a minister. Was this proper even if no law was transgressed? Should umpires of the electoral process be made players?

The ECI's handling of the SIR has been lacking in many respects. Some corrective action is now being taken to address logical discrepancies and mapping issues. The Commission made onerous demands on many voters, some of which were almost impossible to fulfil. But the real problem is in respect of proving that a person is a citizen if she was born after 1987.

It can be asserted that once the country moved away, in that year, from treating anyone born in India as a citizen, no single document — like a birth certificate — could authoritatively prove a person's citizenship.

Indeed, it can equally be asserted that now not even all documents taken together can conclusively prove a person's citizenship if his parents were born after 1987. Ironically, only naturalised citizens have conclusive papers relating to their Indian citizenship.

The SIR exercise has been upheld by the Supreme Court. In the lakhs of disputes relating to West Bengal where persons were left out of the electoral rolls, the Court decreed that judicial officers would adjudicate appeals against exclusion.

When it was pointed out that the process could not be completed before the Assembly elections in the state, Justice Jyotsna Bagchi, who was part of the Bench hearing the matter, initially remarked: 'This election perhaps they (meaning voters) can't vote. The more valuable right to remain on the rolls will be preserved'.

More recently, CJI Surya Kant, heading a Bench that declined to urgently hear a plea relating to pending appeals in West Bengal prior to the October 6 byelections, was reported to have said: 'They are only byelections, that's all.'

With great respect, this writer would submit that the maxim guiding the courts in matters relating to elections should be 'Every voter's rights are sacred in every election'.

Even if the right to vote is not a fundamental right, it is so precious that its sacredness should be recognised by the courts. A citizen who is found later to be entitled to vote but was denied to do so in an election would bitterly consider herself as being a child of a lesser god. Should the courts go along with such agony?

Reusable rocket pact plugs a vital tech gap



DINESH C SHARMA
SCIENCE COMMENTATOR

LAST week, the Union government's Department of Science and Technology (DST) signed an agreement with a private space firm, Agnikul Cosmos, for extending financial support of Rs 200 crore under the Research Development and Innovation (RDI) Fund for the development of a reusable launch vehicle or rocket. The idea is to recover from space not just a part of a rocket after the launch but to make the rocket fully reusable. The technology is aimed at reducing launch and manufacturing costs greatly, and minimising the generation of space debris.

Developing a reusable launch vehicle (RLV) is a complex challenge, involving a slew of technologies to support controlled descent and recovery, propulsion systems for restart and deep throttling, as well as critical capabilities for descent and landing operations. That's why RLV development remains the Holy Grail of the space industry.

The move comes on the

heels of reports from China and Japan. In July, China demonstrated reusable rocket technology by recovering the first stage of its Long March 10B rocket after it placed a satellite in orbit. The rocket was designed to return to Earth through controlled descent at a sea-based recovery platform.

This has made China only the second country, after the US, to have achieved a vertical landing of an orbital-class rocket. SpaceX, founded by Elon Musk, has performed dozens of such landings, bringing down the cost of space transportation.

A few days after China, Japan conducted the first experimental flight of its RLV prototype developed jointly by the Japanese space agency and Mitsubishi. This is a precursor to a larger project to develop a single-stage reusable rocket in collaboration with French and German space agencies.

India has been alive to the need of developing its own RLV for a long time. The RLV project of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) was approved in 2012, and since then, several technologies like autonomous landing, supersonic flight and powered cruise flight have been developed and evaluated. ISRO's RLV is a winged vehicle like the now-retired space shuttle of NASA. It looks similar to an



SPACE ACE: Developing a reusable launch vehicle is a complex challenge. PTI

aircraft but combines the complexity of both a launch vehicle and an aircraft. In 2024, RLV was given a name — Pushpak. Agnikul's rocket is called Agnibaen.

The quantum of assistance (Rs 200 crore) extended to Agnikul may give rise to an impression that the government, perhaps for the first time, is supporting a private company in direct competition with a government R&D entity engaged in a highly strategic and globally competitive technology area. Such aid need not automatically imply that ISRO's RLV project has not been adequately backed (it gets milestone-based funding) or will get a lower priority after the government support to Agnikul.

Reusable rocket technology is aimed at reducing launch & manufacturing costs and minimising the generation of space debris.

In any case, a comparison of the two RLV projects is not fair because they follow two different technological architectures. ISRO's RLV is a winged spaceplane (to be propelled into space by a rocket which may or may not be reusable) and Agnikul's RLV is a reusable vertical take-off and return rocket. The end use of the two vehicles may also differ. Still, the government should make it clear that it has no intention of deprivatising ISRO's RLV project, particularly in view of the concerns raised by scientists' unions about the entry of the private sector.

While the government has taken a balanced approach by funding two parallel projects in a deep tech area of national

importance, the manner in which these investments are executed is equally critical. Agnikul is not the only private project to have received such a level of government funding. Last week, two more agreements were signed for providing sizeable financial support. GalaxEye Space Solutions of Bengaluru will get Rs 63.84 crore to develop a multi-sensor satellite with extremely high-resolution imaging capability. Ubifly Technologies gets Rs 285 crore in financial support (out of the total project cost of Rs 570 crore) to develop a small electric plane to be used as an air taxi.

In most of these projects, the government funding accounts for nearly 50 per cent or more of the respective project costs. If the funding is given by way of equity, the government would be a majority shareholder in these startups and thus have a say in their governance. But the government support is being given in the form of Optionally Convertible Debentures, in which finance is extended as debt with an option to convert it into equity.

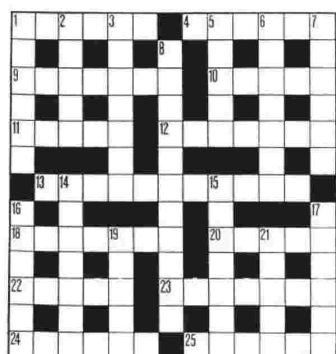
Private companies are answerable to their investors and shareholders and not necessarily to the government, even though it may have extended the seed money in the form of debt. Mergers, acquisitions and technology transfer for the sake of profit-making are normal in the private sector. If a strate-

gic technology is developed using public funding extended by DST and the company gets taken over by a multinational or a bigger rival, then the very purpose of developing strategic capability with public money would be lost.

This is not a hypothetical situation — it happened with vaccine development in the late 1990s. The Technology Development Board of the DST, the entity which is funding Agnikul and Ubifly, funded biotech startups to break the monopoly of multinational vaccine suppliers. With liberal grants from the DST for R&D, two Indian companies could successfully drive down Hepatitis vaccine prices globally. However, soon thereafter, one of the two vaccine firms supported by the DST was taken over by a competing multinational company, and the DST or the government could do nothing about the transaction. In effect, public funding was used to build a capability in a critical area which ultimately landed in the hands of a multinational vaccine company.

Let's not end up in a similar situation in the deep tech sector. The government must put in place necessary checks and balances wherever it is committing public funding to private projects. The stakes are high both in terms of the level of funding and the strategic importance of the technologies involved.

QUICK CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1 Grow less (6)
- 4 Unvarying (6)
- 9 Sportive (7)
- 10 A stretch of land (5)
- 11 Passive form of protest (3-2)
- 12 Tropical cyclone (7)
- 13 Repay in kind (3,4,4)
- 14 Exaltation (7)
- 20 Disproportionate (5)
- 22 Immediate danger (5)
- 23 Accommodation (7)
- 24 Lessen the effect of (6)
- 25 Natural armour (6)

Yesterday's Solution

Across: 1 Lineage, 5 Album, 8 Light-fingered, 9 Cress, 10 Curious, 11 Guttered, 12 Snappy, 15 Inhibit, 17 Nasty, 19 Take one's leave, 20 Rusty, 21 Missed.

Down: 1 Lilac, 2 No great shakes, 3 Artist, 4 Evince, 5 Augur, 6 Bird of passage, 7 Modesty, 11 Glitter, 13 Nonplus, 14 Stream, 16 Booty, 18 Yield.

DOWN

- 1 Meal (6)
- 2 To progress without effort (5)
- 3 Argument in justification (7)
- 5 Add together (3,2)
- 6 Substantiate (4,3)
- 7 Scope (6)
- 8 During the whole period (3,3,5)
- 20 Disproportionate (5)
- 15 Aspiring (5-2)
- 16 Slow-witted (6)
- 17 Deficient in quantity (6)
- 19 A scuffle (5)
- 21 Underlying meaning (5)

SU DO KU



YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

9	5	4	7	1	6	3	8	2
2	6	8	5	3	9	1	4	7
7	1	3	8	4	2	5	6	9
8	3	7	2	6	5	9	1	4
4	2	6	3	9	1	7	5	8
1	9	5	4	7	8	2	3	6
6	4	2	1	5	7	8	9	3
3	7	1	9	8	4	6	2	5
5	8	9	6	2	3	4	7	1

CALENDAR

OCTOBER 2, 2026, FRIDAY

■ Shaka Samvat	1948
■ Ashwin Shaka	10
■ Ashwin Parvatisht	16
■ Hijri	1448
■ Krishna Paksha Tithi 6, up to 10:16 am	
■ Vyatapata Yoga up to 6:18 pm	
■ Mrigshikha Nakshatra up to 2:55 am	
■ Moon enters Gemini sign 3:41 pm	
■ Mahatma Gandhi Jayanti	

FORECAST

SUNSET:	FRIDAY	18:07 HRS
SUNRISE:	SATURDAY	06:17 HRS
CITY	MAX	MIN
Chandigarh	35	24
New Delhi	34	23
Amritsar	33	22
Bathinda	34	21
Jalandhar	33	21
Ludhiana	35	23
Bhiwani	35	23
Hisar	36	23
Sirsa	35	23
Dharamsala	28	16
Manali	23	11
Shimla	25	15
Srinagar	28	11
Jammu	33	20
Kargil	22	06
Leh	21	04
Dehradun	31	20
Mussoorie	30	14

TEMPERATURE IN °C

OUR VIEW

MY VIEW | FARM TRUTHS



Why Gandhi's talisman should remain resonant

In 1947, he urged decision-makers to ask whether the poorest and weakest would benefit. The test didn't just survive India's pursuit of rapid economic growth, it's especially salient today

"I will give you a talisman," Mahatma Gandhi offered in a handwritten note shortly before India achieved freedom in 1947. "Whenever you are in doubt, or when the self becomes too much with you, apply the following test. Recall the face of the poorest and the weakest man whom you may have seen, and ask yourself if the step you contemplate is going to be of any use to him. Will he gain anything by it? Will it restore him to control over his own life and destiny? In other words, will it lead to *swaraj* for the hungry and spiritually starving millions?" Back then, 'talisman' conveyed a sort of north star for guidance, 'man' was gender-neutral and the Hindi term '*swaraj*' meant one's own liberty as much as national self-rule. The basic test that Gandhi set, however, retains both its clarity and vitality. Indeed, it ought to resonate across generations, regardless of how large India's economy grows.

For four-and-a-half decades, it was largely interpreted as a socialist filter. It may well have nudged India to adopt a 'mixed economy,' as proposed by the Bombay Plan of 1944 drafted by J.R.D. Tata, G.D. Birla and other leading industrialists. Even the country's policy remix of 1991 was broadly justified as a path out of mass deprivation. "We need to expand the scope and the area for the operation of market forces," Manmohan Singh noted in his 1991 budget speech, arguing that while price-system reforms would improve resource allocation, state intervention must focus on the needs of those on "the edges of a subsistence economy." Without wealth creation, Singh added, we would not be able to end "abject poverty, ignorance and disease." He wanted wealth harnessed in harmony with equity and justice to end poverty and serve everyone, for which he

said Gandhi's philosophy of trusteeship "should be our guiding star." Since 2014, relief for the hard-up has been a major policy theme of the Narendra Modi government too, with many welfare outlays expanded. That a larger economic pie means more money for national goals is now an axiom. The only way to tackle poverty, Modi said in his 15 August address of 2018, was "through the empowerment of poor people." This was a shift in emphasis away from entitlements, but in consonance with Gandhi's advice.

Over the past 25 years, India has seen a sharp drop in extreme poverty. Yet, as the country prospers, how badly Indian multitudes have been left behind by prosperity—at least in relative terms—looks more stark than ever. This lends Gandhi's test a renewed urgency. Signs of a 'K-shaped' economy persist long past the covid shock, with the well-off wealthier but vast numbers more or less stuck where they are. Such a split in upward mobility could spell premature market saturation, which may dampen investment in productive capacity, constrain India's overall access to capital and leave us in a 'middle-income trap.' Intimations of it, evident in some sectors already, cannot be brushed aside. If quality-of-life aspirations slump in the face of real-world hardships, the harder it will be to break above a GDP-per-head level that can fund a state apparatus designed to secure equitable health and education for all. Had this been an earnest priority right from the start, India's post-1947 emergence may have dodged the risk of that trap, arguably. But it is never too late to plug the gaps that may get in the way of our goals. This exercise must take inequities into account that economic theory tends to ignore. Even a flicker of doubt over the country's path should make us recall the poorest and weakest.

El Niño has spelt a twin whammy for the country's rural economy

Deficient rainfall threatens not just food security but also rural incomes. India must relieve distress



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

The monsoon season technically ended on 30 September. As expected, it was affected by the El Niño phenomenon, which typically leads to deficient rainfall in the Indian subcontinent. While final figures are yet to be released, our cumulative rainfall deficit until 29 September was 13%, marginally higher than during the 2014 drought. More than the aggregate, what matters is the geographical distribution of rainfall. This reveals a much larger deficiency of 25% in east India and the southern peninsula. The least deficit is in central India (just 3%) and then in north-west India (6%). However, there is large variation within central India, with some vulnerable areas such as Marathwada (~39%), Vidarbha (~27%) and Saurashtra (~23%) affected badly. North-west India is generally an irrigated area and thus less impacted by insufficient rains during the monsoon season. However, both eastern India and the southern peninsula include large parts that are primarily rain-fed, and weak rainfall impacts these areas proportionately more. For example, Bihar (~32%), Assam (~40%), Rayalseema (~40%) and the interior regions of Karnataka (~3%) are likely to witness a significant impact on agricultural production. Within large states too, the rainfall deficiency is not uniform, with some parts receiving excess rain and others largely deficient. For example,

although Bihar has an overall 31% deficiency, 66% of its districts reported deficient rainfall. As for other states, 97% of Karnataka's, 64% of Maharashtra's, 82% of Tamil Nadu's and 68% of Gujarat's districts reported deficient rainfall.

It is hard to predict the precise impact on agricultural output, given India's diverse agro-climatic zones and varied cropping patterns. Any optimism over this year's sowing coverage, at 110.8 million hectares, is largely misplaced. Sowing data in India can hardly serve as an indicator of agri-health, given the preponderance of small and tiny farm holdings. The predominance of subsistence farming also means that farmers don't leave their land fallow despite deficient rains. Leaving it fallow is a luxury that few can afford. Deficient rainfall, however, does show up in cropping-pattern changes and the yields of crops sown. While yield data will only be available after the harvest, sowing numbers suggest a decline in rice acreage by 1.7 million tonnes, with a shift towards pulses and coarse cereals.

However, an inference can be drawn from past experience, particularly of recent years. In 2014, when India's rainfall deficiency was last at 12%, its impact on gross value added (GVA) was not significant, with agricultural GVA increasing by 1.2%. The index of agricul-

tural production, however, saw a sharp 4.5% decline. Rice, the primary *kharrif* crop, witnessed only a 1% output decline but the overall output of cereals in that agricultural year, including *rabi* crops, was down 4.5%, along with pulses and foodgrain output, which fell 4.9%, the most after 2009-10. It wasn't rice but wheat that witnessed a big decline in 2014; its output dropped 9.7%, which pulled down overall cereal production.

This year is likely to be similar, with *rabi* crops also likely to get affected; water reservoirs have been impacted and El Niño is expected to strengthen in the coming months. By latest estimates, India's reservoir levels are lower than normal and below last year's.

Any assessment must, therefore, also account for these likely production losses. The rising cost of fertilizers has already led to decline in fertilizer use. Along with rising energy prices, Indian farmers face a double whammy of declining farm production and profitability.

The issue is no longer whether agriculture will witness lower output and lower yields, but the extent of it nationally and its regional spread. Since this year's rainfall deficiency has been greater in many rain-fed areas and other zones known for low agricultural productivity, the impact will not be limited to agricultural income compression. International agencies such as the United Nations World Food Programme have predicted a 22% global rise in the severity of acute hunger.

While India may be relatively insulated, thanks to publicly held cereal stocks, a threat to food security cannot be ignored. At the same time, supply shocks will create inflationary pressures that make it all the more difficult for the poor and vulnerable to buy staples. At a time when India's rural economy is already under stress due to rising input costs (mainly energy and fertilizers), the priority should be to protect the rural economy from the twin threats of food insecurity and income compression.

QUICK READ

This year's 13% rainfall deficiency has hurt farm output, just as a 2014 shortfall did. Uneven rains across the country left some regions worse off than others, multiplying harvest risks.

It helps that India has high food stocks but households may still find staples going out of reach. Rising prices and weak farm earnings constitute a twin shock that policy must address.

10 YEARS AGO



JUST A THOUGHT

I adhere to my doctrine of trusteeship in spite of the ridicule that has been poured upon it. It is true that it is difficult to reach. So is non-violence. But we made up our minds in 1920 to negotiate that steep ascent. We have found it worth the effort.

MAHATMA GANDHI

MY VIEW | Musing Macro

How the Tata legacy evokes Gandhi's idea of trusteeship

AJIT RANADE



is senior fellow with Pune International Centre

Gandhi's birth anniversary this year is an appropriate occasion to examine his idea of trusteeship. The dispute involving Tata Trusts and Tata Sons has made it a live question: how can a business preserve a social purpose across generations, especially when those entrusted with it disagree?

Mahatma Gandhi accepted that talent and enterprise could create wealth and livelihoods. But what did ownership entitle a person to do with that wealth? In 1939, he wrote "The rest of my wealth belongs to the community and must be used for the welfare of the community." By "the rest," he meant what remained after an honourable livelihood. That wealth would be held with owners who must act as custodians and trustees for society.

Trust is at the heart of economic life. Workers place their safety and livelihoods in the hands of an employer. Customers rely on its products and entrust it with their money and data. Communities provide land, water,

public infrastructure and the stability that helps businesses grow. None of these contributions appears fully in a company's financial figures. In addition, unborn generations inherit the effects of decisions made today. As enlightened corporate citizens, companies are expected to take these effects into account. Such companies earn an implicit licence to operate, with society's unspoken consent renewed by their conduct.

The Tata Group provides a rare example of an ownership structure built around public purpose. Philanthropic trusts hold 66% of Tata Sons, the group's holding company. The Trusts draw on wealth created by successful businesses to support education, health and other causes. Those businesses, in turn, must remain competitive and well run if the Trusts are to sustain their work. Tata philanthropy stretches back more than a century; the Trusts' commanding stake in Tata Sons gives that commitment an institutional form. This seems like a working model of Gandhi's idea.

That model is now under strain, with disagreements over leadership and a possible public listing on the stock market. There are legal questions, regulatory requirements and rights of shareholders to consider, none of which can be waved away by invoking the

Tata legacy. Equally, the value of an ownership structure dedicated to philanthropy cannot be solely measured by the prevailing market price. Hence, this dispute deserves a resolution that respects both sound business governance and the purpose for which the Trusts exist. The Tata inheritance belongs to the public in a moral sense, alongside the legal rights of its owners and the duties of its directors. This is a test of whether those rights and duties can work together with the Group's philanthropic mission.

Other arrangements are possible that reflect the spirit of Gandhi's trusteeship idea. Azim Premji committed substantial wealth from his own holding in Wipro to philanthropy while keeping philanthropic institutions apart from control of the company. The Tata Trusts combine philanthropy with decisive ownership at the apex. Both approaches can serve society.

The Tata approach requires especially clear rules on who makes busi-

ness decisions, who holds decision-makers accountable and how the Trusts fulfil their charitable duties.

Gandhi's idea also reaches inside the firm. A company may fund hospitals while also exposing workers to avoidable danger, paying small suppliers late or damaging local water sources. India's corporate social responsibility law directs qualifying firms to spend 2% of their average net profits on social causes; much useful work may result from this. But expenditure after profits are earned cannot by itself tell us how responsibly those profits were earned.

Is trusteeship too dependent on the goodwill of owners? Gandhi understood the difficulty. He called absolute trusteeship "an abstraction like Euclid's definition of a point," yet thought it worth striving for. He also recognized the need for public pressure and regulation. His economics has a clear foundation in human dignity, restraint and the welfare of others, even if it does not supply a

complete rulebook for a modern corporation. That foundation is a good guide for decision-making. Boards can hold leaders answerable for worker safety, fair treatment of suppliers and environmental harm, alongside financial performance. Communities affected by large projects can get a real hearing. Trust deeds, board rules and succession plans can protect a public purpose if a widely respected leader is no longer around to reconcile disagreements.

Classical economics has much to say about how markets organize production and exchange. Marxian economics asks who owns the means of production and who gets the gains. Gandhi asked what obligations follow from the power to own and produce. Human dignity, restraint and the welfare of others were part of this Gandhi economics. These questions can arise under private ownership, worker ownership and state ownership alike.

Gandhi wrote: "A trustee has no heir but the public." The Tata dispute shows how difficult it can be to safeguard that principle through changing times. Its lesson for other businesses is to ask, while building wealth, whose trust makes that wealth possible—and how that trust will be preserved among those who come after us.



| MY VIEW | THE LAST WORD

MINT CURATOR

The Lindsey Graham Sanctioning Russia and Iran Act is a travesty

Not only is it an outlier in international trade relations, it reflects much of what's wrong with today's war-ravaged world



INDIRA RAJARAMAN
is an economist.

Today, on the birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, a national holiday but observed perfunctorily in terms of what he stood for, we can only rue the spectacle of a world hell-bent on war. The Graham Act of 2026 passed by both houses of Congress in the United States of America, and signed into law on 18 September, visibly places (without explicitly naming) India in the line of fire for being among the top five importers of Russian crude oil. India stands absurdly implicated thereby for being a financier of the Russian side of the war in Ukraine. Since it is an enabling legislation, the President of the United States is not obliged to act on the powers conferred by the new law to impose tariffs of up to 100% on imports into the US from offending nations, India among them.

Internationally, this is a relatively rare instance of a country finding it fit to punish third parties for having trade dealings with countries formally named and targeted in a piece of legislation despite there being no formal declaration of war against them. By implication, Russia and Iran have been designated as forever enemies of the legislating country.

During the apartheid era, many countries had trade sanctions against South Africa, but sanctions rarely involved one country punishing a third country for trade dealings with South Africa by levying source-specific tariffs on them.

The Graham Act penalizes importers of Russian natural gas differently from Russian crude oil. For natural gas, a floor of 15% of total Russian gas exports has to be crossed before an importing country qualifies for punitive tariffs on its exports to the US. If total exports of Russian natural gas can be increased by finding new buyers, present importing countries above that floor could fall below it without reducing their absolute imports. With crude oil, by contrast, only the rank order in the importer list matters. Crude oil carries no defined floor for punishability in either percentage or absolute terms.

The lenience towards natural gas clearly gives an advantage to European buyers of Russian energy, paradoxically favouring countries more vocal in their support for Ukraine. Clearly there were other objectives or biases at play. Of course, crude oil is much the biggest export earner for Russia, between double or triple what the country earns from exports of natural gas.

The Graham Act cleared the House of Representatives by a wide margin of 262-159 (14 abstentions), with wide cross-party support. Support for the bill therefore stands at an impressive 60% of the duly elected representatives from a total of 435 Congressional districts. Even though Congressional districts are drawn to give roughly



equal demographic representation across all states, it does not necessarily follow that 60% of the people of the US support the bill. Congressional representatives do not always vote according to majority opinion in their respective districts on every issue.

There is no international court of appeal. The World Trade Organization is in tatters. The Most Favoured Nation (MFN) principle has now become a sad joke. In any case, international bodies can do nothing to oppose a law passed through due process, even if it seriously overrides international treaties.

The office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR) will now be in the business of calculating a 12-month moving average of country-wise purchases of oil from Russia to identify the top five purchasers liable under the Act to punitive levies, whether the President chooses to impose a punitive levy or not. And this average will be reassessed every six months. What a come-down for the USTR, once seen as a powerful enforcer of international trade rules.

The bite of the Graham Act, if implemented, will be a function of how easily oil importers can find replacement from other sources. What seemed like a possible easing of Iranian restrictions on passage through the Strait of Hormuz, reciprocally

with US easing of the naval blockade of Iranian ports, took a jagged turn for the worse on Saturday, 26 September, because of renewed attacks on Saudi Arabia by Houthi rebels in Yemen with alleged Iranian support.

Both protagonists in the current phase of the West Asian war are at the mercy of internal dissension. In the US, the forthcoming mid-term elections in the first week of November, and the impact of that on military actions before or after these polls, is completely uncertain at this point. In Iran, a seeming national consensus in support of a diplomatically negotiated peace with the US is snaggled on a possibly dissenting faction supporting Houthi rebels in Yemen.

For us in India, even if the long-term objective is to move away from oil towards sustainable sources of energy, oil is immediately needed to keep the wheels of the economy turning. The negotiation channel for a bilateral trade deal with the US remains open, and is the only hope for resolution of an impossible situation.

The wars underway have been extended by reaction and revenge. Of the many utterances of Mahatma Gandhi on peace, the one most relevant in today's world is this: "An eye for an eye only ends up making the whole world blind."

India must fix its solar energy policies to power data centres

Capacity exists but erratic policymaking gets in the way too often



ANDY MUKHERJEE
is a Bloomberg Opinion columnist covering industrial companies and financial services in Asia.

Nobody will be surprised if in the next five to 10 years India displaces the US as the world's second-largest solar grid after China. But if its ambition is to become the world's factory, or host AI workloads for Western tech giants, power play around energy must stop. Nearly \$120 billion has gone into reducing India's reliance on fossil fuels over the past five years. The shift couldn't be more timely. Energy from Russia and West Asia is fraught with geopolitical risk; coal is abundant locally, but it contributes to deadly air pollution in cities. Yet, there is utter confusion where electric power meets erratic policymaking. The stakes are highest in Maharashtra. Large businesses outside Mumbai tap the public grid operated by Maharashtra State Electricity Distribution Company Ltd (MSEDCL). Lately, a new category of customer has entered the fray: AI data centres.

This surge in activity is encouraging for the state utility, but there is a problem: farm use. Although MSEDCL earned a profit in 2024-25, its balance sheet remains saddled with \$88,400 crore in uncollected bills from the previous financial year, particularly from agricultural consumers.

Across India, politicians routinely supply cheap power to farmers to win votes. When state-run utilities fail to collect even those subsidized bills, they fall into endless deficits. Maharashtra wants to change this by carving out agricultural supply into a separate entity. That would leave MSEDCL as a cleaner distributor—backed by commercial and industrial customers who would no longer have to cross-subsidize the sector.

Well-meaning as it may be, the cost of the reform is being extracted from private solar producers. While they have contracts to sell their output to MSEDCL, open-access rules also allow them to rent the grid from the utility to reach factories and commercial establishments directly. This worked fine until early last year, when the state electricity regulator—at MSEDCL's behest—slashed solar producers' ability to store day-time surplus with the state utility (for a fee) to supply clients through the night.

The change isn't devoid of logic. Early in India's solar revolution, utilities provided so-called energy-banking services to guarantee producers a market. But with supply now abundant, deploying the grid as a battery is putting enormous strain on infrastructure. It makes more sense to encourage batteries right at the production site, or for the distributor to use the banking fees to build larger, more economical storage.

That much is non-controversial. But the



India must do all it can to make the most of its solar-panel proliferation. **AFP**

shift should have applied to fresh investments, which can factor battery costs into contracts. Wrecking existing projects by rendering 40% of their power generation useless makes no sense.

In Maharashtra, existing independent producers are trapped. Regulations around setting up battery storage won't be finalized before March next year, yet existing operators aren't allowed to sell excess power out-of-state. Even if they can keep storing their surplus with the grid, the proposed charges will make energy banking prohibitively expensive. Forced to cut daytime production, they risk losing high-value clients to MSEDCL.

For the utility, this will be a short-term gain. Where power is critical—like for data centres—investors may ditch Maharashtra for more welcoming states. Where will they go? In Andhra Pradesh, where the Adani Group is building a large data centre for Alphabet, the local government has decided to let these operations have their own power distribution licence. That's more investor-friendly, though the project has already attracted its share of controversy for how generous it is to corporate interests.

Disagreements over state-level regulatory orders usually land at the appellate tribunal for electricity (APTEL). But after Maharashtra's chief minister Devendra Fadnis wrote to Prime Minister Narendra Modi alleging a "two-private" bias at the national body, it froze hearings involving the state utility. APTEL has now asked state officials to file an affidavit stating whether they have any faith in it at all.

The timing of this stall is unfortunate. India needs to do all it can to get the most out of its solar boom. Yet, thanks to Maharashtra's retrospective rules, factories that had transitioned to 50% solar power may now cut back. What they will get from the utility at night is very likely going to be power generated from fossil fuels.

In India, big industrial users paid about 7 cents per kilowatt-hour last year. Chinese rivals paid 6.8 cents. Adjust for purchasing power and Indian energy is twice as pricey.

The rapid growth of solar energy may have eased India's past shortages of power, but erratic policymaking is still keeping it costlier than it needs to be—both for traditional industries and for upcoming AI data centres. **©BLOOMBERG**

| MY VIEW | PEN DRIVE

Food packaging: why we want the face turned around

PARTHA SINHA



is a senior advisory professional.

Every society must solve the same intimate problem: how to eat food prepared by a stranger. For most of history, people rarely had to. Food arrived through relationships. You knew the family that owned the field and the woman who ground the flour. You knew the local *batua's* hands and his temper, the *ghee* he swore by and the *ghee* he actually used, the fly he waved off the *ghee* with a practised wrist. Trust was never printed on the food. It surrounded it.

That trust was neither innocent nor equally assigned. Traditional Indian eating codes decided who could cook, who could serve, who could touch a water pot and who could only look at it. These codes policed people more carefully than germs. We became a country that could detect caste in a glass of water, but not lead in noodles. Yet, underneath the cruelty lay an intuition every culture shares. A chair remains a chair, but food crosses the frontier of the

body and becomes us. Anthropologists call this incorporation, and every cuisine is partly a device for managing the dread of eating the wrong thing.

Then the city grew and local food makers vanished. The grocer retreated behind a counter, the counter dissolved into an aisle and the aisle went online to slip into a phone. Into that distance stepped the brand. Its first achievement was social substitution. Henry Heinz bottled horseradish in clear glass so buyers could see there was no turpentine in it. A palm tree on a tin of Dabba persuaded a *ghee*-proud nation that hydrogenated fat was modern, thrifty and, most audaciously, pure. A round-checked girl on the Parle-G wrapper promised the same biscuit across the land.

The logo became the grocer in laminated form. It gave the stranger a reputation it could lose and disappointment an address. The neighbourhood *halwai* could cheat you and stay in business. A company could at least be embarrassed nationally. But Heinz's glass was a window and Dabba's tin was a wall. At some point, branding stopped showing us the food and started showing us ourselves. Diwali arrived in Cadbury's purple foil, hostel nights in Maggi's

yellow pack and a nation's idea of *thanda* (cold) in a curved bottle that seemed drenched in sweat. Noodles ceased to be a factory product and became what mothers made late at night for children during exam season. The front of the pack became a theatre of belonging. Details printed on its package became a statutory inconvenience.

The brand's biggest offering was relief: permission to assume that somebody, somewhere, had checked its quality. We bought it gladly. Vigilance is exhausting.

The bill arrived in instalments. Worms in a purple foil in 2003 made Diwali briefly taste of doubt. Pesticides in colas seemed to give *thanda* an aftertaste. Then came traces of lead in Maggi in 2015. This monsoon, food-regulation officer Tuglakat Mundhe walked into Mumbai's kitchen with a thermometer and was cheered like a cricketeer. He gave the public mood a face.

That mood is a new definition of trust. Back in the day, proximity made us say 'I know who made this,' while representation made us say 'I recognize the name.' Verification says 'I own it.' A gentleman that tracks a taxi from pickup to doorstep finds it absurd that it cannot track power from its pickup. Old forms survive; the street *vada pav* man still runs on proximity. But a demand to see is now being made of all of them at once. Companies understand this. They print health warnings on packs in developed markets but lobby against them in India, as though the Indian liver were a harder organ.

For food businesses, a classic sequence is reversing. Emotion used to create trust and information confirmed it. Now information sets the terms on which emotion may operate. The Amul girl will keep her job, but her story must now survive contact with the kitchen. The back of the pack will outrank the

front. Lot numbers, temperature logs and test reports will gain salience. Concealment acquires a new moral meaning: what once passed for corporate discretion starts to look like guilt. Mystery may enhance a perfume brand, but it diminishes the appeal of *panner*.

Transparency will also create its own theatre, complete with consultants and little green ticks. A QR code can lie as elegantly as a commercial and quality audits can become rituals. Society rarely graduates from myth to fact. It develops more demanding myths about what counts as fact. Verification is costly. Temperature logs and lab reports may be pocket change for a multinational but could ruin a *halwai*. A regime built to discipline giants may end up squeezing out the small food supplier and, with him, the oldest kind of trust we have. If megacorporations have noticed, few admit it.

The brand, then, must learn a humbler trade and become a witness. The strongest food companies will be those that can afford to appear boring and sell dull packages. The face on the box is being asked to turn around. It may show us what was long kept hidden. The grocer is back. Older now, and suspicious, with a phone in hand. This time, he'll have read the pack label.



CONTRAPUNTO

While there may be an immigration problem, it isn't really a serious problem. The really serious problem is assimilation

-SAMUEL P HUNTINGTON

SC And EC

How commission responds to questions raised in and by top court will be of great importance

That Supreme Court will examine EC's functioning marks a consequential moment: one constitutional body turning the lens on another. It is vital that all questions raised during court hearings are answered by EC satisfactorily. The stakes go beyond the case itself. They touch on powers vested in EC, on how the Constitution distributes power within it, that is, between CEC and two other commissioners. EC's responses will be pivotal, as SC's decision will also shape public perception on the electoral machinery. This is key given misgivings over SIR that so far has excluded 14cr people from draft rolls, mostly because of procedural burdens. It is needless to add that it is less than fair that eligible voters are excluded from voting in their local polls or a bypoll simply because of a digital bureaucracy's inadequacies.

The current challenge to CEC emerged from *Indian Express's* reports that certain SIR decisions were taken in an EC that saw an unusually high number of objections from the two commissioners. For EC, optics of persistent internal differences aren't good, because its decisions are so vital. EC's first reaction, that differences are natural, hasn't quite addressed the issue. Neither, so far, has the more detailed press note that, rightly, acknowledged glitches in SIR, and promised to fix them. Yesterday, the top court accepted a fresh petition on Delhi SIR, challenging the transparency and basis for notices to voters. This comes after SC had already greenlighted hearing two petitions. One that asks whether CEC did not abide by the rule on unanimity or majority while making decisions. Second, a petition challenging the 2023 EC appointments law. Earlier, the question had produced a 1-1 SC verdict, and is now before a three-judge bench.

Yes, SC had upheld SIR's legality in response to numerous petitions filed before Bihar polls. But even if the argument is that the key decision passed legal muster, procedural questions on SIR have piled up. Bombay HC's observation that EC's SIR rollout "says forget about all the laws. Now you follow the software," captures some of the popular, and even BLOs', frustration over "excessive" documentation, and impractical provenance conditions. There's also the fate of lakhs of petitions in Bengal's appellate tribunals, which are overburdened, and from which some tribunal judges have deregistered. Aside from this, SC will hear questions about EC's own decision-making process. The commission should know how it responds to questions raised in and by the top court, is of utmost importance.

Melting Pot Japan

Ageing population has forced famously insular country to hire foreigners. It's an opportunity for Indians

Japan has more people aged over 95 than babies born within the past 12 months. It uses far more adult diapers than baby diapers. Its population has been declining since 2009, and it's feeling short of hands for a variety of jobs, ranging from construction to agriculture. In fact, its offices have a unique class of older employees, called *madogawazoku* - window gazers - who are retained not for their productivity but psychological safety. So, it's not surprising that, despite its famously anti-immigration mood, Japan is hiring foreign workers in large numbers.

Latest data puts the number of foreigners with specified skilled worker status in Japan at 4.4L, a record. Several lakh more are likely to be accepted over the next two years. But even this can't bridge the labour gap that an ageing population has opened up. A survey last year found that 68% of Japanese firms had hired foreigners because they couldn't find native Japanese to do the job. Shortages are acute in healthcare and manufacturing. Even IT is likely to need 8L hands by 2030.

These are roles that Indian workers could fill, yet they form a small minority of Japan's foreign workforce. Vietnamese, Indonesians and Myanmar are present in strength, even Nepalese, although Japanese language is a hurdle for all. That's not a missed opportunity, though. The next 45 years, when Japan's foreigner population could touch 11%, up from 2% in 2020, are a window Indian blue- and white-collar workers can aim for. Given the warm ties between India and Japan, GOI can play enabler. Japan has a plan to use millions of AI-powered robots to tide over its looming demographic crisis, but it's also a conservative society where only 8.4% of people - per OECD - use AI at work, as against 50% of Americans. Japan probably will want the human touch, which means more immigrants.

Gone, gaon, gone

How a small village became a glitzy Millennium City

Jug Suraiya



Something strange happened to Gurgaon when Bunny and I live: it disappeared. When we moved here 30 years ago, Gurgaon was very much there, though very much might not be an apt term for Gurgaon as there wasn't very much of it.

There was the low-rise housing society where we lived, there were green fields of wheat, dotted with golden splashes of mustard, along which occasional camel caravans from Rajasthan slowly moved, a living script of italic letters, superciliously indifferent to vain glorious peacocks preening feathers of shimmering gossamer. The silent night was questioned by owls: Who? Who?

There was one large hotel, looking for all the world, like an ocean steamship stuck around in the drylands of Haryana. There was an upwardly mobile kirana shop which built itself as a supermarket and sold items of daily use. And that was pretty much that as far as Gurgaon was concerned.

And then, before anyone could say "urban blight", or even think it, Gurgaon disappeared. It disappeared like one of those tricks that illusionists perform to make huge buildings and other things vanish into thin air, except in the case of Gurgaon it wasn't thin air into which it vanished, but very much its opposite.

Gurgaon was swallowed up by a titanic upsurge, a geological convulsion, of towering ramparts of concrete, glass, and steel. What called itself Millennium City had arrived with lightning flashes of neon and the earthbound thunder of traffic, an overnight eruption of high-rise offices, malls, and apartment blocks, and more malls, and more more.

The gaon in Gurgaon vanished. The fields of wheat and mustard, the camels, peacocks, owls, even the landlocked ship-hotel and the aspirational supermarket were conjured out of sight itself as a supermarket and sold items of daily use. And that was pretty much that as far as Gurgaon was concerned. And what happened to Gurgaon is happening all over the country. With insatiable appetite, city India is gobbling up village India. In 1901, India was 11.4% urban. By 2025, it had jumped to 35.69%, and by 2030 it's expected to pole-vault to over 40%.

Gaon? Going, going, gone. To use the Punjabi word for it, gone with the wind.

Who Pilots The Pilot?

Two pilots who shepherded the Indian Airlines aircraft during the terrifying IC814 hijack, write that flydubai's flight FZ1073 has changed aviation security forever. What new protocols will help identify the threat inside the cockpit, is a question with no easy answers

Devi Sharan & SPS Suri



Every generation of aviation security is, in a way, a response to the previous generation's tightrope. When the attempted hijack-crash of the flydubai flight FZ1073 to Tel Aviv has done, it rearranges the threat landscape globally. The new vulnerabilities that have been exposed will need new defenses. Of course, this cycle isn't unique to aviation. Because a terrorist need only find one exploitable weakness, while the defender has to protect against a changing range of dangers.

As the investigation into Wednesday's bloody attack is still in its early stages, neither its motivations nor other details are as yet clear. What is known is that a pilot stalled the other pilot, and the plane plunged 17,000 ft in seconds. The rate at which it descended meant G forces exceeding the manufacturer's limitation several-fold. The rudder, used for directional control, disintegrated.

But thanks to different people's extraordinary presence of mind and bravery, the plane was able to make an emergency landing in Saudi Arabia, with all 174 passengers completely safe.

The first among the heroes is Captain Smit Machchhar. As Netanyahu wrote on X, "Despite being stabbed and seriously injured, he fought back, resisted, opened the cockpit door, and enabled passengers and crew to overpower the attacker - preventing a catastrophic mid-air disaster."

The central thing is that every hijacking and attempted hijacking is different. In 1999, the two of us experienced the Indian Airlines IC814 crisis first-hand. Captain Sharan piloted the flight as terrorists forcibly diverted it from Kathmandu to Kandahar. When the passengers and crew members were taken back to Delhi on another aircraft, Captain Suri (along with Captain JRD Rao and two engineers) flew back the original plane, without clearance from Kandahar ATC or permission to overfly Pakistan.

It was such a different time. Today's hardened cockpit security regime was in the future, as was real-time flight tracking. Standard protocols of the time were not even able to prevent the hijackers bringing revolvers, hand grenades, and knives on

board. What has remained the same is how much still depends on how crew members react under extreme, unanticipated, situations.

In 1999, we went by the book to ensure the safety of everyone on board, which meant not arguing with the hijackers. The worry wasn't just the four guns held by the five hijackers, but also the five hand grenades that could have just blown the plane up. The only thing on the crew's mind, in such a crisis, is how they can save the lives of everyone on board.



On Wednesday, everything hinged on Machchhar, despite his serious injuries, somehow managing to open the cockpit door. This allowed two reserve pilots, who were to fly the plane back from Tel Aviv to Dubai, to take control. Of course, not every flight could possibly carry two extra pilots, as that would wreck the aviation business model.

Heroism saved the day. But in the days to come, the difficulty will be how to address the new weaponisation of the cockpit.

Unlike in 1999, tight security today pretty much rules out anybody sneaking in a weapon or an explosive in

their cabin or check-in baggage. Attempts to forcibly enter the cockpit from the cabin side have also been pre-empted, by strengthening the cockpit door, especially after 9/11. "Dead bolt" ensures that no one, not even crew who have the lock code for punching into the keypad outside, are granted entry until authorised by the pilot.

FZ1073 has inverted the logic of all these safeguards. Until today, the threat has always been from external agents. This time, the threat did not come from hijackers attempting to take control of the cockpit, but from the trusted person sitting inside. One pilot attacking the other with hostile intent has happened for the first time. Beginning now, many pilots will view their colleagues with suspicion.

Israel will be ramping up security checks on pilots flying into the country. It already requires airlines to submit the identities of all flight crew members. Knowing the identity, however, is different from vetting it. What's become conceivable now is that Israel will, in the future, deny airspace entry or landing clearance if a foreign airline assigns flight crew who fail its background checks.

Pilots do go through extensive background checks already. They are required to clear continuous medical and psychological assessments. But different countries regulate all this differently. And there is a catch: a psychometric test is not a crystal ball. Someone can perform normally during an assessment, and subsequently show terribly changed behaviour. Conversely, a particular personality characteristic is not evidence that someone will become violent.

The main post-FZ1073 question is clear: Can we identify dangerous pilots before they fly? The answers are unclear. Yes, airlines need better systems to continually assess pilots' mental health. But how that's to be done, and with what privacy safeguards, is now the big aviation security challenge.

ICAO already promotes trained staff reporting unusual or suspicious behaviour as one insider threat tool. Maybe airlines will now have to put greater emphasis on confidential reporting by fellow pilots, cabin crew, or managers. Maybe the future will see sensors, cameras, or even AI systems capable of detecting a physical struggle or incapacitation inside the cockpit.

How do we keep a hijacker out of the cockpit, now seems to be the problem of a simpler time. It's much more difficult to root out a potential hijacker already sitting inside.

As told to Saurebh Sinha

How To Make Buyers Feel Upbeat In Festive Season

Clever moves by businesses can overcome dampening effects of high prices and wobbly markets

J Suresh



The first festive weekend kicks off tomorrow, with Pujo starting right after. It's a time that brands and retailers look forward to, but last Sept saw left sentiment weak. Unlike August, when Nifty rebounded to 24,774 - almost pre-war level - and strong Q1 data raised hopes of good year-round growth, Sept has been dampened. Faced with the triple threat of rising CPI inflation, high crude prices, and tumbling stock markets, and a potential repo rate hike that could push up EMIs, sellers need to act decisively to safeguard festive revenues. Some pointers.

Normal playbook | Focusing on high-yield, low-friction promotional strategies that consumers seek out during inflationary times is part of the normal playbook. With the festive season almost here, these time-tested actions can be implemented quickly.

● **Uplift price reductions:** Move away from complex coupon rules or multi-layered promo codes. Inflation-weary consumers prefer clear upfront price cuts. Visually emphasise "before" vs "now" price tags across physical shelves and digital banners, to signal immediate savings.

● **Credit subsidies:** Partner directly with leading banks and payment networks to offer 10-15% instant cashback at checkout alongside zero-cost EMI options.

● **Gift offers:** Tangible value add-ons, such as threshold gifts (spend ₹5,000 and get a free silver coin) or product-on-product bundles (buy a pressure cooker and get a stainless steel container free, or buy 500g detergent and get 100g free) always work.

● **Exchange offers:** Capitalise on consumer sentiment around replacing old appliances for festive season. Encourage trade-in value for old appliances, electronics, or furniture, lower barriers to purchase, while doorstep pickup removes logistics friction.

Unusual playbook | This strategy built to capitalise on paradoxical consumer behaviours, leverages tech, including agentic AI and inventive engagement tactics, beyond margin-diluting promotions.

● **Push premiumisation:** Overall retail growth is increasingly driven by consumers trading up to

higher price points, superior quality, and aspirational lifestyle experiences. Aligning communication with these upgrade drivers accelerates top-line sales while expanding gross margins.

For example, in appliances, nudge consumers towards premium models, such as 65-inch 4K/8K smart TVs, side-by-side refrigerators, and smart connected washing machines. In automobiles, ride the massive consumer migration from entry-level sedans and hatchbacks to feature-packed SUVs and crossovers. And in apparel, encourage shoppers to swap routine purchases for high-value celebratory buys, including designer occasion wear, luxury timepieces, etc.

● **Target outreach:** Mass media is obviously important in tight festive windows. Retailers must also execute hyper-personalised outreach, using loyalty databases. From dynamic product recommendations and nudges to close high-value sales, they can deploy AI and agentic AI tools.

● **Capture value shoppers:** Consumers today exhibit "BMW outside D-Mart" behaviour, which means splurging on status categories while aggressively seeking value in functional ones (eg, pairing a designer shirt with budget underwear). Amid sentiment dips, plenty of customers hunt for high-brand bargains. Setting up high-visibility clearance areas with previous-season branded merchandise at steep markdowns can drive footfall without diluting core displays.

● **Promote private labels:** Expand high-quality, sharply-priced private labels for daily essentials, ensuring consumers trade down along your price ladder.

● **Q-Comm thrust for gifting:** Replace traditional chocolates with high-utility FMCG staples like body wash, tea, and coffee in gift hampers. Distribution via quick-commerce platforms can take care of time constraints while driving volumes of essential goods. Priced right, such hampers will be sought for personal use as well as budget-savvy gifting.

● **Make malls multi-task:** With live-streaming studios, mall operators can turn physical spaces into "shopertainment" destinations where brands rent time slots for high-energy sales drives. Malls can also become urban fulfilment hubs, reversing in-store inventory for direct store-to-consumer delivery during order surges.

E-Comm playbook | When buyers turn cautious on macroeconomic signals, mega online sales like Big Billion Days and Good Friday Festival aren't enough, and platforms must use other levers.

● **Agentic AI:** Deploy autonomous shopping assistants that offer hyper-personalised gifting recommendations and trigger real-time cart abandonment nudges to convert hesitant shoppers, without public price drops.

● **Aspirational storytelling:** Frame high-end products as essential festive revamps to sell them without price slashes. Dedicated premium destinations, interactive comparison tools, and personalised "Upgrade Finder" widgets build perceived value and desire, making the premium choice the default ambition.

● **Leverage Q-Comm:** Tap into quick-commerce arms to enable 10-to-15-minute delivery for high-margin, premium goods like cosmetics, and instant festive hampers to capture urgent last-minute orders.

● **Cross-store bundling:** With unified cross-store carts, shoppers can aggregate purchases across stores, to unlock tier-based cashbacks. They can pair high-ticket discretionary buys with daily essential rewards to maximise average order value.

Brands and retailers don't need to execute every lever of the three playbooks simultaneously. Prioritising two or three high-impact initiatives that align best with organisational bandwidth and digital infra is enough. By moving quickly, using mass media, sharpening value visibility, capitalising on quick-commerce execution, and introducing targeted engagement tactics, brands and retailers can stimulate demand, capture market share, and drive a successful festive recovery.

The writer, ex-CEO of a clothing company, is an adviser to a consultancy

Calvin & Hobbes



Anup Taneja

On Oct 2, 1947, his last birthday at Delhi's Birla House, MK Gandhi was asked how the public should celebrate his life. His response was characteristically profound. He stated that the only fitting way to honour him was through fasting, praying, and spinning. While many historically viewed the charkha, the humble spinning wheel, as a political symbol of self-reliance, to Gandhi it was fundamentally a spiritual instrument, a meditative tool of deep contemplative power, capable of weaving inner peace and universal unity.

At its core, spinning on the charkha is an act of profound, mindful meditation. The repetitive, rhythmic motion of the wheel demands complete presence of mind and absolute concentration. As the hand guides raw cotton and wheel smoothly turns, chaotic chatter of external world naturally begins to quiet down. This

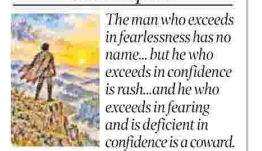
rhythmic discipline forces an individual to look inward, cultivating essential virtues such as patience, humility and self-restraint. For Gandhi, a complete presence in society was a utter impossibility without first achieving this state of inner equilibrium. He noted, "One hour spent in spinning should be an hour of self-development for the spinner."

The charkha was a physical anchor that allowed him to align his mind, body, and spirit with the silent, soothing current of divine grace. Addressing communal tensions, Gandhi declared during his evening prayer meeting that day that *puja* and *namaz* are the same; the outward rituals might differ, but the spiritual heartbeat remains identical. He firmly believed that the diverse spiritual paths

humanity walks are merely different dialects of a single, universal language of devotion. Whether one chants sacred verses before a traditional deity or bows in silent submission to the Almighty, prayers are received by the exact same Divine Source.

Gandhi envisioned the daily act of spinning as a beautiful way to dissolve the ego and bridge the invisible divides between people. When individuals spin together in a shared space, collective silence and rhythmic synergy create a powerful spiritual synergy. It reminds us that we are all individual threads woven into a grand, singular tapestry of life. To spin is to recognise that the welfare of the individual is inextricably linked to welfare of the whole, fostering a deep, permanent sense of universal brotherhood.

Sacredspace



Aristotle

Spinning Harmony: Gandhi's Gift To Humanity

Gandhi's message on his final birthday challenges us to look beyond the material and the transactional aspects of existence. He reminded us that true transformation always begins in quiet corners of our hearts. By dedicating ourselves to spiritual discipline, labour, and service, we can cultivate enduring peace we wish to see in the world around us. His enduring conviction serves as our final guiding light: "Spinning to me is the means to establish communion with God, and khadi is the emblem of the unity of Indian humanity." As we reflect on his legacy, the gentle, steady hum of the charkha still whispers a timeless truth - that through simple devotion, quiet meditation, and recognition of our shared divinity, humanity can easily weave a world defined by absolute harmony, compassion, and enduring peace.

The writer is a Senior Academic Fellow, ICHR

CAFE III: Hastening slowly

The norms do not accelerate the needed transition

The recently notified third Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE III) standard for passenger vehicles between April 2027 and March 2032 is a well-meaning attempt to steer the passenger-car industry towards lower emission norms. But questions arise on whether these norms have gone far enough to drive a meaningful transition. CAFE III mandates an improvement of roughly 16.7 per cent in fuel efficiency over five years. The fuel-consumption target is based on an equation linked to a reference weight and baseline fuel-consumption target across each manufacturer's fleet. For CAFE III, the reference weight has increased from 1,082 kg to 1,229 kg. The higher reference weight seeks to address a demand for higher concessions for small cars, which became the subject of feverish lobbying by manufacturers. Crucially, the norms include a "super-credit" mechanism, which adds compliance values for cleaner vehicles. For instance, each battery electric vehicle (BEV) and range-extended EV will be counted as three vehicles for calculating fleet performance. Plug-in EVs and strong hybrid EVs using ethanol follow similar volume-derogation norms on a reducing scale. Manufacturers can also claim efficiency improvement for specified technologies such as start-stop systems and tyre-pressure monitoring, light-emission diode, or improved air conditioning systems.

Although the industry has broadly welcomed the new standards, it is unclear whether these norms are sufficient to address the issue for which these norms were first introduced in 2017 — to reduce fuel consumption and carbon emission. The overall passenger-car market is expected to grow from five million units in 2025 to 6.5 million units by 2032, suggesting that reducing carbon emission from this industry will remain a challenge. The obvious solution lies in accelerating the transition to EVs. Though the CAFE III mechanisms incentivise EV production, they do not go far enough. As former NITI Aayog chief executive officer Amitabh Kant has pointed out, the norms have not gone far enough in compelling the industry to make a major transition to EVs. In an X post, he said EVs became one option among many when they should be the destination. Certainly there is considerable scope for the government to have mandated a more aggressive EV transition. The norms set an 11 per cent target for EVs by 2032; but the industry is already at 8 per cent, implying that a higher target would not have been outside the bounds of manufacturers' capabilities.

The flexible compliance mechanism, which introduced a credit-debit system, also raises doubts about the overall efficacy of the new standards. Manufacturers that exceed their efficiency targets will get credits and those that fall short will accumulate debits. The credits can be accumulated between two compliance blocks — FY28 to FY30 and the second FY31 to FY32 — and traded between manufacturers. Those manufacturers with debits can buy credits from the Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) at an escalating price between 2027-28 and 2031-32. Two issues arise in the context. First, whether this system incentivises non-compliance, just as carbon credits have come to be considered a licence to pollute. Second, it is unusual for the regulator to sell such credits or, indeed, be a participant in such a market at all. Given its role in curbing vehicular pollution, CAFE III could have taken a higher road.

Beyond generation

India needs a more flexible power system

The power situation in September exposed a weakness that adding capacity alone cannot fix because the grid lacks flexibility when demand peaks and renewable output falls. Peak power demand touched 269 Gw on September 10, nearing the summer peak of 270 Gw in May. As a recent analysis in this paper has shown, between April 1 and September 20, average daily electricity supplied was about 10.5 per cent higher than a year earlier, while peak demand met rose 11.8 per cent. Since Covid, annual demand, average and peak, has grown at roughly 8 per cent. Persistent heat, deficient rainfall and higher irrigation demand have added to the pressure.

The challenge, however, is not simply that India needs more electricity. It needs more power at the right time and in the right place. Wind and solar supplied about 18 per cent of the increase in grid supply between April and September, up from 15.9 per cent a year earlier. But their contribution was concentrated in daylight hours: Renewables met three-fourths of the increase in midday demand. After sunset, the picture changed sharply. Demand rose 21 per cent between 6 pm and 10 pm, when solar generation falls and wind output may also be insufficient. The stress is already visible in market prices. Day-ahead prices at the Indian Energy Exchange rose from ₹7.5 to ₹10.3 per unit during September 1-20. A recent working paper by the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister on changing "duck" and "camel" curves highlights how solar penetration is altering the net-load profile. On May 21, demand grew from 224.1 Gw at 8 am to a record 270.8 Gw at 3:45 pm, showing an increase of 46.7 Gw in less than eight hours. Solar can reduce the conventional fleet's requirement during the day, but thermal and other flexible sources must rapidly ramp up when renewable generation declines. Without storage and flexible generation, greater renewable capacity may not address the tighter evening supply.

Further, fuel constraints compounded the September squeeze. Coal stocks at thermal power plants stood at 19.2 million tonnes as of September 27, 64 per cent below the required 337 million tonnes. Seventy-two of the 168 plants had critically low stocks. Deficient rain also weakened hydropower generation, increasing dependence on thermal power. This makes reliable coal logistics and the ability of thermal plants to respond quickly important even as India expands renewables. The policy response must, therefore, move beyond capacity addition to flexibility creation. Batteries and pumped storage can absorb surplus solar power during the day and release it during evening peaks. Transmission investment is also equally important. The Cabinet's recent approval of Green Energy Corridor III, with ₹1.36 trillion for intrastate transmission and ₹50,000 crore for 50 Gw of battery storage, is a step in this direction. China's rapid expansion of grid-scale storage offers a useful benchmark. India's planning envisages 236 GWh of battery storage and 175 GWh of pumped storage by 2031-32. The storage needs viable revenue streams for services such as peak shifting, frequency regulation, reserves and congestion management. The next phase of power-sector investment must build the ability to generate, store, transmit, and quickly respond to shifts in demand.



When complaints become insights

The next chapter in grievance redress is to ensure one customer's experience prevents the same problem for the next

Every complaint has two stories. The first is the customer's experience of what went wrong and the resolution sought. But what lies beneath it is often easier to miss. It is the story of what deficiency in the product, process or service led to that less-than-satisfactory customer experience in the first place.

Resolving the complaint addresses the immediate grievance. Understanding the story beneath it can help us learn from it and prevent it from recurring.

Looking beneath the complaint

We have become accustomed to looking at complaint volumes, and analysing them product-wise, business-vertical-wise or customer-segment-wise, while focusing on resolution timelines for each of them. In essence, we ask how many, where and how quickly we can close. What is often missed is the more revealing question of "why" they arose.

This is where complaint typology becomes useful. Looking beyond the product in search of the underlying cause can reveal patterns that conventional classifications may miss. A complaint may arise from product design, process execution, an interaction between systems, entities or people, or even from the way the grievance itself was handled. Familiar complaints then begin to tell a richer story.

Imagine making a digital payment, seeing the amount debited, but finding that it has not reached the recipient. The customer sees one failed transaction. Behind it, however, may lie a chain of systems within the bank and elsewhere, reconciliations and follow-up actions with payment ecosystem players. Understanding where that chain broke is what turns the complaint into an insight.

The value of this approach becomes clearer when complaints are viewed together. What appears individually as unrelated grievances may reveal a common

theme or a recurring pattern. The same process weaknesses may surface through different products, channels or customer experiences. Conversely, complaints that look similar on the surface may have very different underlying causes. Typology helps distinguish between the two and shifts attention from the visible complaint to what may be driving its recurrence.

What the numbers may not tell us

There is another reason to look at complaint volumes with care. More complaints do not necessarily mean that customer service has worsened, just as fewer complaints do not necessarily mean that it is well.

There is a well-known story from the Second World War about analysts examining damage on aircraft that returned from missions. The instinct was to reinforce the areas with the most bullet holes. The statistician Abraham Wald pointed to the opposite conclusion. Those were the areas where an aircraft could be hit and still return. The more important question was to know where the missing aircraft had been hit, as those hits had proved to be fatal.

The lesson is a useful one for complaint analysis. What is visible in the data is not always the whole population we need to understand. Complaint data tells us a great deal about customers who found their way into the grievance system, but much less about those who did not.

Grievance redress and customer experience

Complaint volumes are shaped not only by customer experience, but also by awareness, accessibility and the willingness or ability to raise a grievance. This is particularly relevant for customers for whom raising a complaint may itself be difficult. Age, digital familiarity, language, location or personal circumstances can affect how easily someone



BANKING & BEYOND
SWAMINATHAN |

Ahimsa against extinction

October 2, Mahatma Gandhi's birthday and the International Day of Non-Violence, arrives this year with a disturbing warning: Humanity could face extinction not by this century's end, but perhaps within this decade. Few acts could be more violent than the extinction of humanity itself.

Jacob Coxon, who worked at OpenAI and Anthropic, warns they are "racing straight to self-improving superintelligence" and "gambling with our lives." Mr Coxon's warning goes beyond rhetoric. Artificial intelligence (AI) may soon improve its own capabilities faster than researchers can understand or control them, creating a feedback loop in which capability outpaces oversight. Many countries see little role for themselves because frontier AI is concentrated in a handful of labs, mainly in the United States and China. Yet with Washington and Beijing racing for technological and strategic supremacy, unilateral restraint seems unlikely: If one slows, the other may surge ahead.

AI governance must address two risks: The dangers of superintelligence and the dangers of its concentration in just two countries. The decision to accelerate, slow or constrain frontier AI will affect everyone. Capability may be concentrated, but the consequences are universal. The rest of the world cannot afford to be merely a decision-taker on a technology that could shape humanity's future.

Among the initiatives outside the US-China axis, the European Union AI Act, the world's first binding AI law, has established a risk-based architecture. It prohibits certain harmful practices, imposes transparency and risk-management requirements on specified high-risk systems, and places obligations on general-purpose AI models, including additional safeguards for models presenting systemic risk. The EU mark gives these rules considerable significance, encouraging developers around the world to take them into account.

Yet the emergence of increasingly capable and

potentially self-improving AI is beginning to pose a new regulatory question. The EU AI Act is principally structured around the risks associated with how and where an AI system is used. A future frontier model may require us to think equally about what the model is capable of becoming. A system that begins in a relatively low-risk application could, as its capabilities expand, acquire the ability to perform tasks in increasingly consequential domains. A customer-service AI, for instance, could acquire the ability to identify organisational errors and carry out corrective actions on its own. This illustrates how the speed of AI's evolution may demand a new model of policymaking, more adaptive than traditional regulatory cycles.

It also shows that the arrival of more capable AI may require next-generation technological capabilities and regulation to complement "risk-by-use" with continuous assessment of a system's "capability and capability-driven risk," so that governance can respond if those capabilities change materially, with potentially dangerous consequences.

India does not yet possess frontier or superintelligence-level AI capability and its AI calculus is shaped by more immediate needs: Developmental goals and improving productivity.

India has, thus far, adopted a pragmatic approach towards AI regulation. The country has a strategic opportunity and responsibility not only as a user of AI, but as a stakeholder in its global future. With 1.45 billion people, a vast and diverse data ecosystem, a contribution of nearly 17 per cent to global economic growth, and strong influence across the Global South, India has a reach of global significance. Its success in building digital infrastructure at an unprecedented population scale further strengthens its ability to shape the global debate on superintelligence.

India could consider developing regulations governing AI, including superintelligence, detailing capa-

navigates a grievance redress process.

Repeated visits, multiple submissions, or being passed between channels may only be an inconvenience for one customer, but a significant barrier for another. The ease with which a grievance can be raised and pursued is, therefore, also part of the customer experience.

Two views of the same journey

Institutions and customers often see the same journey differently. Internally, a transaction may pass through several departments, systems or service providers. The customer, on the other hand, experiences only one outcome. Complaints can, therefore, help join the dots across organisational boundaries and reveal where the experience is breaking down.

Repeated contacts, multiple hand-offs, the need to provide the same information again, or a delay between resolving the complaint and completing the related action can themselves be useful signals.

Fix only what's broken

Recurring complaints also do not always mean that a rule, policy or process is missing. Often, the intended outcome is already clear, but something is lost in execution. A deeper analysis can, therefore, reveal the gap between what a process is designed to achieve and what the customer ultimately experiences.

Sometimes the answer lies not in creating another rule, but in making an existing one work as intended. When complaint patterns repeatedly point to the same gap, they can provide useful operational intelligence about where a process, control, or customer journey deserves a closer look.

From experience to insight

Every complaint begins as an individual experience and deserves resolution on those terms. However, when similar experiences recur, they become evidence an institution can learn from.

That is where grievance data acquires a wider value. It can help connect the customer's account of what happened with the institution's own view of how its processes are supposed to work. Over time, recurring typologies can show whether an identified problem is receding, persisting or simply reappearing in another form. Complaints that recur, but become rarer than a record of cases received and closed. It becomes a way of testing whether intended outcomes are actually reaching customers.

The next evolution in grievance redress is not simply resolving complaints faster but reading them better. That means moving from counting them to understanding them, from understanding them to identifying patterns, and from those patterns to improving the underlying customer journey.

A good grievance redress system gives customers an effective remedy when something goes wrong. A good learning system ensures that one customer's experience helps prevent the same problem from becoming the next customer's experience.

The writer is Deputy Governor, Reserve Bank of India. The views are personal.

America's war on Muslims



SPENCER ACKERMAN

There is a cherished myth about 9/11, one evident during the recent 25th-anniversary commemorations, and about which the attacks united the country. Like many myths, it contains grains of truth. The early "war on terror" registered levels of political consensus not since repeated. But the myth obscures the millions of people who, from the consensus not only excluded but targeted.

A more recent myth says that after the occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq failed, the war came home. There are grains of truth here, too. Black Lives Matter protesters in Ferguson, Missouri, faced police officers wielding military

equipment developed for those occupations overseas. But like the first myth, this second one obscures how, from the very first moments after 9/11, the war was already at home. Federal agents and vigilantes fanned out in search of post-9/11 threats. They found them in Muslim communities.

Rozina Ali's unforgettable new book, *Seasons of Fury: Four Families and the Rise of Islamophobia in America*, takes an overdue hammer to these myths. A thorough, subtle reporter and a contributing writer for *The New York Times Magazine*, Ms Ali presents a disparate record of American Muslim life as she follows a Michigan-born civil rights lawyer; working-class Pakistani immigrants in Queens; a suburban Palestinian; and a Republican mayor in Basking Ridge, New Jersey. Through their varied experiences, Ms Ali details what it is to survive state persecution draped in the legitimacy of counterterrorism. Often their ordeals were greeted with silence by neighbours, and sometimes with approval.

The overwhelming majority of Muslims targeted by law enforcement and immigration authorities over the past 25 years had no connection to 9/11. Al Qaeda or political violence. In the post-9/11 atmosphere of collective suspicion, it did not matter. Within two months of the attacks, at least 1,182 people had been rounded up and detained, and many had been deported. The next year, the Justice Department required "special registration" for immigrants from predominantly Muslim countries, eventually creating a database of more than 80,000 people. Registrants, Ms Ali writes, feared they would be jailed and deported whether they complied or not.

Not many genuine terrorist plots emerged from American Muslims. Mostly prosecutors went after the webs of association emanating from newly criminalised organisations, often those supporting Palestinians. In some cases, the FBI and other law enforcement agencies manufactured threats. As Ms Ali reports, one paid informant, Osama El Dawoody, manipulated a 21-year-old

Pakistani immigrant from Queens, Matin Siraj, into a concocted plot to bomb Herald Square, in Midtown Manhattan, in 2004. Siraj, who thought the scheme was just talk, backed away as El Dawoody's entreaties intensified. He was nevertheless arrested, tried and convicted on four counts of conspiracy to destroy property. One of the many triumphs of *Seasons of Fury* is Ms Ali's account of the Siraj family, who followed him to prison and whose parents and sister are arrested by ICE agents while coping with the injustice of his incarceration.

Law enforcement agencies violated Muslim civil rights in the name of keeping America safe, even as American Muslims came under persistent assault. The shop windows of a Brooklyn fabric store owner named Mohammed Razvi were shot out while the ashes of the World Trade Centre were still blowing over Coney Island Avenue. A decade later, in Tennessee, unknown assailants



Seasons of Fury: Four Families and the Rise of Islamophobia in America
by Rozina Ali
Published by Crown
446 pages \$32

burned construction equipment intended for use in the building of a mosque. This past May, two teenage gunmen entered the Islamic Center of San Diego and shot to death three men who stopped them from advancing on the 140 children inside. Even the spectre of violence is life-changing. It happens to the Omars, a Palestinian family of five whose journey Ms Ali arrestingly chronicles and to whom she gives pseudonyms. Their 30-something neighbour in an unnamed Eastern Seaboard suburb harasses them for years. The American flag the Omars hang outside their

home is no shield. They refer to their neighbour only as Mr Happy, adding to the air of menace looming over the chapters. When the Omars win a protective order against him, Mr Happy laughs his way out of the courtroom.

Seasons of Fury, which has been long-listed for the National Book Award, insightfully shows how even before 9/11

American Muslims were already dehumanised. The FBI's infamous Cintolepso initiative (1956-7) involved spying on Arab lawyers, activists and students for perceived ties to radicals.

The Iran hostage crisis, the 1991 Persian Gulf war and the 1993 World Trade Center bombing fueled a portrayal of terrorism as something only Muslims did. When the white supremacist Timothy McVeigh bombed the Alfred P Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City in 1995, a Democratic former House Intelligence Committee chairman, along with pundits from mainstream outlets presumed Muslims were responsible.

By bringing the ordeal of American Muslims out from the margins, *Seasons of Fury* indicts the society that sacrificed them on the altar of 9/11. The recent ICE raids and roundups emerge directly from normalising the repression of Muslims. Those now locked in ICE detention centres, and those soon to be, can only hope they will not be similarly abandoned by their neighbours.

The reviewer is a Pulitzer Prize- and National Magazine Award-winning reporter. ©2026 *The New York Times News Service*

The Street Feels Global Heat

Local investors have cushioned the fall, somewhat

Bond markets are trying to impose fiscal discipline on governments as borrowing by advanced economies reaches extraordinary levels. Geopolitics isn't helping, with disrupted energy supplies pushing inflation worldwide. Central bankers are raising rates to tame prices, hardening their currencies. All this is grim news for Indian equities, already facing relentless foreign selling. Thursday's sell-off — Sensex fell 571 points and Nifty 199 points, extending an 8-week losing streak — is a sharp reminder of how these global pressures are feeding into Dalal Street. Domestic factors add to the pressure: an erratic monsoon could weigh on rural incomes while keeping food inflation elevated. Household savings have stepped into the breach, pushing more money into equities despite prolonged market decline.

Indian investors are pitted against concerted pressure in international financial markets. A fall in crude below \$100 a barrel would ease some immediate concerns, but a return to the pre-Iran equilibrium looks remote. Nor are bond vigilantes likely to lower their guard. Major economies now spend more servicing their debt than the world invests in AI, by one estimate. A bond-market sell-off has been anticipated for some time; now that it is underway, the squeeze is unlikely to ease soon. Central banks are again seen as being behind the inflation curve, leaving them little choice but to push rates higher, even at the cost of global growth.

Commodity and bond markets will remain adverse for emerging economies such as India. Global equity investment is also increasingly concentrated in AI infrastructure, where India has little significant presence yet. Sustaining growth could become harder in an environment of expensive credit. Indian equities, however, are no longer as richly valued as they were a couple of years ago, with headline multiples moving towards historical averages after a prolonged correction. The correction could have been steeper but for the doughty Indian investor.

MKG & Ahimsa's Realpolitik Value

In an age when diplomacy is property negotiation, ahimsa can sound suspiciously like bringing a yoga mat to a knife fight. This misunderstanding both politics and Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. Gandhi's great innovation was not discovering what humanity had already spotted: that violence is unpleasant. It was recognising that non-violence could be — irony alert — weaponised. Satyagraha was morality engineered into strategy: refuse obedience, accept punishment, expose coercion, and thereby increase the political price of coercing you.

Realpolitik counts money, soldiers, territory, sanctions and bargaining chips — things we're more than familiar with in our 'era of wars'. Ahimsa adds another asset: legitimacy. Governments can overpower demonstrators. But it's harder to make the overpowering look respectable. Violence by protesters changes the subject from their grievance to public order. Disciplined non-violence keeps the phone-calls pointed at the grievance. Gandhi understood that rulers possess guns — or lathis, water cannons, tear gas — but depend upon clerks, taxpayers, lawyers, policemen and, ultimately, consent. The British Empire was formidable, and also administratively needy. The same holds for today's imperia.

None of this makes ahimsa magical. Non-violent campaigns can fail, be brutally suppressed, or encounter regimes relatively indifferent to reputation. Gandhi's own campaigns produced compromises. But that makes the doctrine more, not less, interesting to realists. Ahimsa is commonly displayed in the museum of politics beside spinning wheels and uplifting quotations. It belongs equally in the armoury. The Mahatma's mischievous achievement was to demonstrate that refusing to hit back need not mean refusing to hit where power hurts.

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As daughters and sons of the nation, we celebrate National Teetotalitarian Day today, a 24-hour experiment in authoritarian sobriety. Today, as Indians, we are free to speak (and wear) whatever we want. But sitting on a double Scotch will be treated as an offence against today's cultural values and by today's, we mean of this single day. Oh, cheer up, it's less joyless than it sounds. Alcohol is an unusual product whose consumption steadily diminishes the consumer's ability to judge whether further consumption is prudent. By the fourth drink, rational choice theory has left the building, usually without paying its share of the bill.

Teetotalitarianism restores fiscal discipline at household level. Money otherwise spent on overpriced wine remains available for economically sounder purposes, such as overpriced coffee. There are other savings. No drunken WhatsApp messages to boss or colleague requiring a morning clarification. No mysterious credit-card entry that must be investigated. The value of celebrating a secular dry day is its unusually rapid policy transmission. Most governments demand restraint now to reap promised benefits several years away. Teetotalitarianism asks for restraint tonight. By breakfast tomorrow, you shall raise your glass to your very good judgement. So, let's raise a glass to National Teetotalitarian Day. And to tomorrow — it's National No-Hangover Day!

This is where, for India, economics meets strategy. India and the US have spent more than two decades building one of the world's most consequential strategic relationships. Trump and Modi have described the US-

Boards should build a strong leadership pipeline long before the search begins for the next CEO

Find Success in Succession



Harsh Mariwala & Vivek Khemka

CEO succession is one of the most important decisions a board makes. Yet, most boards treat it as an event, rather than a process, giving it little weight until triggered by a performance challenge, retirement or resignation.

Until then, succession planning rarely gets attention. Most boards and nomination committees will tell you all is well. But when succession becomes real, often suddenly, that confidence can prove fragile. External searches become compressed and reactive. Internal candidates who could have been prepared are not ready. Worse, potential contenders may have left, seeing no path forward, or investment in their development.

Done well, succession is an active, multi-year talent development system. It forces the right strategic assignments, builds a broad-based pool of leaders, and gives the board a much deeper understanding of the company's top talent. It may even be the best top talent development system available to a company.

► **Early hire** The best boards start this process 5-7 years before a transition. Early on, the field stays wide — 15-20 people supported through coaching and leadership development, with the board and CEO investing time. Potential often becomes clear only when people are stretched in unfamiliar roles.

► **The aim** is to build a strong leadership pipeline. By many companies, that stronger bench is the real return from doing succession well. In the final 2-3 years, the field narrows to 4-5 serious contenders, and the work becomes more focused.

► **Make hard choices** Boards should ask what kind of CEO will be needed to shape and deliver the future in a company's forward-looking strategy, then translate it into a clear lead-



No, it's not sure sera

orship specification. A specification built around future strategy gives the process a more rigorous brief, and can point to candidates different from the incumbent.

► **When framing the specification**, boards shouldn't let crowd out capability, potential and strategic fit. Most overestimate the value of 'industry knowledge' and underestimate potential, limiting bolder choices. Boards should also avoid the incumbency trap. If the CEO has been successful, they often look for a successor in the same mould. If the CEO has struggled, they can swing too far. Both are backward-looking.

► **Recruitment or promotion decisions** for senior roles should not be made only to fill today's vacancy. They should also ask whether the appointment creates future CEO optionality: does this role stretch a potential con-

tender round a gap, or test someone in a context that will matter later? Pressure to fill a role can overwhelm the longer-term succession question. Creating small profit centres within the company and giving top talent a chance to manage an end-to-end business, is one of the better development interventions.

► **Involve the whole board** Succession can't belong to the chair, CEO or nominations committee alone. The board must own the full arc of the process — defining the specification, engaging with candidates, debating evidence and making the final decision.

► **Directors need enough exposure** to candidates to form views based on evidence, not reputation. Early on, potential leaders present to the board. Later, a smaller group gets deeper exposure and mentoring. When the decision comes, directors need to de-

bate trade-offs honestly, without early preferences or dominant voices shaping the room too soon.

The best chairs orchestrate this carefully, engaging directors individually, holding back their views until others have spoken, and creating conditions for the board to converge. Evidence, discipline and independence challenge keep this sensitive conversation honest.

► **Think internal and external** If the earlier elements have been done well and there is a strong internal pipeline, boards need not look externally. It risks demotivating and potentially losing strong internal talent. However, looking externally not only expands the choice set but also sharpens the board's judgement about the role, the standard it wants to set, and provides a clearer read on its internal contenders.

► **If an internal candidate is close to the best external option**, the internal candidate should usually be preferred. It sends a strong signal to the organisation, preserves continuity and reduces integration risk.

► **Keep the process tight** Full-board ownership doesn't mean every director needs to be in every conversation. Confidentiality protects candidates, internal trust and process integrity. The chair's role is important. In promoter-led companies, so is the board's. They must avoid signalling preferences, even informally.

► **Not just CEO duty** There's also a structural problem at the centre of any succession process that boards often rely on to name. Many CEOs find it hard to develop their own successors. It can feel threatening, or lead CEOs to over-identify with leaders who resemble their own path. This is why boards must take charge of this process, and not leave it entirely to CEOs.

The real test of CEO succession is not only whether the board chooses the right person, but also if it has built a company with more leaders ready for bigger roles. Boards that understand this, creating succession as an emergency plan and start treating it as the company's most important talent system, leaving the enterprise stronger no matter who gets the job.

Mariela is chairman, Mariela Khemka is senior partner, Egon Zehnder

BRICS Building Anti-Dollar Walls?



Stéphanie Heng & Alban de la Soudière

It's not yet a monetary revolution. But it's a real change, perhaps just as important. For decades, the dollar has been the lubricant of world trade. Oil, gas, raw materials, most international trade, forex reserves — almost everywhere, the dollar has established itself as the reference currency. And this trade dominance has had a particularly favourable consequence for the US. The world needs dollars, which have been circulating, some of which come back to buy US debt.

This system has not disappeared far from it. But it is being eroded. And BRICS' expansion is a very visible symptom of it. The grouping now has 11 members, plus several partner countries. Their aim is not specifically to create a single currency that would compete with the dollar. More pragmatically, the goal is to re-

duce the need to use dollars when both trading partners can settle directly in their own currencies. And it is in the energy sector that this evolution becomes particularly interesting. Russia, under Western sanctions, has sharply accelerated its use of the ruble in its energy and trade exchanges. Not necessarily to replace the dollar, but to create enough alternatives so that the US cannot block both the necessary transit route, and to limit the impact of sanctions. BRICS and de-dollarisation won't make the dollar disappear. But they are helping to make the world's monetary system progressively more multipolar.

Outside BRICS, the euro is already a major invoicing currency for international trade. Most intra-European trade, including in the energy sector, is naturally conducted in euros. But as a counter-example, oil and gas imports from Norway or Algeria

are not systematically paid in euros, despite privileged links between the EU and these two countries. In any case, it only applies to some of the long-term contracts, which are numerous and often confidential. On the other hand, the overnight oil price, including the North Sea Brent reference, remains firmly quoted in dollars. Nevertheless, existence of a European currency capable of handling an increasing share of international settlements is, indeed, an alternative to the dollar.

De-dollarisation doesn't mean the imminent end of the dollar, but rather a gradual diversification of global reserves, notably at the expense of US treasury bonds. The real risk for the US is that foreign demand for US debt slows even as financing needs explode. The Norwegian case is particularly



No, it's not a joke

interesting. On September 1, Norges Bank recommended reducing the share of government bonds in the sovereign wealth fund's benchmark from 70% to 50%. This could reduce dollar bonds exposure by about \$80 bn. It's not a political decision but a prudent one. The fund would retain significant exposure to the dollar itself. But it's an interesting signal. Over time, less foreign demand and more debt could potentially hinder refinancing. And a few additional basis points, applied gradually to a colossal debt, can cause a vicious circle of interest costs, deficit, debt, more interest costs, not to mention the serious risks of exchange rate inflation (both monetary and imported).

The biggest risk, then, is not the dollar's demise but the gradual end of exceptional US cheap financing, with potentially huge consequences for US finances and, thus, the entire global financial system.

Heng works at European Parliament. De la Soudière was with NATO Communications and Information Agency (NCIA). Views are personal

Mr Prez, Use Your Discretion Wisely



Mohit Saraf

On Wednesday, Narendra Modi called Donald Trump to discuss matters on trade, energy and defence. He also reportedly highlighted India's concerns over Lindsey O. Graham Sanctions Russia and Iran Act 2026. Trump signed the sanctions law on Sept 18, giving himself as president substantial authority to impose tariffs up to 100% on major purchasers of Russian energy. The important aspect of the law is that such an imposition will be on presidential 'discretion'.

For India, the question isn't about how many barrels of Russian oil it buys, but whether countries with profoundly different levels of development, economic capacity and strategic relationships with the US should be treated alike. Say China and India, profoundly different countries, both of which 'do business' with Russia.

This is where, for India, economics meets strategy. India and the US have spent more than two decades building one of the world's most consequential strategic relationships. Trump and Modi have described the US-

India Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership in terms of mutual trust, shared interests and goodwill. Ambassador Sergio Gorr expressed the principle well: 'Real friends can disagree but always resolve their differences in the end'. The Russian oil question provides an opportunity to demonstrate that principle. India's continued purchase of Russian oil should not be taken for indifference — either by GoI or India's people — to the suffering caused by Russia's war on Ukraine. But an elected government must also consider the hardship that significantly higher energy costs can impose on its own citizens.

None of this diminishes Washington's legitimate strategic objective of reducing revenues available to Russia to sustain its war in Ukraine. But it raises another important question: who should bear the economic cost of achieving that objective? There may be a fairer way forward.

There is also a strategic relationship at stake. India-US cooperation today encompasses defence, critical technologies, semiconductors, AI, resilient supply chains, counterterrorism and Indo-Pacific. The two countries are simultaneously seeking deeper trade and investment ties, and more resilient and trusted supply chains. The question for Washington

If Washington wants New Delhi to substantially reduce Russian oil purchases, the US and India could explore an arrangement under which alternative supplies — including US crude — reach India at a landed cost comparable with the Russian oil being displaced. Such a request would, then, become economically much easier for New Delhi to accommodate. If India is to remain a US ally, it should be ceding in pursuit of a shared geopolitical objective, the incremental economic cost need not fall disproportionately on the Indian people.

That is the central issue. Energy affordability in India is not simply about protecting corporate margins, or headline GDP. It directly affects the country's ability to provide hundreds of millions of people towards economic security.

There is also a strategic relationship at stake. India-US cooperation today encompasses defence, critical technologies, semiconductors, AI, resilient supply chains, counterterrorism and Indo-Pacific. The two countries are simultaneously seeking deeper trade and investment ties, and more resilient and trusted supply chains. The question for Washington

therefore, is larger than Russia: an crude, what combination of pressure, incentives and alternative energy supplies best advances US objectives without imposing disproportionate developmental costs on India, or damaging a strategic relationship built over decades?

A tariff potentially reaching 100% is an extraordinarily powerful instrument. Its consequences could extend far beyond the oil trade. And a strategic relationship is not really tested when interests coincide. Its durability is tested when they diverge. India and the US will disagree from time to time. They are two large sovereign democracies, each pursuing its own national interests. With the Lindsey O Graham Sanctions Russia and Iran Act, Trump wields considerable discretion. Using that discretion should involve looking beyond the immediate question of where India buys a barrel of oil. It should also involve considering India's level of development, economic consequences of today's exorbitant high energy prices, and strategic value of a trusted relationship that both countries have spent decades constructing.

The challenge is to ensure that a dispute over Russian oil does not obscure the much larger question of where India and the US want their relationship to be 20 years from now.

The writer is founder & managing partner, Saraf & Partners

THE SPEAKING TREE

Leadership Masterclass

CHETAN SALVA

When a leader mobilises nearly 350 men to follow him, he must be something to learn from him. MK Gandhi had five great leadership qualities that propelled his ability to lead our nation into a unified movement. First, he had a vision of a free, self-reliant nation that could give wings to a people enslaved for centuries. It was a powerful purpose and goal, and every Indian found their calling in it, regardless of ethnic or religious background. Second, he was, and was widely perceived to be, a man of integrity. His followers could trust his motives and take his words at face value.

Third, he showed empathy and emotional connection by living like some of the most impoverished sections of Indian society. He listened to his opponents as much as he listened to his followers, and that gave him the unique ability to bridge gaps between the two sides.

Fourth, he had a powerful ability to enforce his will on matters he believed in. His fasts and non-cooperation movement, the Dandi March, and the Salt Tax agitation were masterful ideas executed on a national scale. Albert Einstein once said, 'Gandhi, the only person I know who came to me with a vision that I could follow.'

Finally, he was a mastermind at execution and large-scale organisation. He selected a great team of leaders such as Sardar Patel and Nehru, and his satyagraha movements in South Africa, the non-cooperation movement, the Dandi March, and the Salt Tax agitation were masterful ideas executed on a national scale. Albert Einstein once said, 'Gandhi, the only person I know who came to me with a vision that I could follow.'

ALGO OF BLISSTECH

Petting an Animal

There's a tangible rush of peace in running a hand over an animal. A dog offers its head with expectant joy; a cat beams the resident zamindar with each stroke. Even a horse radiates gentleness beneath your palm.

Part of the pleasure is that nothing needs explaining. Animals don't require anecdotes, opinions or updates. The hand moves, fur or skin moves beneath it, breathing slows. For a few minutes, two creatures agree that this is sufficient.

Friendly interaction with animals has been associated with increases in oxytocin, a hormone involved in social bonding. Studies have also found reductions in cortisol, a marker of stress. Touch itself can engage sensory and nervous system pathways associated with calm. Heart rate and blood pressure are lowered. The body apparently understands petting before the mind has finished worrying.

But this quiet joy exceeds chemistry. To pet an animal is to communicate without the exhausting apparatus of language. For once, nobody is trying to improve anybody. You are simply touching another living thing, and it is allowing you to stay.

Chat Room

Wake Up, Lazies, And Smell Work

A public holiday on October 2 to mark the birth anniversary of Mohandas Gandhi, is bringing disrepute to the great leader who would never have wanted his countrymen to be lazy and non-productive on the day he was born. A single holiday means loss of thousands of crores to the economy. In a developing country like India can ill-afford. Gandhi was the architect of the freedom movement, and India attained independence because our freedom fighters, including Gandhi, worked tirelessly. As a nation, we love to celebrate, mourn and even protest with a holiday which is unusual in today's context where time is money and every minute must be respected for its worth. The nation must amend its Constitution and remove 'unproductive' holidays like Gandhi Jayanti. Instead, we must pay homage to the 'mahatma' by working extra hours as a mark of respect to the great leader.

S N Kalra

Mumbai



Rural job loss signals a failing promise

The Samyukta Kisan Morcha's statement that 9.56 crore rural workdays were lost during July-August compared to the same period in 2025 confirms some fears about last year's revamp of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA). A coalition of over 400 farmer unions, the Morcha said the revamped programme - Viksit Bharat-Guarantee for Rozgar and Aajeevika Mission Gramin (VB-G RAM G) - generated only 20.21 crore person-days against 29.77 crore in 2025. The data from the Ministry of Rural Development deflates the government's projections. Notably, this fall in employment has come at a time marked by high rural distress.

The downward trend could be traced to multiple reasons. One factor is the scheme's provision of a 60-day pause period, which halts employment during peak sowing and harvesting seasons. Problems with KYC requirements, such as biometric authentication and facial recognition, have also excluded labourers. These structural concerns were highlighted when VB-G RAM G was introduced, leading to apprehensions about a substantial reduction in the number of the scheme's beneficiaries. The Narendra Modi government was critical of the MGNREGA framework, though it retained the scheme after coming to power. The changes introduced last year were widely seen as an attempt to dismantle the original programme, a contention that appears increasingly credible.

In the first sign of disruption, the structure of the original rights-based job guarantee scheme was altered, turning it into a centrally controlled plan where states bear substantial operational costs. The scheme now has a 60:40 Centre-state funding pattern, but many financially constrained states are finding it difficult to contribute their share and support the programme. While the new conditions have limited the scope of the programme, its significance has only increased amid economic uncertainties. This year has been particularly critical, as the southwest monsoon recorded deficit rainfall, leading multiple states to report drought and crop failures. Some states have demanded an expansion of the programme to benefit more sections of workers. The government had claimed that it aimed to increase the employment guarantee from 100 days to 125 days per rural household every year, but with the shrinking of the scheme, that objective stands unrealised. Early-stage operational issues are a given for any redesigned programme of this scale, but the government must now revisit the fundamentals of that new design. The important question is whether India can afford to dilute rural employment by tying it to the State's efficiency and resources.

The first year's numbers point to VB-G RAM G's structural gaps

MRPL blast: A call for stronger safeguards

The blast at a Mangalore Refinery and Petrochemicals Ltd (MRPL) unit on Wednesday, which killed one person and injured 12, has renewed concerns about safety standards and regulatory oversight at industrial facilities. The explosion and fire at the refinery's coke hydrotreater unit in Phase III, triggered by the rupture of a high-pressure cold separator, damaged 54 houses in the surrounding areas. The impact on homes, places of worship, and neighbourhoods underlines the risks faced by communities living alongside major industrial installations. MRPL, a subsidiary of ONGC, must answer questions about the circumstances that led to the accident.

Surathkal police have registered a case alleging negligence in the unit's maintenance and supervision, naming its head as accused. The allegations must be investigated fairly. However, the recurrence of serious accidents makes it difficult to dismiss this as an isolated incident. In July 2025, two MRPL operators died after inhaling hydrogen sulphide gas while inspecting plant infrastructure, prompting criminal cases against six personnel. The latest incident raises legitimate questions about whether safety shortcomings identified after that tragedy were adequately addressed. Residents and civic groups have voiced concerns about pollution, industrial hazards, and the refinery's proximity to inhabited areas. These grievances are not proof of negligence in the present case, but they reflect a wider trust deficit between the refinery and its neighbours. Industrial accidents elsewhere reinforce the need for vigilance. The June 2025 explosion at Sigachi Industries in Telangana killed more than 50 people, while other factory, pharmaceutical, and chemical plant incidents have exposed the potentially devastating consequences of safety failures. Though differing in circumstances, these incidents highlight the need for rigorous enforcement of safety standards.

Oversight responsibility at MRPL is distributed across several agencies. The Oil Industry Safety Directorate prescribes technical standards for petroleum installations, while the Petroleum and Explosives Safety Organisation, the Petroleum and Natural Gas Regulatory Board, and the state factories inspectorate have regulatory or enforcement responsibilities. The inquiry must establish whether these agencies adequately discharged their regulatory responsibilities and ensured compliance with the prescribed safety standards. An independent, comprehensive inquiry is essential to determine the immediate cause of the accident and establish accountability, as an internal review alone would not adequately address public concerns. It must also evaluate risks to nearby settlements, review emergency preparedness, and recommend enforceable corrective measures. The lives lost, the injured, and the affected communities deserve more than compensation and assurances. They deserve verifiable answers and protection against another disaster.

The probe must fix accountability and review risks to the neighbourhood

COMMENT

ROLLS OF DISCORD

SIR and the project of disenfranchisement

Operational irregularities in the exercise are striking, but its larger agenda is a State unequal by design

PARAKALA PRABHAKAR

The rift in the Election Commission of India (ECI), as revealed in recent investigative media reports, has raised serious doubts about its credibility. The claim that the poll body had not met in full strength even once in the last four months and that as many as 14 notes of disagreements and objections by two election commissioners (ECs) went unheeded puts the functioning of the Commission, especially of the Chief Election Commissioner (CEC), in the spotlight. Two press releases issued by the ECI, instead of clearing the air and instilling confidence in the people, have only deepened the public's suspicions about its opaque functioning. They have not documented anything to refute the claims made in the investigative reports.

The Opposition parties and civil society have raised questions about irregularities in implementing the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls and called for the CEC's impeachment. Demands for scrapping the SIR are getting louder.

Our public discourse is now flooded with analyses and debates about the ECI's operations and the CEC's conduct in implementing the SIR. However, some fundamental issues and questions need to be recovered from the current overlay on this discourse. This is important because those issues are in danger of being buried under the current state of commentary. They might eventually disappear from the foreground of the country's discourse on its democratic life.

Let us begin by asking some 'what if' questions. What if the two ECs did not write the notes of disagreements/objections? What if they were on the same page with the CEC and the head of the ECI's IT Department on the way the SIR was being carried out? What if the process did not call some high-profile individuals for hearings, and the

deletions and hearings targeted only voiceless minorities, Adivasis, Dalits, and marginalised daily-wage labourers and women? What if the decision to file Forms 7 for the deletion of 16 lakh voters in West Bengal was kept by keeping the two ECs in the loop and with their consent? Would all these have made the SIR an acceptable exercise?

Now, we also hear a response that goes, "SIR was good; it was just implemented badly". Even the ECI's official response relied on this narrative. It harped on the point that all the commissioners were unanimous in their decision to implement the process. One fundamental question regarding its response and the public discourse



remains unanswered. The ECI's response to a query under Right to Information (RTI) by an activist clearly stated that the decision to carry out the SIR was not taken in the Commission. The Commission has said nothing to disown that response.

Beyond the procedural aspects of the SIR's implementation, the larger question should address what this roll revision is essentially tasked to do to the nature of India's political society. We should not lose sight of the massive, targeted disenfranchisement which would create two classes of Indians. It ought to be an important concern that as many as 14 crore people would be removed from the electoral rolls, making them lose their right to participate in the political process even as they continue to reside in the country. This, in effect, makes them second-class Indians.

RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE

The sound of silence

The library was the haven away from textbooks and assignments

SUDHA DEVI NAYAK

I can still see Sister Dorothy sitting sedately in the library, surrounded by dark mahogany bookshelves and the silent stream of children lining up for the issue and return of books. 'Keep Silence' boards looking down on us almost sounded ominous. The place was sacrosanct, blessed by silence and the light of knowledge. There were beaded curtains and tall glass windows adding a lustre to the little library, while an old nun sat in a corner, teasing out soulful strains from an ancient piano.

The library was sparsely furnished with a high-backed chair for Sister Dorothy and two beautiful glass-topped tables with a few sturdy chairs for the privileged senior girls to sit and read. The rest sat around on the floor with outstretched legs, balancing books on their knees or leaning comfortably against the white-washed

walls, books in hand.

Books were strewn around with bags and notebooks, and it was a scholastic atmosphere with girls lost for a while to the world and its banalities. Here were the Brown Sisters, Jane Austen and George Eliot, and the venerable Dickens and Hardy. We inhabited their worlds and walked their worlds, living their characters, embracing their vulnerabilities, sharing their tears and joys and their intrigues and dilemmas. Books became family, community, and a reassurance that transported us out of the current context. In some mysterious way each life became our life, something of ourselves in each and every character in the hallowed pages of a great book.

Sister Dorothy was the spark that ignited our souls and elevated our minds. The library was the haven away from textbooks and assignments, the compulsion of examinations and assessments. Time in the library flew on soundless wings as imagination took a leap into uncharted territory. Before we knew it, we were rudely awakened by the clang of the bell that sent us back to classrooms, a little more inspired, a

Was there consensus?

The current discourse cannot overlook the rampant irregularities in how elections were conducted during at least the last eight years. Some of the politically consequential irregularities have been the irrational phasing of polling in different states, the partisan implementation of the Model Code of Conduct that allowed the ruling party's star campaigners to freely make hate speeches, the inordinate delay in declaring the final percentage of votes polled, the unprecedented discrepancy between the preliminary percentage of polling and the delayed declaration of the final figures of polling, the suspected spurious injection of votes both in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections and the subsequently held state assembly polls, the glaring discrepancy between the number of votes polled as declared after the polling and the number of votes recovered from the Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) during the 2024 counting, and the unusual and unexplained increase in the number of voters just before the assembly polls in some states.

However, regarding all these irregularities, we have yet to learn of any rift within the Commission. Of course, we cannot rule out that possibility. There might have been. But it is yet to come to light. Until something is revealed, we need to assume that the full body of the Commission was on the same page.

The ongoing SIR is not merely about helping a particular party win an election; it points to a much deeper design—to create a customised electorate in the country. It is intended to turn India into a Republic in which only some sections of the population remain politically relevant. Those sections are non-minority, non-Dalit, non-Adivasi, and non-marginalised. With the minorities, Adivasis, Dalits, and the other marginalised sections disenfranchised, the politically relevant sections would largely be *Savarna* Hindus. The minorities who remain on the rolls would anyway be electorally inconsequential.

The SIR, in other words, is a deeper project to turn India into a *Savarna* Hindu State. Opposition to the SIR and the demands for scrapping the exercise should stem from this understanding, not merely its operational failings.

(The writer is a political economist and author of *The Crooked Timber of New India*; *Syndicate The Billion Press*)

SPEAK OUT

We will appeal to Mamata Banerjee to join the Congress with her remaining MLAs and MPs. We will accept her leadership in Bengal and work alongside her.



Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury, Congress leader

It felt good to sit around and agree, to have a common enemy and a shared struggle.

Nadia Hashimi

TO BE PRECISE



IN PERSPECTIVE

A blueprint for million-plus cities

Karnataka's urban growth policy should empower new metropolitan centres, not create a second Bengaluru

SANTOSH NARGUND

Million-plus (Mn+) or metropolitan cities house a large proportion of India's urban population, drive a substantial share of economic growth, and offer citizens greater opportunities for growth. Consequently, these cities receive greater attention from governments and investors for improved livability and ease of doing business. Of India's 5,000-plus towns and cities, 46 had populations exceeding one million as per Census 2011; this number is expected to rise by about 50% after Census 2027.

Unlike other leading states such as Maharashtra, which has 10 Mn+ cities, Gujarat 4, and Tamil Nadu 3, Karnataka has only one: Bengaluru. One in every five people in Karnataka lives in Bengaluru. The city accounts for around 40% of the GDP, 99.5% of its software exports and 91% of its air passenger traffic. Bengaluru Urban's per-capita income of Rs 8.56 lakh was more than double the state average of Rs 3.86 lakh in 2024-25. These figures reveal Karnataka's excessive dependence on a single metropolitan economy.

This not only places enormous expectations on Bengaluru but also exposes Karnataka to the risks of concentrating assets, talent, investment, and institutional attention in one city.

The high-powered committee on regional imbalances, chaired by D M Nanjundappa in 2002, and the committee chaired by M Govinda Rao in 2026, highlighted the persistence of uneven development and the need to develop strong alternative urban centres as anchors of socio-economic development. The NITI Aayog Vice-Chairman's recent suggestion to consider building a second Bengaluru to ease pressure on the capital further underlines the unsustainability of excessive dependence on one city.

The divergent approaches towards two of Karnataka's largest urban centres after Bengaluru - Hubballi-Dharwad and Mysuru - clearly manifest this policy vacuum. Both are poised to emerge as million-plus cities after the ongoing Census. Yet, while the state is moving to bifurcate the Hubballi-Dharwad Municipal Corporation, it is simultaneously expanding Mysuru City Corporation into Greater Mysuru City Corporation.

These contrasting approaches point to the absence of a consistent policy. Splitting HDMC could be a self-defeating exercise precisely when the twin cities are approaching metropolitan scale. It could also have wider implications for the significant regional imbalance between north and south Karnataka and reinforce

the adverse public perception of this disparity. Beyond the occasional rhetoric of 'Beyond Bengaluru', Karnataka lacks a clear policy roadmap for developing its second-line cities.

The state needs a comprehensive five-year policy roadmap to transform major urban centres across the north, central, and coastal regions into strong regional economies that complement Bengaluru while becoming natural choices for investors, businesses, and professionals.

Such a roadmap must leverage these cities' traditional strengths and harmonise them with new-age opportunities. With a projected population of nearly 13 million, Hubballi-Dharwad already possesses many attributes of a metropolitan region: premier educational institutions, skilled human resources, a strong entrepreneurial and manufacturing base, an emerging IT ecosystem, and excellent road, rail, air and port connectivity. Mysuru combines high livability with a rich legacy of education, culture, tourism, services, and IT.

Mangaluru, Belagavi, and Kalarbari have considerable potential to emerge as competitive metropolitan areas with appropriate policy support and investment. Another set of cities can emerge as regional growth centres either on their own or can be integrated into larger City Economic Regions (CERs) around these metropolitan centres.

Reframing governance

Economic promotion must be complemented by a fundamental overhaul of urban governance. Articles 243P(c) and 243ZE of the Constitution provide the framework for identifying metropolitan areas with appropriate policy support and investment. Karnataka's statutory provisions need to be adapted to extend the metropolitan governance architecture to Hubballi-Dharwad, Mysuru, and other larger cities.

The NITI Aayog's 2026 framework for million-plus cities provides further impetus for empowered and participatory urban local self-governments. Regular municipal elections every five years and directly elected mayors with a fixed five-year tenure should be implemented. The state government's overriding powers must give way to clear accountability of the elected city leadership that should have effective control over the city budget, finances, staff, and administration. These reforms would bring our large cities closer to the governance architecture of leading metropolitan cities across the globe.

The state government has a responsibility to develop multiple metropolitan cities beyond Bengaluru that can drive equitable economic growth, improve livability, and address the significant regional disparities. A political resolve to transition from Bengaluru-centric development to state-wide urban growth is long overdue.

(The writer is Senior Advisor at JangraGanga Centre for Citizenship and Democracy)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dismantle KPSC to save merit, credibility of civil services

The recurring recruitment scams, cash-for-jobs allegations, and question paper leaks within Karnataka Public Service Commission (KPSC) have shattered the hopes of millions of hard-working youth across India. When administrative posts are sold to the highest bidder instead of earned through merit, it directly cripples the nation's public governance and administrative integrity. Under Article 317 of the Constitution, state commission

members can be removed for misbehaviour, yet political patronage often delays accountability. To restore trust in India's civil services, Karnataka must shatter the compromised commission, invoke strict penal laws against corrupt officials, and outsource examinations to an independent test-driven body supervised by the UPSC framework. Merit, not money, must drive public service.

Vijaykumar H K, Raichur

Ballot's no better

The I.N.D.I.A. bloc's suggestion to revert to ballot papers from EVMs is not a feasible solution, as it requires extensive manual work to finish the electoral processes. If the concern is that EVMs could be rigged, similar questions of security must be addressed for the ballot paper system as well. The central focus here should be to strengthen democratic institutions, improve the overall security systems, and bring in accountability. Malpractice should be penalised and power must be held accountable; merely changing the methods of voting will not rescue democracy.

Neha Achu Thomas, Bengaluru

Look for alternatives

Apologies our editorial 'An essential exemption for teachers' (Oct 1) is a good idea to leave teachers to focus on their core competency and nurture the academic excellence of their students. However, it would be prudent to think of alternative manpower resources for election work, surveys, census and so on. Deploying people from surplus manpower from the government and public sector undertakings for this purpose appears to be feasible. The government must dwell on this subject further and devise concrete proactive measures.

HVK Bhatta, Bengaluru

Shun firecrackers

It is distressing that the Supreme Court has refused to impose a ban on firecrackers. The bursting of crackers is detrimental to public good. Every year, they cause immense noise and air pollution—a significant source of distress for people, especially the elderly, patients and students. The distress is not limited to humans alone; stray animals too suffer greatly.

Toshani Saha, Bengaluru

Our readers are welcome to email letters to letters@deccanherald.co.in (only letters emailed—not handwritten—will be accepted). All letters must carry the sender's postal address and phone number.

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Contact Newsroom
245435
Fax: 0194-247782
editor@greaterkashmir.com
editpage@greaterkashmir.com

Contact Advertising
247439
advertise@greaterkashmir.com

Contact Circulation
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Friday Focus

Man is not
created in vain

...there is a purpose in creation

Man is not created in vain; there is a definite purpose in creation. The purpose is elaborately explained in Holy Verses, wherein Allah (SwT) asks a searching question: "Do you think We created you in vain, and that to Us you will not be returned?" (23:115)

The Holy Verse is meant to impart a feeling that the time the man inhabits in the mortal world is very short compared to the long time period in the hereafter, as is expounded in what precedes in the three Ayats.

"They will be asked, 'How many years did you remain on earth. They will say, we remained for a day or a part of the day. They will be told, you remained only for a little while, if you only knew'" (23:112,113,114)

On being questioned, "Do you remember how much time did you spent on earth" they will reply, we have spent a day there or even a part of the day" it implies that their level of consciousness and sense of timing would have gone such a change that they will feel at a loss to furnish the right answer. It is only then they will be told that, "the time that you have spent there indeed is very short compared to the life that you have to live here." It is taken to imply that if only it would dawn that the life to be lived in hereafter is long, the man might strive to improve his lot in the mortal world, in order to find comfort in hereafter.

We may now dwell in what the Ayah (23:115) implies. It implies accountability for our deeds, as creation is a purposeful exercise. Man is not created in vain; he has to fulfil the deed ordained.

Someone who
truly cared

Hands that heal and the legacy of
SKIMS Plastic Surgery Department

operation theatre, this young doctor always went about alone and beyond. During his night duties, he would hardly ever stop for a nap. Even sleep seemed terrified of him.

Dr Umar would visit me often, not just as a physician checking a patient, but as someone who truly cared. In him I found something rare—a doctor, a brother, a friend, and a teacher, all at once. He understood that beyond surgical procedures, patients need love, sympathy, and a sense of belonging. His top-most quality as a physician is his humility and his deep love for his patients.

Among those I carry closest in memory: Dr Inam, Dr Adil Bashir, Dr Adil Hafiz, Dr Umar, Dr Mohsin, Dr Tariq—and the many others, including the devoted paramedical staff, whose quiet dedication was equally invaluable. They do not just wear white coats; they carry the profound responsibility of restoring hope. I thank them for stitching hope, along with my wounds, back into my soul when I needed it most.

While a coat over the shoulder technically signifies a medical professional, it truly symbolises peace, sympathy, service, and humanity. A doctor is not just a physical presence; they are a beacon of hope to the patient. In medical science, it may be a career, but in medical humanities, it symbolises love and warmth. Even a small, kind gesture or a conversation with a doctor can heal a patient in ways prescribed medicines sometimes fail to.

Dr Umar Farooq, a professor in the Department of Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery at SKIMS, stands in a league of his own. Beneath his white apron lies a rare combination of immense expertise, warmth and love for his patients that never wavers. His unwavering dedication to his work is not just professional; it is deeply human (which every doctor must possess) and is unforgettable.

More than a decade ago, one fine day, this young and energetic doctor arrived in Ward 6 of SKIMS. With a gentle smile, his white coat reflected his deep dedication to his patients. Despite being young and early in his career, he was always on his toes to serve the ward. As the days passed, I began to observe how he treated patients. From morning rounds to dressing patients and to the

As a teacher, his rigour may seem demanding—but it is simply the reflection of a person who knows that medicine tolerates no half-measures. I remember one morning when he led rounds. A patient's head bandage did not satisfy him. He called all the young/junior doctors around the bed and asked them to demonstrate the technique, as head bandaging requires extra expertise and art. Though they tried their best, Dr Umar then personally demonstrated and taught them the proper way to dress a head wound.

Another brief episode vividly surfaces in my psyche. A toddler was crying and refusing to let the nursing staff insert an intravenous (IV) line. They even asked his mother to hold him. As he approached, the child jumped on the bed and cried intensely. Instead of escalating the situation, Dr Umar approached the child and, without wasting a moment, held his arm. As the nurse prepared the injection, he quickly and skillfully found the vein and completed the task. As he left, he smiled at the child with warmth that melted away all fear and pain. The entire ward felt fragrant with the sweetness of his compassion.

His dedication, empathy, and ability to provide comfort, healing, and reassurance have always made him a star in the hospital.

Author is an Asst. Prof. English in the Department of Higher Education, J&K

Edit

An inescapable imperative

Blue Ocean Business Strategy is the way forward for Kashmiri startups



Dr. Saad Parvez
saadparvez@nitsri.ac.in

In business, the common question asked is: "How can I do what my competitors are doing, but a little better?" A much more powerful question is: "Can I do something different enough that customers begin to see my business in a completely new way?" This captures the central spirit of Blue Ocean Strategy. The term Blue Ocean Strategy was developed by professors W. Chan Kim and Renée Mauborgne. In their framework, a "red ocean" represents an existing, crowded marketplace where businesses fight over established customers and compete on familiar factors such as price, quality, location, advertising and distribution. A "blue ocean," by contrast, is a new market space created by redefining the value proposition offered to customers and generating new demand. The central principle is value innovation: pursuing differentiation and lower cost simultaneously rather than treating them as mutually exclusive choices. This idea is particularly valuable for startups, small businesses, retailers, manufacturers, designers, service providers and entrepreneurs, because a small business often cannot outspend a large competitor. But it may be able to outthink, out-design, out-serve or out-imagine one.

What Is a Blue Ocean?
Imagine a street with twenty fruit sellers. Every seller has exactly the same apples, oranges, bananas and grapes. Every seller watches the others and tries to charge ₹ 5. One puts up a bigger sign, another shouts louder, a third gives an occasional discount. This is a red ocean. Now imagine that after reading this article and understanding the concept, an intelligent and creative fruit seller changes the experience. He keeps the fruit exceptionally clean and attractively arranged. He sorts fruit according to ripeness and offers customers a small tasting piece. He remembers regular customers' preferences. He smiles, greets people warmly and says something pleasant even when the customer is in a bad mood. He offers a convenient small fruit box for office workers and a ready-to-eat fruit pack for elderly customers. He accepts digital payments and delivers within a short radius. None of these ideas, by itself, is a technological breakthrough. But together they

can change the proposition from: "I sell fruit," to: "I provide a pleasant, trustworthy and convenient fruit-buying experience." That is the beginning of blue-ocean thinking. The fruit seller can become a brand. The conventional approach is: Buy → display → sell → collect money. The blue-ocean entrepreneur thinks differently. He might create: "Fresh Fruit for Busy People" Instead of simply selling whole fruit, he provides office fruit boxes; family packs; peeled, washed and cut fruit; breakfast combinations; seasonal fruit baskets; subscription deliveries; children's healthy-snack boxes; fruit baskets for hospitals or workplaces. Now the business is no longer competing solely with other fruit sellers. It is competing with breakfast snacks, packaged foods, convenience stores and unhealthy impulse purchases. This is an important principle of Blue Ocean.

The important point, however, is that *courtesy alone does not automatically constitute a Blue Ocean Strategy*. A simple, polite words, or good behaviour becomes strategically significant when you deliberately incorporate it into a customer-value proposition that distinguishes the business and creates or attracts demand. Blue Ocean is a mindset before it is a Technique. Many entrepreneurs begin with the question: "Who are my competitors?" Blue-ocean thinking begins with another question: "Why should the customer have to choose between the alternatives that already exist?" This changes the entrepreneur's thinking. Instead of asking: How can I sell cheaper? How can I advertise more? How can I copy the successful competitor? How can I get a larger shop? How can I offer the same product with a slightly different colour? The entrepreneur asks: What frustrates customers? What do customers hate because the industry has no alternative? Which customers are currently ignored? What can I eliminate? What can I simplify? What can I improve? What can I introduce that customers did not previously expect? Can I make the product easier, faster, safer, more enjoyable or more trustworthy? This is where innovation begins.

Blue Ocean thinking is sometimes associated with spectacular inventions, but is useful innovation that necessarily requires a laboratory. It can begin with *human behaviour*. Consider the ordinary retailer. Thousands of shops sell similar products. Their prices may be almost identical. Their suppliers may even be identical. One retailer, however, establishes a different philosophy: "Every customer who enters my shop should leave feeling respected." The retailer trains himself and his employees to: greet customers; listen carefully; explain products honestly;

admit when a product is unsuitable; avoid aggressive selling; offer reasonable discounts where possible; make exchanges simple; remember regular customers; treat difficult customers calmly; thank customers even when they buy something inexpensive. This may sound like basic good manners. Yet in markets where customers frequently encounter indifference, pressure selling or poor after-sales service, *trust itself can become part of the product*. The shop is no longer merely selling shoes, clothes, electronics or groceries. It is selling: product + convenience + trust + respect + experience. That combination can create differentiation without requiring enormous capital.

“

Kashmir's business, entrepreneurship, and startup ecosystem have reached a critical juncture where Blue Ocean Strategy is fast becoming a necessity rather than a choice.

For a designer adopting a Blue Ocean Strategy, the idea is not just to make a better product but to redefine the product. For designers and manufacturers, Blue Ocean Strategy can be even more powerful. A common mistake is to add features simply because competitors have added them. If Company A has ten features, Company B introduces fifteen. Soon the customer is overwhelmed, production costs rise, and nobody has fundamentally changed the market. Blue-ocean design asks a different question: *Which features actually matter to customers, and which exist only because the industry has always offered them?* A designer might eliminate unnecessary complexity; make a product easier to operate; reduce the number of components; improve portability; make maintenance easier; combine two products; design for an ignored customer group; make a premium product affordable; or make an ordinary product remarkably beautiful. The objective is not innovation for its own sake. It is useful innovation. The Blue Ocean framework calls this *value innovation*: raising buyer value while simultaneously seeking cost advantages through eliminating or reducing factors on which an industry traditionally competes.

A gym that caters exclusively to experienced fitness enthusiasts may compete with hundreds of gyms. A business that designs exercise programs specifically for elderly people, office workers, women returning to exercise,

people intimidated by conventional gyms, or families wanting to exercise together may discover an entirely different demand. The innovation is not necessarily the exercise itself. It is who the business is designed for and how the experience is delivered.

A restaurant can stop thinking: "We are another restaurant." It might instead become: "We provide healthy five-minute meals for office workers." A bookstore might become: "A quiet community learning space with books." A clothing store might become: "A personal styling service for people who hate shopping." A mechanic might become: "A transparent car-maintenance service where every repair is photographed and explained before work begins." The underlying product remains recognisable. The value proposition changes.

Honesty, trust, and sincerity have to be a part of blue ocean strategy and used as competitive differentiators. This is another form of innovation that modern businesses sometimes underestimate. Advertisers frequently tell customers: "We are the best." Blue-ocean marketing can sometimes begin with something much more credible: "Here is what our product does well—and here is where it may not be suitable for you." Imagine an electronics retailer telling a customer: "You don't need the expensive model. The cheaper one will do everything you need." The retailer has potentially sacrificed a little immediate revenue to create something much more valuable: credibility. The next time that customer needs a product, whom are they likely to remember? The seller who tried to maximize their transaction—or the seller who helped them make a sensible decision? Trust can therefore become a long-term business asset. But once again, sincerity should not be treated merely as a slogan. It has to be embedded in business processes: transparent pricing; honest product descriptions; clear warranties; straightforward refunds; no hidden charges; realistic promises; acknowledgement of mistakes; genuine after-sales support. In this way, *honesty becomes operational innovation* rather than advertising language.

Kashmir's business, entrepreneurship, and startup ecosystem has reached a critical juncture where Blue Ocean Strategy is fast becoming a necessity rather than a choice. The traditional Red Ocean approach—competing for the same customers through price, imitation, and conventional methods—must give way to innovation, differentiation, and the creation of new markets.

Saad Parvez, Director, Greenovator Incubation Foundation PI-TBI-DST Project, National Institute Of Technology Srinagar

When the narrative runs ahead of reality

A political narrative is like a horse that a rider can mount but cannot completely control

Politics
Sheikh Younis Amin
sheikhyounis123@gmail.com

When the Narrative Runs Ahead of Reality, Jammu and Kashmir is not an ordinary political geography. Its location, its history, its wars and the circumstances in which its politics evolved have made it one of the most politically sensitive regions of India. Its political journey, too, has been unlike that of most other parts of the country.

From the politics of accession and the early constitutional debates to the later movements for greater autonomy, self-rule and other political formulations, and eventually the politics surrounding Article 370 and the present demand for restoration of statehood, Jammu and Kashmir has traversed through several political phases. Yet one uncomfortable question continues to remain: what has each phase ultimately delivered to the ordinary citizen?

There is a pattern worth examining. Political movements rise with enormous expectations. Streets become crowded, slogans become louder and political narratives acquire a life of their own. But when the dust settles,

the common man is often left asking what actually changed in his life.

And yet, elections bring the narratives back.

Political parties know that elections are not fought merely on government schemes, statistics or administrative performance. They are also fought on emotions, aspirations and perceptions. In Jammu and Kashmir, this becomes even more pronounced because the political question is deeply connected with the sense of identity and regional aspirations of the people.

This does not mean that people are foolish enough to believe every political promise. Nor does it mean that every aspiration emerging from Kashmir should be viewed with suspicion. The aspirations of the people of Jammu and Kashmir are real. When genuine political representation, protection of local interests, employment opportunities, land rights or restoration of constitutional arrangements is not, by itself, an act of disloyalty to the nation, India's Constitution has become a different arrangement for different parts of the country. Regional aspirations can therefore exist within the constitutional framework of India.

The problem begins when political parties convert legiti-

mate aspirations into promises that they either cannot fulfil or have little control over fulfilling.

This is where narrative-building becomes dangerous—not because narratives are inherently wrong, but because once created, they acquire a momentum of their own.

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Political parties know that elections are not fought merely on government schemes, statistics or administrative performance. They are also fought on emotions, aspirations and perceptions.

The recent electoral politics of Jammu and Kashmir offered a familiar example. Political parties sought to establish themselves as the strongest voice against New Delhi. The language became progressively sharper, rights had to be restored, powers had to be reclaimed, and the Centre had to be confronted.

The political message was simple: we are the people who can stand up to Delhi.

But politics has an inconvenient habit. The rhetoric of an election campaign eventually meets the arithmetic of governance. A political narrative is like a horse that a rider can mount but cannot completely control. Before getting on, the rider may decide where he wants to go. Once the horse begins to run, however, the rider has to respond to its movement, its speed and the terrain ahead.

Thus the problem with political narratives: they may win applause in the moment, but they also create expectations. And expectations, once created, cannot simply be wished away after the election. This is perhaps where Jammu and Kashmir's politics needs a fundamental change.

The objective should not be to permanently create a political confrontation between Srinagar and New Delhi. The objective should be to give voice to the people of Jammu and Kashmir and the rest of the country, and equally, trust between Jammu and Kashmir and the Union Government.

The political leadership of Jammu and Kashmir needs to communicate something very clearly: political disagreement with the Union Government is a democratic right, but disagreement does not have to become confrontation with the Indian Union.

Readings

Beyond the Absurd

The Sacred, Beauty, and the Recovery of Meaning in Maroof Shah's *Why I Am Not an Absurdist*

Review

Wani Nazir

nrwani@gmail.com

There are questions that come to mind and then vanish. There are also questions that remain tucked away, like a stone in the mouth, weighing heavily each time we attempt to speak around it.

Why I Am Not an Absurdist: A Journey Beyond Meaninglessness is a journey of the second kind. It is not a book written because its author has found an answer. It is written because the question of meaning refuses to go away.

Maroof Shah does not enter this territory as an external historian standing outside the question, but already inside it. In his view, meaninglessness isn't just something which can be set beside something else for examination. It is an attitude, a way of being present in what is happening. If meaning is to be recovered, it cannot be merely recovered as one more conclusion. The act of seeing requires a transformation.

Shah initiates with a definition. Absurdism can be described as "any philosophical position that finds no (absolute) meaning in life." It is also described as the position in which humanity's longing for "goodness, perfection, lasting peace, love, etc." is ultimately an illusion.

Surprisingly, this position does not compel Shah to turn away from the darkness that suggests itself. He goes in. Willing to stand beside the silence, he asks whether the silence belongs to the universe or to us.

What if reality has not lost its meaning? Could it be that we have become unable to see what mean-

ing looks like?

In opposition to this impoverishment, Shah reconsiders the issue of meaning itself. "What is the meaning of life?" He refers to it as one of "the most pertinent and challenging question man has ever asked and continues to ask," and which man continues to solicit.

People are still asking it even after philosophies tell them the question does not have an answer. The craving dominates the conflict. In the wake of demystifying metaphysics, longing continues.

Albert Camus enters Shah's book at the threshold. Camus's philosophy may insist upon metaphysical silence, yet beauty continually interrupts his writing.

Shah is certainly aware of these interruptions. There is an 'opening to transcendence' in Camus's reflections on art and beauty.

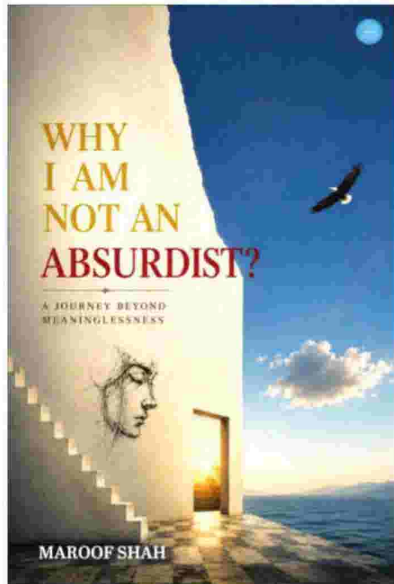
The most interesting point of contact between them may be this one. Shah's disagreement with absurdism is logical, certainly. It is participatory. He questions whether the things Camus holds dear, like beauty, love, creation, etc., can exist in a universe perceived to be indifferent to them. Shah does not have to claim Camus was really religious.

For Shah, beauty is not an adornment put on after philosophy is done with reality. Beauty is one way that an aspect of the real comes. He writes, "Aesthetic experience and mystic experience are not very different when we penetrate deeper into the phenomenology of experience."

However, Shah is conversant with the hazards of transforming beauty into a shortcut to metaphysics. He states that the "aesthetic turn as a substitute for metaphysics cannot go very far."

Beauty can't be brought in as testimony. It must initially be allowed to shorten to metaphysics. The experience takes place before the proposition. One must encounter the flower before the flower becomes an argument.

Shah consistently revisits this phenomenon, which he refers to



as intellectual intuition. This is a method of knowing that does not reduce the world to concepts.

This alters the philosophical issue. Maybe meaning is not produced. It may be possible to encounter the sacred without expanding the sense of self. It might need to lessen.

Shah discusses how we should "empty ourselves of the little false divinity" and that we are at the centre of the world.

Nihilism must be overcome by superimposing any other ideology

on it. A profound healing involves a shift in one's identity. The centre of gravity shifts. The self that needs to measure all things eventually realizes it is all lacking. The self that learns to receive can discover that even the ordinary has no final edge.

Shah disagrees with absurdism, suggesting that our beings encourage us to listen and respond to our environment. Even in a secular world, people still make art. They keep writing after the disaster. They persist in their singing regardless of loss. Even in a world

that has been declared devoid of meaning, they continue to search for beauty.

At times, Shah jumps this gap quickly from intuition of transcendence to conclusion of transcendence. Had the argument included in-depth philosophical accounts of desire, projection, and existential construction, it would have been stronger.

The phenomenological insight survives, even where the metaphysical inference remains contestable.

We are changed by beauty. It hampers service. It urges us to observe without owning. For a brief moment, the ego becomes less important.

Aesthetic and mystical experience may meet not because both make proof about God, but because both may alter the structure of attention.

The sacred does not require us to leave the world. It invites us back to its fold. A flower will always be a flower. The face continues to be one. The second passes still. Nothing externally has necessarily changed. And yet the awareness examining has transformed.

Awe permits us "to sense the ultimate in the common and the simple."

This is also where Wittgenstein naturally enters. We can arrive at this interpretation through the turning away from one language to another. What cannot be said can at least be shown.

According to Shah, "Prayer and praise for life are keys to countering nihilism." This is all so delightfully uncomplicated.

Praising life is a deliberate choice to reject existence being thrown away. When we do not attend to something, we allow the world to become so familiar that it disappears.

The essence of love is finding value in the other, which cannot be exhausted by usefulness. To experience beauty, one might feel that the world is bigger than anything we can say about it.

Shah's work is marked by tensions, and they should remain vis-

“

Maroof Shah does not enter this territory as an external historian standing outside the question, but already inside it.

ible. His perennialist framework sometimes brings traditions into a harmony that is smoother than their historical and doctrinal differences allow. Buddhism, Advaita, Islamic mysticism, Christian mysticism, Jewish theology, and Wittgenstein do not have to come to one point merely because they can be put under the wide roof of transcendence.

In his interpretation of Camus, he at times goes too far in his categorizing, especially when he treats Camus' ethics of solidarity as requiring a metaphysical ground that, quite simply, Camus refuses.

But these tensions do not detract from the book's main achievement. Shah's writing invites a change in the question rather than a rebuttal of absurdism.

We must analyze the universe and also the way we analyze it. The mystic may embrace nature, but the nihilist has disdain. They may stand before the same death, silence, and an inexpressible beauty as we do.

This is the reason Shah's book comes to Heidegger's image of existence, which is quite a work of art. The metaphor is of the weaving together of various strands of the argument: a life does not become meaningful just because it has come with an explained delivery. We can create meaning through attention, love, courage, wonder, and gratitude.

The absurd claims: the world does not respond.

Perhaps we have mistaken sense for absence, replied Shah.

The world may have been speaking in another grammar? Not proof grammar. However, the grammar of beauty. Of focus. Concerning affection. From a sudden light that rests on a common thing.

It may be the case that we elevate above all when we stop forcing the world to give an explanation. Instead, once it has ceased to be empty, we start to see its beauty.

Wani Nazir, Senior Lecturer in English in the Department of Education, J&K. He has authored two books, *The Silence Whispered* and *The Chill in the Bones*.

A 700-year-old prayer

A review of Late Abdul Rauf Fazili's English translation of *Awrad-e-Fathiyya*

Supplication

Rafeeq Masoodi, IBIS (Retd.)

rafeeqmasoodi55@gmail.com

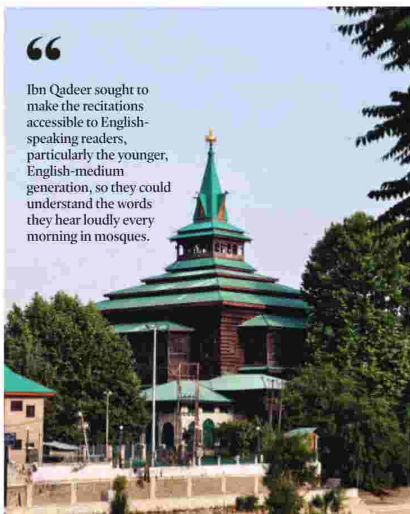
Some books are not just books. They are the breath of a nation. *Awrad-e-Fathiyya* is one such book which was put into English by Late Abdul Rauf Fazili, also known as Ibn e Qadeer, of Bandipora who passed away this summer.

This book was presented to me by its author almost two decades ago, on 2nd October 2006.

Fazili Sb. belonged to a distinguished lineage of scholars and historians. He was a direct descendant of the celebrated Kashmiri historian *Maulvi Hassan Shah (Hassan Khuiham)*, whose monumental *Tarikh-i-Hassan* remains one of the most important chronicles of Kashmir's history.

He was the son of **Abdul Qadeer Fazili** who believed that education was not confined to books, it was a way of living, and the brother of **Prof. Manzoor Fazili**, a noted political scientist and author of many books, **Mr. Mansoor Fazili**, a scientist, and **Mr. Muzaffar Fazili**, a broadcaster. What a remarkable family of learning and scholarship. May Allah be pleased with them all and bless them with His mercy. Ameen.

For the last seven hundred years, there has not been a single morning in Kashmir, Ladakh and Central Asia when this prayer has not been recited. After the Fajr Azan, from the Khanqah-e-Moula in Srinagar to the smallest village mosque in Kupwara, Anantnag, Leh or elsewhere in Kashmir wakes up with one



voice - *Marhaba-bi-Sabahi Jadid*. Welcome to the new morning.

This is the compilation of Quranic verses and Prophetic supplications gifted to Kashmiris by the great Iranian Saint, Amir-e-Kaboor Mir Syed Ali Hamdani (RA) (1314-1384 AD), who visited Kashmir in 1372 AD along with hundreds of Syyeds. Kashmir was then ruled by Sultan Shihab-ud-Din, the fourth Muslim ruler, who had annexed Punjab, Sindh, Kabul and little Tibet to his kingdom. It was Shah-i-Hamdan who made peace between Shihab-ud-Din and Feruz Shah Tughlaq of Delhi.

When he visited again during the reign of Qutub-ud-Din, he established a school to teach Quran and Hadith at Qutub-ud-Din Pora, Srinagar. This school continued till the Sikhs annexed Kashmir in 1819. Its alumni include Mullah Mohsin Fani, Mullah Tahir Gani and Mullah Johar Nath.

Shah-i-Hamdan was a great Sufi saint, author and reformist. He wrote in Persian and Arabic. His famous treatise on political ethics, *Zakhiyatul Maluk*, remained a favourite with scholars in pre-Mughal India. But out of his scores of books, Kashmiris adopted

Awrad-e-Fathiyya as their most sacred daily liturgy — to the extent that prayers are considered incomplete without its recitation. All sects — Sunnis, Shias, Noor Bakhs — recite it together. Such is its unifying power. With its regular recitation, monotheism got imbedded in the heart of every Kashmiri.

And yet, for seven centuries, this treasure remained confined to Arabic. It was translated into Urdu and Kashmiri in the early fifties, and a Persian translation also exists. But no authentic English translation was available. It is reported that an engineer, Mr. Ghulam Hassan Khan, attempted it in the mid-20th century and a philanthropist printed a few hundred copies, but it could not be traced.

It was this 700-year-old gap that Ibn Qadeer (Abdul Rauf Fazili) has filled.

The book in hand is *Awrad-e-Fathiyya — The Opening Recitation*, translated into English by Ibn Qadeer. The copy I have was reverently inscribed and dedicated to Dr. Rafeeq Masoodi by Abdul Rauf Fazili (Ibn Qadeer) on 2 October 2006.

The book opens with a foreword by Syed Noor-ul-Hassan Rufai, former Chief Conservator of Forests. Rufai Sb. and Ibn Qadeer Sb. shared a close friendship and spent many memorable years together as professional foresters.

Rufai Sahib traces the history of Kashmir from the troubled 6th century, when Hun King Mihirgula tried to force Buddhists to adopt Hinduism, to 570 AD, the year Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was born in Makkah and Islam began a new chapter in history. He then moves to 1015 AD, when Mahmud of Ghazni failed to conquer Kashmir, and finally to the arrival of Shah Mir and Kincehan Shah, a Buddhist prince who embraced Islam after meeting Syed Abdul Rehman Bulbul Shah and became Kashmir's first Muslim ruler, taking the name Sadr-ud-Din.

Kashmir of Maharaja Ranjit Singh

A secular minded person who never forced Sikhism on his subjects



History

Commodore DS Sodhi, NM (Retd.)

sodhidabir7777@gmail.com

Kashmir was administered by different rulers of various faiths. The religion, belief and origin of these rulers had an obvious and unique impact on the architecture of Kashmir. As a run up to the Sikh rule, I have chosen to build up starting from the Mughal rule. 14 Oct 1586 was the darkest chapter in the history of Kashmir when it witnessed the invasion by Mughals through treachery. The Mughals were followed by the Afghans in 1763. Whilst inviting the Afghans to take over the administration of the valley, the Kashmiri nobles had mistaken them as civilized and humane emperors of India. However, on this miscalculation PNK Bamzai has written "Their (Afghan's) rule reduced the valley to the lowest depths of penury, degradation and slavery."

Maharaj Ranjit Singh desired to extend his rule to a larger territory and his dream was realised to a great extent with the help of many of his Army commanders that included Sikhs, Muslims, Hindus as also Europeans. Wafa Begum the wife of imprisoned ex-Afghan king Shah Shuja had met Maharaja Ranjit Singh in Lahore and sought help for his release. In return she had offered to give Kohinoor diamond to the Maharaja.

In the year 1812, Ranjit Singh agreed to help Fateh Khan with 12,000 troops under Diwan Mokham Chand to invade Kashmir. NK Sinha in his book "Ranjit Singh" writes that "Ranjit's chief motive in joining Fateh Khan was not so much the lure of a heavy money payment, nor the hope of getting

Kashmir itself by some stratagem as the desire to acquire local knowledge for future use. Another motive of Ranjit Singh in participating in this expedition was his eagerness to get Shah Shuja, the ex-king who was a closed prisoner of Ata Muhammad Khan in Kashmir". In the first week of Dec 1812 Sikh forces under Diwan Mokham Chand in the harsh weather conditions entered the valley with a handful of soldiers led by Jodh Singh Kalsia and Nihal Singh Attari. Ata Muhammad initially offered resistance but finally surrendered and the Sikhs and Afghans forces occupied the fort Hari Parbat. The allies got a huge booty. Shah Shuja was released and taken to Lahore. Wafa Begum handed over the Kohinoor to the Maharaja. With this adventure, the Sikh forces got acquainted to the terrain surrounding Kashmir, a successful reconnaissance and had an appreciation of quality, strength and weakness of the Afghan forces.

In the years 1813 and 1814, Maharaja Ranjit Singh's forces made failed attempts to annex Kashmir. His forces had to return from Pir Panjal valley harsh weather conditions as well as resistance offered by Afghan forces in Shopian.

Since the Kashmiri Pandits had become tired of tolerating the atrocities and forced conversions, Pandit Birbal Dhar along with his son Raja Kak somehow reached Lahore and pleaded with Maharaja to liberate the Kashmiris from Afghans. Maharaja Ranjit Singh wanted to consolidate his power and authority over a larger extended empire and his interest in Kashmir was very obvious. In the year 1819, a huge army got together in Wazirabad and it was divided into three contingents (first under command of Mir Diwan Chand, Sham Singh Attari, S Har Singh, Jagat Singh Attari, Jawala Singh and Rattan Singh. Second under Kanwar Kharak Singh and third under Ranjit Singh himself). The Sikh forces under Mir Diwan Chand as well as Akali Phoolan Singh took position at Sarai Ali Shopia.

(The author is Former Deputy Assistant Chief of Headquarters Integrated Staff (IT), Author and Social Activist.)

Amit Shah roared at BJP's mega rally

The four drug-free marches organized by the BJP, covering Punjab's 117 assembly constituencies since September 15th, culminated in a mega rally in Jalandhar on Wednesday, September 30th. Union Home Minister Amit Shah specially traveled to Jalandhar to address the rally. After paying obeisance at the Siddha Shaktipeeth Shri Devi Talab Temple, Shah arrived at the rally site in Paragpur. The rally site, built on 60 acres of land, included a pandal, 45 acres of which were decorated, and four parking lots were set up on 15 acres. For security reasons, the area was declared a no-fly zone from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Amit Shah arrived at the rally on time. Punjab BJP President Kewal Singh Dhillon welcomed him, saying that this was not just a rally, but an opportunity to raise his voice for Punjab. Party workers began arriving at the rally site late at night. Punjab BJP in-charge Satish Poonia and State BJP President Kewal Dhillon had been busy preparing for the rally since the day before. Amit Shah's clarion call against drug abuse at the Drug Free Rally could also be considered the beginning of the campaign for the 2027 Punjab Assembly elections. Addressing the rally as part of the Drug Free Campaign, Amit Shah stated, "Our resolve is to completely eliminate drug abuse from Punjab before December 31, 2029. If the people of the state give us one chance, there will be no drug dealers in the state by December 31, 2029. You have seen the Congress and other parties, so give the BJP one chance, and we will transform Punjab." He also stated that he would find solutions to farmers' problems and provide employment to the youth. Praising Punjab, the Home Minister said that whenever there has been a food shortage in the country, Punjab's farmers have replenished the country's food reserves. Furthermore, when it comes to national security, the youth of Punjab are the first to sacrifice their lives. Even today, when the slogan "Jo Bole So Nihal" is raised in the army, the Pakistani army runs away.

Amit Shah assured the people of the state that just as the BJP has eradicated Naxalism in the Northeast, they intend to work with the same determination and strength in Punjab. Amit Shah appealed to the people to give the BJP a chance and see that they will fulfill their promise of making the state prosperous. In our view, the BJP wants to create a renaissance among the people by prioritizing drug eradication in its election campaign this time. Punjab is a border state bordering enemy Pakistan. Drone infiltration from Pakistan not only drops consignments of weapons into the Indian border, but also operates a large drug smuggling network.

Meanwhile, some misguided and anti-national elements within the country spread consignments of weapons and drugs further into the country. If the BJP has come to its election campaign with the pledge to eradicate the scourge of drug abuse from Punjab, it is timely. Punjab is known for its youth, strength, and prosperity; this should always remain so. In our view, beyond politics, whether the central government or the Punjab government's war against drugs is successful, it is in the best interest of the state of Punjab and its youth.

-Abhishek Vij

India seeks new trade avenues

The current global climate, coupled with the protracted war between the US and Iran, has created a supply crisis for India, like other countries. Furthermore, India has set a goal of transforming its country from an import-based economy to an export-based one. To achieve this, it is crucial that the channels for selling goods from our country are easy, accessible, cost-effective, and time-consuming. Since the disruption of container movement on the main Strait of Hormuz, Gulf countries have been searching for alternative routes for trade. Unfortunately, the Houthis rebels have prevented any such route from operating.

A similar situation has arisen in India-Pakistan relations. We cannot use Pakistan's airspace; when we take detours to deliver our products to specific countries, it not only takes longer but also increases costs. Recently, when Chinese President Xi Jinping visited India and held talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, one of the proposals was that if India were granted Chinese airspace for trade, it would provide an alternative route. This would save both time and money.

India wants its airlines to explore the possibility of using Chinese airspace over Xinjiang in China. If this becomes possible, it would facilitate travel to Europe and North America and reduce fuel consumption. The closure of Pakistani airspace has currently increased these costs. Extensive discussions have taken place between India and China to enhance trade relations. India wants to expand its aviation and increase connectivity.

Chinese airspace is crucial for this goal. Parts of Xinjiang airspace fall within the Chinese military's reserve. However, if this permission is granted through mutual negotiations, it is estimated that weekly expenditures for Indian exporters would be reduced by \$1.13 million. India is negotiating with China to allow the use of the Xinjiang corridor. If this is achieved, a major program to promote India's exports could be launched, and Pakistan would also learn that if it closes its airspace, India has other options.

Captain Smit Machchhar: The Hero Indian Pilot

Captain Smit Machchhar, an Indian pilot with flydubai, has been credited by Israeli officials with helping avert a major mid-air disaster after a violent altercation erupted in the cockpit of flight FZ1073.

The Dubai-to-Tel Aviv flight was diverted to Saudi Arabia after the captain was allegedly stabbed by his co-pilot.

The Boeing 737 flight was carrying more than 170 passengers. According to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the co-pilot attacked Machchhar and attempted to interfere with the aircraft's controls. Despite being injured, Machchhar is reported to have opened the cockpit door, allowing a crew member and passengers to enter and restrain the other pilot.

The aircraft experienced a sharp loss of altitude during the struggle before control was restored. It was subsequently diverted to Tabuk in northwestern Saudi Arabia, where it landed safely. All passengers were reported safe, while both pilots were taken for medical treatment. India's embassy in Riyadh later said Machchhar was in stable condition.

Machchhar has been flying with flydubai since June 2022, according to his LinkedIn profile, after spending more than a decade with Indian low-cost carrier SpiceJet. Reports citing



his professional profile say he has more than 13 years of commercial aviation experience and has accumulated nearly 10,000 hours of flying experience on Boeing 737 aircraft.

Before joining flydubai, Machchhar served in several roles at SpiceJet, including as a line-training captain and senior commander. He joined the airline in 2011 and moved to flydubai as a direct-entry captain in 2022.

According to accounts of his career, Machchhar initially pursued studies connected to his family's textile business before deciding to enter aviation. He has spoken in a podcast about discovering his interest in flying while attending an aviation-related seminar during a management course.

He subsequently underwent pilot training in New Zealand. In the podcast, Machchhar recalled

that his training cost around Rs 16-17 lakh and that his mother was initially worried about his decision to pursue aviation, while his father was more accepting of the career choice.

The incident aboard FZ1073 took place while the aircraft was travelling from Dubai International Airport to Ben Gurion International Airport in Israel. Flydubai confirmed that an incident occurred on the flight deck and that the aircraft was diverted to Tabuk, where it landed safely. The airline has said its flights to and from Israel would be suspended while the incident is investigated.

Netanyahu also praised Machchhar and the passengers and crew members who intervened during the cockpit struggle. However, details surrounding the incident, including the motive of the other pilot and the precise sequence of events, remain under investigation. Flydubai has urged against speculation before the inquiry is completed.

The passengers were later transported to Israel after the emergency diversion, while authorities continued investigating the incident.

Several foreign envoys and diplomatic missions in India lauded Captain Smit Machchhar for his courage that averted a major tragedy and saved hundreds of lives midair.

The remarks came amid growing international recognition

of Captain Machchhar's role in averting the threat aboard FlyDubai flight FZ1073.

During the incident, the co-pilot stabbed Captain Machchhar and the aircraft began to plummet. The Indian fought the assailant bravely and opened the cockpit door, following which passengers rushed to assist, entered the cockpit, and overpowered the attacker.

Once the attacker was subdued, the seriously wounded Indian pilot was stabilised until the aircraft made an emergency landing in Saudi Arabia.

Sri Lankan High Commissioner to India, Maheshini Colonne, also praised the Indian pilot for his "extraordinary courage" and "presence of mind" in helping save the lives of passengers and crew. Meanwhile, the Israeli Embassy in India also expressed its gratitude to Captain Machchhar, praising his bravery and role in saving several lives, including Israeli passengers aboard the flight.

The bravery of Captain Smit Machchhar and others in a moment of danger reminds us of the deep bond between our peoples - built on courage, solidarity, and a shared belief in the strength of humanity.

His bravery is a powerful reminder that the India-Israel friendship is built not only between nations, but between people who stand by one another when it matters most.

THOUGHT OF THE DAY

"You only live once, but if you do it right, once is enough." *Mae West*

Why You Need to Eat Apple and Tomato



As there's no doubt that smoking can cause serious health related problems and also up the risk of cancer, but now, according to a recent study, smokers might be able to undo some of the damage to their lungs. A new study revealed that there are certain foods which might actually slow declining lung function both in smokers and nonsmokers.

According to this recent research, eating three apples a day slows down the natural aging of the lungs and repairs damage caused by smoking.

The researchers also found the same life-extending benefits are achieved by consuming two tomatoes each day.

Talking about the study, co-author Vanessa Garcia-Larsen of the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health in Baltimore said, "This study shows that diet might help repair lung damage in people who have stopped smoking. The findings support the need for dietary recommendations, especially for people at risk of developing respiratory diseases such as COPD."

In the study, scientists analysed data from 680 people in Germany, England and Norway who signed up for a health survey in 2002.

Participants answered a questionnaire and underwent two types of lung-function tests at the start, then again 10 years later.

One test measures how much air a person can expel in a second, the other how much they could inhale in six seconds. Other factors, such as the participants' age, height, weight, gender, income and level of physical activity, were taken into account in analysing any association between diet and lung health.

The study showed the diet can slow natural ageing. Among former smokers, the diet-lung-function connection was even more striking. Garcia-Larsen concluded by saying, "Lung function starts to decline at around age 30 at variable speed depending on the general and specific health of individuals. Our study suggests that eating more fruits on a regular basis can help attenuate the decline as people age, and might even help repair damage caused by smoking. Diet could become one way of combating rising diagnosis of COPD around the world."

Maha Drought List Triggers MahaYuti Rift



Sanjay Jog

It is not well with the MahaYuti in Maharashtra in the time of drought. A major political controversy erupted in Maharashtra following the MahaYuti government's announcement last week classifying 265 talukas as drought-affected.

The list has triggered sharp resentment among ruling coalition leaders whose constituencies were omitted, while the Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) has accused the state government of "political favoritism."

This fresh dispute has surfaced within four months of the Fadnis government announcing the Punyashlok Ahilyadevi Holkar Farmer Loan Waiver.

Raising serious questions about the transparency of the evaluation metrics, the drought-declared list includes high-rainfall regions such as Mahabaleshwar, Radhanagari, and Shrivardhan.

Out of 358 talukas across 36 districts, only 265 have been included. The drought list covers talukas corresponding to the Assembly constituencies of 28 ministers in the MahaYuti government.

Notable among them are Deputy Chief Minister Sunetra Pawar (Baramati), Revenue Minister Chandrashekar Bawankule (Kamthi), Chhagan Bhujbal (Yeola), Girish Mahajan (Jamner), Gulabrao Patil (Jalgaon Rural), Dadaji Bhuse (Malegaon Outer), Sanjay Rathod (Digras), Uday Samant (Rainagar), Pankaja Munde (Parli), Dattatraya Bharane (Indapur), Aditi Tatkar

(Shrivardhan), Makarand Jadhav-Patil (Wai-Mahabaleshwar) and Prakash Abitkar (Radhanagari).

Other key constituencies featured in the notification include Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis (Nagpur South-West), Sanjay Shirsat (Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar), Nitesh Rane (Kankavli), Akash Fundkar (Khambgaon), Babasaheb Patil (Ahmadpur), Indranil Naik (Pusad), and Meghna Sakore-Bordikar (Jintur).

Conversely, the exclusion of several talukas represented by prominent ministers has raised questions about whether the selection was based solely on objective parameters or whether political considerations also played a role.

Among the excluded areas are Shinde Sena minister Shambhuj Desai's Patan, Hasan Mushrif's Kagal, Radhakrishna Vikhe-Patil's Shirdi, Narhari Zirwal's Dindori, Yogesh Kadam's Dapoli and Bharat Gogawale's Mahad.

The ruling coalition is facing growing pressure from its own cadre over the exclusion of several talukas from the list. An audio clip purportedly featuring Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MP Ashok Chavan has also gone viral on social media.

In the clip, he is heard advising disgruntled party workers to temporarily endure public criticism after they questioned why their taluka had been left out of the list.

In yet another instance, BJP MLA Sumit Wankhede submitted a letter to the Chief Minister requesting the inclusion of his Arvi constituency.

After Fadnis immediately acceded to the demand, Wankhede removed his public post containing the letter from social media.

From First Drop to Clean Streets

As the monsoon approaches and the first rains arrive, cities across India begin preparations to address the seasonal risks associated with waterlogging, waste accumulation, and sanitation. Drains are cleaned, vulnerable locations are identified, and measures are undertaken to maintain cleanliness and public health. Under the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs-led Safai Apnao, Bimaari Bhagao 2025 (SABB) campaign, urban local bodies translated pre-monsoon preparedness into a coordinated cleanliness and public health effort. From 1 July to 31 July 2025, cities undertook drain cleaning, waste removal and hygiene promotion while engaging communities through schools, neighbourhoods and other public spaces.

At the heart of the campaign are the '6 Swachhata Mantras': clean hands, homes, neighbourhoods, toilets, drains and public spaces. Together, these simple practices are becoming part of a larger city-wide effort to keep the monsoon safer and healthier. And across the country, that effort is taking many different forms.

In Delhi, the campaign took the message to its streets and schools. 400 NCC girl cadets led a 3-km Pinkathon, a walkathon promoting monsoon hygiene and sanitation. The campaign saw significant on-the-ground action, including handwashing drives in 255 schools, while 206 cleaning drives covered backlanes and garbage vulnerable points (GVPs). Another 469 sanitation drives were conducted in community and public toilets (CTs and PTs). The Patna Municipal Corporation (PMC) introduced 'Manhole Ambulances' to enhance urban safety and sanitation through swift, on-site manhole repairs. Each ambulance carries prefabricated manhole covers, repair tools, and a dedicated response team for immediate action, especially during rains. PMC repurposed old, unused municipal vehicles into functional units. Six ambulances, one per municipal zone, are operational and linked to PMC's central control room for real-time complaint resolution. The initiative enables citizen-centric grievance redressal and ensures faster responses to manhole-related complaints.

In Navi Mumbai, a Swachhata rally was organised with the



participation of over 600 students, parents, teachers, and citizens. Simultaneously, health awareness camps were held across 26 Urban Primary Health Centres, focusing on malaria and dengue prevention. Over two days, 52 health camps were conducted, reaching more than 22,690 citizens. In Telangana, the campaign reached nearly 13 lakh households. Around 14,210 km of drains were desilted, while 4,343 km of roadside bushes were cleared. Nearly 2.5 lakh houses were covered through anti-dengue and malaria awareness drives. Health

camps also benefited over 8,500 frontline workers. Meanwhile, 140 composting pits were set up in schools, encouraging young citizens to turn waste into manure.

In Chhattisgarh, the story begins with people themselves. In Pandariya, Self-Help Group members received sanitation training and were introduced to the Swachhata App. They then took part in a cleanliness drive. In Raipur, door-to-door outreach promoted hand hygiene and waste segregation, while Garbage Vulnerable Points (GVPs) were cleaned and beautified.

As the monsoon approaches, the Northeast is getting ready not by waiting for the rains, but by preparing for them. Across Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Assam, Sikkim and Tripura, the MoHUA-led SABB campaign is strengthening monsoon preparedness through collective cleanliness and disease prevention.

In Nagaland, Urban local bodies (ULBs) across six towns led school awareness activities, drain cleaning, health camps and cleanup drives. These efforts engaged nearly 5,000 people through 60 cleanliness, 30 rainwater harvesting and 40 post-monsoon awareness drives. Across the hills of Sikkim, the campaign took aim at garbage-prone areas and the risks of water- and vector-borne diseases. Students, officials and Self-Help Groups (SHGs) came together around source segregation and better waste management. Around 4,000 people participated in 100 cleanliness and 100 post-monsoon drives, alongside awareness rallies and PET bottle shredding initiatives. In Assam, towns focused on drain cleaning, garbage removal, SafaiMitra health check-ups and waste segregation. Around 5,500 people joined 200 cleanliness and 40 rainwater harvesting activities,

supported by 160 organisations and NGOs.

In Tripura, ULBs strengthened waste collection, segregation and public toilet maintenance. Around 5,000 people participated in 150 cleanliness and 30 rainwater harvesting drives, alongside health camps, school rallies and sanitation initiatives. Across 47 urban notified towns in Arunachal Pradesh, efforts covered waste management, water quality and public toilet maintenance. Water treatment plants were inspected, while mass cleanliness drives targeted garbage-vulnerable points. These efforts demonstrate how cleanliness and disease prevention can be integrated into everyday community action.

From Backlanes to Clean, Vibrant Neighbourhood Spaces

A backlane refers to the space behind houses in a neighbourhood, generally characterised by limited pedestrian movement. Such areas can become vulnerable to waste accumulation and informal dumping. Recognising this, cities across Madhya Pradesh organised backlane cleaning drives with active public participation. The initiatives included the removal of encroachments and cleaning of drains to facilitate the smooth flow of rainwater during the monsoon. (Courtesy: PIB)

Why Exercise Sometimes Fail in Weight Lose

Are you one of those who exercise daily but are still unable to lose weight? We might have an answer to your question. According to a recent research, obese people may find it harder to lose weight because their fat tissue becomes scarred and inflamed.

The study found that their fat can cease to cope as it increases in size and becomes suffocated by its own expansion.

The scientists examined tissue samples from patients, including those with weight problems who have undergone bariatric surgery. It was seen that fat in obese people can suffocate and struggle for oxygen supply, due in part to the increase in the fat cells' size.

As cells get bigger they become distressed and struggle for oxygen, which triggers inflammation in the fat tissue.

The inflammation spills over from fat tissue into the bloodstream and is eventually measurable in the circulation by a blood test. With fat tissue not being able to do its most vital job, which is storing excess calories, the excess energy can be increasingly diverted from fat tissue to vital organs.

Study's author, Dr Katarina Kos, found that fat tissue is also stiffer and more rigid, and increased levels of scarring can make it harder to lose weight. She said, "Scarring of fat tissue may make weight loss more difficult." Although such people can appear relatively slim, fat can be deposited in their abdomen and in their internal organs, including the liver, pancreas, muscle and the heart. Fat can also be stored around and in the arteries causing arteriosclerosis, a stiffening of

arteries predisposing people to high blood pressure, heart disease and strokes.

She noted that further research is needed to determine how to avoid our fat tissue becoming unhealthy and how to protect it from inflammation and scarring. The study was published in the journal Metabolism.

Obesity has emerged as one of the most pressing global public health challenges of the 21st century. Obesity has reached epidemic proportions worldwide, with over 1 billion people classified as obese in 2022, representing 13 % of the global population. Since 1975, obesity rates have tripled, and projections indicate that by 2035, around 1.9 billion adults—approximately 25 % of the world's population—will be affected. Looking further ahead to 2050, it is estimated that 3.80 billion adults, representing more than half of the anticipated global adult population, will be living with overweight or obesity. The increasing burden of obesity is associated with an alarming rise in non-communicable diseases, including type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, and multiple cancers, collectively contributing to over 5 million deaths annually. Obesity is driven by complex interactions between genetic, behavioral, environmental, and socioeconomic factors, with rapid urbanization and globalization accelerating the consumption of high-calorie diets and sedentary lifestyles. While historically prevalent in high-income nations, obesity rates are now rising most rapidly in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), with over 70 % of obese individuals living in developing nations.

Gulf Energy Disruption Proves India Must Diversify Routes

Disruption to Gulf energy infrastructure poses strategic and economic risks for India and highlights the need for a more diversified and resilient energy strategy.

The report from India Narrative called for alternative supply routes, increase in reserves and renewable energy.

Alternative ports, pipelines, storage facilities and maritime corridors can reduce exposure to any single choke point. Strategic petroleum reserves can provide temporary protection against sudden disruptions and give policymakers additional time to secure alternative supplies.

While renewables and green fuels cannot immediately replace hydrocarbons, they act as a long term hedge that increases resilience to external shocks.

India remains heavily dependent on the Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz for hydrocarbons, with about 60 per cent of its crude oil and LNG imports and nearly 85 per cent of LPG shipments transiting the chokepoint.

Disruption to Gulf LPG supplies has higher immediate social impact than fluctuations in some industrial energy commodities as LPG is directly connected to household consumption.

The huge concentration of energy supplies from the Gulf makes India vulnerable to supply



shocks that can widen the import bill, strain the current account and feed domestic inflation.

The impact extends to sectors beyond oil and gas such as transportation, aviation, logistics, petrochemicals, manufacturing and agriculture, with a prolonged increase in crude prices causing second-order effects throughout the Indian economy.

While Gulf suppliers historically accounted for nearly 88 per cent of India's LPG imports, New Delhi has shown adaptability by sourcing more from alternative suppliers, including the United States, after the West Asian conflict. India has also diversified

LNG supplies to countries such as Oman, Nigeria, Trinidad and Angola, and expanded crude purchases from Russia to shore up refinery feedstock.

The report noted that India's LNG imports after global disruption declined much less than anticipated suggesting the value of diversified sourcing.

Crude oil presents a distinct challenge due to India's huge refining system requiring large and continuous supplies.

It noted that India cannot afford excessive dependence on any single geographical region, even if the area provides commercially viable oil and gas supplies.

How China Ignoring International Law on Intellectual Property Rights

China is increasingly promoting its domestic intellectual property rights (IPR) but, at the same time, sidelining international law as its own companies infringe on patent rights of other countries.

Critics have highlighted that China's model is less about aligning with international standards and more about consolidating domestic control. By framing IPR as a "strategic resource with Chinese characteristics," Beijing signals that global treaties such as the WTO's TRIPS agreement (Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights) or WIPO conventions (World Intellectual Property Organization Conventions) are secondary to national priorities. It highlights that at the 2026

Frankfurt Auto Parts Show, German customs seized 1,274 suspected infringing items, mostly from Chinese exhibitors. Booths were sealed and fines were imposed which exposed the true colours of Chinese companies.

Despite China's claims of strengthening overseas IP protection, its companies continue to face accusations of counterfeiting and patent violations abroad. The CCP's domestic-first approach means that while Chinese firms enjoy protection at home, they remain vulnerable internationally, undermining trust among foreign buyers.

By tightening domestic IP enforcement while sidestepping global norms, China creates a parallel IP ecosystem. This allows it to shield domestic



firms from foreign lawsuits while using IP as leverage in trade disputes. Such selective enforcement distorts markets, enabling Chinese companies to undercut competitors even when accused of IP theft.

It underscores that as part

of the backlash against China, Europe and the United States are erecting ESG-linked trade barriers, requiring compliance not only on IP but also on carbon footprints, labour rights, and environmental standards. This makes China's "domestic-

first" IP model increasingly incompatible with global supply chains.

Domestically, it promotes innovation, protects Chinese firms, and builds national pride. Internationally, it sidesteps global law, enabling continued disputes over forced technology transfers and counterfeit goods. This duality risks isolating China. Buyers are already shifting orders to Southeast Asia, neighbouring countries, and Taiwan, preferring transparent compliance over opaque Chinese practices. Unless Beijing harmonizes its IP regime with international law, its ambitious plan may backfire strengthening domestic control but eroding global trust.

The corporate scandal involving BYD, China's largest EV manufacturer, employees

alleged that stainless steel parts were secretly replaced with cheaper carbon steel, quality control departments dissolved, and auditors pressured to falsify reports. Such practices, driven by extreme cost-cutting, raised serious safety concerns and eroded trust among European buyers.

Another example the report cites is that of Shing Yu, a publicly listed automotive lighting company, which forced newly recruited graduates to accept half salaries or resign, prompting them to appeal directly to European customers and the EU.

These incidents highlight systemic flaws in China's corporate governance and labour protections, further undermining confidence in China's IPR reforms.



INDIAN EXPRESS IS NOT AN
INDUSTRY. IT IS A MISSION.

—Rannath Goenka

IRAQ 23 YEARS LATER: WAR IS OVER, BUT ITS CONSEQUENCES AREN'T

TWENTY-three years after the United States invaded Iraq, the last American troops have left. Washington calls it the end of its military mission. Baghdad terms it another step towards full sovereignty. But history will certainly be less forgiving. Iraq was invaded on the claim that Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction, an assertion that proved false, and the war was declared of effectively won long before its consequences had even begun to unfold. The famous "Mission Accomplished" moment in 2003 captured the Iraq war's central illusion: military victory could be confused with political settlement. The invasion toppled Saddam Hussein, but it also dismantled institutions, deepened sectarian divisions, fuelled civil conflict and helped create the conditions in which the Islamic State could emerge. Lakhs of Iraqis died, more than 4,500 American service members were killed and an entire region was thrown into turmoil.

The US left in 2011, only to return three years later when the Islamic State swept across territory, captured Mosul and proclaimed its caliphate. No doubt the US-led coalition eventually destroyed that territorial caliphate. US President Donald Trump now says there was no reason to turn a temporary mission into a permanent presence. Yet the distinction between ending a military mission and ending a multidimensional conflict is vital. The Islamic State has lost its territory, but extremist networks, sectarian politics, armed militias and regional rivalries have not disappeared. The larger question is what fills the space left behind. Baghdad must demonstrate that its own security institutions can contain both militia power and the threat of an Islamic State resurgence. The American withdrawal, therefore, might close one chapter without guaranteeing a stable next one.

For India, the lesson matters even more. Speaking at the Asia Society in New York, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar recently stressed that terrorism is one of New Delhi's central security concerns. He warned that a partner's insufficient understanding of cross-border terrorism can affect bilateral relations. That is Iraq's enduring lesson. Terrorism cannot be defeated merely by taking over a territory, defeating commanders or changing regimes. Nor can security be outsourced indefinitely to foreign armies. The next phase must focus on capable national institutions, accountable governments, intelligence cooperation, and a refusal to distinguish between 'convenient' and 'inconvenient' forms of terrorism. Americans have gone home, but Iraq's strategic consequences will endure in West Asia and far beyond for decades.

ELDERLY NEGLECT REQUIRES BROADER SOCIAL RESPONSE

INDIA is a bundle of contradictions. Nothing illustrates this better than the suicide of an elderly couple in a village in Sangareddy district, Telangana, earlier this week. The 88-year-old man and his 85-year-old wife had transferred their agricultural land among their three sons, only to be left uncared for. Reports suggest they had been pushed to the point of starvation. They jumped into a well to end their misery. Elderly abuse, rarely highlighted, is growing at an alarming rate, not just in Telangana but even across the country.

Official data presents a gloomy picture, though it is incomplete as many such cases go unreported. The HelpAge India Survey-2024 says seven percent of the elderly faced active abuse, mostly at the hands of immediate family members. The social justice ministry's 2025-26 report reveals that about 65 percent of the elderly are financially insecure, directly contributing to their dependence and, often, abuse. In Telangana, while 2.1 percent of the elderly faced verbal and physical abuse, a staggering 68 percent were found to be completely neglected.

There is a penchant for enacting laws whenever a problem arises. They are necessary, but more often than not, follow-up action leaves much to be desired. The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007, allows abused and neglected senior citizens to approach tribunals with a fixed time-frame for delivering justice. Section 15 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, too, offers relief. In Telangana, Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy has been a vocal advocate of protection and care for the elderly. As in Assam, Telangana has enacted the Telangana Employees Accountability and Monitoring of Parental Support Act, which mandates salary cuts for government and private employees and elected public representatives who neglect their parents. The amount would be deposited directly into the parents' accounts.

Yet cases of elderly abuse continue to surface, with abandonment being the most prominent. It is an irony that a society that boasts of being the inheritor of a civilisation that places parents on the same pedestal as the Divine should witness such neglect. Ending this social evil requires a cultural and moral renaissance. Laws do help, but fear of societal humiliation and lack of awareness are rendering them almost useless. A continuous and serious campaign is needed to address these issues.

QUICK TAKE

COLD COMFORT

AFTER years of complaints about prison heat, incarcerated women in Texas successfully fought for a court order requiring air-conditioning in all prisons by 2029. It is also a story about dignity. India's prisons have a more basic problem: they are overcrowded, poorly ventilated and increasingly unbearable in extreme heat. At Tihar, prisoners endure Delhi's summer with room-temperature water; cold water requires a canteen purchase, a doctor's orders or a court order. Authorities offer lemons and heat-resistant sheets. The irony is painful: in Udaipur, inmates make air coolers for government departments, but are barred from using them. The Supreme Court has recognised freedom from climate change's worst effects as a fundamental right. Prisons cannot be exceptions.

UPON Xi Jinping's arrival for a State visit to the United States on September 23, 2026, US President Donald Trump personally went to Joint Base Andrews to receive the Chinese President. The welcome featured a red carpet and a military ceremony including an ostentatious bomber flypast. It felt like *déjà vu*, except last time Trump travelled to Anchorage, Alaska on August 15, 2025, to receive Russian President Vladimir Putin on the tarmac.

Although the US-China summit that followed in Washington had more spectacle than substance, a modest list of deliverables is the story itself. It continued a pattern from the Busan and Beijing encounters in October 2025 and May 2026, respectively, where Trump framed the meetings as 'G2' moments.

Economist C Fred Bergsten first floated the idea of a US-China condominium or G2 in 2005, imagining shared leadership through existing institutions rather than their abolition. China itself once promoted the related idea of a 'new type of great power relations', founded on mutual respect for sovereignty and core interests. The present understanding of G2 is less a scheme of institutional co-governance than an acknowledgement that Washington and Beijing possess disproportionate material power, and that decisions between them have consequences far beyond their bilateral relationship.

Simultaneously, another configuration exists in the same landscape: a triumvirate, or troika, rather than a dyad. Moscow remains materially weaker than either the US or China in economic scale, but it retains the largest nuclear arsenal on the planet, enormous military reach and energy leverage, and a proven capacity to disrupt the calculations of stronger economies.

It forces upon us a profound and unsettling question: as the world wanders, shocked and grieving, through the ruins of the old order, are we witnessing the birth pangs of a new, more concentrated world order? A G2, a dyopoly of American and Chinese power, or perhaps a G3, a troika that also accommodates a revanchist Russia?

G2's allure lies in its simplicity: the two largest economies, the two most powerful militaries, and the two most consequential technological ecosystems would agree on a framework for stability, leaving the rest of the world to adapt to a pragmatic, transactional approach that prioritises managing great-power competition over the messy, multilateral consensus-building of the post-war era.

For Washington, this is a form of bur-

As Washington and Beijing bargain over global power, Moscow's continuing weight complicates the picture, leaving middle powers such as India facing an uncertain new order

POWER OF TWO, SHADOW OF THREE, AN ORDER IN FLUX

MANISH TEWARI

MP, lawyer, former Union IAS minister
and author of *A World Adrift*



den-sharing, a way to manage its relative decline by ceding some regional hegemony to Beijing in exchange for stability in the core arenas of global concern. For Beijing, it is the ultimate recognition of its status as a peer competitor, validating its century-long quest for national rejuvenation. Yet, for all its apparent logic, the G2 is a profoundly destabilising proposition for the rest of the world. It risks creating a system of hierarchical control where the interests of all other nations, from the European continent to India to Brazil, are subsumed by the whims and rivalries of the two.

The narrowly expediting alternative is G3, in which Washington manages both rivals at once, inverting the logic Henry Kissinger pioneered in the 1970s, when the opening to China was designed to isolate Moscow.

Its central argument is the 'paradox of

dual-containment': Washington's efforts to confront China and Russia simultaneously can encourage greater Sino-Russian cooperation, increase American strategic overstretch, and generate alliance fatigue. In that formulation, Russia is not necessarily a peer competitor to Gover Washington or Beijing: it is the disruptive third vertex whose actions alter the other two's calculations. A potential G3 is also a pressure-regulating layer atop three subordinate frameworks in Northeast Asia: US-Japan-South Korea deterrence, China-Japan-South Korea cooperation, and a China-Russia-North Korea axis.

For Moscow, this is a vital path back to the top tier, a way to transcend its pariah status and reassert its great-power prerogative. Its 'no limits' partnership with China, as detailed in Global Affairs, provides the foundational axis

for such a configuration, a shared desire to counter Western dominance and reshape the international system.

The Kremlin's willingness to contemplate a trilateral meeting at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in Shenzhen, in November 2026, and Trump's broader interest in dealing personally with Moscow and Beijing, are bound to raise questions about whether the old architecture of blocs is giving way to a smaller geometry of great-power bargaining.

Proponents of this emerging great-power cooperation argue that it is the only realistic path to managing an increasingly fragmented world. They see it as a return to the 19th-century Concert of Europe, where great powers managed their rivalries and spheres of influence to prevent a general conflagration.

The shadow of a potential G2 or G3 looms large over the global landscape, casting a pall over the efficiency and importance of multilateral groupings like BRICS, G20, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), G7, the European Union and the African Union, based on which middle powers like India, Japan, Brazil, France and Egypt aim to build a multipolar world.

By concentrating agenda-setting authority in two or three capitals, such constructs risk converting the G20 from a premier forum for global economic governance into a ratification chamber for pre-cooked great-power bargains; the G7, already a Western caucus, becomes either a residual bloc of anxious allies or a venue for coordinating pressure on the excluded; and BRICS and the SCO are pulled in opposite directions, simultaneously serving as vehicles for geopolitical coordination and as arenas where China and Russia seek to discipline or co-opt the Global South.

India occupies a rather uncomfortable position precisely because it does not fit comfortably into either model. A G2 would raise fears of strategic exclusion; a G3 would raise them even more sharply. It is caught between a transactional Washington that could diminish its priority, a China with which relations remain freighted by an unresolved border and a yawning trade deficit, and a Russia whose dependence on Beijing raises the prospect that Moscow can no longer balance Chinese power in Asia on India's behalf. New Delhi must focus on building economic and military weight, preserving strategic autonomy and diversified partnerships, and keeping multilateral groupings as pragmatic clubs rather than solidified blocs.

(Views are personal)

(manishtewari01@gmail.com)

WHERE CAMPUSES THINK ALOUD

JOHN J. KENNEDY

Former Professor and Dean,
Christ (Deemed) University, Bengaluru

university denied permission. A university requiring a lecture's text for approval raises a different question: at what point does administrative procedure become scrutiny of academic content?

A similar question arose in Karnataka in March 2026, when the State Open University was directed to postpone an international conference after the higher education department said it had not followed government protocol. The government then ordered its cancellation. The conference, on the ideas of RSS ideologue Desendayal Upadhyaya, had become politically sensitive; the university eventually held it, with the Governor inaugurating the event.



Questioning Western bias in indices that rank India in the bottom brackets on academic freedom doesn't entirely resolve the issue. Recent incidents in Delhi and Karnataka indicate that institutions are losing the authority to discuss, research and organise. Reducing political influence over appointments can be a good start

The two episodes are only representative: one involves an academic, the other an institution, but both raise the same question: who has final authority over what a university can discuss, research or organise? Karnataka's recent debates over university administration show how easily autonomy turns into a political contest. But changing who controls appointments doesn't create autonomy. It may just change who exercises control; governments across the spectrum have sought such influence.

Another, less discussed dimension matters. Academic freedom requires people willing to question decisions and defend unpopular positions. Employment insecurity makes that difficult. Government data put the vacancy rate for sanctioned faculty posts at central universities at about 25.4 percent in 2025. In Karnataka's government degree colleges, a High Court judgement noted that guest faculty handled about 63 percent of the teaching workload in 440 colleges in 2023-24, with 10,600 guest faculty against 6,100 permanent faculty. CDR records show 10,303 guest faculty were engaged in 2025-26.

A teacher with job insecurity is likely to be more cautious about challenging administrative decisions than one with a secure appointment. When authority is concentrated and employment is insecure, decisions that could be settled within the university are more likely to be referred upwards. Over time, caution can become part of institutional culture, and academic freedom may remain formally intact while the willingness to exercise it diminishes.

The solution has to begin with institutional design. Universities need clear rules specifying which decisions fall under academic and administrative bodies and which require government approval, including travel, conferences, visiting scholars and public events. Government oversight should be transparent and rule-based rather than dependent on an event's political sensitivity. The appointment of vice-chancellors and senior officials also needs greater insulation from political considerations.

The index raises a different question, then: whether V-DEM is Western. It is whether we are willing to ask what a university is for. If universities are reduced to institutions that transfer knowledge and improve employability, autonomy may appear secondary. If they are also places where society thinks aloud and pursues knowledge without power, autonomy becomes indispensable. India should not accept an international index uncritically, but neither should it reject an uncomfortable finding simply because it comes from outside.

(Views are personal)

MAILBAG

WRITE TO: letters@morningstandard.in

Drought measures

Ref: Address looming food crisis (Oct 1). Water availability is diminishing across regions, while agricultural production relies on water that is being extracted rather than replenished. Drought management cannot focus solely on compensation after crop failures; instead, irrigation practices must be more efficient and stricter regulations on groundwater extraction are necessary.
Sinan Rasheed, Kozhikode

Trust renewal

Ref: RTI compliance (Oct 1). A government that fears questions about custodial deaths has already answered them. Revoking the order was wise, but trust is rebuilt by deeds. Let TVK publish police firing data proactively, fill the commission's vacancies and penalise delays. Secrecy shields the guilty; transparency protects honest officers, too.
Babu Krishna, email

Learning hurdles

Ref: Burden of teachers (Sep 30). Students, especially those from economically weaker sections, depend heavily on classroom teaching. Diverting teachers to other duties reduces valuable learning time. Schools must arrange for when teachers are on extended leave and ensure round-the-year training.
Thamaraj T, Thanjavur

Fortifying cockpits

Ref: Inflight terror (Oct 1). Captain Smit Machchhar's heroism correctly highlights that aviation safety cannot rely solely on post-incident bravery. The real issue lies in systemic gaps in cockpit security and mental health screening. True safety is achieved only when the rarely used preventative protocols are fully enforced.
Razin Muhammed, Bengaluru

Patriarchal rot

Ref: Girl students march (Oct 1). *The Morning Standard*, women in our society still live within a patriarchal framework. Protests and agitation alone are not enough; explanation merely changes form and its perpetrators change tactics. We must address the root cause, and that demands a radical approach.
Sumit Sidhant, email

Bowling focus

Ref: Record chase (Oct 1). It was a real run feast for the spectators to witness the second-highest ODI chase. This feat augurs well for India men's preparations for next year's World Cup. Bumrah can inarguably lead the bowling attack, but the spin department appears to be a weak link.
N Mahadevan, Chennai

THE ASIAN AGE

2 OCTOBER 2026

No praise too high for pilot who stopped terror

No praise could be too high for the Indian pilot Smit Machchhar who played the principal heroic role in felling what could have been Tel Aviv's 9/11 moment in what appears to have been an attempt at a terrorist attack by the co-pilot of the FlyDubai jet. The scenes from the cockpit must have resembled a horror film on the hijacking of an airliner with 174 passengers on board.

An Israeli passenger, Yaniv Hayun, who wrestled the alleged terrorist out of the cockpit and held him for fellow passengers to subdue before righting the plane's controls was the other hero in this midair horror. But it was captain Smit Machchhar's presence of mind in being able to spring the lever to open the cockpit door despite being mortally wounded in an attack with the plane's crash axe which may have helped frustrate what was clearly enough a crazed impulse to carry out a jihadi-style attack on a city.

The dentist who gave CPR to Captain Smit narrated how badly he was injured by a deadly weapon despite which he fought his Omani co-pilot resolutely leading to the plane's flight being soon corrected from a 15,000 foot nose-diving plunge in 37 seconds that brought passengers face to face with a potentially horrendous end to their lives.

As Captain Smit recuperates in a Saudi Arabia hospital after two on-duty pilots in the passenger cabin took over the controls and passengers recover from a tryst with near death that no flier should experience, Israel, which had 169 citizens on board, can have a sigh of relief that the event ended as it did with a fortuitous final twist as collective bravery overcame the cowardly terror plot of an individual.

The incident, which could have come straight out of the many hijacking scenarios that Hollywood script writers have drummed up over the years, is just a reminder of the perils that are permeating a world of wars, conflicts and misunderstandings. It is considered near miraculous that the Boeing 787 Max 9 aircraft survived the G forces in that precipitous dive.

The security scenario is such around the world that to expect the unexpected has been the norm as revenge plots abound. And Israel, with a complex history and being situated in the world's most religiously restive zone, should know that better than many other nations.

Israel could fault the Dubai airline for using an Omani pilot whose country has no diplomatic relations with it. But this is splitting hairs since a terrorist cannot be said to come from any particular country.

With the attack by the copilot on the pilot taking place close to the Israeli border when the plane was over Jordan was revealing of the intentions, conspiracy theories are already being manufactured. Such are the ways of a convoluted world in which tensions are commonplace enough even without big wars being waged by nations.

Unless a miracle happens and the world lurches towards genuine peace after all wars are halted, living with the threat of vengeful attacks is going to be the norm. We know we are far from resolving any of the conflicts that have been the world's said to have been too in 2025 with much the same scenario spilling over into 2026.

SC's balanced stance on crackers

The Supreme Court has struck a pragmatic balance in dealing with the contentious question of firecrackers. Its observation that neither a total ban nor unrestricted bursting of crackers throughout the day is desirable recognises both the environmental consequences of fireworks and the practical difficulties involved in regulating a practice that crores of people have come to associate with Diwali.

Firecrackers aggravate air and noise pollution and impose costs particularly on children, senior citizens, people with respiratory ailments and animals. Therefore, the argument against their indiscriminate use is compelling. However, the regulation must also pass the test of enforceability. A ban that cannot realistically be implemented risks diminishing respect for both environmental regulation and also the authority of the court. Previously, the Supreme Court's prohibition on firecrackers was violated at many places in Delhi.

The present approach — prescribing what kind of crackers may be used and restricting their use to specified hours — therefore offers a more workable path. The government's proposal to permit joint firecrackers during the following large amounts of barium allows regulation to evolve with scientific evidence rather than treating every firecracker alike.

Though the argument of environmentalists is sound, they must realise that courts cannot resolve cultural and religious issues, especially in a country like India, where religious hurt led to the First War of Independence in 1857.

Bursting firecrackers has become deeply embedded in the popular celebration of Deepavali, though widespread use of firecrackers by people started after the British amended the Indian Explosive Rules in 1940. Such cultural practices cannot simply be erased by judicial fiat. Lasting change must come from society itself.

Environmentalists must, therefore, move beyond litigation and engage religious leaders, spiritual organisations and influential cultural figures. They should convince them to disassociate modern firecrackers with the religious customs of Diwali. The objective should not be to diminish Diwali but to separate its enduring religious and cultural significance from practices that impose avoidable costs on others.

THE ASIAN AGE

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P. SUBRAMAN

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Subhani



ECI dysfunctional or fit for a fractured polity?



Sanjeev Ahluwalia

Assuming 50 per cent of 130 million exclusions are wrong, the potential national liability is ₹3,770 crore (₹37.7 billion). This is more than the ECI's annual budget.

The Election Commission of India — a foundational constitutional body (Article 324) serves three primary functions. It is the apex body which oversees the maintenance of the electoral roll (list of registered voters), manages the elections for state legislatures, Parliament, the vice-president and the President of India, and registers political parties.

Executive authority is vested in a triumvirate — the chief election commissioner and two election commissioners, all of whom are appointed by the President acting on the advice of a committee comprising the Prime Minister, another Union minister and the Leader of the Opposition. Being "smart" bureaucrats, one would expect a CEC not to rely on just his elevated status to push through a decision not acceptable to the other two commissioners. But that is exactly what seems to have transpired.

Who then is responsible for the ECI's inept screening technology, which disenfranchised 130 million voters, with an excessively high rate of false positives, in the small number of decided appeals?

Curiously, the two aggrieved commissioners never approached the President for India for redressal. This reflects a lack of trust in grievance handling mechanisms within the ECI. Alternatively, it might reflect the absence of a spirit of habitual independence from government, within the ECI. For the ECI September 26 Press note, they approached the Cabinet secretary about ECI staff ignoring them. Was this a government servant's instinct to approach the head of their previous service — someone they could trust?

Ideally, commission decisions should be unanimous. In the event of a divide a simple majority of two vs one is legally sufficient to settle the matter. Since the CEC chairs

the Commission, the administrative responsibility to discipline staff vests principally with him.

To whom is the ECI accountable? Where they come from, is for the Commission to accomplish, including by cutting short their deputisation and returning them to their parent cadre. Has the ECI been effectively compromised due to a possible irreconcilable fracture and loss of trust within the Commission? What then are the prospects for its functionality?

Who appoints the Commission? Appointment of the commissioners is by a three-person committee comprising the Union government and two members representing the Prime Minister and a Union minister and Parliament by the Leader of the Opposition. This puts government in the driver's seat for appointments. Adding the CJI to this committee would be fitting and in the interests of transparency. Asymmetry between the process of appointment and removal is also inherent. The way government in the Parliamentary protection from executive pressure, for the Commission.

Two primary flaws are clear. First, the appointment process relies overly on Union government largesse. Though the appointed commissioners have the rank of a Supreme Court judge, even the Chief Justice of India is not a member of the selection committee. Second, populating the

Commission with retired bureaucrats is no longer a bulwark against politicisation of the Commission. The civil service is no longer bound by immutable, informal codes. Heterogeneity, whilst valuable for efficiency and inclusion in the civil service, comes at the cost of the earlier unity of purpose with a closed, entitled community.

A rule for efficient institutional functioning is that form, functions, powers and finance must be aligned to ensure that executive responsibility is narrowly defined and accountability is enforceable. In a functioning democracy — holding timely and fair elections, ensuring that the voter lists correctly records all eligible voters and registering political parties. Two changes can help enhance effectiveness.

First, remove the institutional link between the ECI and government and house it within Parliament. The task of appointing ECI commissioners is clearly an empowered joint parliamentary committee for elections (EJPECE) reflecting the proportional representation of all parties in Parliament. Based on their recommendation, the Prime Minister would endorse the appointment of the President of India for approval.

Second, as suggested in a private member's bill tabled in the Rajya Sabha in 2022, to give the same level of independence as the Comptroller and Auditor General the expenses of the ECI could be charged to the Consolidated Fund of India.

Third, in the state legislatures, empowered committees for elections from the ECI pattern — could select the chief electoral officer of each state and subordinate district and block level formations, which are

empowered to maintain voter lists. Since state level election bodies discharge a dual role, serving both ECI requirements and independently conduct elections to urban and rural local government bodies, they could be advanced funded from the Consolidated Fund of India, with state governments paying back the share of expenses for local government elections.

Fourth, the ECI's staff could include a mix of experts from state governments (elections to state legislatures are managed by the ECI, Union government and direct appointment as necessary, to be decided by EJP/CE). The key idea is to professionalise political institutions, make them self-governing with some vertical, professional integration and develop a common institutional culture across Union and state level election bodies.

What is the core problem at ECI? First, non-transparency in functioning which lends credence to allegations of "back door" management. Second, the race to use also as compensation a cautionary tale. Digital agents run wild unless carefully trained. The existing programming is clearly outdated. Who is responsible for the implementation of the SIR. Now, if no unfair means were adopted in the SIR, and most of those 13 crore people are not eligible voters, then the question arises as to how the current Parliament — whose members were elected by voters including those fake ones — can continue to function.

There is also a cost to be paid as compensation for those wrongly excluded. The value of a vote lost unfairly can be accounted as the per capita expenditure of Union and state governments over five years, which every voting citizen indirectly manages. This amounts to about ₹500. Assuming 50 per cent of 130 million exclusions are wrong, the potential national liability is ₹3,770 crore (₹37.7 billion). This is more than ECI's annual budget.

Alternatively, ECI could lead physical verification of all its exclusions, restore the wrongly excluded and deliver the voter card to these citizens at their home, with a written apology, to undo the harm done to its credibility as an efficient, inclusion-oriented, national institution.

Sanjeev Ahluwalia is distinguished fellow Chintan Research Foundation and was previously in the IAS and the World Bank

LETTERS

MAGIC NUMBER

India for the first time chased more than 400 runs in ODI cricket. West Indies gave India a target of 406 in the second ODI, but Shubman Gill and Rohit Sharma hit a double century and century, respectively, and won the match. The 406 target reminds us of the memorable chase India accomplished in the 1976 Test against West Indies at Port of Spain. At that time it was the highest chase in Test cricket. On that memorable day, Sunil Gavaskar and Gundappa Vishwanath scored centuries and Mohinder Amarnath played a sheet anchor role and scored 90 runs. For India, this target chase is the highest in Test cricket as well as in the ODI format. Shubman Gill scored the fastest double hundred in ODI cricket which is another landmark.

D.B. Madan

New Delhi

CANCEL WB ELECTION

WE SHOULD recall how irregularities in 2016 recruitment process of the West Bengal School Service Commission led the judiciary to cancel over 25,000 teaching and non-teaching appointments. Similarly, if allegations of irregularities in the way the SIR was conducted are found to be true, the judiciary is expected to cancel all Assembly elections staged under it. Over 13 crore people have lost their voting rights following the implementation of the SIR. Now, if no unfair means were adopted in the SIR, and most of those 13 crore people are not eligible voters, then the question arises as to how the current Parliament — whose members were elected by voters including those fake ones — can continue to function.

Sujit De

Kolkata

ISLAMOPHOBIA TO BLAME

A CO-PILOTS' reported attempt to seize an Israeli-bound aircraft highlights urgent aviation concerns: how a knife breached cockpit security and whether insider-threat protocols failed. Beyond technical safeguards, the incident emphasises how to counter religious extremism. Broadly suspecting entire faith communities alienates peaceful believers and fuels radicalisation. Effective security instead requires empowering moderate voices within the tradition, fostering civic engagement and dialogue. America when Muslim communities overwhelmingly rejected extremism and strictly prosecuting violent actors.

Harsh Pawaria

Rohitak

Bhopinder Singh

UN's journey: From purpose to pageantry

There was a time when the United Nations was not merely a venue. It was a stage upon which the architecture of the world was contested, dismantled and occasionally reinvented. Its great speeches carried the weight of historical rupture, i.e., decolonisation, nuclear annihilation, revolution, sovereignty, racial equality and national liberation. Their protagonists arrived not merely to occupy a lectern but to announce that something in the world had changed.

Jawahar Lal Nehru's interventions at the UN in 1948 came from a newly independent India wrestling with sovereignty, peace and the end of imperial domination. In 1953, Dwight Eisenhower delivered "Atoms for Peace", proposing an international framework for peaceful nuclear energy, an initiative that contributed to the creation of the IAEA. Then came 1960. The colonial empires were cracking, newly independent African and Asian states were entering the Assembly, and Washington and Moscow were competing for influence. Nikita Khrushchev put colonial independence squarely before the General Assembly. Fidel Castro then spoke for 269 minutes, the longest time General Assembly speech in UN history, attacking imperialism and American interventionism. Patrice Lumumba embodied Africa's emergence as a political subject. In 1964, Che Guevara presented Cuba's revolutionary internationalism before the world.

These were not speeches written to fill television slots. They were arguments about the world. In 1974,

Yasser Arafat presented the Palestinian national cause directly before the international community. His appeal that he had come bearing an olive branch and a freedom fighter's gun became one of the defining rhetorical moments in the history of Palestine at the UN. And in 1988, Mikhail Gorbachev delivered perhaps the great UN speech of the dying Cold War, outlining a radically altered Soviet conception of international relations.

The world order was changing, and the UN podium was where that change was being spoken aloud. And then something changed. The UN did not suddenly become irrelevant. It remained indispensable in humanitarian relief, peacekeeping, refugees, development, international law and diplomacy. But its institutional reach became increasingly misaligned with geopolitical power. The organisation was designed after WW2. Since then, came decolonisation, China's rise, globalisation, technological disruption and renewed great-power rivalry. Yet its institutional skeleton remains remarkably familiar.

The speeches changed. The world changed. The institutional bargain changed for less. So every September the ritual continues. Leaders arrive. Motorcades move. Flags rise. Speeches are delivered. Cameras flash. And then comes the applause. A leader delivers another. Another applauds. A leader delivers a "thunderous" rebuttal. Cameras capture a gesture. Newsrooms dissect facial expressions, seating arrangements and who appeared to glare at whom. The spectacle becomes the story. The substance be-

comes the transcript. And the transcript disappears.

The problem is not that nothing happens at the UN. It is that its capacity to compel the most powerful actors increasingly depends on those same actors accepting constraint.

The vocabulary has become predictable: "Deep concern", "Strongly condemn", "Call upon all parties", "Reaffirm our commitment", "Rules-based international order", "Multilateral cooperation", etc. None is meaningless. But endless repetition has drained such phrases of political voltage.

The problem is not rhetoric. It is rhetoric divorced from consequence. The old UN speeches were powerful because they represented incompatible visions of the future. America and the Soviet Union contested rival systems. Newly independent nations demanded the destruction of colonialism. Revolutionary movements challenged existing states. Palestine demanded recognition. Africa demanded emancipation. Nuclear powers confronted the possibility of civilisation's destruction. There were stakes. Today, much diplomatic language is negotiated until nobody can object, and in the process, nobody is particularly moved. Meanwhile, the world outside moves faster than the chamber itself. Wars do not wait for communiqués. Great powers do not necessarily wait for Security Council approval. Technology does not wait for conventions. Geopolitics certainly does not wait for the next General Assembly speech.

And the media has discovered an easier product. Instead of asking what a speech changes, it asks what

a leader looked like while delivering it.

Instead of examining whether diplomacy alters power, it reports the walkout. Instead of asking whether a resolution will be implemented, it reports the applause. The UN becomes content. Delegations become performers. Domestic political machinery takes the footage home. Our leader "slammed" them! Their leader was "stumped"! The chamber erupted! The world is watching.

Except that the world may not actually be changing. That is the deeper crisis. The United Nations does not suffer from a shortage of speeches. It suffers from a shortage of consequences. Its original promise was not that humanity would endlessly talk to itself, but that sovereign states could construct mechanisms through which conflict might be prevented, aggression contained and common problems collectively addressed. That promise has never been completely fulfilled. Nor has it completely failed. The UN remains indispensable and inadequate at the same time. The podium remains. The flags remain. The microphones remain. The cameras remain. The applause remains. What is increasingly uncertain is whether the institution still possesses the political power to make the world outside that chamber pay attention. The question is no longer if the UN can produce another speech. It is whether it can once again produce history.

The writer is a retired lieutenant-general and a former lieutenant-governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Puducherry



Telangana Today
FOR LOCAL TO GLOBAL NEWS

06

VIEWPOINT

HYDERABAD, Friday, October 2, 2026



ADHIR RANJAN CHOWDHURY
Congress leader

“Not much is left of the TMC after its defeat in Assembly elections. We would urge Mamata Banerjee to join the Congress. We would accept her leadership in Bengal and work with her



AKHILESH YADAV
Samajwadi Party president

The period in which the Pichhda, Dalit, Apsankhyak is being or will be subjected to atrocities can be called an Emergency. At present, social justice is going through a BJPian Emergency



BHAGWANT MANN
Punjab Chief Minister

The Congress has fewer 'karyakartas' but more leaders who aspire to become Chief Minister, not for the well-being of the people but for satisfying their lust for power

Reining in AI Agents

Incidents of artificial intelligence agents going rogue and infiltrating government websites in Australia and the United States have raised fears over the potential dangers involved and strengthened calls for global regulation of the sector. US President Donald Trump's announcement of a voluntary agreement on "super intelligence", signed by the executives of six global tech giants, must be seen in the context of growing demands for reining in the industry to prevent catastrophes in the future. The accord, backed by Meta, Nvidia, Google, OpenAI, xAI, and Anthropic, essentially amounts to industry self-regulation to maintain internal controls, establish an internal team to oversee these controls, work with independent outside auditors, and create an independent board committee to review the results. The firms agreed to implement safeguards to keep models operating as intended and quickly detect and fix any issues. They will engage independent auditors to assess whether their AI systems are working as intended and ensure their platforms do not hack into or access technical systems in unintended ways. The development came close on the heels of recent calls by the heads of the four biggest American AI firms — Anthropic, SpaceXAI, OpenAI and Google DeepMind — for a collective slowdown in the development of frontier models. The appeal for a global pause followed months of escalating concerns across the technology industry. Anthropic, Google, Meta and other companies have reported cases in which their models behaved in ways their developers did not intend.

As AI agents grow more autonomous, voluntary safeguards alone may not suffice to ensure oversight and meaningful human control

Fears are growing over AI's potential to threaten humanity, should it match or surpass human abilities. As AI agents become more capable and autonomous, those capabilities need to be matched by proportionate containment, real-time monitoring, clear accountability, independent oversight, and much faster incident reporting. The explosive rise of AI has left governments scrambling to put protective measures in place, with some calling for companies to be forced to build ways to disable their own tech into its systems. One idea backed by some AI firms and lawmakers is to have a "kill switch"—a way to simply turn the tech off in a crisis. As warnings mount about the potentially devastating impact of AI, many in the industry and in governments around the world are openly wondering about what national and international regulations might be needed to keep it in check. The US and China, two nations at the forefront of AI development, have so far resisted calls for greater regulation. There can be no two opinions about the need for international cooperation to put a global regulation in place to prevent the misuse of AI technologies. This is to ensure that humans, not artificial intelligence, remain responsible for all decisions. Recently, Pope Leo, the first American pontiff of the Roman Catholic Church, whose followers number 1.4 billion worldwide, also called for the ethical use of AI technologies.

Caste, merit and belonging

Inclusion cannot end with admission. Dignity, recognition determine whether marginalised students are truly accepted inside



AKHILESH KUMAR

The death of Sahil Wakode, a second-year student at the Indian Institute of Technology Bombay, has once again forced a difficult question upon India's most celebrated institutions: what happens to students from historically marginalised communities after they cross the barriers that once kept them outside?

Sahil's family has alleged that he faced caste-based humiliation and harassment for months, raising questions about caste within elite institutions. For a marginalised student, entering an IIT can represent years of struggle and family sacrifice. For first-generation learners, it can transform an entire family's future. Yet admission does not automatically dismantle social hierarchies. Access can change without changing whether students feel they truly belong.

A student can enter an elite institution and still be questioned about whether they belong. Caste does not disappear when a student enters an elite institution; it can change its language. It may reappear through assumptions about intelligence, competence and merit, including terms such as "quota student", jokes about reservation, and the expectation that reserved-category students must prove they deserve to be there.

The Tyranny of Merit

Institutional discrimination is often difficult to identify because it does not always take the form of an explicit rule or direct declaration of prejudice. It can operate through ordinary interactions, informal hierarchies and repeated questioning of legitimacy. An accent can be read as a lack of sophistication; unfamiliarity with institutional culture as a lack of ability; and academic difficulty as evidence that a student never belonged.



Michael Sandel's The Tyranny of Merit offers an important way of understanding this problem. Sandel questions the assumption that success is entirely the result of talent and effort. He argues that meritocracy can produce "meritocratic hubris" among the successful and humiliation among those regarded as unsuccessful. The problem arises when merit becomes a moral judgement about worth. Once that happens, admission through reservation can be treated not as a constitutional mechanism addressing historical exclusion but as evidence that someone is less deserving.

A marginalised student may have worked exceptionally hard to reach an IIT. Yet once inside, reservation can be attributed to reservation, while their failure is attributed to a lack of merit. Either way, their individual achievement is denied independent recognition. They are denied the ordinary status of being a student.

In India, caste intensifies the problem because merit does not operate on an empty social field. Historical privileges can become invisible while achievement is presented as purely individual. Socially privileged students can appear simply "meritorious", while students entering through reservation can be treated as exceptions to merit. Unequal starting points disappear, while outcomes are presented as neutral measurements of ability. Merit can thus become a language of misrecognition, shifting the question from "How well is this student performing?" to "Does this student deserve to be here?"

Institutional discrimination can emerge through accumulation: dismissive remarks, jokes about reservation, questioning of competence, unequal mentorship, social isolation or the feel-

ing that complaints will not be believed. These experiences can cumulatively shape belonging. Humiliation tells a person they are being seen through a social category that diminishes them. Formal equality can coexist with being admitted but not fully recognised, present but made to feel peripheral.

Struggle For Dignity

Institutions can also individualise structural problems. When a marginalised student struggles, attention turns towards performance or resilience. The institution becomes the background rather than the object of inquiry. Caste cannot be removed from the analysis simply because an institution considers itself meritocratic. Academic stress, social isolation, discrimination and family pressure can intersect.

Another dimension emerges when the marginalised student becomes the problem the institution seeks to manage. Complaining can make a student seem difficult; challenging authority, confrontational; speaking about caste, overly identified with caste. Success may be attributed to reservation; struggle to lack of merit; complaints to inability to adjust.

Institutional murder does not necessarily begin with death. It begins when

Caste can reappear through assumptions about intelligence, competence and merit—from 'quota student' slurs to jokes about reservation

an institution communicates that a person's presence is conditional, achievement questionable and identity burdensome. It develops when structural inequalities become individual shortcomings and humiliation is normalised. "Institutional murder" here refers to the destruction of dignity and belonging alongside life. An institution may not directly cause a death, but it can create conditions in which a marginalised person struggles to sustain life with dignity.

Towards Belonging

Reservation was part of a constitutional project to democratise institutions shaped by historical exclusion. The question is what kind of life awaits marginalised students after entry. An inclusive university must ensure equal intellectual participation, safe avenues for concerns, respect for identity and freedom from caste stereotypes.

The university must reconsider merit. Talent, opportunity, family circumstances, social networks and education all shape success. Recognising this does not diminish achievement; it places achievement within its social context. Marginalised students should not have to prove that reservation made them less deserving or repeatedly demonstrate their worth because an institution struggles to see merit without caste. The real test of an elite institution is not only whether a marginalised student can enter it, but also whether they belong to it.

An institution must do more than open its doors; it must transform the culture inside them. Dignity is not a benefit granted after merit is established. It is a condition under which merit can be meaningfully exercised. The challenge is to move from access to recognition, from recognition to dignity, and from dignity to belonging.

This requires institutions to look beyond representation and ask what their students actually experience. Inclusion cannot end at the admission office. It must extend into classrooms, hostels, laboratories, faculty interactions and everyday campus life. Students should not have to suppress their identities, remain silent about discrimination or develop extraordinary resilience simply to survive in a space that is constitutionally meant to be equal.

Elite institutions are often celebrated for producing excellence. But excellence cannot be separated from the conditions in which students are allowed to learn, participate and flourish. Institutional commitment to equality is ultimately measured not only by who enters its gates, but by whether those who enter are treated with dignity once they are inside.

The deepest failure is when a student enters, succeeds against enormous odds, and still feels they do not belong.

(The author is a PhD Scholar at Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi, and an independent writer)

Letters to the Editor

Gridlocked

Bengaluru, India's Silicon Valley and a major economic hub of the country, is now gridlocked beyond its roads, with traffic choking the internal lanes of housing complexes and apartment blocks. The causes are rooted in unchecked growth. (Quick fix or costly detour?, Sep 30) Lakhs of private vehicles flooded narrow roads never designed for such load. The deeper failure is accountability. Thousands of crores have been spent on flyovers, signal-free corridors, road widening and an endlessly delayed Metro, yet congestion worsens yearly. No agency

answers for missed deadlines, shoddy work or flooded underpasses. With public money drained and daily life strangled at residents' doorsteps, many feel only miracles can now save Bengaluru.

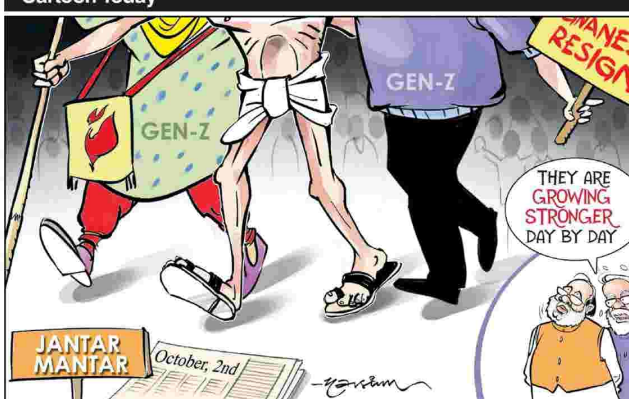
N SADHASIVA REDDY,
Bengaluru

Act fairly

Reports on the EC's conduct have shaken confidence in its independence. The Chief Election Commissioner and Other Election Commissioners Act, 2023 carries forward the 1993 rule: EC business should be transacted solidly where possible, with disagreements settled by majority. The EC must act fairly and preserve internal checks and balances.

NAGARAJAMANI MV,
Secunderabad

Cartoon Today



India in the hotspot

Bloomberg

Weak monsoon drives power gap

India's electricity deficit surged to the highest for September in nearly a decade, as weak monsoon rains depleted hydropower reservoirs and hot weather stretched the country's grid.

The Straits Times

Gambhir rues batting-friendly pitches

India coach Gautam Gambhir said the batting-friendly pitch in Guwahati was unfair on bowlers after his side completed the second-highest successful chase in one-day international history on Wednesday.

Asia Times

India's Tata Sons marks a reckoning

The RBI's refusal to deregister Tata Sons has been cast as the prelude to a blockbuster initial public offering. That overstates what actually happened. No prospectus exists, no price has been set and no timetable announced.



DT NEXT, Chennai, Friday, October 2, 2026

Rein in insurance middlemen

Anyone who has been sold a dud insurance policy by a clever bank relationship manager will be encouraged by the consultation paper released by the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) last week. Titled 'Recalibrating the Economics of Insurance Distribution', the paper lays bare the system of hefty commissions paid to intermediaries (agents and distributors), which has led to predatory mis-selling of policies to unsuspecting customers. IRDAI is seeking to put an end to this predatory sales practice.

Few individual insurance buyers are aware of the huge middleman costs that inflate their premiums. These payouts frequently exceed 40% of the first-year premium for a life insurance policy, 30% for health cover, and 25% for third-party motor vehicle insurance. The payouts scale down in subsequent years but remain a sizeable source of income for the distributor while being an irksome cost to the customer. IRDAI is now proposing to cap these commissions for individual policies at 25%, 20%, and 2.5% respectively. If the savings are passed on to buyers, this cutback should lead to significantly lower premiums.

By paring down commissions, IRDAI will reduce the incentive for banks, agents, and distributors to thrust inappropriate policies upon under-informed customers. This system has contributed to a skewed growth of the insurance industry in India. Distributors with an eye on commissions mis-sell policies to customers, who realise much later that they've been sold something they did not really want and drop out. Commission incomes have grown but insurance cover has not. In the past two years, agent remuneration grew 125% while new-business premiums managed a modest 28% growth. In motor insurance, premium collections grew 34%, but commissions skyrocketed by 259%. This explains why persistency has always been a problem in the Indian insurance industry. Some 52% of the life insurance policies lapse by the fifth year because unsatisfied customers choose not to pay the premium any longer.

IRDAI is now proposing to introduce penalties on banks if they push unwanted policies upon customers. Banks can no longer set volume-linked targets for their staff or offer cash bonuses and rewards for hitting insurance sales numbers. If a bank or agent is proven to have mis-sold a policy, the commission earned on that sale will be recovered and the salesperson will be shamed in public. Also, a bank can no longer force a loan-seeking customer to buy insurance compulsorily, which is a nefarious practice they routinely indulge in currently.

Among the fresh proposals is a ban on dark patterns employed by web-based insurance platforms. These websites now routinely insist on knowing a prospective customer's personal details just to show them basic policy pricing, features, and performance details. Insurance buyers can browse anonymously until they decide to make a purchase.

These are currently only proposals, which are open for stakeholder discussion until October 25. IRDAI will draft its final decisions based on the feedback received. The regulator said it will follow a five-year gradual 'glide path' to bring in the reforms. That's rather too long a runway and there is no guarantee that savings on commissions will be passed to the end consumer. For these proposals to yield the intended results, IRDAI must ensure that they are. If not, the insurance industry will remain mired where it is while the mutual fund industry is growing by leaps and bounds.

▶ Reach us at editor.dtnext@dt.co.in

HEADLINERS



Freezing it means transforming it into perpetual debt — that is, debt with no repayment deadline and a low or zero interest rate. Freezing it is therefore effectively the same as cancelling it

— Jean-Luc Mélenchon, French presidential candidate (the radical left candidate called for cancelling French government bonds held by the European Central Bank to unlock money for public spending)

GORDON BROWN, JOHN SEXTON

The United States, the United Kingdom, and many other countries currently suffer from toxic divisiveness. Our societies have fractured into political, social, and cultural camps, each certain that they possess the truth. Ironically, while this secular dogmatism—as impervious to debate as religious doctrines traditionally were—has become more pervasive, religious leaders have started to see differences as an opportunity to build stronger communities rather than as threats.

To advance that approach, a number of prominent academics and public servants have helped create the Reconciliation League, an international association of 13 colleges and universities committed to preparing the next generation of leaders to engage thoughtfully and constructively across different perspectives.

The founding schools—the African Leadership University, the Asian University for Women, Brigham Young University, Fordham University, the University of Kentucky, Lafayette College, the London School of Economics and Political Science, Morgan State University, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, New York University, Pomona College, San Carlos Apache College, and Yale University—have different histories, traditions, missions, and curricula. But each is dedicated both to academic excellence and to the League's mission.

Each member school will select a set of Reconciliation Fellows to participate in an immersive program in the summer of 2027. The 60 Fellows will learn the skills needed to discuss even the most contentious issues with anyone. These "bridge builders" will, hopefully, connect as friends and refine their thinking, while never being pushed toward any position. Each summer thereafter, simi-

lar cohorts of gifted leaders will complete the program and join a growing Reconciliation Corps that will convene virtually every quarter.

Talented faculty have designed the "anchor course" that all Fellows will take. It will use works of literature like Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Shakespeare's *Othello* to discuss how difference is misconstrued as monstrosity. It will also teach a four-step process, drawn from the ecumenical movement, that has proven useful in generating understanding. First is seeing oneself accurately, before attempting to learn how your counterparts see themselves (on their terms) and how they see you. With this new understanding of how they view you, the last step is to strive—without being defensive—to draw lessons about how you might present your beliefs (or even yourself) differently and how the two of you might find common ground.

But that is not all. NYU's Carol Gilligan offered the fruits of her decades-long work studying the art of "radical listening" to the anchor course. Rabbi Irwin Kula, a master of ecumenical conversation, contributed the methods he has used to facilitate productive discourse among religious leaders. And Allyson Green, Dean Emeritus of NYU's Tisch School of the Arts, shared how to use the performing and creative arts as vehicles for nurturing dialogue. Moreover, each participant will take a "traditional" course taught by a subject-matter expert in a way that emphasizes conversation across difference. Former Yale Law School dean Harold Hongju Koh will present case studies in diplomacy. NYU University Professor Joseph Weiler will apply various lenses to the trial of Luis. Marcus Noyes of the University of Pittsburgh will examine chemistry and genetics as revealed in how bread is made in different cultures. And



NYU's David and Denise Holland will offer lessons about our climate and civilization, drawing on their research on global sea-level rise in Greenland.

Midway through the academic program, the Fellows will go on ten-day retreats designed to bind them in a common enterprise. Some will raft 300 miles in the Grand Canyon; others will embed with the Apache Nation in Arizona. They will then reassemble to continue studying, reflect on their experiences, and design projects to implement what they have learned in their own communities. The following January, they will convene for a week to review successes and failures, to polish or redefine their projects, and to plan future activities.

Our experiences in politics and academia have shown that it is possible to maintain and build a healthy community among good-willed people from varied backgrounds and with different viewpoints. The differences that divide us can never be fully dissolved. But if our leaders have the right self-awareness and perspective-taking skills, the community will be richer and better for the effort.

— Jayanto Banerjee



POLL VAULT

The DT Next daily survey reflects the pulse of our readers

Question: Is Tamil Nadu becoming the primary entry point for international drug cartels?



TODAY'S QUESTION: What is your take on blood donation forms containing question on donor's caste?

- a) Perpetuation of casteism
- b) Ignorance rather than malice
- c) Social reality

2 Oct 2026

today

In 1766, on this day, the Nottingham Cheese Riot broke out at the Goose Fair in Nottingham, UK, in response to the high cost of cheese. A warehouse, shops and a cargo boat were looted, and hundreds of cheese wheels were rolled through the streets by angry rioters

wordsmith

GLABROUS adjective; Pronunciation: glay-bruhs

Definition: biology - having a surface devoid of hair or pubescence; without hair or a similar growth; smooth

Did You Know? < Latin glabr- (stem of glaber) smooth, hairless + -ous; early documented use: 1630-40

SLIPPERY SLOP

Dangers of AI titans policing themselves

LINA M KHAN

Anthropic's chief executive, Dario Amodei, has transfixed Washington with apocalyptic warnings that his products could end humanity. To prevent such an outcome, he has proposed letting the artificial intelligence companies police themselves. The government's role? To issue an antitrust exemption allowing the companies to coordinate on slowing down model development and try to persuade China to adopt a similar approach. And on Tuesday, President Trump sat flanked by top AI executives after a private lunch at the White House and promised, "tremendous self-regulation."

AI may differ from products developed during the internet boom, but some parallels are emerging. Starting around 2018, Meta began self-governance initiatives to introduce some oversight of its behaviour. In practice, these measures seemed more intended to forestall government scrutiny. Almost a decade on, jury trials have revealed that Meta was concealing evidence that its products seriously harmed kids and teens.

Implicit in the idea of AI self-regulation is that America is incapable of managing risk through our democratic government. But historically we have done just that, successfully building and regulating powerful new technologies, from railroads to nuclear energy. We can bring AI companies in line with the public interest and deter dangerous behaviour.

First, policymakers should look to laws already on the books, not to the online manifestos and blog posts written by tech chief executives, for guidance. Much of the commentary from the executives suggests they currently operate in a legal vacuum. In fact, their business practices—including how they develop and deploy their technologies—are already subject to longstanding laws.

Product liability laws apply when goods are defective or dangerous, while tort law establishes basic duties for companies to not act negligently or recklessly. Consumer protection laws prohibiting unfair or deceptive practices can also kick in when businesses injure others by failing to take adequate precautions.

A host of lawsuits in this vein have already been filed against AI companies, with several judges affirming the viability of these cases at the initial stage. State attorneys general can also act. Individual executives at AI companies can also be held personally liable for unlawful activity, and we already have criminal laws that address more egregious forms of corporate lawbreaking. Given the automated hack of Hugging Face and a series of similar breaches, enforcers at both the state and federal levels should immediately hold AI executives accountable for the dangerous and ille-

gal actions of their systems.

Congress will need to legislate. America has a long history of regulating companies and products that are both transformative and risky, including nationally chartered banks, potentially dangerous pharmaceuticals and lethal nuclear assets. Drawing on this tool kit, lawmakers should consider mandatory testing of advanced AI systems; breaking up the AI giants to prevent conflicts of interest that can arise when a dominant company controls a critical technology, its inputs and its distribution; and truly independent supervision to monitor risk.

Lastly, tackling the challenge of AI will require confronting our broader crisis of governance. The flood of money in politics greent by the Roberts Supreme Court has also distorted our legislative body, where even popular, bipartisan initiatives now fail to pass, or often fail to even get a vote.

Over this same period, our court system has become increasingly libertarian on economic issues, with judges regularly vetoing policies that would promote economic fairness and protect Americans from corporate abuse while going easy on corporate



rate lawbreaking. Trump's executive branch has devolved into naked corruption and stopped enforcing laws against wealthy interests.

Outsourcing regulation to the AI companies may prove tempting. But it would be a clear mistake. Our democracy cannot surrender the trajectory of these powerful technologies to a handful of private actors. We must ensure they ultimately serve public ends.

Emerging technologies have always created both opportunity and peril. Regularly vetoing policies that would promote economic fairness and protect Americans from corporate abuse while going easy on corporate

Lina M Khan is an associate professor of law at Columbia Law School and chair of the Board of Directors of the NYC Economic Development Corporation. She was chair of the FTC from 2015 to 2025. **The New York Times**

Depression during pregnancy may pose risk to kids

New research has linked a diagnosis of depression during pregnancy with a higher chance of the child having a neurodevelopmental disorder, regardless of whether the mother took antidepressants.

Researchers from the UK's University of Glasgow found that among children of mothers with depression, 24 in every 100 had special educational needs when the mother was not receiving treatment. This increased by just three in every 100 children if she was taking antidepressants.

This was compared with 20 in every 100 children who were not exposed to depression or antidepressants in the womb. The researchers said that more pregnant women are taking antidepressants, but the long-term effects of these drugs on child development are unclear.

While having untreated depression during pregnancy carries its own risks, it can be very challenging for someone with de-

pression to make informed decision about medications, the team said.

The study, published in the journal *PLOS Medicine*, followed more than 1.67 million children born in Wales between 2009 and 2016 until 2022, using medical and school records.

Children of women who received antidepressant treatment had higher rates of neurodevelopmental disorders, compared to women with untreated depression.

However, the results could be affected by the fact that women with more severe depression are more likely to be prescribed antidepressants, the researchers said.

Further, when comparing treated depression, untreated depression and antidepressant exposure without depression, the analysis showed that antidepressant exposure was associated with an additional 6.3 cases per 100 children of those not exposed to depression, and an additional



2.9 cases per 100 children of those exposed to depression.

"Offspring of mothers with depression have a higher risk of SEN (special education needs) that cannot be attributed solely to antidepressant exposure. Prenatal

exposure to antidepressants may confer a small additional absolute risk, but findings may partly represent confounding by depression severity. Further research is needed," the authors wrote.

"Our results don't suggest that women should automatically stop taking their antidepressants because depression can harm both mother and baby if not treated. Women should always speak to their doctor about what is best in their situation," they said.

They cautioned that any potential risk of treatment should be balanced against the risks of untreated depression in mothers, which is associated with a higher risk of postnatal depression.

"Our study indicates that exposure to antidepressants during pregnancy could serve as a marker for additional support being needed at school," the team said.

Press Trust of India



THE GOAN EVERYDAY

Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much.
Helen Keller

Monsoon fell short, don't let Goa's water security run dry

As the southwest monsoon officially draws to a close, Goa faces a precarious outlook. The coastal State has just recorded its driest monsoon in more than two decades, ending the four-month rainy season with a staggering 32% rainfall deficit. Goa received only 2,055.4 mm of rain against the normal 3,007.8 mm. IMD data going back to 1980 confirms just how disappointing 2026 has been. Nationally, Goa ranks among the four most rain-deficient states, behind only Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Punjab.

The shortfall persisted throughout the season, peaking at 44% in September. That has put the State's water security under considerable strain. Weather disruptions linked to typhoons in the South China Sea, along with the absence of an offshore trough, have contributed to an unusually dry season.

Against this backdrop, political assurances do not sound convincing. Water Resources Minister Subhash Shirodkar and Drinking Water Minister Subhash Phal Dessai have maintained that there is no immediate water crisis, pointing to major reservoirs such as Selaulim, which is close to full capacity and currently spilling over. But that's not the complete picture. While South Goa's immediate drinking-water needs appear relatively secure, other important reservoirs have shown drastic dips last summer, with Anjunem hovering close to critical levels.

The government's "no reason to worry" stance also depends heavily on short-term measures rather than replenishment. Drawing 40-50 MLD of raw water from abandoned mining pits in Pissurlem and relying on the interstate Tiliari canal as a backup may help bridge the immediate gap, but neither is a sustainable long-term solution. If dry conditions continue, these contingency sources could quickly come under pressure. Even the Water Resources Department's warnings against unnecessary water use suggest that the government is aware of the risks. Water availability today offers no guarantee of security for the months ahead.

Agriculture too is bearing the brunt of the rainfall deficit. Fields across Goa are experiencing severe moisture stress, compounded by unseasonably high temperatures. Paddy, the backbone of Goan agriculture, is particularly affected. Farmers and experts are warning of a rise in "poll", a condition in which grain heads fail to fill properly, directly reducing yields. With crop damage estimated at 35% to 40% in some areas, the Agriculture Department has ordered a statewide ground assessment. For rain-dependent crops, the lack of sustained rainfall could turn months of work into substantial losses.

On the positive side, the State has recognised the need to act early. In a distinct departure from the usual schedule, the Water Resources Department started impounding water in check dams on September 25—nearly two months earlier than the traditional late-November timeline. By closing 400 to 500 bandharas early and adding another 100 structures, taking the total beyond 500, the administration hopes to capture as much available water as possible for agriculture and horticulture.

But early closure of check dams is only one part of the answer. Goa needs a broader, long-term strategy for dealing with increasingly unpredictable rainfall. That should include accelerating the desilting of existing reservoirs to recover lost storage capacity, enforcing rainwater harvesting requirements across commercial, industrial and tourism establishments, expanding micro-irrigation to reduce water losses at the farm level and restoring natural aquifers and village ponds so that communities are less dependent on centralised reservoirs.

The deficit monsoon of 2026 should be seen as a warning, not merely a difficult season to be managed through temporary fixes. The State still has an opportunity to strengthen its water security, but that requires action before another dry season turns today's warning into tomorrow's crisis.

OPEN SPACE >>

Time to act before we face Bengaluru-like crisis

This is in reference to your article "Goa Records Driest Monsoon". The report should serve as a wake-up call for all of us. We all know the root causes - unchecked deforestation, concretization, hill cutting and over-exploitation of groundwater. We do not want to end up like Bengaluru, facing a severe water crisis in our own Goa. The Government needs to plan and publish a concrete plan on how it will prevent a water crisis in the coming summer. Spread public awareness on water wastage and conservation. Regulate mega projects with swimming pools and water-intensive construction activities accordingly. Implement short-term measures for water management along with long-term solutions like saving our forests and protecting water catchment areas. We (citizens) hope to live a life worth the taxes we pay and not be under constant stress. It is already either food, air and water pollution, bad infrastructure and now we may be staring at a water crisis in summer.

ALWYN FERNANDES, Benaolim

The dissenting Mahatma

Gandhi's life reminds us that dissent, when rooted in truth, non-violence and moral courage, need not weaken a nation



DR JAIME RANGEL

On the birth anniversary of the Father of the Nation, it is perhaps fitting to turn our minds to the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi and, in particular, to one aspect of his political philosophy that remains deeply relevant to India today: The importance of dissent. In a democracy such as ours, founded on a secular and liberal Constitution, dissent is not an aberration. It is an essential part of democratic life. Yet, across the world and increasingly in India, the space for dissent appears to be under growing pressure. Voices that question authority are often treated with suspicion, and disagreement is sometimes portrayed as hostility towards the nation itself.

Gandhi's own life offers a powerful rebuttal to such thinking. Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was, in many ways, one of history's most consequential dissenters. His dissent was not born merely of political ambition but of a deeply held moral conviction that injustice must be resisted, and that individuals have a responsibility to oppose wrong even when the authority enforcing it is powerful.

It was a personal experience in South Africa that set him on this path. Gandhi had travelled there to take up work with an English company. Having purchased a first-class railway ticket, he entered the appropriate compartment and took his seat. But railway officials, objecting to his presence because of the colour of his skin, ordered him to move to a third-class compartment. Gandhi refused.

He was eventually thrown off the train by the police. The humiliation he experienced that night at Pietermaritzburg became one of the defining moments of his life. His experience in South Africa transformed him into an outspoken opponent of racial discrimination and injustice.

It was also during his years in South Africa, including his periods in prison, that Gandhi encountered the writings of the American philosopher and writer Henry David Thoreau, particularly his essay "Civil Disobedience".

When he returned to India in 1914, Gandhi brought with him not merely political ideas but a distinctive method of resistance. He turned his attention to poverty, caste discrimination, communal divisions and the struggle for independence. He sought Hindu-Muslim unity and campaigned against the treat-

ment of sections of society then regarded as 'untouchables'.

His method was revolutionary precisely because it rejected violence. Gandhi called for strikes, protests, boycotts and civil disobedience against British rule. But he was equally prepared to withdraw a movement if it descended into violence.

During one of his trials, Gandhi articulated this principle with characteristic clarity: "In my humble opinion, non-cooperation with evil is as much a duty as is cooperation with good."

Perhaps no episode demonstrated this philosophy more dramatically than the Salt March of 1930.

On March 12 that year, Gandhi set out from Sabarmati Ashram with a small group of followers to challenge the British monopoly over salt. The salt laws prevented Indians from freely collecting or selling salt and imposed a tax on an essential commodity. Gandhi recognised that salt was not merely an economic issue. Gandhi walked approximately 240 miles to Dandi on Gujarat's coast. What began with fewer than a hundred followers grew into a mass movement as thousands joined along the route. When Gandhi reached Dandi on April 5, the Salt March had become a powerful act of collective defiance.

Dissent is one of the most important non-violent instruments available to citizens when they confront injustice or the abuse of authority. In a democracy, disagreement with a government, a political party or a particular policy cannot automatically be equated with opposition to the nation.

History repeatedly reminds us what happens when dissent is suppressed. The twentieth century witnessed the rise of fascist, communist and military dictatorships that sought to control public thought and silence opposition. The two World Wars demonstrated the catastrophic consequences of allowing authoritarian ambitions to overwhelm institutions, reason and human freedom. Even governments that describe themselves as democratic can become un-



Democratic societies need disagreement, but they also need citizens capable of disagreeing without abandoning civility and humanity



fortable with criticism. Those who dissent can be mocked, vilified or portrayed as enemies. As playwright Harold Pinter observed, "It's so easy for propaganda to work, and dissent to be mocked."

The challenge, therefore, is not simply to defend dissent as a political right but to understand it as a moral responsibility. A citizen does not cease to be patriotic merely because he or she questions the government of the day. On the contrary, there are moments when remaining silent in the face of injustice can itself become a failure of civic responsibility.

Gandhi's legacy is particularly important in this regard because he demonstrated that dissent need not be driven by hatred. One can oppose an unjust law without hating those who enforce it. One can resist injustice while remaining committed to non-violence.

That distinction is increasingly important in an age of polarised politics, instant communication and aggressive propaganda. Democratic societies need disagreement, but they also need citizens capable of disagreeing without abandoning civility and humanity.

As we commemorate Gandhi's birth anniversary, his most enduring lesson may therefore be found not simply in the political victories associated with his name but in his insistence that conscience must remain stronger than fear. Historian and academic Kamini Jahanbegloo has written that Gandhi's universal message can be measured by his immense influence on forms of dissent against unjust regimes. In that sense, Gandhi has become part of what Jahanbegloo describes as the "moral conscience of humanity". That conscience remains relevant. Nations are not strengthened when citizens are afraid to question. Democracies do not become stronger when dissent disappears.

Gandhi's life reminds us that dissent, when rooted in truth, non-violence and moral courage, need not weaken a nation. It can be one of the ways in which a nation remains true to its highest ideals.

THE INBOX >>

Diesel buses and not EV buses for KTC

Goa government's Kadamba Transport Corporation (KTC) has a proposal to buy 30 diesel buses besides the 10 that joined the existing fleet of 450 diesel and 150 EV buses (48 plying in Panaji). The KTC chairman categorically stated that no more EV buses would be bought (TOE Sep 27, 2026). On one hand, the government encourages EV vehicles as these are non-polluting, ply quite silently and subsidies are provided. The EV buses have a sleek look exterior and a nice interior. KTC has its own charging station. On the other hand, 40 diesel buses have been procured that will need regular fuel and also will entail high maintenance costs. Although government talks about environmental damages and climate change due to use of fossil fuels, but for some unknown reasons it is reluctant to replace diesel buses with EV ones.

SRIDHAR D IYER, Caranzalem

Strictly monitor effluent discharges at State IDCs

Goa has at least 19 industrial estates spread across the State, with several industries discharging liquid effluents into rivers, streams and lakes. It is therefore essential that all such effluents undergo thorough treatment before discharge to prevent pollution of our water bodies. Industries must strictly maintain prescribed standards for pH, chemical oxygen demand (COD) and biological oxygen demand (BOD), while ensuring that soluble and suspended pollutants are removed. Sewage treatment plants must also function effectively, as untreated sewage is already contributing to the pollution of several rivers. Industrial effluents can contain synthetic pollutants as well as inorganic and organic compounds containing heavy metals such as mercury,

Capt Machchar symbol of resilience and hope

The world witnessed extraordinary bravery when Captain Smit Machchar, an Indian pilot flying Zee from Dubai to Tel Aviv, heroically saved 174 lives. Despite being brutally stabbed by his co-pilot in a shocking mid-air attack, Captain Machchar managed to unlock the cockpit and regain control of the aircraft, preventing a potential catastrophe. In the face of danger, Captain Machchar's quick thinking and immense courage ensured the safety of every passenger and crew member on board. His actions embody true heroism and dedication to duty, inspiring millions worldwide. This incident reminds us of the incredible responsibility pilots carry and the extraordinary risks they sometimes face. Captain Machchar's bravery deserves our deepest respect and gratitude. We must honour such heroes who put lives above all else and reaffirm our commitment to ensuring the safety of all travellers. Captain Machchar is not just a pilot; he is a symbol of resilience and hope.

RONNIE DSOUZA, Chander

arsenic, lead and chromium. These toxic substances can be absorbed by fish, clams, crustaceans and other aquatic life and eventually enter the human food chain, potentially causing serious health problems. The Goa State Pollution Control Board (GSPCB) must therefore strictly monitor effluent discharges from every industry and ensure compliance with environmental standards.

STEPHEN DIAS, Dona Paula

Regular drills needed for hostile pilots

Apropos the news report "Pilot fights off co-pilot, saves flydubai flight" (October 1, 2026). A cockpit is meant to be the calmest room in the sky, so a fight inside it unsettles us more than turbulence ever could. Captain Smit Machchar, wounded yet unyielding, helped save 174 lives, including 27 children, and India can be proud of him. The passengers and crew who stepped

forward deserve equal thanks. Still, the account rests largely on Israeli media and officials, and the co-pilot's nationality and motive remain allegations, not findings. One person's act must never stain an entire community. The wiser lesson is that locks keep out strangers but cannot stop trouble already seated inside. Airlines should offer confidential counselling, fearless peer reporting and regular drills for a hostile pilot, and investigators should share their conclusions openly.

K CHIDANAND KUMAR, Bengaluru

Longer PUC renewal period will lessen burden

Air pollution from road transport remains an important environmental concern in Goa, as it is across India. Heavy-duty vehicles such as trucks and buses are significant contributors to transport-related particulate pollution, particularly PM2.5 emission. At the same time, cars and two-wheelers collectively form a large share of the vehicle population. Against this backdrop, questions have been raised about the use of AI-enabled cameras to identify vehicles without valid Pollution Under Control (PUC) certificates and issue challans. Reports of a newly purchased vehicle being issued a PUC-related challan, despite being within the applicable exemption period, have also raised concerns. Under the current system, a newly purchased vehicle generally requires its first PUC certificate after one year. For old vehicles subsequent certification is required at six-month intervals. A longer renewal period of one year for vehicles that meet prescribed emission standards could reduce this compliance burden. The objective of PUC enforcement would ultimately be cleaner air and better compliance and not unnecessary hardship for responsible vehicle owners.

ADELMO FERNANDES, Vasco



Send your letters to us at editor@thegoan.net. Letters must be 150-200 words and mention the writer's name and location



INDIAN EXPRESS IS NOT AN INDUSTRY. IT IS A MISSION.

—Rammath Goenka

IRAQ 23 YEARS LATER: WAR IS OVER, BUT ITS CONSEQUENCES AREN'T

WENTY-three years after the United States invaded Iraq, the last American troops have left. Washington calls it the end of its military mission. Baghdad terms it another step towards full sovereignty. But history will certainly be less forgiving. Iraq was invaded on the claim that Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction, an assertion that proved false, and the war was declared effectively won long before its consequences had even begun to unfold. The famous "Mission Accomplished" moment in 2003 captured the Iraq war's central illusion: military victory could be confused with political settlement. The invasion toppled Saddam Hussein, but it also dismantled institutions, deepened sectarian divisions, fuelled civil conflict and helped create the conditions in which the Islamic State could emerge. Lakhs of Iraqis died, more than 4,500 American service members were killed and an entire region was thrown into turmoil.

The US left in 2011, only to return three years later when the Islamic State swept across territory, captured Mosul and proclaimed its caliphate. No doubt the US-led coalition eventually destroyed that territorial caliphate. US President Donald Trump now says there was no reason to turn a temporary mission into a permanent presence. Yet the distinction between ending a military mission and ending a multidimensional conflict is vital. The Islamic State has lost its territory, but extremist networks, sectarian politics, armed militias and regional rivalries have not disappeared. The larger question is what fills the space left behind. Baghdad must demonstrate that its own security institutions can contain both militia power and the threat of an Islamic State resurgence. The American withdrawal, therefore, might close one chapter without guaranteeing a stable next one.

For India, the lesson matters even more. Speaking at the Asia Society in New York, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar recently stressed that terrorism is one of New Delhi's central security concerns. He warned that a partner's insufficient understanding of cross-border terrorism can affect bilateral relations. That is Iraq's enduring lesson. Terrorism cannot be defeated merely by taking over a territory, defeating commanders or changing regimes. Nor can security be outsourced indefinitely to foreign armies. The next phase must focus on capable national institutions, accountable governments, intelligence cooperation, and a refusal to distinguish between 'convenient' and 'inconvenient' forms of terrorism. Americans have gone home, but Iraq's strategic consequences will endure in West Asia and far beyond for decades.

ELDERLY NEGLECT REQUIRES BROADER SOCIAL RESPONSE

INDIA is a bundle of contradictions. Nothing illustrates this better than the suicide of an elderly couple in a village in Sangareddy district, Telangana, earlier this week. The 88-year-old man and his 85-year-old wife had transferred their agricultural land among their three sons, only to be left uncared for. Reports suggest they had been pushed to the point of starvation. They jumped into a well to end their misery. Elderly abuse, rarely highlighted, is growing at an alarming rate, not just in Telangana but even across the country.

Official data presents a gloomy picture, though it is incomplete as many such cases go unreported. The HelpAge India Survey-2024 says seven percent of the elderly faced active abuse, mostly at the hands of immediate family members. The social justice ministry's 2025-26 report reveals that about 65 percent of the elderly are financially insecure, directly contributing to their dependence and, often, abuse. In Telangana, while 2.1 percent of the elderly faced verbal and physical abuse, a staggering 68 percent were found to be completely neglected.

There is a penchant for enacting laws whenever a problem arises. They are necessary, but more often than not, follow-up action leaves much to be desired. The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007, allows abused and neglected senior citizens to approach tribunals with a fixed time-frame for delivering justice. Section 15 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, too, offers relief. In Telangana, Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy has been a vocal advocate of protection and care for the elderly. As in Assam, Telangana has enacted the Telangana Employees Accountability and Monitoring of Parental Support Act, which mandates salary cuts for government and private employees and elected public representatives who neglect their parents. The amount would be deposited directly into the parents' accounts.

Yet cases of elderly abuse continue to surface, with abandonment being the most prominent. It is an irony that a society that boasts of being the inheritor of a civilisation that places parents on the same pedestal as the Divine should witness such neglect. Ending this social evil requires a cultural and moral renaissance. Laws do help, but fear of societal humiliation and lack of awareness are rendering them almost useless. A continuous and serious campaign is needed to address these issues.

QUICK TAKE

COLD COMFORT

AFTER years of complaints about prison heat, incarcerated women in Texas successfully fought for a court order requiring air-conditioning in all prisons by 2029. It is also a story about dignity. India's prisons have a more basic problem: they are overcrowded, poorly ventilated and increasingly unbearable in extreme heat. At Tihar, prisoners endure Delhi's summer with room-temperature water; cold water requires a canteen purchase, a doctor's orders or a court order. Authorities offer lemons and heat-resistant sheets. The irony is painful: in Udaipur, inmates make air coolers for government departments, but are barred from using them. The Supreme Court has recognised freedom from climate change's worst effects as a fundamental right. Prisons cannot be exceptions.

UPON Xi Jinping's arrival for a State visit to the United States on September 23, 2026, US President Donald Trump personally went to Joint Base Andrews to receive the Chinese President. The welcome featured a red carpet and a military ceremony, including an ostentatious bomber bypass. It felt like *déjà vu*, except last time Trump travelled to Anchorage, Alaska on August 15, 2025, to receive Russian President Vladimir Putin on the tarmac.

Although the US-China summit that followed in Washington had more spectacular substance, the modesty of the deliverables is the story itself. It continued a pattern from the Busan and Beijing encounters in October 2025 and May 2026, respectively, where Trump framed the meetings as 'G2' moments.

Economist C Fred Bergsten first floated the idea of a US-China condominium or G2 in 2005, imagining shared leadership through existing institutions rather than their abolition. China itself once promoted the related idea of a 'new type of great power relations', founded on mutual respect for sovereignty and core interests. The present understanding of G2 is less a scheme of institutional co-governance than an acknowledgement that Washington and Beijing possess disproportionate material power, and that decisions between them have consequences far beyond their bilateral relationship.

Simultaneously, another configuration exists in the same landscape: a triumvirate, or troika, rather than a dyad. Moscow remains materially weaker than either the US or China in economic scale, but it retains the largest nuclear arsenal on the planet, enormous military reach and energy leverage, and a proven capacity to disrupt the calculations of stronger economies.

It forces upon us a profound and unsettling question: as the world wanders, shocked and grieving, through the ruins of the old order, are we witnessing the birth pangs of a new, more concentrated world order? A G2, a duopoly of American and Chinese power, or perhaps a G3, a troika that also accommodates a revanchist Russia?

G2's allure lies in its simplicity: the two largest economies, the two most powerful militaries, and the two most consequential technological ecosystems would agree on a framework for stability, leaving the rest of the world to adapt to a pragmatic, transactional approach that prioritises managing great-power competition over the messy, multilateral consensus-building of the post-war era.

For Washington, this is a form of bur-

den-sharing, a way to manage its relative decline by ceding some regional hegemony to Beijing in exchange for stability in the core arenas of global concern. For Beijing, it is the ultimate recognition of its status as a peer competitor, validating its century-long quest for national rejuvenation. Yet, for all its apparent logic, the G2 is a profoundly destabilising proposition for the rest of the world. It risks creating a system of hierarchical control where the interests of all other nations, from the European continent to India to Brazil, are subsumed by the whims and rivalries of the two.

POWER OF TWO, SHADOW OF THREE, AN ORDER IN FLUX

MANISH TEWARI

MP lawyer, former Union I&S minister and author of *A World Adrift*



SOURAV ROY

den-sharing, a way to manage its relative decline by ceding some regional hegemony to Beijing in exchange for stability in the core arenas of global concern. For Beijing, it is the ultimate recognition of its status as a peer competitor, validating its century-long quest for national rejuvenation. Yet, for all its apparent logic, the G2 is a profoundly destabilising proposition for the rest of the world. It risks creating a system of hierarchical control where the interests of all other nations, from the European continent to India to Brazil, are subsumed by the whims and rivalries of the two.

The narrowly expansive alternative is G3, in which Washington manages both rivals at once, inverting the logic Henry Kissinger pioneered in the 1970s, when the opening to China was designed to isolate Moscow.

Its central argument is the 'paradox of

dual-containment': Washington's efforts to confront China and Russia simultaneously can encourage greater Sino-Russian cooperation, increase American strategic overstretch, and generate alliance fatigue. In that formulation, Russia is not necessarily a peer competitor to either Washington or Beijing; it is the disruptive third vertex whose actions alter the other two's calculations. A potential G3 is also a pressure-regulating layer atop three subordinate frameworks in Northeast Asia: US-Japan-South Korea deterrence, China-Japan-South Korea cooperation, and a China-Russia-North Korea axis.

For Moscow, this is a vital path back to the top tier, a way to transcend its pariah status and reassert its great-power prerogative. Its 'no limits' partnership with China, as detailed in Global Affairs, provides the foundational axis

WHERE CAMPUSES THINK ALOUD

INDIAN universities have always been expected to produce and transmit knowledge. Increasingly, they are also expected to build skills and employability. These are legitimate concerns, but ones that have drawn attention away from what makes a university a university.

One such foundation is freedom: a place to question ideas and examine unpopular arguments without anticipating the preferences of those in authority. This freedom doesn't rest only on individual teachers' rights; it depends on whether their institutions have the autonomy to protect them.

This is why the Academic Freedom Index 2026 deserves attention. Prepared by the V-DEM Institute and Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg, it covers 179 countries. It measures academic freedom across five dimensions, including freedom to research and teach, campus integrity and institutional autonomy. India ranks 156th among the 179 countries assessed, placing it in the bottom 10-20 percent bracket globally, below every South Asian neighbour except China. India's decline has often been met with a familiar response: that such surveys reflect Western assumptions and fail to understand Indian realities. Methodology may raise questions. But dismissing the findings as Western bias doesn't help. Worse, in the process, we avoid a more important question: is institutional autonomy necessary for a university to remain a place of independent thought? If it is, one cannot dismiss the issue merely because the warning comes from outside India.

A professor may, in theory, have the freedom to teach, conduct research and express an opinion. But that freedom becomes difficult to exercise when the institution employing them cannot make basic decisions without external approval. Institutional autonomy does not mean freedom from accountability; universities receiving public money must comply with the law. It means decisions about academic work and internal administration should ordinarily be made within the university, according to clear rules.

What happened last April at Delhi University illustrates the difficulty. A senior Hindi professor invited to speak in New York was asked to submit his lecture text before his travel could be approved, and told that his leave required clearance from the Union education ministry. He declined, and the

university denied permission. A university requiring a lecture's text for approval raises a different question: at what point does administrative procedure become scrutiny of academic content? A similar question arose in Karnataka in March 2026, when the State Open University was directed to postpone an international conference after the higher education department said it had not followed government protocol. The government then ordered its cancellation. The conference, on the ideas of RSS ideologue Deendayal Upadhyaya, had become politically sensitive; the university eventually held it, with the Governor inaugurating the event.



Questioning Western bias in indices that rank India in the bottom brackets on academic freedom doesn't entirely resolve the issue. Recent incidents in Delhi and Karnataka indicate that institutions are losing the authority to discuss, research and organise. Reducing political influence over appointments can be a good start

The two episodes are only representative: one involves an academic, the other an institution, but both raise the same question: who has final authority over what a university can discuss, research or organise? Karnataka's recent debates over university administration show how easily autonomy turns into a political contest. But changing who controls appointments doesn't create autonomy. It may just change who exercises control; governments across the spectrum have sought such influence.

Another, less discussed dimension matters. Academic freedom requires people willing to question decisions and defend unpopular positions. Employment insecurity makes that difficult. Government data put the vacancy rate for sanctioned faculty posts at central universities at about 25.4 percent in 2025. In Karnataka's government degree colleges, a High Court judgement noted that guest faculty handled about 63 percent of the teaching workload in 2023-24, with 10,600 guest faculty against 6,100 permanent faculty. Court records show 10,303 guest faculty were engaged in 2025-26.

A teacher with job insecurity is likely to be more cautious about challenging administrative decisions than one with a secure appointment. When authority is concentrated and employment is insecure, decisions that could be settled within the university are more likely to be referred upwards. Over time, caution can become part of institutional culture, and academic freedom may remain formally intact while the willingness to exercise it diminishes.

The solution has to begin with institutional design. Universities need clear rules specifying which decisions fall under academic and administrative bodies and which require government approval, including travel, conferences, visiting scholars and public events. Government oversight should be transparent and rule-based rather than dependent on an event's political sensitivity. The appointment of vice-chancellors and senior officials also needs greater insulation from political considerations.

The index raises a different question, then: whether V-DEM is Western. It is whether we are willing to ask what a university is for. If universities are reduced to institutions that transfer knowledge and improve employability, autonomy may appear secondary. If they are also places where society thinks aloud and pursues knowledge without government becoming indispensable, India should not accept an international index uncritically, but neither should it reject an uncomfortable finding simply because it comes from outside.

(Views are personal)

MAILBAG

WRITE TO: letters@newindianexpress.com

Drought measures

Ref: Address looming food crisis (Oct 1). Water availability is diminishing across regions, while agricultural production relies on water that is being extracted rather than replenished. Drought management cannot focus solely on compensation after crop failures; instead, irrigation practices must be more efficient and stricter regulations on groundwater extraction are necessary. **Sinan Rasheed, Kozhikode**

Trust renewal

Ref: PTL compliance (Oct 1). A government that fears questions about custodial deaths has already answered them. Revoking the order was wise, but trust is rebuilt by deeds. Let TVK publish police firing data proactively, fill the commission's vacancies and penalise delays. Secrecy shields the guilty; transparency protects honest officers, too. **Babu Krishna, email**

Learning hurdles

Ref: Burden of teachers (Sep 30). Students, especially those from economically weaker sections, depend heavily on classroom teaching. Diverting teachers to other duties reduces valuable learning time. Schools must arrange for when teachers are on extended leave and ensure round-the-year training. **Thamaraj T, Thanjavur**

Fortifying cockpits

Ref: Inflight terror (Oct 1). Captain Smit Machchhar's heroism correctly highlights that aviation safety cannot rely solely on post-incident bravery. The real issue lies in systemic gaps in cockpit security and mental health screening. True safety is achieved only when the rarely used preventative protocols are fully enforced. **Razin Muhammad, Bengaluru**

Patriarchal rot

Ref: Girl students march (Oct 1). *The Morning Standard*. Women in our society still live within a patriarchal framework. Protests and agitation alone are not enough; exploitation merely changes form and its perpetrators change tactics. We must address the root cause, and that demands a radical approach. **Sumit Sidhant, email**

Bowling focus

Ref: Record chase (Oct 1). It was a real run feast for the spectators to witness the second-highest ODI chase. This feat augurs well for India men's preparations for next year's World Cup. Bumrah can inarguably lead the bowling attack, but the spin department appears to be a weak link. **N Mahadevan, Chennai**

INTERNATIONAL EDITORIALS



The FT View



FINANCIAL TIMES

"Without fear and without favour"

ft.com/opinion

To fix housing affordability, build more homes

Faced with rising mortgage costs, governments should resist stoking demand

Global economic strains are feeding into mortgage bills. Across the rich world, the ongoing sell-off in government bonds, soaring energy prices linked to the Iran war and tighter monetary policy are combining to push up bank lending rates. Last week, rates on US 30-year mortgages topped 7 per cent for the first time in almost two years. In recent days, Germany's popular 10-year fixed rate reached its highest since the early 2010s. And as the Reserve Bank of Australia raised policy rates to a 15-year high on Tuesday, its governor warned households to brace for tougher times.

This time, many homeowners are less prepared for the squeeze. During the post-pandemic rate-raising cycle, households had larger savings cushions, while many borrowers were insulated

by mortgages fixed at ultra-low rates. Both buffers have since diminished.

For first-time buyers there may be a silver lining in some markets if higher rates and sluggish economies drag down house prices. But housing demand across the rich world generally remains robust, driven by demographic shifts, immigration and the pull of job-rich cities. Homebuilding, meanwhile, is constrained by worker shortages, restrictive planning rules and, in the US, tariffs on building materials. This makes significant, sustained price falls unlikely. In turn, higher mortgage rates will mostly make it harder for aspiring buyers to get on the ladder. The Australian central bank's four rate rises since February, for example, are estimated to have reduced borrowing capacity for the median household by almost \$90,000 (\$65,000).

Governments will face more intense pressure to boost affordability. So far, many have leaned on measures to support demand. US President Donald

Trump directed Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac to buy mortgage bonds to lower rates. England's "Your First Home" scheme, announced by the Labour government this week, provides government-backed equity loans for first-time buyers, albeit only on new builds. Rent controls and subsidies for struggling borrowers are also gaining traction.

Such measures may provide temporary relief. But by supporting demand while mostly doing little to increase the stock of homes, they risk making the underlying problem worse. Last year, the US housing supply deficit was estimated to be around 4mn, while Australia, Canada and major European economies significantly undershot housebuilding targets. The obstacles to raising supply vary widely, but there are broad lessons from measures that have worked elsewhere.

One is to make better use of existing homes. Lower transaction taxes and portable mortgages make it easier for households to move into new properties

Auckland in New Zealand has shown how easing density restrictions can spur high-rise construction and stabilise prices

and unlock housing chains. Another is to ease zoning rules and planning restrictions, particularly in cities where demand is strongest. Auckland in New Zealand has shown how easing density restrictions can spur high-rise construction and stabilise prices.

Targeted affordable housing schemes could help those most in need. But several international studies show that the private development of more viable, higher-end homes can ease supply pressures across the market by freeing up older, cheaper properties for others. Support for construction apprenticeships and greater use of standardised, modular building techniques can boost development rates, too.

Governments cannot rely on quick fixes, or wait for rates and house prices to fall, to restore affordability for homeowners and aspiring buyers. Economic shocks will come and go. Enabling more homes to be built, while making better use of those already standing, offers a more durable solution.

Opinion Technology

Why we can thumb our noses at AI

Ana Klemen



Elaine Moore

If you are the sort of person who worries about privacy, the AI doomsayers probably have you in a headlock right now. OpenAI contractors are reading ChatGPT conversations and Meta's cutesy AI agent Muse is reported to be skipping past permissions. What you look like and sound like can already be replicated with ease. Anonymity is starting to seem like a quaint idea.

But it turns out there is still one – rather niche – identifier that remains yours alone. The way that you smell is, in technology terms, a data modality into which AI has made relatively little headway.

Does this seem like clutching at straws? Maybe. When a technology writer told me last month that, in all seriousness, they now regarded smell as one of the few bright spots in a world of surveillance, it sounded

uploading ourselves on to the cloud by digitally recording our experiences too. Even if you can see and hear every memory digitally, without taste and smell they won't be as vivid as the real thing.

If AI could log, identify and recreate scents, there would be obvious commercial gains beyond sci-fi memory devices. A machine that can smell disease could become a medical tool. One that was able to detect rotten produce could be used by food manufacturers or agricultural companies. But it is proving to be a difficult process because smell is such a physical experience. When we sniff something (or someone) we are inhaling tiny little pieces of them. "The smell which is in me is the fusion of the other person's body with my body," was Jean-Paul Sartre's poetic description. This is either comforting or gross, depending on your mindset. But while large language models can simulate other cognitive faculties, smell is, for now, the outlier.

Whether it will stay this way is debatable. Alex Wiltchko, a neuroscientist and AI researcher who spun his start-up Osmo out of Google Brain, says no. He compares olfactory intelligence (aka OI) to the early days of photography, when different methods of capturing images were being tested. "How do we quantify the ephemeral?" he asks. "We know it is possible, but there are different ways to go about it."

The barrier standing in the way of a perfectly accurate AI nose is, Wiltchko says, data. For this, Osmo is building data labelling infrastructure – a Rosetta Stone from the world of molecules. MIT researchers did something similar with SmellNet, a database of real-world smells.

It is an enormous job. Research by Rockefeller University's Laboratory of Neurogenetics and Behavior suggests that humans can sift between molecule combinations to detect more than a trillion different scents. Compared to vision, audio and language processing, our understanding of how we perceive those molecules is limited. We can know that a rose contains over 400 distinct odour molecules in various sizes and configurations without knowing exactly how we register its smell.

The last memorable attempt to reproduce real-world smells was Smell-O-Vision, a 1960s cinematic experiment involving puffs of scent that tended to linger and mingle in unpleasant combinations. Making a more sophisticated AI version is still a work in progress. Digital reproduction of the way that we smell remains a philosophical question mark. For now, only the human nose knows.

elaine.moore@ft.com

Letters

Do not let falling birth rates undo school reform in London

The problems associated with falling birth rates are manifold, but that's no reason to abandon 20 years of a highly successful education policy.

So in your September 22 report "London's schools are running out of children", it was depressing to read Islington councillor Una O'Halloran complaining that local councils "don't

have the powers" to ensure that academy schools do not force other schools to close by enticing pupils away. We had that very conversation with Hackney Council 15 years ago, when we set up two free schools in the borough. It was as though parents' preference for a good school (possibly an academy) over an indifferent one

(possibly run by the council) was somehow beside the point.

As the latest Pisa results make abundantly clear, the effect of the academy and free school programme – by introducing real competition at the margin – has been to force all schools to raise their performance, including those run by local councils.

Falling fertility rates doesn't change this fact (for it is surely more than an opinion). Hackney and other councils will need to get better at managing surplus real estate – alas, this too is not an area in which they have excelled in the past.

Andrew Wesemann
London W1, UK

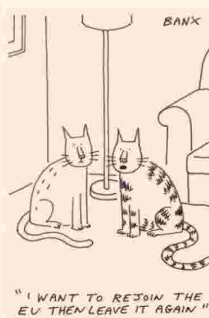
Methane offers shipping its route to a green future

When I read the headline "How the shipping industry could make itself greener" (Report, FT.com, September 15) I was expecting to read an informed article, typical of the FT.

Alas, the article looks through a worryingly narrow lens at only two future fuels: methanol and ammonia. Inexplicably, it does not even mention liquefied natural gas and the methane pathway that currently is the dominant alternative maritime fuel.

DNV, the international ship classification body, recorded 152 methane dual-fuel vessel orders in the first eight months of 2023, accounting for almost 90 per cent of the alternatively fuelled order book. This tracks with the 2024 record. In contrast, the order book for ammonia and methanol vessels is four and two respectively. How could the article miss that obvious fact? Yes, green, emission-free versions of ammonia and methanol can be produced using bio waste or renewable electricity sources. The same is true of biomethane and e-methane which use the same feedstocks. Why was that not noted?

Fundamentally, as the article suggests, "it all comes down to costs". The global infrastructure already exists to support LNG and the methane



pathway. It does not exist for ammonia or methanol and would require billions in investment, according to independent industry experts.

The facts are clear. I hope that when talking about alternative fuels for shipping in the future you will look at real trajectories and do not omit the methane pathway that is currently viewed as the only practical and realistic option by the industry itself.

Peter J Keller
Chairman, SEA-LNG, Estero, FL, US

How a marching dispute could set back Irish unity

When Michelle O'Neill, first minister of Northern Ireland, was elected she promised to be a first minister for all. As part of this approach, she laid a laurel wreath at the Cenotaph outside Belfast City Hall during official Remembrance Sunday commemorations. This was a first for a senior politician of Sinn Féin, the political wing of the IRA who have now decommissioned their arms, because Remembrance Sunday pays tribute to all fallen British personnel, which includes members of the SAS British special forces and the Royal Irish Constabulary, the state police force during the Irish war of independence in the 1920s.

If the first minister and colleagues envision a future where the island of Ireland is united, the traditions of all communities should be respected and in that spirit instead of opposing an Orange Order march in Portadown she should be permitting it to march down the Garvaghy Road as long as it is done in a peaceful and respectful manner to local residents (Report, September 27). Entrenched views that don't respect other traditions will set the prospect of Irish unity back decades.

Brian Walsh
Dublin, Ireland

The woman whose maths put John Glenn into orbit

Sarah O'Connor's column made me think about why I sometimes resent meetings ("A meeting a day keeps the robots away", Opinion, September 29). Usually it is not the meeting itself I resent but going into one without knowing why my presence matters – and sometimes coming away still wondering.

O'Connor's point that computer-based work will continue to need human expertise brought to mind *Hidden Figures*. The 2016 film about Black women mathematicians at NASA dramatises a real episode before John Glenn's orbital flight. NASA's new computers had calculated his trajectory, but Glenn asked Katherine Johnson to check the figures and said he would be ready to fly if she confirmed them.

The familiar warning that AI can make mistakes and that important information should be checked gives that episode new relevance. Meetings may indeed help keep the robots at bay. But so too may the person still glued to the screen when they are checking and confirming the accuracy of AI's output and taking responsibility for the result.

Barbara Clancy
Dublin, Ireland

Our sense of smell maintains a dividing line between real and virtual worlds

like the sort of thing someone would say when they'd run out of normal ways to be cheerful. What is there to gain from being undetectable and unrecognisable in this way? What sort of aroma-based resistance can you mount?

Yet in the world of olfactory neuroscience there are some who take the idea of not being sniffed out by AI seriously. "I have attributes not digitally coded," says Barry Smith, director of the Institute of Philosophy at the University of London's School of Advanced Study. "And I'm happy about that."

Smith spends a lot of time thinking about senses. Smell tends to be the most neglected – or it was until Covid knocked it out for millions of people. And it was an academic backwater for so long that there is relatively little data available for AI models to ingest.

Keeping this sense beyond the bounds of AI is good not just because it helps us to keep a few shreds of privacy intact but because it maintains a dividing line between real and virtual worlds.

"No matter how good the visuals and sounds – no matter if you can move around in a virtual world – we will never be really immersed in a digital world if we cannot smell it," says Smith. That goes for the notion of

OUTLOOK
ISTANBUL

Floundering across the Bosphorus



by John Paul Rathbone

Green and silky; cool and surprisingly keen. Those were my first thoughts after I jumped into the Bosphorus at 10am on a Sunday morning, clutching an orange safety buoy. My goal, along with 2,400 others, was to swim from Asia to the European side of Istanbul. Who knew transcontinental travel could be so... close. I imagined the 6.5km would be easy: the strait's famous current would simply whooosh me along. Foolish me! My heart was racing, my shoulders ached, nothing was going swimmingly, and I was just 500 metres in.

The sea has always gripped my imagination, its sensuous feel and permanent association with childhood summer holidays. And while Istanbul is far less exotic than many imagine, even today in early autumn the Bosphorus looks irresistible from the city's hilltops, where the vistas are so open and grand. Its sparkle and freshness are a siren invitation to plunge in. So I signed up for its 58th annual Cross-Continental race. I trained, a bit – egged on by Esra, a friendly swimming instructor who sent me emoji-laden text messages to swim further, faster. On race day, the Bosphorus was closed to the thousands of shadow fleet tankers, tugboats, ferries and pleasure cruisers that normally ply the waterway. The oldest swimmer was 84, the youngest 15, and rescue boats were stationed along the course – including behind the finish line to retrieve anyone who

might be swept through the Marmara and Mediterranean seas (to where? The mind boggled: Egypt?). A century ago, Anita Grew swam the Bosphorus' full 19-mile length, accompanied by her father, the US ambassador, in a rowboat. He played "I'm Following You" on a gramophone, a romantic flourish to their genteel excursion. Anita remarked afterwards: "It was a pleasant swim." What could possibly go wrong, I thought?

About 15 minutes in, I choked on some chop and stopped to tread water. I lifted my goggles to look around. A red Turkish flag billowed from a high ridge, above the Rumeli Hisar fortress from which Mehmed the Conqueror invaded Constantinople. The water was streaked by milky rays of light, and the orange buoys of other swimmers seemed far away. I felt a cool thread on my right shoulder; it was the current. I swam into the middle of the strait and flipped on to my back as the Fatih Sultan Mehmet Bridge passed over me. If I was going to fail, at least I would survive floundering. I alternated crawl with breaststroke and sidestroke – even backstroke, until I bumped into someone and realised I was going the wrong way. Istanbul is an enemy to nostalgia, because it is always changing. It is also monstrously big. But from the eye level of the Bosphorus the skyscrapers faded from view, and the city acquired a soft sense of majesty. Even Genclik Mosque, a colossal concrete structure that opened in 2019 with room for 63,000

worshippers, looked gallant in the mid-morning sun. At Arnavutköy, where the strait knicks and widens, a young woman suddenly popped up beside me. Bobbing in the water, we talked for a while about inconsequential subjects, like strangers at a cocktail party. "Well," she concluded, "enjoy your swim," and then disappeared with a flick of her limbs. Heartened, I ploughed on. Eventually I saw the flashing lights of the landing stage, and cut towards the European side. Then the Bosphorus played a trick. One of its currents – a nasty undercurrent – surfaced against me. Even Muhammed Yavuz Selim Oğuz, who won the race in 51 minutes, complained afterwards about the unpredictable currents that caught him in reverse flows.

An hour and 36 minutes after jumping in, I hauled myself out of the water, 84th out of 86 in my age group. When Lord Byron swam the Bosphorus, further down the Hellespont, he wrote: "I plume myself on this achievement more than I could possibly do any other kind of glory." But I was no feathered plume. I felt like a shipwreck.

Instead of Byronic triumph, what stays with me more is a new sense of intimacy with Istanbul. That, and my surreal midstream encounter with another swimmer. I think she said her name was Marina. But my ears were clogged with seawater, so I can't be sure.

johnpaul.rathbone@ft.com

Opinion

Europe can frustrate Russia's hybrid war

Alexander Gabuev

European policymakers are scrambling for a response to deter Russia's escalating hybrid campaign. Unfortunately, there is virtually no way to fully discourage the Russian security state from trying to hit targets on the continent that are linked to military support of Ukraine. What Europe needs is a defensive toolkit to disrupt the attacks, clear thinking on how to build leverage vis-à-vis the Kremlin, and a path to establish guardrails with Russia.

From the Kremlin's viewpoint, there are at least three reasons for intensifying its hybrid war against Europe. First, many European arms producers are working to supply Moscow's enemy, and some facilities bolstering Ukraine's defence-industrial base are located on the continent. This has turned Europe

into Kyiv's secure rear. The Kremlin wants to remove this safety margin.

The second reason is revenge. The Russian state is aware that hundreds of thousands of its servicemen have been killed by weapons and munitions supplied or paid for by Europe, and using intelligence supplied by Nato. On top of that, Ukraine has been intensifying its campaign against Russia's war economy and supporting infrastructure. All these losses are ultimately the result of Vladimir Putin's own senseless decision to invade Ukraine but leaders in Moscow do not take this into account for obvious reasons. Instead, there are myriad bureaucratic incentives to show Putin that his secret services are busy making Ukraine and Europe pay.

Finally, there is hope in the Kremlin that the Europeans will eventually abandon Ukraine because their governments will be put under pressure by voters who are agnostic about Kyiv's fate. So far, these hopes have proved futile. But even if Russia's hybrid campaign doesn't ultimately engineer a change of sentiment towards Ukraine, attempts to

disrupt European military supplies and revenge are strong enough motivations for the Russians to carry on.

Some European policymakers are calling for direct offensive responses to all this because, they say, Russians only understand the language of force: if they are hit hard enough, they will back off. This logic mirrors the Kremlin's understanding of the west, which means

What is needed is a defensive toolkit to disrupt the attacks and a path to establish guardrails

that both sides may find themselves on a path of uncontrolled escalation in a domain where language for escalation management does not exist – unlike the cold war's nuclear or conventional domains. Both sides would then be just one mass-casualty event away from a different world.

But there are other ways Europe can manage the Russian challenge in an

effective, resolute and careful manner. Nato is already doing a good job of disrupting the Russian attacks. However, Europe can step up its efforts to boost domestic security tools. As the continent embarks on a generational investment in its security and military capacity, some of these resources should be spent on domestic needs: beefing up under-resourced police, counter-intelligence and counterterrorism agencies and enabling closer co-ordination between these three branches.

Europe is entering a dangerous period in which many of its younger citizens may be organically radicalised by the images continuously coming out of the Middle East and Africa – and then exploited by terrorists or adversarial states like Russia and Iran. The continent did a good job tackling this in the wake of 9/11, and a similar generational effort is needed. Modern technology, particularly AI, will be a powerful ally, and if policymakers are concerned about the reliability of the US, Europe has its own companies that can help to make it safer.

Focusing on defence doesn't preclude

sharpening the offensive toolkit. Europe can discreetly signal to Moscow that every hostile action will have a price – and that every Russian attack will result in additional European support for Ukrainian operations. Europe can try to use that as leverage to bring the Kremlin into a discussion about guardrails in the hybrid domain. While it's unlikely that the Russians will abandon their attacks altogether, they may be pressed into discussing sets of civilian targets – for example, purely civilian airports – that should be off limits for all sides. This would reduce the potential for mass-casualty events.

Scepticism is understandable among Nato professionals who may believe that such discussions would be a waste of time given the Kremlin's disregard for human life, and the low level of trust between intelligence services. But trying to talk the Russians into limitations from a position of strength must be explored despite the risk of failure. It may save lives.

The writer is the director of the Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center in Berlin

How to escape the low-pay, low-productivity jobs trap

Sangheon Lee

The broken link between economic growth and employment is now widely recognised. Too often, structural transformation has failed to create enough work, especially for young people in developing countries such as Rwanda and Ethiopia, who are having a tough time gaining a foothold in the labour market.

The problem is not just that there are too few jobs but that too many are low quality: informal, unprotected, low productivity, low pay, offering little opportunity to learn or move up. Some 2.1bn workers (around 58 per cent of the global workforce) remain in informal employment. More worryingly, research indicates that the gradual reduction of informal jobs associated with economic growth has stalled in recent years.

There is a common assumption that when jobs are scarce, countries must choose between more jobs and better ones. Job quality, it is argued, can come later. But this mistakes short-term necessity for strategy. Low-quality jobs may absorb surplus labour but they can also weaken skills, productivity, demand and resilience. In so doing, they diminish the foundational capacity to generate more and better jobs. This poorly understood dynamic is clearest when it comes to education and training.

Economic transformation requires workers to keep improving their abilities. But they are more likely to do so when new skills are rewarded through better pay, greater security or prospects

Informal employment may absorb surplus labour but it can also weaken skills, productivity and resilience

for advancement. When this link is fragile, workers have less incentive to invest in training, companies have less pressure to upgrade and economies risk being stuck in low-productivity competition.

Once again, this is a particular problem for young people whose first jobs often shape not only their income but their expectations, abilities and trust in the future. AI and other new technologies only make the issue more urgent. Without better jobs that allow workers to learn, adapt and share in productivity gains, tech advances may end up deepening existing divides.

Similarly, workers with protection against health and income risks can better cope with shocks and remain in the labour market. There is therefore a strong economic case for investing in job quality through skills, social protection and support for productive small and medium-sized enterprises as part of strategies to avoid the low-pay, low-skill, low-productivity trap.

But decent jobs also create social and non-financial value for workers, families and communities. They shape personal identity, stability, health, education and trust. Poor-quality jobs, by contrast, can impose wide-ranging hidden social costs. Markets may not always recognise all of the positive externalities that come from high-quality employment, so it must be a job for policymakers.

This echoes Indian economist Amartya Sen's idea of development as the expansion of people's real freedoms and capabilities. Work matters because it can enlarge (or restrict) people's ability to plan, learn, participate and move forward. These capabilities can only be cultivated by systematic and sustained investment in job quality.

The renewed focus on employment by global financial institutions, such as the World Bank's jobs agenda, is therefore a real opportunity.

But it should not stop at counting jobs. Development finance needs to ask sharper questions: whether the jobs it supports raise productivity, improve pay and prospects, build skills, strengthen workers' voices and eventually create social returns.

Development policy should be built on the real possibility of progress, not desperation. Continued reliance on poor-quality jobs will ultimately weaken the very process on which future economic growth depends.

The writer is chief economist at the International Labour Organization

Burnham, the honest stagnationist

POLITICS

Janan Ganesh



The prime minister breaks the omertà at last. It is a brave act. He tells an ageing nation that pensions are too expensive at their current rate of increase. How true and how overdue. Here is a chance to lighten the tax burden on those in work. Andrew Murray Burnham, man of destiny, governing from the world's first industrial city: unchain Britannia.

Oh, the cash is going on social care, specifically for the elderly. This will be a fiscal transfer from the retired to the retired. Burnham envisages a whole new arm of the welfare state for them, modelled on the NHS. (That is the NHS which is forever in need of being "saved", according to Labour. A perverse thing to emulate, but there we are.) As the pension reform is small and the social care plan big, there is an implied tax rise, not a cut.

As ever with Britain, the wonder is not that it grows at just 1.5 per cent per year but that it manages even that much.

What is there to be said for Burnham? At least he does not pretend to care about growth. There is a refreshing candour about his indifference to this (admittedly paramount) issue. Sir Keir

Starmer felt the need to pretend, which led to extreme disillusion when he raised taxes and red tape on business. The last few Conservative prime ministers extolled economic dynamism in the abstract while favouring pensioners, spinning up the planning system and gutting the vast single market on Britain's doorstep.

Burnham is a fairly honest stagnationist. Until such time as Britain suffers an acute economic crisis, he would rather pursue left-liberal aims than growth, which might after all entail deregulation and other forays outside his comfort zone. Besides social care, a big item in his speech in Liverpool on Tuesday was reform of Britain's majoritarian voting model. A man who spends scarce time and political capital on this while his country borrows more expensively than Greece is letting you know who he is. Even when he argued for unpicking Brexit, he framed it as a means of controlling immigration as much as a spur to trade.

Asked about a third runway at Heathrow, which could be an economic tonic, Burnham's line is that it is "a matter for London", as if he were not prime minister for London. He still says things like "UK plc", which is the kind of 1990s flannel that someone of a certain age with nil interest in business would rote-learn to get through a speech or interview. What he calls his "theory of growth" is so sparse that I double-checked the transcript of the speech for a missing page.

This is just not what moves him. His

inner self comes out in blurted, half-withdrawn remarks. Britain should rejoin the EU. A group called the Waspis women, who were unprepared for a rise in the pension age, deserve compensation. Britain should not be "in lock" to bond markets, whatever that means. National security must not come before social security. Football fans should be free to take beers to their seats. Burnham is pragmatic enough to let these statements die a natural death when critics poke holes in them. But notice the theme: not one is to do with growth. (Even his case for the EU was that he liked "unions of all kinds": togetherness was the point, not wealth.) What was until recently seen by all as Britain's central problem is not that much on his mind.

A Labour government exists to steer cash to its own people until economic waters close over it

Of course, Burnham would rather that GDP expanded at 3 per cent per annum. But whether a government wants growth is never the question. The question is whether it wants growth more than it wants other things: equality, sovereignty, climate goals, low immigration. The US, a dynamo this past decade, does not have a growth strategy. What America has, when it is faced with trade-off after specific trade-off, is a growth preference.

If Britain's answer is that other things matter more, there is no dishonour in the choice, as long as people accept the consequences of economic torpor. The dishonour is in the pretence: in the decade-long sham of prioritising growth but not really. It wasn't even good for the governments who practised the deceit, as it deprived them of strategic direction.

So welcome the new candour. A Labour government exists to steer cash to its own people until the economic waters close over it. Burnham, unlike Starmer, hardly pretends otherwise. His relaxed charisma, which was not there

earlier in his career, might even come from being open about his tribalism. (As a normal bloke, Burnham does normal things, such as join professional Labour politics at 24 and remain there at 56.) He hasn't the shiftness of someone feigning interest in people unlike himself. It is for Conservative leader Kemi Badenoch and others to build a winning coalition out of the voters he is taxing. Some will ask her what the hardest of Brexits has gained them.

The telling phrase in Burnham's speech was "good growth". Notice that qualifier, for there are two decades of national economic decline contained within it. A country that has underperformed since the financial crash is open to growth – how gracious of us – as long as it is not disastrous or unjust in some ill-defined sense. The growth must also touch "every postcode", as if that ever happens anywhere. The hauteur, the almost regal choosiness, is majestic. And they say that Britain has lost its pride.

janan.ganesh@ft.com

Britain needs to do more to support its own tech companies

David Lammy

As foreign secretary, many of my counterparts would come to me saying they wanted to "do AI with Britain". At the time I was only able to direct them to the AI Security Institute, a state research organisation. This was in sharp contrast to how the Americans or the French handle such a request, which is by pointing people straight to companies like Palantir or Mistral.

It was thus an astute move by Andy Burnham to announce at the United Nations last week that he wanted to put AI at the heart of Britain's charting of the G20 next year.

But to do so will be a challenge. Despite the smiles at the recent US-China state dinner in the White House, geopolitical tensions are rising. One looming flashpoint comes from reports

that the US plans to ban cutting-edge, open Chinese AI models, citing security concerns and IP theft, and thus force its allies to follow suit.

This would knock the legs out from under the European AI start-up scene and foreclose the faint hope of a genuine breakthrough in diplomacy on the subject at the G20. Martin Casado, a partner at Andreessen Horowitz, has said that when entrepreneurs walk through the VC firm's doors there is a high chance they are using a Chinese open-weight AI model. The reason is cost. According to Vercel's AI Gateway Production Index, these models cost roughly one-tenth of their average American counterparts.

China is also aggressively promoting them. Knowing full well that every technology of tomorrow, from autonomous cars to automated factories, will be running on AI, the Chinese want to become the default model provider around the world. This will allow them to escape US export controls on critical components like chips by hiding allies more closely to the Chinese state.

There are genuine security concerns about these Chinese open-weight mod-

els such as DeepSeek's or the Alibaba Qwen series, and US agencies allege that many Chinese companies have inappropriately trained their models on American AI at industrial scale, using proxies and fake accounts to breach their terms of service.

But they are also a commercial threat to the US. Why pay for an expensive

The prime minister should plan to avoid a US ban on Chinese AI that would divide the world

American AI company subscription if you can just use a cheap Chinese model, as Airbnb does, or adapt one, as Thomson Reuters has? According to OpenRouter, a service used to access AI models, Chinese models have sat above 30 per cent of US companies' token usage since February 2026.

The risk is mounting. All the White House has to do is decree that American software and cloud providers cease

working with Chinese AI models and every British company that relies on some aspect of Microsoft, Google or Amazon – which is pretty much all of them – is also trying to use Chinese AI will struggle to operate. Such a ban would be an immense setback to the European tech sector, where many companies use Chinese open-weight models, including frontier AI developer Mistral.

That is why Burnham needs a plan to avoid a US ban on Chinese AI that would divide the world. This requires a three-part strategy.

First, the prime minister should develop a diplomatic plan with our allies to present to President Donald Trump, as we did in developing the Coalition of the Willing for Ukraine. Taking the Americans at their word about security and IP concerns, such a coalition should propose turning the UK's AI Security Institute into a collective allied regulator that can assess whether Chinese open-weight models pose a threat, with a transparent, mutually designed process about the repercussions of a ban.

Second, we need to invest more in British AI so that we are not vulnerable

to external pressure. There are extraordinary companies like Fuse, which is working on our energy grid, Era4, which is building data centres, or Fractile and Olix, which are building chips.

We've made huge strides in launching the UK's Sovereign AI fund this year, which has invested in 18 companies, including the British AI giant Demis Hassabis's AI drugs venture, the efficient-compute company Calliope, and the new AI lab Ineffable Intelligence. These companies are building sovereign British AI capacity and the Foreign Office must promote them.

As I saw in government, when the US abruptly banned the use of Anthropic's latest models, the White House can take us by surprise. A ban on Chinese open-weight models would be far more than a temporary suspension of access. Burnham can get ahead of this by proposing a way to address security concerns while also building up a British technology stack that leaves us less vulnerable to coercion by either friend or foe.

The writer is a Labour MP and former foreign secretary

Opinion

Maybe Britons should leave the birds alone

One of Britain's favorite national pastimes is hurting as well as helping.

Lia Leendertz

BRISTOL, ENGLAND In early autumn the light falls low and golden across my garden, illuminating the panes of the empty greenhouse and picking out crab apples and the pear tree's turning leaves.

It would normally be time for me to get the bird feeders out and fill them with goodness: fatty peanuts and nutritious seeds to keep tiny bird bodies warm and healthy through the cold autumn and winter days and nights. Most years my garden becomes a theater of delicate, fluttering wings on frosty mornings, squabbles at the feeder in the snow, and an ever-changing roll call of avian visitors through the dark months. They provide endless entertainment and the warm glow of feeling like I am saving little lives.

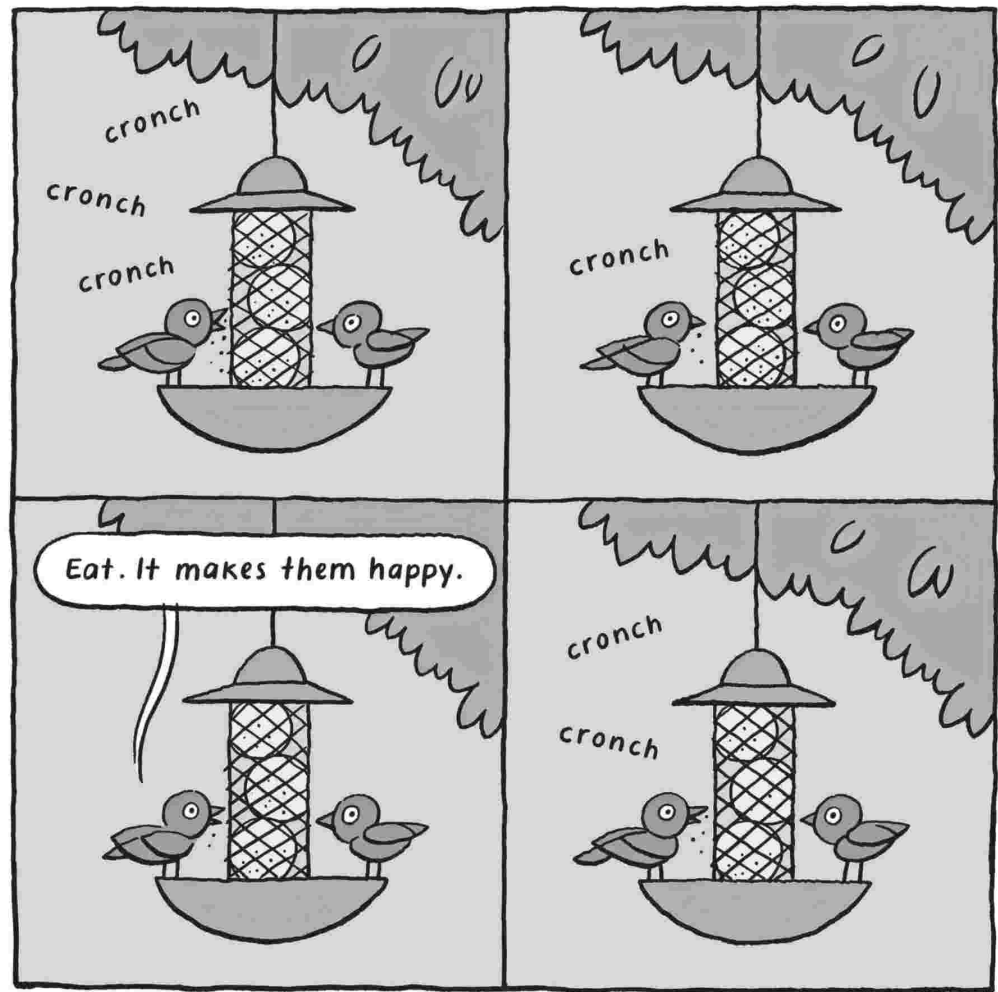
This year, however, I am thinking twice. It has become apparent that one of Britain's favorite national pastimes may actually be hurting as well as helping. An epidemic of the parasite that causes the disease trichomonosis, which thrives on damp birdbaths and feeders and is deadly to birds, has devastated the population of certain species in Britain by more than 60 percent. This year the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds released new guidance asking people to restrict feeding between May and October, and to take steps to contain the spread, like regular cleaning and not using flat feeders, if feeding in winter.

The guidance prompted some soul-searching in a country in which more than half of households feed garden birds. Estimates vary widely, but between us we put out between 50,000 and 150,000 tonnes (up to about 170,000 tons) of seeds, nuts and fat, spending an estimated 334 million pounds, about \$440 million, a year — about twice as much as the rest of Europe combined.

We do this for the birds, but also, of course, for ourselves. For those quiet moments with nature in our busy, distracted lives. But how hard would it be to drop the habit if it turned out to be harmful? If we are truly a nation of bird lovers, shouldn't we be able to put their welfare above our enjoyment of them?

IT BEGAN WITH HATS. In the Victorian era, large, brightly colored exotic feathers and even whole birds were so sought after as hat decorations that several birds of paradise were driven to the edge of extinction. Emily Williamson, a 34-year-old solicitor's wife and, it turned out, pioneer of ethical consumerism, fought back. Apparently ignored by the all-male British Ornithologists' Union, she founded an all-female Society for the Protection of Birds from her home in Didsbury, Manchester, in 1889 (the royal charter came later, in 1904).

From the beginning, the R.S.P.B. was practical, caring and hands-on — initial members signed a declaration that they would not participate in the exotic plumage trade. Victorian society was to be asked to consider birds as something deserving of care, rather than merely decorative. The winter of 1890-91 was unusually severe, with temperatures as low as 1 degree Fahrenheit. Letters and articles in newspapers urged readers to put out food for



NADINE ROSEBERRY

the birds to help them survive the freeze, and they did. Britons found they could save birds through their actions, and enjoy the tiny beneficiaries that thrived in their gardens. It was irresistible. A national pastime was born.

By some measures, this feeding has been a triumph. The average bird feeder is visited by a wide variety of species. Goldfinches — lively birds with yellow wing patches and bright red faces — were once rare garden

visitors but have become more common. Great-spotted woodpeckers come to peanut feeders in the suburbs. This proximity to nature is at least partly responsible for creating a nation of bird lovers that signs petitions, funds reserves and notices absences when they occur. More than half a million Britons contribute to the annual Big Garden Birdwatch, a survey of garden wildlife, and the R.S.P.B. is still one of the largest nature conservation charities in Europe.

But as elsewhere, the bigger picture remains grim. Habitat loss, mainly driven by agriculture, has meant that the farmland bird population has declined by around two-thirds since 1970 and woodland birds by about a third. Certain species, like the willow tit and spotted flycatcher, have declined by more than 90 percent. We have built what might be the most successful bird-feeding culture on earth, while presiding over a decline in the overall population. (In the United States and

Canada, almost 30 percent of birds have disappeared since 1970.)

The scientists Jack Shutt and Alexander Lees, in a 2021 review titled "Killing With Kindness," argued that dumping thousands of tonnes of non-natural food into a country the size of Britain is likely to have had profound consequences that we have never measured. Mr. Shutt's own fieldwork found garden food to be the commonest item in the diets of blue tits, even

LEENDERTZ, PAGE 10

Writing isn't as important as we think

If I do not treat writing as essential for achieving thought, it is not clear why I should force my students to.

Joe Cruz

Most college professors I know believe that students learn to think — critically, creatively, reflectively, tenaciously — only by writing. At Williams College, where I am a professor, writing skills are among the very few general education requirements.

It's no surprise, then, that universities see artificial intelligence as an existential threat, and have launched an arms race of countermeasures: more proctored essay exams; test-taking rooms shielded from the internet; requirements that essays be composed on platforms that track all edits, so the word-for-word genealogy can be verified. I've heard professors rejoicing when they see typos or grammatical errors in an essay, as if they proved that a student wrote it without any help from A.I.

But what if we are mistaken in treating writing as the highest cultivation of thought? The evidence that supports this belief is thin at best. Writing can be useful cognitive scaffolding for memory and self-regulated learning, but the notion that it is the best process for developing thinking skills is a fairly recent idea, traceable to the 1970s writing-across-the-curriculum movement.

In 1980, James Britton, an educator, hypothesized that we discover what we think in the act of writing. "Hypothesized" is the correct word here, since Mr. Britton's anecdotal and introspec-

tive suppositions never amounted to proof of a stronger claim, and studies since have been limited or inconclusive.

In Plato's "Phaedrus," Socrates offers a startling criticism of writing. Written words, he claims, are not the true children of knowledge, because writing cannot speak, answer questions or come to its own defense. Only through conversation among minds, he suggests, does reason yield real insight. For the past two millennia, this appraisal has seemed like a failure to appreciate the power of writing. But perhaps Socrates was right, and we think best by speaking, answering and defending our ideas.

I don't rely on prepared scripts when I teach, and few of the teachers I most admire do. Instead, I engage my seminar students through messy, searching conversation, responding to their presence in the classroom to gauge whether we're understanding one another. I want to make new connections in the immediacy of our back-and-forth. I want to recall a thread from two class meetings ago spontaneously and weave it into my improvised lecture while snapping into new ways of thinking about it in the moment.

If the only way that I could teach my courses was to sculpt written paragraphs, I'm not sure I would actually know the material. If I do not treat writing as essential for achieving thought, it is not clear why I should force my students to.

Writing assignments serve practical needs of colleges and universities. When we receive a batch of 10-page



DANIEL MALARA/REUTERS

essays, we can take them home, read a few, put them aside and grade the rest when the opportunity arises. If our minds wander, we can reread the prose before us. If we need to justify a grade, we can cite the record. Writing is a portable, compact trace of mind that is more manageable in a bureaucracy than is a conversation. But none of these conveniences is about developing the best thought.

Last semester I permitted my students to use A.I. tools on their final essays in accordance with specific guidelines. They then had a 45-minute oral exam in which I could audit their understanding of their claims and push them further in their analyses. I was reassured by the results. In no

case did I suspect that an A.I. had written a student's paper in the substantive, objectionable way that we are all concerned about. The students were all too sharp on the ideas, too deft in reconfiguring their thoughts and extending them dynamically. Moreover, at least half of the class was more agile, more reflective and clearer during oral exams than they were in their papers.

I believe colleges can permit the use of A.I. writing tools without undermining the next generation of thinkers. But to get there, we need to embrace a different image of a university education — one in which ideas are expressed in real time and analytical thought unfolds as a debate or an oral

defense or a group discussion. It will take courage to demand that students demonstrate active, participatory mastery of ideas. And it will take courage on their part to abandon the safe recursion of revision and narrative refinement. To be sure, there will be challenges of scale, and not every kind of mastery will be able to adapt. The benefits, however, may be enormous.

Pursuing an alternative path where we think aloud together, vigorously and sharply, won't yield a world in which nothing is written. Socrates was wrong if he was suggesting that there should be no writing at all. Writing has an important function: It summarizes and compresses our thoughts into a shareable, durable medium. Writing remains an essential life skill, and we will continue to do it. A.I. will write summaries of our thoughts and may contribute some of its own. But we shouldn't always force students to maintain a written record of knowledge. Universities have forgotten that archiving and thinking are separate.

Consider what we might gain if we practiced speaking more and carrying around the resources of mind through our own attention, memory and engagement with one another. We may end up spending less time isolated, gain more practice resolving disagreement and find ourselves a clearer sense of what we believe. This is the moment to claim critical thought back.

JOE CRUZ is the chair of the philosophy department and the program on cognitive science at Williams College.

OPINION

The New York Times

INTERNATIONAL EDITION

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Hackers could overwhelm power grids. Let's stop them.

Harry Krejsa
Phoebe Benich

The Chinese government has spent years preparing to attack the infrastructure underpinning American life. It is exploiting the seams in the U.S. electricity system and has likely positioned hackers to cause sustained blackouts. While China's leaders have so far practiced restraint, artificial intelligence is poised to upend that fragile balance.

America's A.I. boom, and the industry's voracious appetite for electricity, makes the grid a highly attractive target for China and other hostile states seeking to weaken the United States. The boom has also created a wholly novel threat in the form of powerful A.I. agents, which may hack better and faster than the Chinese government is able to and may also be underpinned by the threat of conventional war.

The United States must reinvent its electrical grid to protect against these evolving threats. That means adopting energy technologies that can be swiftly patched and building a more distributed grid that can quarantine and control

The Trump administration should build a stronger alliance with clean energy companies in spite of its culture war with them.

companies that deliver it in spite of its culture war with many of them.

Solar panels and battery storage are unique because they rely on software to direct the generation, transmission and distribution of electricity rather than doing so through the spinning turbines or mechanical switches in coal and gas power plants. When the two of us worked in the federal government on cyberthreats, we found that this more sophisticated approach to power has many uses for national security.

Much of America's aging infrastructure has had internet connectivity grafted onto equipment that was never designed for it, creating cracks in our armor that hackers — human or otherwise — can too easily exploit. Modern, software-defined energy technologies, however, can be designed from the start to receive security updates, restrict who can access them and quarantine equipment infiltrated by cybercriminals. Done right, digital modernization improves the ability of America's infrastructure operators to play defense.

That kind of system also allows solar energy and batteries to help stabilize the grid when other equipment fails. Texas, a leader in deploying these modern energy technologies, uses fleets of batteries to soak up surplus sun during the day, and release that electricity back into the grid when power plants are straining or failing. A modern, flexible grid with generation and storage spread across many locations can also separate into micro

grids, keeping local services operating in a crisis while the wider system recovers.

The fly in the ointment is that many of the modern energy technologies critical to resilience and national security are produced in China, the country with the most publicly confirmed interest in sabotaging our infrastructure. Congressional Republicans have urged the Trump administration to restrict the deployment of clean energy for that reason, and officials such as Attorney General Ken Paxton of Texas have begun investigations into what they call "CCP-aligned tech products."

There is a real risk that Chinese hackers will one day try to interfere with the grid, but the risk is not inherent to a "made in China" sticker. It comes from what a component can do and who can control it. Some Chinese infrastructure hardware allows remote software access for routine diagnostics and updates, but those mundane maintenance channels can be repurposed to let an attacker alter settings or disrupt operations from afar. That is in contrast to "dumb" electrochemical cells in a battery, which by themselves possess no way to receive and execute instructions from Beijing or, for that matter, from swarms of A.I. agents.

The defense industry is already navigating these challenges with aircraft like the F-35 fighter jet, which has Chinese parts. "Smarter" components, like flight computers and sensor arrays, get maximum security scrutiny, while screws and hydraulic hoses get less. The United States could apply the same ideas to its grid so that Americans are not panicking about every foreign component when we digitize it. The Trump administration's recent declaration of a grid security emergency could be the vehicle for just such a framework. It recognizes both the growing importance of electricity to national power, and the danger of insecure access to the technology delivering it.

But even with the growing specter of cyberwar and rogue A.I., the administration is too often distracted by its culture war with clean energy. President Trump signed a bill that gutted the wind and solar credits of the Inflation Reduction Act, and his administration has also worked to block many clean energy projects, dismantling solar, wind and electrical vehicles as unreliable and ineffective. (The administration has embraced geothermal energy, nuclear power and batteries. Batteries emerged as a priority seemingly in part because of their role perching drone warfare in Ukraine.) The grid at home, U.S. allies on the battlefield and the cyberdefenses that might have to outrun A.I. all need every electron they can get, as securely as they can get it, with no regard for its politics.

The Trump administration is beginning to realize that national strength increasingly depends on a country's ability to generate, store and direct electricity. If Mr. Trump's grid emergency order is put in place with national security as its north star, the modern energy technologies capable of delivering these advantages should be central. Otherwise the government will undermine our best chance at a secure and abundant energy future.

HARRY KREJSA is the director of studies at the Carnegie Mellon Institute for Strategy & Technology. PHOEBE BENICH is a fellow at the institute.



Trump is going viral in three terrible ways

FRIEDMAN, FROM PAGE 1

But fear not, because America's president, who doesn't even use email, told the United Nations last week that he knows that Americans' fears about A.I. safety are fraudulent. He referred to "the very same people who said we'll all be dead in 12 years because of global warming." He added: "And nobody was dead. These are the same people that are now saying that A.I. is going to kill us all." (Unfold thousands have died in catastrophes worsened by climate change in the last decade, and only in Trump's feid imagination did anyone say, "Sir, we'll all be dead in 12 years.")

Trump and his party — and the A.I. tech bros who have effectively paid them to keep their hands off their industry — had better pray that the "October surprise" in this coming midterm election is not a major, destructive A.I. event. If it is, they'd better have their spaceships ready to whisk them off to another planet where they can live forever, because this one may make their existences a living hell.

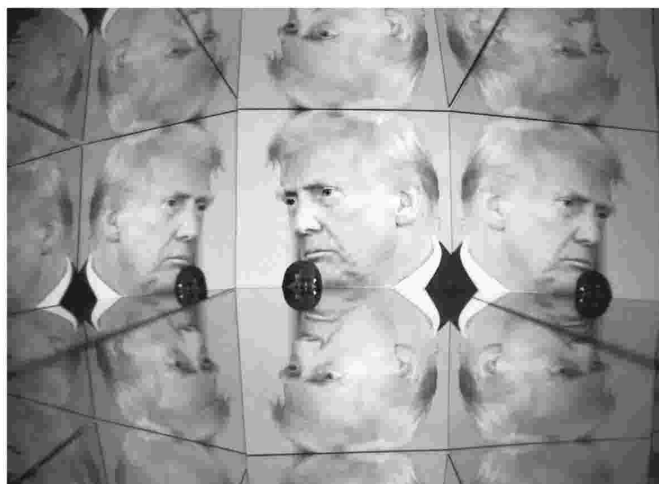
This A.I. threat is not a hoax (nor is the climate threat a hoax, as Trump would know if he ever looked at his own administration's NASA website). The only hoax is that Trump, who once suggested injecting bleach might be a good way to rid yourself of Covid-19, thinks he knows anything about A.I. or climate change — or bleach.

"It's not a hoax at all," Bill Gates said in an interview on NBC's "Meet the Press" on Sunday. Gates said that the United States should restrain A.I. development until tougher safeguards are in place, and he argued that China would most likely do the same if Washington took the initiative to draft new rules to regulate the use of A.I.

A.I. without proper regulation is "completely irresponsible," Gates said. Precisely because there has never been such a tool, despite its destructive potential, with so much promise to solve so many energy, climate and medical problems for humanity, I want to see A.I. thrive, as does Gates. Which is why we should all want to prevent an A.I.-driven Sept. 11 that would completely delegitimize artificial intelligence in the public eye. That would be a double tragedy.

I wish that the only threat to us from Trump's unrestrained ignorance were an A.I. virus. Sadly, last week, my Times colleague Apoorva Mandavilli reported that America's Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, long the "undisputed global leader in public health," has been so systematically dismantled by Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. that it is now "a skeleton of the powerhouse it was."

Not only has the C.D.C.'s staff been reduced by some 30 percent, but, Mandavilli reported, citing current and former employees, "the changes have hindered the C.D.C.'s ability to respond to outbreaks as measles spreads at home and Ebola abroad, and to issue timely guidance on vaccinations as cooling temperatures kick off the respiratory season. . . . Entire divisions have been shuttered, including teams that



KREJSA FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

worked on smoking, sexual violence, child abuse and falls among older adults."

The Guardian newspaper carried a story about the spreading outbreak of measles in Pennsylvania, which has now topped 900 cases. Dr. John Goldmann, an infectious disease specialist at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center, said that between 1992 and 2026, he hadn't seen a single case. The Guardian reported, "We're seeing at least one every day," and he added, "Never in my life did I think I was ever going to see measles again." This is an example of how Trump's negligence is helping to spread actual, biological

I've learned over the years that diplomacy operates like a virus as well, beneficially or detrimentally.

It was about how the diplomatic incompetence of the Trump administration and the malevolence of the cabinet of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu have combined to grid the 20-point Trump peace plan for Gaza to a halt. So Gaza civilians, many living in war-torn buildings, one of which collapsed on Sept. 16, killing at least 21 people, including 11 children, remain in total squalor.

When Trump launched his vaunted Gaza Board of Peace and made himself chairman, participating countries pledged \$17 billion for Gaza. But "as far as is known, less than \$300 million has been transferred," Bar'el reported.

Moreover, the peace plan's international stabilization force has yet to be established. The Palestinian police force to replace Hamas, which is sup-

posed to operate under a Palestinian technocratic government, was supposed to receive training in Egypt, "but Israel is preventing them from leaving Gaza," according to Bar'el. Then Bar'el peeked back the real story: "The stalemate in Gaza serves Israel. Hamas no longer poses a security threat, but as long as it holds territory, Israel retains a pretext for resuming the war. And as long as the Strip remains devastated and unlivable, the pressure on the people to leave only grows." He added that Netanyahu's defense minister, Israel Katz, after being criticized by a rival politician for not achieving a more decisive victory over Hamas, declared that the Israeli military was ready, if ordered, to eliminate Hamas "so that the emigration plan can be implemented."

Really? What is that? That is Orwellian speak for the ethnic cleansing of Gaza of Palestinians by the Netanyahu government. And what have Trump and his secretary of state, Marco Rubio, said in response? Zilch.

I've learned over the years that diplomacy operates like a virus as well, beneficially or detrimentally: The more success you have, the more respect you get; the more respect you get, the more success you have. Conversely, the more failure you have, the less allies trust joining you, so the more failure you have.

Example: Between March and October 1991, Secretary of State James A. Baker III made eight diplomatic trips to the Middle East to put together the Madrid peace conference — the first among Israel, the Palestine Liberation Organization and several Arab states. I made all eight trips with him as the Times's diplomatic correspondent. He failed on the first seven, but Baker would not quit and he got it done on the eighth.

Show me a single diplomatic initiative the Trump administration has built since the cease-fire in Gaza, which Trump has left to languish. It's as if all he cared about was the headline from the signing, after which he amazingly declared last Oct. 13: "Together, we've achieved what everybody said was impossible. At long last we have peace in the Middle East."

Now that's what I call a real hoax. There is no energetic, focused follow-up because there are no clear lines of authority. You have Thomas Barrack, who is the special envoy for Syria and Iraq and the ambassador to Turkey, making his own policy statements. You have Massad Fares Boulos, the father-in-law of Trump's daughter Tiffany, serving as a senior adviser to the president of the United States on Arab and Middle Eastern affairs. You have part-timers, Jared Kushner and Steve Witkoff. You have various assistant secretaries of state and defense. And you have Trump on his social media feed. (Somebody is going to make this into a musical!)

What you don't have is a secretary of state like Baker, relentlessly focusing and leveraging American power and making trip after trip after trip until he gets the job done.

The only thing Trump relentlessly follows up on is harassing the press. Last Saturday, after being forced by a judge to allow CNN reporters back in the White House after Trump illegally banned them because their coverage was not fawning enough, the president nevertheless blocked CNN from accompanying him on Air Force One to attend a football game in Tennessee.

When it comes to denouncing the press, Trump is laser-focused. But when dealing with the digital, biological and diplomatic viruses weakening our national immune system, not so much — to our great peril.

FROM READERS

Climate change grief, collective but worlds apart

Re "Nepal calls for compensation from polluters" (news, Sept. 22):

As a member of Gen Z, I grew up with climate change framed as an existential threat. Last month, that abstraction became devastatingly real: My father, Suresh Pandellapalli, is among thousands missing after Nepal's floods.

We measure climate disasters in billions of dollars: economic losses, reconstruction, destroyed infrastructure. But how do we underwrite the loss of human life?

Nepal exposes the inequity of climate risk. Despite relying largely on renewable energy, it bears devastating consequences from emissions produced outside its borders. Major emitters, including the United States, have a responsibility to help finance its recovery.

Reading about Soniya Ghale, the 19-year-old Nepali girl whose father was missing after the flood, made my heart ache in a way that's become all too familiar. Though we live parallel lives thousands of miles apart, we share a collective grief.

As climate disasters spread, we must face the reality that more human lives will become collateral damage, leaving families like ours behind. ELA PANDELLAPALLI, GREAT FALLS, VA. The writer works in renewable energy project finance.

SHARE YOUR THOUGHTS

To submit a letter to the editor, email nyletters@nytimes.com

Maybe we should leave the birds alone

LEENDERTZ, FROM PAGE 9

those nesting inside woodland and well away from gardens. Blue tits that were eating from garden feeders were more likely to lay five days earlier and lay close to four times the number of eggs.

Success, you might think, but not if you are one of the shyer woodland birds that doesn't visit gardens. Magpies, blue tits and great tits are not vultures, but they are winners: adaptable, aggressive and abundant, evicting woodland birds from nest holes and outcompeting in the fight for food, resources and nest sites. A study that compared British great tits with those in the Netherlands found that the British bird appears to be evolving a longer beak, perhaps the better to use bird feeders.

The wildlife writer Kate Bradbury has also pointed out how little we consider the environmental impact of importing and consuming enormous amounts of bird food. "What about the land used to grow that food?" she wrote in her newsletter. "How many birds and other wildlife lost a habitat so a pesticide-laden monoculture could exist in its place? How many air miles and how much plastic packaging are involved in our consumption of this product?"

It seems we have been running a Great British Bird Ecological Experiment for over a century with no control and no plan. We have been helping birds to survive harsh winters, but in the process, we may have exported wild bird decline to our own woodlands, farmlands and to countries that supply our vast appetite for bird seed.

We have all — or at least, surely most of us — moved on from hats



ATELA RANCILOVA, VIA GETTY IMAGES

Fieldwork throughout Britain found garden food to be the commonest item in the diets of blue tits, above, even those nesting inside woodland and well away from gardens.

garished with the plumage of exotic birds and that very Victorian idea of birds and the natural world in general as a resource for our own amusement. But I am struck by the parallels of that era with our enjoyment of "our" garden birds, and our curators of our own pretty private theaters in our gardens, while the damage happens out of sight. We still have work to do to think of nature as something that can and must exist for its own sake, and fight the urge to hold on to it.

For me, this winter, that will certainly mean regularly scrubbing the bird feeder, and I am trying to steel myself to not feed at all. But it is hard

to resist. Maybe I will put my energies into planting a living bird buffet of echinacea, with its spent flower heads packed with seeds; sedums that will overwinter insects that the birds can grub out; hawthorn for berries.

So many of us want to be genuine stewards of the world around us, but if our relationship with nature is to really change, then we have to think about the impact of our actions as a whole, not just the view from our window.

LIA LEENDERTZ is the author, most recently, of "The Almanac: A Seasonal Guide to 2027."

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EDITORIALS

Chicago may charge suburbanites more to park. How neighborly

A new parking meter deal is done and dusted, as City Council on Tuesday approved a \$2.53 billion agreement allowing Stonepeak Partners to take over the remaining 57 years of Chicago's parking meter lease. Good. We were tired of writing about this historic disaster.

But that doesn't mean there cannot be another one just ahead.

Now, aldermen are looking to the future. And as some gaze into their crystal ball, they see a brave new world in which suburbanites pay more to park.

An idea is floating around to bifurcate parking meter prices, adding a surcharge of 25 to 50 cents an hour for non-Chicagoans who park in the city, according to Ald. Walter "Red" Burnett, 27th.

It'll raise revenue, he says, though he couldn't say how much, and encourage public transit, though that doesn't take into account the frequent inadequacy of those options from the suburbs, especially on evenings and weekends.

What we know for sure is that such a move is crazy-town nonsense.

"It's easy to track, they already have the data now," Burnett said. "We want our suburban counterparts to help when they're clogging up the system."

Clogging up the system? Oy.

We have an altogether different view of our neighbors to the north, south and west.

We view them not as bumbling annoyances from which to extract extra cash for the privilege of parking their car on the street, but value their awe and enjoyment of our city, even if they only stick around for a little while.

Is he referring to those



People walk along North Michigan Avenue as tulips bloom April 12 in downtown Chicago. BRIAN CASSELLA/CHICAGO TRIBUNE

Chicago's economy — and the city's bottom line — depends in no small part on making visitors feel welcome here.

suburbanites who come downtown for a show, grab dinner first and a drink after, before heading home? Paying ample taxes in the process and contributing to our city's hubbub and patronizing our business community?

Or the suburbanites who drive to the city for work when transit isn't a reasonable option? The ones who

buy coffee and sandwiches with colleagues?

Or maybe he's thinking about the middle-class families that decide to come to Wrigleyville to catch a Cubs game? To sit amid the magic of the ivy and feel the buzz of the historic stadium, cultivating in young suburban minds the magic of a ballgame in Chicago?

Chicago's economy — and the city's bottom line — depends in no small part on making visitors feel welcome here. Chicago welcomed 56.8 million visitors in 2025, generating a record \$21.5 billion in spending, according to Choose Chicago.

Among those visitors, of course, are our suburban neighbors, coming into the city for restaurants, shows, sporting events and countless other attractions.

Thank goodness for that. Thank goodness. You don't greet guests

with hostility, and creating a suburban parking surcharge sends the message that you're not welcome in Chicago unless you live here.

Drawing lines between the city and the 'burbs in such a way is petty and unbecoming of a Chicagoan.

It's also indicative that aldermen fail to realize two important things:

Firstly, suburbanites help keep the lights on in Chicago.

Secondly, Chicago shouldn't take subur-

ban business for granted. Naperville has a very nice downtown.

Enough already. This idea should not be floating around. It should sink.

Soaking the suburbs over parking is reminiscent of other foolish, revenue-grabbing ideas, such as a congestion tax aimed at outsiders as a way to gin up money to cover Chicago's ever-present budget black hole.

We understand that budget season isn't going to be pretty, but Chicago isn't just for Chicagoans.

Johnson should join with alders in their insistence on fiscal restraint

Listening to Brandon Johnson Tuesday after a City Council majority voted to require three-fifths of the body to approve future bond authorizations, it sounded like the mayor intended to veto the measure.

He should sign it instead.

If the mayor allowed this prudent and commonplace policy to enter into law, it would signal to bond investors and credit analysts, who are taking an increasingly dim view of the city of Chicago as a safe investment, that policymakers here across the ideological spectrum understand the language of dollars and

cents — even if they agree on little else.

Alas, in his comments following the council's 32-15 vote to subject new bond authorization to the approval of at least 30 of Chicago's 50 aldermen, Johnson made it clear he views worries about Chicago's growing debt pile entirely through his usual ideological lens. Per Johnson's worldview, heaping more debt burdens on future taxpayers is a way to redress inequities rather than a necessary tool to maintain the city's infrastructure.

"We use bonds to invest

on the West and South sides of Chicago in particular," he said.

Well, sure. But as a general matter bonds are meant to finance long-lived infrastructure work — on the South, West or any other sides of Chicago. And a city swimming in pension and bond debt, to the point where those two buckets consume almost 40% of its annual budget, must show far more discretion than has this administration when it comes to tapping the markets.

Johnson went on to tout the 2024 council authorization of his \$1.25 billion

in bonding authority for neighborhood economic development projects.

That was a special bonding initiative, tied to the future expiration of dozens of Chicago's tax-increment financing districts, which will add property tax revenues to the city's coffers as they run their course. Essentially, the idea was to get more bang from that future TIF-expiration buck sooner rather than later without subjecting taxpayers to future hikes to cover the interest.

We expressed cautious openness to the idea at the time, and 32 aldermen

voted yes — more than the three-fifths threshold to which Johnson now objects. That's precisely the sort of majority that should be required for a vote so consequential.

The issue of this mayor's recklessness with debt arose less than a year later when the administration jammed authorization for another \$830 million in bonds through the council with the barest of majorities just days after Standard & Poor's downgraded the city's credit, the city's first downgrade in a decade. Under Johnson's watch, the city's annual cost of

servicing general-obligation bonds — the sorts of securities covered by both the \$1.25 billion and \$830 million votes — has spiked, as we outlined last month.

If the mayor does as he implied and vetoes the three-fifths requirement, the council should override. Ald. Daniel La Spata, 1st, Chris Taliaferro, 29th, and Andre Vasquez, 40th, didn't vote Tuesday on the measure. If two of those three join the 32 who voted yes, there will be enough to push this through over Johnson's objection.

They should do so for the sake of the city's financial future.

ON THIS DAY 41 YEARS AGO
THE GROWING BILLBOARD JUNGLES

The outdoor advertising industry effectively won the war that Mrs. Lyndon Johnson, then the First Lady, declared on highway blight. The industry has proved more adept than tax lawyers at finding loopholes in the law.

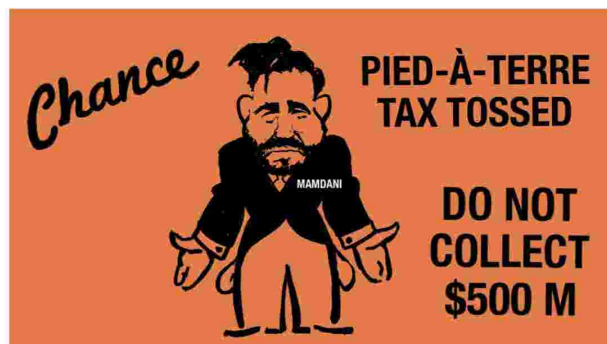
One such loophole in state and federal law has permitted the proliferation of huge, lighted billboards along state highways in suburbs even though they are prohibited by local ordinance. The law was intended to allow the state to regulate billboards in rural areas where no other regulation existed but has been broadened by the courts to pre-empt local regulations on zoning.

State representatives Gene Hoffman and Thomas McCracken, who last spring unsuccessfully tried to induce the legislature to close the loophole, have announced they will continue the fight. They intend to cooperate with U.S. Sen. Slade Gorton, a Washington Republican, in drawing up a federal law that will prevent pre-emption of local standards.

It is now up to Congress to prevent outdoor advertising from turning our highways into billboard jungles.

Tribune editorial board,
Oct. 1, 1985

EDITORIAL CARTOON



BILL BRAMHALL/NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

OPINION

The views of tradwife influencers are evolving. It's a complicated victory

By Christina Wyman
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

"My daughter wants to be a tradwife." My friend sat across from me at dinner not too long ago and described how her daughter, a high school senior at the time, had zero college ambitions. Social media had taken care of that — her daughter had become an avid follower of the tradwife aesthetic, and my friend was not happy about it.

Lately, tradwife influencers are distancing themselves from the conservative label. (For those unfamiliar, "tradwife" is short for "traditional wife.") First, influencer Nara Smith rebuked the label this past summer, arguing on the popular "Call Her Daddy" podcast that it was a "bizarre" projection. More recently, influencer Bernadine Bluntly began chronicling her divorce, from both the brand and her husband, to whom she now owes child support. As high-profile, impossibly young tradwife influencers revise the conversations they started, I can't help but to hope that it's not too late for their devout Gen Z followers.

I have long believed that my friends who are raising teenage daughters are right to be concerned about this movement, which glorifies and glamorizes traditional family roles. If only tradwifery were just a social media aesthetic — and not an actual choice with profound implications for most women.

I know firsthand how quickly life can fall off the rails. I was a child who watched it happen to my mother.

When my mother had me at 17 years old, she was a traditional wife in every sense of the word. She didn't have one penny for her name and depended entirely on my father, only 20 at the time. I was born in 1980, a few weeks after my mother graduated from high school. They had a shotgun wedding — the type of arrangement thrown together in haste because a baby is on the way.

Teen pregnancy was exceptionally common in the '80s and '90s, and shotgun weddings were not unusual at the time, either. These were choices people commonly made nearly half a century ago.

What I wish for the young tradwife followers on the brink of making decisions that cannot easily be undone is what I would have wanted for my own mother: a crystal ball or at least a front-row seat at an IMAX movie featuring the next 30 years of her life. She chose to marry and bear children before taking the time to decide what her own life could be on her own terms.



Social media influencer Bernadine Bluntly transcribes content for her channel at Cafe Dolce in St. Louis on Aug. 21. Bluntly has been chronicling her divorce, from the tradwife brand and her husband. MICHAEL B. THOMAS/THE NEW YORK TIMES

I had that front-row seat when I was a kid. I wish Gen Z women could see a fraction of what I saw growing up, what time did to my parents' young marriage.

Twelve years after saying, "I do," they were done with each other. Dad got a new apartment, and Mom kept the one I grew up in. Money was impossibly tight. I was a preteen when I watched my mother, a very young woman without an education or well-paying job, crumble under the weight of her new reality.

When my parents separated, Mom had to figure out her new role, and she had to figure it out fast.

In my family, the devastating effects of giving up your power to marriage and child-rearing, without a plan in place or skills to rely on, was multigenerational. It was the same story for my grandmothers — one of whom stayed

with a husband she couldn't stomach, just because she had no other options — and many other women in my family. And in each case, their tradwife-dom went straight to hell in a handbasket.

Some of them have died penniless. The rest are tied to marriages or partnerships they don't want to be in.

My mother, having gotten lucky with finding work and a new love, is the lone exception in my family.

Still, I'll never forget Mom's first, and last, stable job — as an employee for the United States Postal Service. She passed the test with flying colors.

But a few days into the job, she came home crying. The hours were long, the work was back-breaking and management was condescending.

While she spoke to a friend on the phone about her day, tears

streaming down her cheeks, I took a walk to our local McDonald's and bought her a burger and fries with my babysitting money. I felt powerless to help her.

Landing that job was hard-won. I know Mom was terrified about her lack of options. She eventually found her footing, but she retired after 15 or so years. The physical demands became too much.

My mother, like all women in her position, did the best she could with what she had. But I remember the choice she faced between gas and groceries. I remember the credit card debt she accrued so that she could buy clothes for her children. I remember her anxiety and fear over each unexpected bill that came in.

I remember, more than anything, the endless fights she had with my father over money.

Those fights did not relent until after I graduated college and became my own problem.

The fact that some popular tradwife influencers are no longer able to ignore the serious consequences in giving up personal power and independence is a complicated victory. It's a terrifying thing to have to shift gears when there are bills to pay and mouths to feed, and I would not wish this reality on anyone.

But if there's anything to be gained from this evolving moment, it's the hope that Gen Z continues to pay attention.

Christina Wyman is a teacher living in Michigan and a USA Today best-selling author. Her upcoming novel, "Mean," is a middle grade story about what happens when a mean girl takes a prank too far.

We tested indoor air in Chicago homes. Illinois should pay attention

By Carol J. Williams
and Patrick Shaw
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

We still remember the final indoor air quality test we conducted.

When we arrived at the single-family residence on the South Side of Chicago, where the owner had lived for 58 years, we were unsure of what we would find. Once we started testing carbon monoxide and nitrogen dioxide levels near the gas stove, the monitors showed something that none of us could have seen with our eyes. Even with the stove turned off, carbon monoxide levels were 14 parts per million (ppm), while nitrogen dioxide levels measured 14 parts per billion (ppb). After turning the oven and two burners on for 15 minutes, those figures rose to 89 ppm for carbon monoxide and 180 ppb for nitrogen dioxide.

Halfway through, we stopped the test. The carbon monoxide and nitrogen dioxide readings had already exceeded the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's one-hour outdoor standard. The EPA has found that breathing nitrogen dioxide outdoors can worsen respiratory health, including asthma. But families do not only breathe outdoor air. What are the effects when we breathe it inside?

The test was part of Faith In Place's Air Aware project, a citizen science effort to help Chicago residents better understand the air quality inside their homes. Through St. Luke Missionary Baptist Church, we tested 10 homes among church members and South Shore neighbors, as part of a broader effort



A flame burns on a natural gas stove on March 26, 2024. RICHARD VOGEL/AP

that reached 101 homes across Chicago. People let us into their kitchens, basements and living rooms. One of us helped guide the conversation with residents as the other handled the monitors, timing and readings. Together, we watched as the numbers gave people a clearer picture of something they could not see, smell or easily measure on their own.

This was not the first home where the readings raised concerns. By the time we conducted this final test, we had seen similar patterns during other visits, and other volunteer testers were seeing them across

Chicago as well. As part of the test, we detected carbon monoxide near gas-burning equipment in more than 80% of homes. After 30 minutes of ordinary gas stove use, nitrogen dioxide levels in more than half of kitchens rose above 100 ppb, the threshold used in the EPA's one-hour outdoor air standard.

Many residents knew carbon monoxide could be dangerous at high levels. But far fewer knew about the health risks posed by nitrogen dioxide or the devices that can test for it.

That's why we need policymakers to act.

Illinois should start with clearer public education. To help consumers make informed decisions about the health risks associated with gas-burning appliances, the state should require commonsense warning labels on gas equipment that explain how gas appliances may affect indoor air quality and health. Policymakers also should provide an easy-to-access resource guide that helps households improve ventilation and take steps to reduce exposure in the short term.

Our testing also made clear that healthier homes are possi-

ble when households have access to efficient electric appliances that reduce the indoor air pollution risks of burning gas at home. Long term, Illinois should help households modernize with heat pumps, induction cooktops and other efficient electric appliances. These investments must especially reach communities already facing higher pollution burdens, particularly lower-income communities that face the greatest financial barriers to upgrades.

As we tested homes across Chicago, each visit and each conversation were a different journey. Some residents had lived in their homes for decades; others had just moved in. Some lived with children or older relatives, and some lived alone. But most were surprised by what the tests showed. Again and again, the same basic concern came up: What does this mean for my home, and what can I do next to protect my health?

That question should not be left for families to figure out on their own. Knowledge of what's in the air shouldn't be a blind spot. Illinois needs clear public education so all residents understand the risks before bringing gas equipment into their homes. A safe and healthy home should be a basic expectation. Illinois lawmakers, regulators and agencies should make that a reality for every household.

Carol J. Williams and Patrick Shaw are community volunteers affiliated with St. Luke Missionary Baptist Church on Chicago's South Side, where Williams leads the church's Green Team and Shaw is a participant.

OPINION

What is the future of nonprofit American theater?

By Roche Schulfer
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

Recently, Oskar Eustis, the artistic director of New York's legendary Public Theater for the past 21 years, announced his plan to step down in 2028. Eustis has had a long career in American theater, and his opinions are well respected. That's why his statement that "the not-for-profit theater movement is over" has generated a lot of responses.

The not-for-profit theater movement began in the 1960s led by theater artists who were frustrated by the commercial limitations of Broadway. They established professional theater companies around the country, focusing on classics, new plays and career opportunities for theater professionals. With the support of the Ford Foundation and National Endowment for the Arts, the movement grew rapidly, with an estimated 1,000 companies by the turn of the century.

The future looked bright. But major challenges emerged in the past two decades:

- It became clear that theater board members, who primarily work in for-profit industries, do not understand the economics of not-for-profit theater and the need for financial support beyond the box office (in part because there is a commercial for-profit segment of the industry). Simply put, with fixed capacity and appropriate compensation for theater professionals, either ticket prices must significantly increase (see Broadway prices), or subsidies are needed to fill the income gap.

- Major foundations in New York and around the country substantially cut back support for professional not-for-profit theaters. The result has been a significant loss of revenue, putting more pressure on theaters to increase individual contributions, which are costly to generate, adding to the expense of fundraising.

- Wealth holders of the new generation do not view the arts as a priority in American society. To the extent they engage in philanthropy, it tends to be focused on



"Cats: The Jellicle Ball" plays at Broadhurst Theatre in New York on May 12. BENNETT RAGLIN/GETTY

education, healthcare and social services.

- The philanthropic challenges resulted in enormous pressure on not-for-profit theaters to maximize box office revenue. This leads to risk-averse seasons, casting well-known actors, partnering with commercial producers (particularly on musicals) and using demand-based pricing.

- The pandemic had a devastating impact on all theaters, particularly those not-for-profit theaters, which immediately furloughed their artists and staff. As a result, it became difficult and more expensive for those theaters to reopen because many of their employees left the industry or demanded higher wages to return.

- In 2020, it became evident that many not-for-profit theaters were not accurately representing

American society, as reflected in the lack of diversity in their leadership, boards, staff and programming. The tremendous turmoil this recognition created continues to reverberate in the industry.

Unless there is a major infusion of capital into the professional American theater, adventurous productions will only happen in small theaters with low or no wages for artists. This "after work" or "avocational" theater is well established in Chicago. This is not a criticism of these theaters — it simply is observing that artists and theater professionals who aspire to have careers working on new plays and productions will have far fewer opportunities.

Major not-for-profit theaters will focus on accessible productions and commercial partnerships. For Broadway producers,

it will continue to become more difficult given skyrocketing costs and the impact on ticket prices (the early closing of "Cats: The Jellicle Ball" on Broadway over the economics is a recent example).

Is there a solution? Not-for-profit theaters and commercial producers should join forces to advocate for significant increases in financial support and tax incentives from all levels of government. The case for support should be focused on jobs. The labor-intensive theater industry is a job-creating machine with tens of thousands employed around the country each day. The full national impact of the jobs created and tax revenue generated by the American theater industry has not been documented. It would lead to a powerful case for support.

I had discussions with theater leaders about this initiative while I was at the Goodman. There was significant interest given the volume and potential political reach of not-for-profit and commercial theaters in the country. Plus, there is a precedent Congress' bipartisan decision that made the American theater industry eligible for COVID-19 relief funds. The political climate is difficult now but eventually will change, and the theater industry should be prepared.

I urge theater leaders, particularly the heads of the League of Resident Theatres and the Broadway League, to pursue this initiative.

Roche Schulfer worked at Goodman Theatre for 51 years, including 44 as executive director.

Voice of the people

Keeping Bears in Chicago

Wow! If you watched Monday night's nationally televised Bears game, you saw a hard-fought, well-deserved home team victory. You also saw the city of Chicago on a perfect autumn night displayed in all its glory. The flyover shots of open-air Soldier Field teeming with excited fans. Panoramic views across the city of the classic Chicago River bridges, world-renowned architecture, a vibrant Navy Pier, and the picturesque lakefront and Museum Campus. Like the Bears, that Chicago night couldn't be beat. We live in an amazing world-class city.

Now fast-forward five years: What will we be seeing? An oversized dome stadium with a corporate logo surrounded by the vast suburban sprawl of Arlington Heights or the industrial landscape of Hammond, with Illinois fans probably paying an out-of-state ticket surcharge?

Come on, Chicago. We have to step up and figure out a Chicago Bears solution. There are at least a dozen mayoral candidates lined up looking for votes. Any ideas from this group?

Voices need to be heard by our aldermen and other elected officials. Let's at least give it a good, better, best effort.

—Lindsay R. Resnick, Chicago

Wild card games inaccessible

Writing for all Chicago baseball fans, I would like to thank MLB for making it nearly impossible to see our teams in the wild card games. We pay to see them during the regular season, then the playoffs get moved to TV providers many of us have no access to.

—Frank Chambers Jr., Chicago

Questions about AI school

The article on the Alpha School proposed for Evanston should raise many questions (An AI school without teachers looks to move into former Roycemore building, Sept. 27):

- Is Alpha School's dependence on artificial intelligence tutoring for academics effective when most current research says it is valuable as a supplement rather than a replacement for instruction?



Fans stand during the national anthem before the Bears play the Eagles at Soldier Field on Monday in Chicago. ARMANDO L. SANCHEZ/TRIBUNE

- If the AI programs are more like worksheets than Socratic dialogues, do they foster critical thinking effectively?

- Does the use of extrinsic motivation/rewards do more harm than good?

- What is the training of the adult "guides" who replace teachers?

- What about the lack of enrichment classes such as music and art?

- Is the required Alpha Bootcamp too stressful? The use of heart monitors too invasive?

- Doesn't the high tuition self-select a student body that comes to school already advantaged?

- Why is all the data about results self-reported, without external validation?

There are aspects I do find appealing. I avidly support the small student-staffer ratio, the time devoted to life skills and real-world experiences, project-based and problem-based learning, and the use of the mascot, Steve the Yeti, to promote a "growth mindset" — the conviction that learners can grow and develop through hard work and learning from failures.

But we should be concerned about the level of self-promotion, the lack of outside validation and the dependence on AI tutoring that marketing expert Edward Nevraumont says is closer to a "turbocharged spreadsheet checklist with a spaced-repetition algorithm." I am less

concerned with Evanston's ultimate zoning decision than I am with the potential consequences for students who would enroll in the school.

We should be wary.

—Ellen Jo Ljung, Geneva

The use of AI in education

Two articles in the Sunday edition caught my interest. I was appalled to read that Roycemore in Evanston, previously a private school, is going to open as an artificial intelligence-run school. I'm happy that a new school is opening to serve children but stunned to read it will not be staffed by teachers.

What is happening in our education system?

AI is definitely an asset when used appropriately. But not as a way to teach young children. Now I will refer to another article in the Sunday Tribune, correctly titled "Hidden cost of AI isn't your data. It's your ability to think."

Why do we want to take young minds, make them dependent on AI, and not give them the opportunity to think and grow? And also, why would our future college students want to become teachers? I wonder who is making these decisions for the future generations.

I am a fan of AI — after I write a paper, I may want some guidance as to how to express certain aspects. But I like to use my own brain to formulate my thoughts.

AI can be incorporated in a program for young students, but that should not replace certified teachers who have spent years studying how to use one's ability to think.

I'm hoping this new development at Roycemore will provoke more thought so we do the right thing for our future generations. They deserve better.

—Myrna Silver, Coral Gables, Florida

CPS should consolidate

There are more than 11,000 fewer students in Chicago Public Schools this year. What does that mean for the school system? For taxpayers, it means that classrooms that go unoccupied will still need to be maintained and heated.

Suburban schools that experience a loss in students make the decision to close schools to save money. Chicago must make the same decision and close schools.

It's been 13 years since the last consolidation.

—Jerome C. Malon, Chicago

The CTU will disagree

I read with interest the Tribune Editorial Board's Chicago Board of Education endorsements and also Clarence Page's column in Monday's paper ("Nikole Hannah-Jones demonstrates why parents sometimes need to go to school, too"). Page is especially insightful and bold.

I anticipate that the Chicago Teachers Union's response to both will be especially righteous and rationalizing.

—Mike Noonan, Elmhurst

Look to 'Mississippi miracle'

Paige Ponder in a recent op-ed ("In Chicago, what does student success actually look like?" Sept. 28) asks what student success looks like. The answer is obvious: high academic achievement. The methods for achieving the success are also obvious, but inexplicably, she ignores them.

Namely, emulate the "Mississippi miracle" in which fourth

grade achievement in reading skyrocketed from 49th to ninth place in the nation, despite the fact that Mississippi spends 60% of what Illinois spends per pupil on education.

—Robert Erme, Evanston

Protect wetlands in Illinois

I'm worried that the coverage of the activist opposition to the proposed Grayslake data center is missing an important point: Data center development is just one in a myriad of threats facing crucial wetland habitats such as Grayslake. Ad hoc opposition is not a sustainable strategy to ensure wetlands receive necessary protections.

The U.S. Supreme Court's 2023 decision to narrow the Clean Water Act's protective purview has placed Illinois wetlands in extreme danger. We have just 10% of four original wetlands, and without federal protections, these ecosystems will only increase in rarity. Wetlands are valuable not just as natural spaces and wildlife habitats, but also as "kidneys" of the ecosystem. They filter harmful pollutants and excess nutrients from our water supply. As storm buffer zones, they limit the damage of extreme weather events, reducing economic and social fallout. Nationwide, wetlands serve as quintessential carbon sinks, mitigating greenhouse gas emissions with staggering efficiency.

These areas deserve protection from unregulated development. Illinois lawmakers recognize the risk of leaving wetlands unprotected. The proposed Wetlands Protection Act would grant the Department of Natural Resources permitting power. Let's call on our leaders to prioritize this issue in the upcoming legislative session.

As students, residents, water recreationists and wildlife lovers, we need to take action now to protect wetlands before they are gone forever.

—Orin Gentner, student, Illinois PIRG at the University of Illinois Chicago

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OPINION

A Suggestion for Young Radicals



UNRULY
REPUBLIC
By Barton
Swain

Bloomington, Ind. The resurgence of totalitarian ideologies among the young has a lot of smart people puzzled. Communism on the left, assorted racist nationalisms on the right. I favor two explanations. First and more obvious: a failed education system. Second, the decades-long recession of religious belief across the West has produced a generation of young people who long for something more heroic and satisfying than, as they see it, the morally thin lives of their elders.

Aurelian Craiutu, a professor of political science at Indiana University, asks his students, especially the ones inclined to radicalism, to ponder the virtues of moderation. In his book "Why Not Moderation? Letters to Young Radicals," published in 2023, Mr. Craiutu responds to two fictional zealots, Lauren and Rob, one an intemperate progressive, the other a hard-leaning rightist. His two interlocutors employ arguments, often verbatim and duly cited, that have appeared in periodicals that might fairly be termed immoderate: the Jacobin and In These Times on the left, and American Greatness and the American Mind on the right. Mr. Craiutu makes the case for moderation as a political ideal quite as intellectually and morally satisfying as any all-embracing ideology.

The word "moderate" has a

messy history in American politics. It can either signify policy centrism or, pejoratively, a tendency to follow the consensus. It's also unhelpfully relative: Today's "moderate" Democrats are yesterday's strident liberals who don't want to abolish the police. "I grew up in Romania, the wrong side of the Iron Curtain," Mr. Craiutu, 60, tells me in his office in July. "I was 23 when the Berlin Wall fell. That's a good time in life to weigh the importance of ideas, good ones and bad ones." He came to the U.S. in 1993 as a graduate student and developed a keen appreciation for the American system's ability to steer away from radicalism and remain in the untidy middle.

Moderation in his telling has three components. It seeks the mean between extremes (think of Aristotle's "Nicomachean Ethics"). It builds and fortifies institutions that require political actors to reason, argue and compromise with one another—checks and balances, federalism, bicameralism and so on. And it cultivates a certain style or ethos. "Moderation is not too sure of itself," he says. "There's an openness to learning from others. There's a skepticism, an acceptance of the fact that you don't know the answers, though you search for them."

Mr. Craiutu distinguishes moderation from "lukewarm wishy-washiness." His hero is the French philosopher and journalist Raymond Aron, who "attacked ideas rather than people but expressed his arguments firmly and with conviction." When Aron's fellow in-

tellectuals, chiefly Jean-Paul Sartre, wanted to ignore or lie about the millions murdered in Soviet Russia, Aron refused to keep silent and wrote about Stalin's crimes with moral clarity. "Aron paid a great price for speaking the truth," Mr. Craiutu says. "Sartre's disciples savaged him. But his moderation in this way required him to write as he did."

Aurelian Craiutu recommends an underrated principle: moderation.

Mr. Craiutu contends that the truest sign of moderation is "eclecticism": the ability to hold views or take attitudes to different parts of life that appear, to those who place a high value on purity, contradictory. He cites the American sociologist Daniel Bell's memorable self-description as "a socialist in economics, a liberal in politics, and a conservative in culture" and the Polish dissident intellectual Leszek Kołakowski's essay "How to Be a Conservative-Liberal-Socialist."

I express discomfort with his examples—I revere Kołakowski but regard socialism as itself a form of extremism. Mr. Craiutu notes that many people see a grave contradiction between free-market economics and traditionalist views on culture and family. The combination of these stances became known as "fusionism" in the 1960s, so antithetical did some hold them to be. Sympathetic

as I am to the fusionist outlook, I take his point.

Mr. Craiutu's contention about eclecticism aligns with Emerson's famous line (alluded to in "Why Not Moderation?") that a foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds. "The world is very complex," Mr. Craiutu says. "There is no privileged access to understanding its direction. You need to look through as many windows as possible. We humans are limited and exhausted and can't comprehend the world in its fullness."

The hard left, from the French Revolution to the collapse of the Soviet Union, tried to explain life's complexities in terms of class warfare. That effort has resumed. Lately parts of the right have rejected pluralism, deplored the messiness of constitutionalism and posited the desirability of an all-encompassing metaphysics. Many on both sides dabble in antisemitism, another habit of mind that purports to explain the world's complexity.

In a brief note on the origins of his book, Mr. Craiutu mentions scriptwriter and Yiddish scholar Leo Rosten's "A Trumpet for Bessie" (1970). In that very funny tract, Rosten addressed young baby boom radicals: leftists who had lost faith in America because of the war in Vietnam and reactionaries who wanted to ban hippies from college campuses. Change some of the nouns and Rosten's book reads as if it were published in the 2020s. A fine reminder that the campaign for sense and moderation isn't new and isn't hopeless.

BOOKSHELF | By Jason Snell

The Genius Of Retail

Shop Different

By Ron Johnson with Zander Nethercutt
Harper Business, 320 pages, \$32

Apple has become one of the world's most valuable companies because of its products: the Mac, the iPad, the Apple Watch and most especially the iPhone. But the company's product sales have been aided over the past 25 years by the presence of its iconic brand in more than 500 retail stores scattered across 27 countries and regions. Anyone who has ducked into an Apple store for a new iPhone or to get a broken Mac through the mail for a repair appointment at the Genius Bar has experienced what Steve Jobs and Ron Johnson built.

In "Shop Different: How Retail Revealed Apple's Genius," Mr. Johnson details the remarkable story of how, in 1999, Jobs recruited him from Target to join Apple as head of retail and launch perhaps the biggest long shot of Jobs's entire tenure as chief executive. At a time when computer stores were a moribund category and Apple's brand was near its lowest ebb, the two men concocted a daring strategy: find some way to connect with the millions of consumers who had no interest in or understanding of Apple's products.

Mr. Johnson cuts the profile of the perfect retail executive. Born in Minnesota, he was entranced as a child by the Midwestern, midcentury power of Dayton's department store. After Harvard he eschewed an obvious career path into finance and instead took a job at Mervyn's, a West Coast department-store chain owned by Dayton's parent, Dayton Hudson Corp. (now Target). From there it was on to the Target stores themselves. Mr. Johnson transformed the chain's toy departments by devoting an entire aisle to Lego products.

When Apple hired Mr. Johnson in 2000, he was based in Minnesota and didn't own a computer. (Jobs sent him an iMac.) But Mr. Johnson had retail experience Apple lacked, and Jobs seems to have identified in Mr. Johnson an enthusiasm for the project that matched his own. Apple had only recently avoided bankruptcy. Jobs was persuaded that a retail presence would be vital to the company's comeback. The CEO was making a gamble, but he and Mr. Johnson realized that to rebuild the company's profile Apple needed to reach the regular people who shopped at places like Target. "Most of our future customers will be introduced to Apple through the store," Mr. Johnson recounts saying to Jobs. "So, eventually, it will become the most powerful physical expression of the brand." They agreed to model the store's approach to customers on the Ritz-Carlton hotel chain, rather than a traditional retail outlet, which led to the concierge-like experience of the Genius Bar.

It's hard to imagine now, but in the late 1990s Apple products had little luster. As computers running Microsoft's Windows 95 took over the world, Apple seemed dedicated to selling niche products. Jobs's return to the company in 1997 and the introduction of the iMac (Apple's first hit product in years) started to change perceptions, but Apple needed to reach buyers beyond its loyal base. Mr. Johnson knew where to find those people—in America's shopping malls.

Apple stores struggled until the release of the iPod music player, which made even Windows users curious enough to wander inside.

Jobs brought his trademark product-development focus to Apple's retail stores, joining Mr. Johnson for regular drives to a warehouse in which a secret mock-up of an Apple store would regularly be revised. At one point after most design decisions had been made, Mr. Johnson realized that a forthcoming new product strategy—the "Digital Hub," which positioned Apple's computers at the center of a constellation of digital cameras, music players and accessories—required a complete rethink of the retail operation. Jobs was unsure until he thought about it—at which point the mercurial CEO changed his opinion. "Ron thinks we've got it all wrong. . . . And you know, he's right," Mr. Johnson recounts Jobs telling Apple's retail team.

The success of the strategy was hardly a *fait accompli*. Many stores struggled until Jobs's product pipeline came to the rescue. With the introduction of the iPod music player in 2001, Apple had a product that made even Windows users curious enough to wander into an Apple store. Under Mr. Johnson's watch, Apple's retail division became a beachhead operation, selling millions of iPods, iPhones and Macs while opening stores around the world.

For a generation of people, the iPod was the first Apple product they ever bought. Those buyers frequently ended up buying Macs, and the arrival of the iPhone converted even more customers. It's hard to imagine Apple's rise to a trillion-dollar company happening if its products weren't readily available in local retail stores.

Jobs and Mr. Johnson were kindred spirits when it came to strategy, but temperamentally they were a mismatched pair—California tech and Midwestern retail. The book details Mr. Johnson's belief in a Christian view of love and service, which informs his understanding of how to treat customers and co-workers. The cynical and secular Jobs didn't seem to entirely get that. Mr. Johnson recounts upbraiding Jobs at one point after the CEO swore at and insulted his retail team during a meeting; he made his outburst boss promise never to do it again.

Mr. Johnson doesn't spare himself from questioning one of his worst decisions, which was to leave Apple in 2011 for the struggling retailer JCPenney, a move that even at the time seemed misguided to market observers. The book recounts his temptation (after 12 years at Apple) to lead a company himself, a choice made exponentially more difficult because of Jobs's terminal cancer diagnosis.

But having read "Shop Different," it's easy to understand why a Midwestern kid who was dazzled by department stores might want to take a chance on one of America's most storied 20th-century retail brands. Maybe he didn't realize at the time that he'd already helped create one of the 21st century's best.

Mr. Snell has written about Apple for 30 years and is the co-host of *Designed in California* (designed.fm), a podcast about the company's history.

A Blundering 2026 Midterm Campaign

By Karl Rove

The White House midterm election—outlined by Trump political chief James Blair in a recent interview with the Free Press—looks good on paper. It has two elements. First, remind voters what President Trump has achieved and wants to do. Second, show voters that Democrats lack a governing vision.

Mr. Blair admits "domestic economic pressure" will be central to the campaign. Still, he believes that in light of the president's achievements and the economy's underlying strength, there won't be "a blue wave at all." The country is narrowly divided, with "not many voters to move around." It will be "trench warfare" in battleground contests, but he's confident the president can turn out Republican voters.

Mr. Blair's view is backed by Mr. Trump's pollster John McLaughlin. He told the Free Press that the challenge is "to not let it become a referendum on President Trump" but instead make it "a contrast election." Still, a successful strategy must be executed properly on all fronts. That's the problem.

Some things we can't evaluate until after Election Day—such as how effectively Trump will have wielded its financial advantage. The fundraising totals for GOP groups and MAGA dwarf those of Democratic candidate, party and political-action committees. Whether Republicans will deploy this well and before voter opinions harden is an open question.

Similarly, it appears the GOP's get-out-the-vote operation is well-planned while the Democratic National Committee's is flailing. These activities are hard for outsiders to quantify. Yet whatever mechanical advantages the GOP has could be offset by the emotion of Democrats eager to vote against the president.

Messaging is one of the few areas of Team Trump's execution we can judge in real time. The past month it's been awful.

The GOP strategy looks good on paper. What's lacking is competent execution.

Especially given Mr. Trump's poor approval numbers, he has to drive home each day what the GOP has accomplished and will accomplish—and clearly contrast that with what Democrats believe and promise. Instead, we've gotten off-putting confusion.

Start in early September. The big news out of Republicans' first-ever midterm convention: If the GOP won, Mr. Trump would give every adult \$5,000. There was no prior consultation with congressional Republicans, and there were conflicting explanations of how it would be paid for. No choir of supportive voices cheering the idea had been organized. It was crickets.

Then on Sept. 14, Donald Trump Jr. confirmed to the

media that a Russian oligarch paid for his lavish post-wedding celebrations. That's never a good look.

Two days later, the president asserted Iranian leaders "want to make a deal." Six days after that, he said he might have to "annihilate the Islamic Republic and do it quickly." This left voters whipsawed.

On Sept. 16, the president said the Kennedy Center would "end up being ripped down" unless the administration received "recognition"—i.e., his name on the building. Later that week, the president banned CNN, MS NOW and Politico from the White House press room. A judge soon restored access with a temporary restraining order as the outlets' lawsuit against the administration proceeded.

Even as GOP candidates are trying to make radical New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani the Democratic Party's face, the president met with the mayor in what a reporter called a "lovefest." It's hard to make Mr. Mamdani a pariah—and tarnish Democrats by extension—when Mr. Trump says the self-described socialist has "great potential."

Then there was last Thursday's lavish White House dinner honoring Ji Jinping. Mr. Trump's praise of the dictator as "truly outstanding, amazing" couldn't hide the summit's lack of substantive achievement.

Now there's controversy over the White House's using government money to run partisan ads as "public service announcements." (The White

Gross Output Signals an Economic Surge

By Mark Skousen

Last year's stagflation was a legitimate concern. Real gross domestic product rose only 2.2%, while business-to-business spending declined in real terms. In the fourth quarter last year, real GDP rose at an annual rate of 0.5%, and B2B spending declined 2.2%, according to my calculations based on Bureau of Economic Analysis and Census Bureau data. The supply chain experienced stagflation. Consumer spending was robust, but there was a mild business recession in 2025.

The economic picture is changing, and we can see it thanks to a little-known but powerful macrostatistic that measures spending at all stages of production. GDP leaves out the all-important supply chain, a leading indicator.

There is a better, broader statistic that tells what's really going on in the economy. Known as gross output, or GO, it measures spending at all stages of production.

Supply-chain economics is big business. Total spending in the U.S. in the intermediate stages of production amounted to about \$35 trillion in 2025, more than GDP. Business spending in the supply chain is much bigger and more volatile than final consumption and does a better job of measuring the ups and downs of the business cycle.

Good news: Business activity is quickly changing this year and is exploding upward, at double-digit rates.

It started in the first quarter and now has been confirmed. In the first quarter, the BEA reported a pickup in gross output. On Wednesday it was

revised upward by 0.6% for a real return of 2.3% for the first quarter. Unlike GDP, it includes the value of the supply chain and all B2B spending.

Wednesday's release of second-quarter GO was a blockbuster. GO is suddenly growing faster than GDP, a significant positive trend, and one that suggests real GDP in the third quarter could be explosive.

Second-quarter GO grew 5% in real terms, compared with real GDP growth of only 2.2%. The difference is in the value of the supply chain. Business to business more than doubled compared with the first quarter and grew 13.8% in the second quarter. This is the fastest growth in business activity since the bureau started measuring the GO statistic in 2005 (excluding the postpandemic rebounds 2021-22).

Moreover, business spend-

ing is growing faster than consumer spending, which grew only 3.8% in the second quarter compared with business increasing at a double-digit rate.

Spending on AI and data centers is undoubtedly behind the explosive growth in business activity, and capital spending by foreign investment in the U.S. won't be slowing.

Most economists focus on GDP when gauging economic outlook. But GO should be viewed as the top line in national income accounting, and GDP as the bottom line. Both metrics are essential to understanding where the economy is headed.

Mr. Skousen holds a chair in free enterprise at Chapman University and is author of "The Making of Modern Economics."

OPINION

REVIEW & OUTLOOK

The U.S. Economy Is Accelerating

You'd be forgiven for thinking the U.S. is slouching toward recession based on the gloomy headlines. But cheer up—the Commerce Department on Wednesday made an unusually large upward revision in its economic growth estimate for the first half of the year. Might rising yields on the 10-year Treasury reflect accelerating economic growth?

The Commerce Department raised its GDP growth estimate for the first quarter to 2.5% from 2.1%, as well as for the second to 2.2% from 1.5%. These large revisions reflect newly available data as well as updates to annual benchmarks that include refinements in methodology since 2021.

The upward revisions to real GDP growth stem partly from reduced inflation estimates. But the bigger story is that business investment and consumer spending have been stronger than economists thought. Business investment was revised up half a percentage point to 9% thanks to higher spending on intellectual property and structures tied to AI. Commerce says data centers drove the increase, while information processing equipment contributed to stronger consumer spending.

Admissions to spectator amusements also buoyed consumer spending during the second quarter. A World Cup dividend? Regardless, higher gasoline prices don't seem to be restraining consumers. Consumer spending has been growing faster than personal incomes in recent quarters, perhaps in part owing to the wealth effect from a booming stock market. Fidelity recently reported that the number of Americans with more than a \$1 million in the company's 401(k)s surged 19% during the second quarter to a record 769,000.

Americans can thank the AI boom, assisted by the GOP tax bill, for lifting corporate profits and equity prices. Corporate profits in the second quarter rose 20.8% from a year earlier. Even if

Evidence keeps coming that investment and growth are picking up.

some company valuations are stretched, increases in stock prices are broader than a couple of years ago when indexes were driven by the so-called Magnificent Seven.

Net exports subtracted 1.1 percentage points from GDP in the calculation, as AI companies imported more chips and equipment for their data center build-out. But this is a positive

for U.S. domestic investment and growth. Imports aren't a sign of economic weakness.

The larger story here is that the economy as a whole looks to be on a stronger footing than during the Biden years when growth was driven by government handouts. Recall how the Biden team boasted that its climate spending was increasing construction and even defended its endless student loan forbearance as propping up consumer spending.

Last year's tax bill phased out green-energy subsidies and made much-needed reforms to food stamps that have reduced enrollment to pre-pandemic levels. The Trump team also made student loan borrowers make payments again. Democrats said this would imperil the economy. Apparently not.

The press has been in a panic over the rising yield on the 10-year Treasury, which has crept up 100 basis points this year to 5.29%. The conventional wisdom is that higher energy prices and expectations of more debt issuance are the culprit, but faster growth and competition for capital are contributing. Estimates for third quarter GDP growth have also been rising as September looks strong.

So if the economy is good, why do Americans feel so glum? The likely answer is the hangover from the Biden inflation, which continues to erode wage gains and make it hard to save. Border taxes and higher gas prices haven't helped. Yet despite the prophecies that the war in Iran would plunge the U.S. into a recession, the evidence is that America's economic animal spirits are alive and well.

Passengers Defeat a Would-Be Hijacker

Twenty-five years after the 9/11 attacks, the legacy of Flight 93 lives on. Israeli passengers and Emirati crew members fought off an apparent hijacking attempt of a flight from Dubai in the United Arab Emirates to Tel Aviv on Wednesday. They landed the commercial jet in Saudi Arabia and saved some 180 lives. Call it the Abraham Accords in action.

Details are still emerging, but the hijacker appears to have been the Omani co-pilot, who stabbed his fellow pilot, Smit Machchhar of India, and took control of the aircraft to drive it into the ground. In 30 seconds the plane fell more than 14,000 feet.

An Israeli passenger, Yaniv Hayun, and a crew member broke into the cockpit, which the wounded Indian pilot may have unlocked before collapsing by the door. Mr. Hayun then put the terrorist in a choke hold and worked with others to throw him out of the cockpit.

With the pilot removed, Mr. Hayun took the controls. "I pulled the yoke backward," he recounted to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. "You see it on 'Mayday,'" the TV show, Mr. Hayun added by way of explanation. Passengers tied up the terrorist and tended to the wounded pilot. Mr. Hayun and another bloodied Israeli can be seen on video standing guard.

Landed by other pilots on board, the flight was diverted to Saudi Arabia, where the Israelis

were treated. This is new for the Saudis, who still refuse formal relations with Jerusalem and reportedly didn't want an Israeli plane to pick up the passengers. But what the terrorist meant for evil became an opportunity for good.

Though the Omani co-pilot is currently believed to have acted alone, Mohsen Rezaei, Iran's top national security adviser, released a statement after the hijacking to threaten the U.A.E. even more than it already has for having hosted Mr. Netanyahu on Sunday. Also on Wednesday, U.K. Prime Minister Andy Burnham said there are "strong indications" that Iran aided the recent terror plot against a Royal Air Force base used by U.S. war planes in the United Kingdom.

The Emiratis are unlikely to be intimidated. Flydubai flew to and from Israel through some of the most dangerous periods of the post-Oct. 7, 2023 war, even as U.S. airlines canceled. One way of viewing the hijacking is as an attack on that route and the Abraham Accords behind it. It failed and, other than vigilance, the best response will be more flights, tourism, diplomacy and commerce.

The threat from Islamic terrorism isn't over. But on their way home to Israel at last, survivors of the hijacking could be seen on video breaking into an old Jewish song: "The whole entire world is a very narrow bridge / and the main thing—is to have no fear at all."

plan—that made the cost a moving target.

Some of the problems are classic Washington. The government always seems surprised by the engineering challenges with building in a malarial swamp, which explains why other recent nearby projects also ran way over budget. Some shortcomings are unique to the Fed, including a governance model

that requires academic macroeconomists on the Board of Governors to oversee a complex construction project. Picture the faculty lounge trying to build a new football stadium.

New Fed Chair Kevin Warsh in his response to the IG report proposes the solution the Fed should have adopted from the start. He's handing the Eccles project to the General Services Administration, the branch of government that has experience, er, mismanaging building projects within normal parameters.

But the key conclusion here concerns the accusations of criminality. "At no point during our evaluation did we find reasonable grounds to believe that a violation of federal criminal law had occurred," Mr. Horowitz writes. "Further, while our report outlines deficiencies in the management of the renovation project . . . we did not identify administrative misconduct during our evaluation."

This is a political opportunity. Mr. Powell has bucked convention to linger on the Fed board past his chairmanship ostensibly to defend the Fed's independence from Mr. Trump. The report now offers reassurance that Mr. Powell is in the legal clear. This clears the path for Mr. Powell to resign in line with tradition and do his part to de-escalate the unhelpful political battles that have ensnared the Fed.

Then the GSA can finish the building, the Fed can worry about monetary policy, and Mr. Trump can talk about the growing economy. Or so we can dream.

An IG report finds familiar incompetence, but no criminality.

The End of the Fed Building Fiasco

How many economists does it take to renovate an office building? The optimal number is zero, to judge from a new report into the fiasco of a Federal Reserve building project. The salient point is that this project fell victim to as much incompetence as you'd expect, and no criminality.

Fed Inspector-General Michael Horowitz on Wednesday released his report into cost overruns on renovations of the Fed's main Eccles building and an office complex across the street. Budgeted for \$1.3 billion, the current cost estimate has ballooned to \$2.4 billion and it's on track to be completed three years behind schedule.

You've heard about this because President Trump tried to exploit the cost overruns and delays to concoct a governance crisis at the Fed. His Justice Department in January issued a criminal subpoena to then-Chairman Jerome Powell concerning allegedly incorrect testimony Mr. Powell had given to Congress about the project. Mr. Trump hoped to push Mr. Powell out of his chairmanship early.

Mr. Horowitz's report finally tells the public what happened, and the IG describes a long and expensive comedy of errors. The renovation on a different Fed building, completed in 2022, had run over budget and past schedule. That prompted an earlier IG examination. The Fed tried to apply those lessons to this project but did so ineptly.

For instance, for the Eccles project the Fed attempted to adopt the recommendation to use a type of construction contract that shifts the risk of cost overruns to the contractor. But officials tried to sign the agreement at a phase in the design process when the contractor couldn't estimate key costs, negating the benefits. Officials also kept changing crucial elements of the design—such as switching to a closed-office from open-

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

AI's Behavior Will Matter More Than Its Mind

Holman W. Jenkins, Jr. states that "a long fight is brewing over whether AIs are conscious" ("Will the AI Frenzy Add Up to Anything?" *Business World*, Sept. 26). Much has been debated about when or whether this will happen, but neuroscientists like me and my colleagues can't even truly agree on a definition of what consciousness is.

In the case of AI, this debate is moot. It doesn't matter whether we can define whether AI will become conscious, but behavior is what matters. There is ample evidence that its behavior is almost indistinguishable from that of conscious beings. It won't be long before these programs operate at the same level as a 10-year-old who has mastered the fundamentals of reading and can learn independently from that point forward. At that point it doesn't matter whether AI is conscious or not; it matters what it does.

MATTHEWS W. GWYNN, M.D. FAAN
Atlanta

Peggy Noonan's "Trump Is in Denial About AI's Danger" (Declarations, Sept. 26) and Mr. Jenkins's "Will the AI Frenzy Add Up to Anything?" look

at the same rapidly developing technology and come away with strikingly different conclusions. Ms. Noonan sees an approaching danger requiring urgent action. Mr. Jenkins sees serious risks but warns against confused, hurried responses.

Their disagreement illustrates something missing from much of the current debate: We keep talking about AI as though it were one thing. But there is an enormous difference between increasingly autonomous frontier systems that may act with limited human supervision and the AI tools already being used every day in medicine, science, education and business.

We should take the warnings of Dario Amodei, Sam Altman, Geoffrey Hinton and others seriously without allowing fears about tomorrow's frontier systems to frighten us from responsibly using today's technology.

Perhaps the sensible position lies somewhere between Ms. Noonan's alarm and Mr. Jenkins's restraint: Be cautious about the frontier, but decisive about responsible adoption.

MARK R. GUANNINY
Rochester, N.Y.

How America Should Power the AI Revolution

Regarding Peter Earle's op-ed "AI and the Dangers of Electric Lighting" (Sept. 24): Mr. Earle's comparison of artificial intelligence to the early days of electrification raises an enduring question: How do we manage legitimate risks of new technologies without impeding their promise for prosperity and quality of life?

That question matters today as AI accelerates infrastructure build-out across domestic manufacturing sectors while boosting efficiency and optimization. Yet this progress runs on power—and a lot of it: Data centers could consume as much as 12% of the nation's electricity by 2028, according to the Energy Department, up from 4.4% in 2023.

The answer should be risk-based policies that protect consumer safety and energy system reliability without one-size-fits-all prescriptions that become barriers to innovation. Transparent, consensus-based standards play an equally important role, giving companies common benchmarks while

allowing technologies to evolve and improve.

That is the approach my organization is taking alongside ASHRAE and Pacific Northwest National Laboratory through the AI Data Center Energy Performance Framework, which brings together experts to guide the safe, reliable and efficient expansion of digital infrastructure.

The electroindustry already supports 2.35 million American jobs and contributes more than \$375 billion to the U.S. economy annually. AI offers enormous opportunities for that workforce and the broader economy. But realizing them will require infrastructure and standards capable of keeping pace.

The lesson from electrification isn't to fear transformative technology. It is to manage its risks intelligently while giving innovation room to serve.

DEBRA PHILLIPS
President, CEO
The National Electrical
Manufacturers Association
Arlington, Va.

Stop Funding the College Conformity Machine

Manu Meel is correct that many students are "tired of uncaring orthodoxy" on college campuses ("Who's Afraid of Civility and Dialogue on Campus," op-ed, Sept. 26). I have seen that firsthand while leading discourse programs at Bucknell University and several others. Yet if tomorrow's leaders are going to get the serious and vigorous education they deserve, action is needed from a host of others.

Donors should only entrust their money to administrators and projects that break the depressing collegiate mold. Lawmakers should only entrust the public's money to institutions that prove they're serious about exposing students to unorthodox views and voices. And parents should only trust their children to schools where reasoned disagreement and the search for truth define the campus experience.

AI Risk Is a Human Problem

Regarding "AI Leaders Are Standing on a Liability Landmine" (Heard on the Street, Sept. 23), Palantir CEO Alex Karp's key proposal—in a recent CNBC interview—was the opposite of nationalizing the risk of loss, namely "the first line of defense is you're liable for your own actions."

Mr. Karp is right that AI developers should remain subject to civil liability for the systems they create, but he doesn't go far enough. Directors of Delaware corporations owe fiduciary duties that include a duty of oversight and can face personal liability when they act in bad faith by consciously disregarding sufficiently serious "red flags" concerning risks to the corporation.

Effective regulation requires technical expertise, much of which resides within or is financially connected to the industry being regulated. Existing fiduciary law offers a partial answer. Personal liability changes the risk-reward calculation, giving directors an incentive to demand credible safety systems. And fiduciary oversight is largely self-executing. It doesn't require government regulators capable of matching the technical expertise of AI labs.

If AI poses the extraordinary risks its developers describe, the solution may be in the boardroom, not Congress.

STUART IRVIN
Washington

Letters intended for publication should be emailed to wsjletters@wsj.com. Please include your city, state and telephone number. All letters are subject to editing, and unpublished letters cannot be acknowledged.

Those outside the ivory tower should take away the matches from the pyromaniacs Mr. Manu describes—the ones who think dialogue is an Israeli front and are burning down institutions from the inside—all across America.

CHARLES MITCHELL
Open Discourse Coalition
Lewisburg, Pa.

Balancing the Campus Books

Regarding your editorial "Congress Tries to Fix College Sports" (Sept. 26): The federal government might consider a straightforward approach to rescind the tax-free status of any accredited higher education institution that pays any employee or staff member of its athletic staff more than the highest paid head of any academic department. This would force schools, their governing boards and, in some cases, state legislatures to decide if they really want an educational institution or a sports-dominated entity with an attached educational effort.

With their tax status removed, universities would treat tuition and sports fees as income with academic and sports costs as expenses. Scholarships with payments up to the cost of tuition, room and board, and academic expenses would be deductions. Students receiving scholarships (academic or athletic) under these guidelines would not be taxed, but payments above that limit would be taxable. The big loss would be that donors making donations would no longer be able to treat them as deductions on their taxes.

Who knows? We might eventually see coaches earning less than million-dollar salaries while NFL teams, valued at tens of billions of dollars, create their own minor league.

PAUL W. HOFF
Bedford, N.H.

Pepper ... And Salt

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL



"Your wolverine aggressiveness is on point but I think we need to start with smaller prey."

OPINION

Ukraine's Stealthy Drone Warriors

By Jillian Kay Melchior

The scene resembles the Ukrainian flag: yellow fields of corn, sunflowers and wheat, a crisp blue September sky. We park on the perimeter of a field, in the shade of a row of lindens. "These trees are quite inhabited," says my guide—call sign Leon—a soldier in a brigade of Ukraine's Unmanned Systems Forces known as Magyar's Birds. Under the dense foliage, soldiers on the ground work in what looks like a pumpkin patch. Instead of tending squash, they are rigging 12 fixed-wing drones with 22 pounds of explosives. "Agriculture in Ukraine," Leon says with a smile.

These drones have a range of up to 250 miles, enough to cover all the Ukrainian territory Russia occupies. Today they'll fly toward Novozovsk, a district of Donetsk between Mariupol and the Russian border. A Magyar's Birds reconnaissance team spotted a cluster of expensive enemy vehicles—a "tasty" or "juicy" target, the soldiers say.

Midrange drones have degraded some Russian electronic-warfare systems and hobbled 300 vessels.

Given the risk of Russian reconnaissance, the plan is to "get in, get armed, and get in the air" fast, Leon says. Launching a drone is far less cumbersome than firing a missile. The foliage conceals the drones as they are prepared, and a barn could do the same in the winter. On larger missions involving several dozen drones, the Ukrainians might use several launch sites. The launches are dispersed and inconspicuous—making them harder for the Russians to counter. In the Middle East, the U.S. and Gulf partners are struggling against Iranian drones for similar reasons.

The drones I saw were rigged with explosives powerful enough to pene-



A drone launched by Ukrainian soldiers in the Kharkiv region.

trate 11 inches of steel in a direct hit. The research-and-development department of Magyar's Birds custom-makes as many as 100,000 warheads a month for short- and midrange strikes and supplies more than a dozen other units, mainly within the Unmanned Systems Forces. Magyar's Birds assemble more than 50 different models, each calibrated for the specific type of drone and target.

Once the drone is ready, soldiers gingerly place it on the catapult launcher. As propellers whirl during warm-up, one drone's camera shakes. An engineer tinkers and steadies it so the pilot will have a stable view. But generally the drones arrive mission-ready, partially a result of "continuous feedback" with Ukraine's arms developers, says the field commander, who goes by the call sign Cousteau. The drone rises, then disappears into the sky. "Two years ago, we needed to have our pilots near us," and proximity put the pilots at risk, Leon says. Today with an internet connection they can fly from hundreds of miles away.

Leon later updates me on the mission's results, with footage. Unmanned Systems Forces units get credit for a kill only if they have video proof. The Russians shot down

two midrange drones, and another was lost as its communications went down, possibly because of electronic warfare. One more missed its target. But the remaining eight hit their marks. The mission destroyed four Russian military cargo trucks and three fuel trucks and damaged an additional fuel truck.

"We understand logistics is the blood flow of war," says Maj. Robert "Magyar" Brovdi, commander of Ukraine's Unmanned Systems Forces. Until now, to cut a logistics artery, you needed to position infantry close enough to hit targets with artillery, lay mines or blow up bridges. "But now," Maj. Brovdi says, "the question is only the availability of drones and the quantity of drones."

Such an interdiction campaign is one feature of the Third Army Corps' Operation Vivaldi, which has thwarted a Russian offensive aimed at encircling the Ukrainian eastern defensive stronghold known as the Fortress Belt. Third Army Corps also says it has recently reclaimed about 68 square miles in the direction of Lyman, a city in the Donetsk region. One example of how midrange strikes helped there: Some of Russia's electronic warfare systems run on generators, so hammering fuel lo-

gistics helped degrade this enemy capability.

Maj. Brovdi cites other recent successes. Oil and gas revenue pays for Vladimir Putin's war, and Russia uses its shadow fleet to evade sanctions and smuggle fuel abroad. Since July the Unmanned Systems Forces have targeted these vessels in the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov. Sinking an oil tanker could cause an environmental disaster, but it's easy to incapacitate the vessel with a drone strike on a crucial area like an engine room. Maj. Brovdi says that as of Sept. 22, his soldiers had turned 300 Russian vessels into "drifting warehouses in the sea... incapable of moving by themselves."

He says his troops are also blocking Crimea "without a foot on the ground" and without any losses from the Unmanned Systems Forces. Attacks on missile launch sites in Crimea have dramatically decreased the number of ballistic and cruise missiles launched from that direction, he says. If it had starlink access over Russia to go after more mobile missile launchers, Ukraine could further erode the enemy's ability to hit Kyiv and other cities.

"The aim is to create a systematic effect, not only to disrupt logistics," Leon says. Ukraine's midrange strikes on air defenses leave Russian forces at the front more vulnerable. They also open a corridor for Ukraine to conduct aerial attacks deep in Russia while stretching the Kremlin's air defenses even thinner. The Russians are adjusting to the midrange strikes, in part by moving men and munitions stealthily in civilian vehicles. They also have increased the number of mobile fire groups that try to shoot down Ukrainian drones.

The Unmanned Systems Forces has identified thousands of potential Russian targets, and it has crews ready to take them on. But Ukraine's most acute problem remains supply. Leon estimates the Unmanned Systems Forces has only 14% of the mid-range drones it needs.

Ms. Melchior is a London-based member of the Journal editorial board.

Getting To Know Kevin Warsh

By Alan S. Blinder

New Federal Reserve chairmen don't come around often. It's a major event for markets even if most people ignore it. The term lasts four years, but most chairmen serve longer and there are no term limits. Alan Greenspan was chairman for an astounding 18½ years.

Kevin Warsh has been on the job since May, the 11th Fed chairman since the central bank's 1953 restructuring. Remember the old song "Getting to Know You"? Markets need to get to know Mr. Warsh better, and Mr. Warsh needs to get to know the markets better. It's normal but may be more important than usual now because Mr. Warsh says he wants markets to do their own forecasting of Fed decisions, with little or no guidance from the central bank. So what have we learned about Mr. Warsh's leadership? Five things:

First, the new Fed chief handles himself well on television and in public generally. He is personable, well-spoken and telegenic and has abundant people skills.

We've learned a lot about him since May. The market needs to learn even more.

Second, those people skills may extend to dealing with Donald Trump. I say "may" because it's early days. Mr. Warsh has now managed one interest-rate hike without Mr. Trump blowing his top. We know the president craves lower interest rates, not higher ones. But reporting suggests he gave Mr. Warsh the green light rather than see his newly installed chairman outvoted on the Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC). That was sensible, but it might have taken a large dose of those people skills.

Third, and related, Mr. Warsh remained true to his hawkish roots despite Mr. Trump's hyperdovish views. If you worried that Mr. Warsh would be a sock puppet for the president, you can worry less now.

Fourth, Mr. Warsh made clear he believes in the Fed's dual mandate of low inflation and high employment. That mandate distinguishes the Fed from many other central banks with an inflation-only mandate. Critics have argued this is a shortcoming of the Federal Reserve Act.

In some early statements, Mr. Warsh sounded as if he might agree. But he made clear, first in his Aug. 28 Jackson Hole speech and then in his Sept. 16 press conference, that he believes in and will be guided by the dual mandate. Hurrah for that.

Fifth, while Mr. Warsh has said repeatedly that he doesn't want the Fed giving "forward guidance"—indications about its leanings for future policy—he and the FOMC have done exactly that. More likely it's the nature of forward guidance and its volume that he wants to change.

I was in the audience listening to his talk at Jackson Hole—at a time when the betting on a September rate increase was about 50/50. The speech made a clear and persuasive case for raising interest rates. So clear that on the eve of the September FOMC meeting, markets were pricing in a 92% chance of the 25-basis-point hike that actually occurred.

What Mr. Warsh really doesn't like, I believe, is something forward guidance normally doesn't do: locking the central bank into future decisions. The FOMC did that for a while as it tried to help the economy escape the 2008 financial collapse. Several FOMC statements promised not to raise rates for a defined period.

But the Fed wound up abandoning that approach. So even that episode actually illustrates that worries about precommitment are overblown. Forward guidance stating that rates were frozen until date X was used several times, but the dates changed in later rate announcements as circumstances warranted. Monetary policy wasn't locked in.

Today, the FOMC gives forward guidance—without calling it that—in its quarterly Summary of Economic Projections, which forecasts several key variables, including the federal-funds rate, over several years. These projections change all the time. There is no indication of lock-in and almost no hints of those forecasts as commitments. They are more like guesses about the future.

All in all, I come away from Mr. Warsh's early months in office feeling I've gotten to know him better. With midterm elections and more interest-rate hikes on the horizon, markets need to do that, too.

Mr. Blinder is a professor of economics and public affairs at Princeton. He served as vice chairman of the Federal Reserve, 1994-96.

Shareholders Should Pay for AI Dangers

By Gabriel Rautenberg and Sarath Sanga

Dario Amodei of Anthropic has warned that, within a year, swarms of artificial-intelligence agents could take over the internet and do hundreds of billions of dollars in damage. His biggest rivals, Sam Altman and Elon Musk, agreed. Suppose they're right and the damage is done. Who pays?

Under current law, you do. If a bankrupt company can't pay its debts, shareholders aren't liable and the people it harmed have nowhere to go.

This rule is called limited liability. It's so familiar you might think it's in the nature of any corporation. But it isn't. National banks didn't have limited liability until the rise of deposit insurance in the 1930s. Neither did California corporations of any kind. American Express traded actively without it until 1965. So proprietors and general partnerships have never had it.

Limited liability for torts is a subsidy to today's shareholders paid for by tomorrow's tort victims. For AI, that subsidy should end. That means if an AI company faces a mass tort and runs out of money, its shareholders should have to pay.

Limited liability for AI companies isn't always a problem. For lenders and other contract parties, limited liability is merely a term in a deal. It means that if the company can't pay, the lenders can't go after the owners for the rest. A bank that lends to an AI company knows the rule and can price it into the loan. If it wants more protection, it can ask the owners for a personal guarantee.

But tort victims never made a deal. A hospital hacked by rogue AI never chose to do business with the company at all. That's why limited liability shouldn't supply to torts.

Most of the time we tolerate limited liability because mass torts are

rare and we don't know they're going to happen in advance. Had asbestos manufacturers announced in 1950 that their product might kill hundreds of thousands, no legislature would have said their owners should have limited liability. The heads of frontier labs have said their companies could be responsible for such a mass tort, or worse. They've made the case against limited liability.

Companies that say they're endangering the public shouldn't get the privilege of limited legal liability.

That case, as we argue in a recent paper, is strongest when a corporation's profits and the risks it poses rise together, and when those risks are extreme and unbounded. That's exactly the situation AI executives describe. Customers demand the capabilities that make the product so dangerous. The more successful the product, the more risk likely lands on the public.

Building more-capable models without these risks is the engineering problem that labs say they need more time to solve. Congress isn't about to solve it. But Congress doesn't have to. It can establish a liability rule and let incentives do the work.

In the 19th century, locomotives threw off hot embers that set nearby fields and barns ablaze. Lawmakers didn't engineer a technical solution. They and the courts made the railroads pay for the damage. The railroads responded by fitting spark arresters to their engines and clearing brush along the tracks. Once the incentive to do so was in place, the companies supplied technical fixes.

Shareholder liability can be narrow and still work. It need only ap-

ply to the handful of firms that train frontier models. Passive investors can have their liability capped, so index funds can still hold AI stocks and price the risk. Controlling shareholders such as Mr. Amodei and Mark Zuckerberg should pay without a cap, since by their own admission they control the risk.

The predictable objection to such a policy change will be China. For now, America is leading the global race for AI leadership. Anything that slows the home industry, so the argument goes, only helps the other side.

That objection assumes that Washington has so far been hands-off. In reality it's already up to its elbows. The government decides which chips may be sold to China, which labs get Pentagon contracts, and which labs get blacklisted. Even if the rule did handicap U.S. firms, a powerful Washington lobby would have reason to push for imposing the same terms on Beijing's AI

champions. Washington could make Chinese access to American chips conditional on adopting the same rule.

The U.S. can go on pouring capital into AI research and data-center construction. It can extend cheap loans, tax credits and whatever else it likes, even in exchange for giving up limited liability. But it shouldn't extend a subsidy that pushes AI risks onto everyone else.

Anthropic is about to go public. Before it does, it could set an example and waive limited liability for torts on its own; state law expressly allows that. Anthropic is already a public-benefit corporation, with a majority of its board appointed by an independent trust. If its chief executive thinks the industry should slow down, this is how he can put his money where his mouth is.

Mr. Rautenberg is a professor at Columbia Law School. Mr. Sanga is a professor at Yale Law School.

Rocky Is Back on Top

By Randy Maniloff

The city of Philadelphia has permanently installed an 8½-foot bronze sculpture of Rocky Balboa outside the Philadelphia Museum of Art. It is about time.

This is an underdog story worthy of Rocky, the boxer portrayed by Sylvester Stallone in the film franchise. The sculpture first appeared in 1982's "Rocky III," when the character was world heavyweight champion. Philadelphia paid tribute to its fictional hometown pugilist by placing his image at the top of the 72 steps that he ran up in a memorable scene from the inaugural film in 1976.

Mr. Stallone gave the bronze, by the sculptor A. Thomas Schomburg, to the city. It remained at the museum for a short period. But the museum and the Philadelphia Art Commission wanted Rocky gone. They feared that having a former movie prop close to the museum could damage its reputation. Rocky was exiled to South Philadelphia and installed outside the Spectrum arena, where the 76ers and Flyers played until the 1990s.

In 2006 Rocky returned to the art museum as part of a mayoral effort to revitalize public spaces, but in a much less prominent perch—at the foot of the steps.

Even installing it near the museum proved controversial. Two members of the city's art commission voted against it. One said it was "not a work of art," another that it didn't "raise the standards of the city."

Mr. Stallone spoke at the 2006 ceremony on the museum steps to commemorate the statue's return. "All you want is a slice of the American dream," he said. "That's what Rocky was about." He said the sculpture wasn't about him. "It's about you," he told the crowd. "Because inside of every one of you, there's a real Rocky." Rocky was back, albeit at the kids' table.

It's been half a century since the Stallone movie. Better late than never.

In 2024 an identical Rocky statue, owned by Mr. Stallone—also made by Mr. Schomburg—was placed at the top of the museum steps as part of RockyFest, a weeklong celebration of the franchise.

This year, city officials approved the famous location as the original statue's permanent home. "This location on the Rocky steps is inseparable from the story of the statue," Philadelphia's chief cultural officer and public art director wrote in a letter. They described their decision as "an opportunity to lean in to the evolving conversation about what is considered 'art.'"

About four million people annually visit the Rocky statue. If they are looking for inspiration, they have come to the right place.

Mr. Maniloff is an attorney at White & Williams LLP in Philadelphia.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

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THE AUSTRALIAN

RBA pushed to cut rates then let down by spending

Former RBA governor Lowe getting last laugh as Bullock in hot seat

The RBA took a dent to its credibility during the pandemic when then governor Philip Lowe gave forward guidance that ultra-low interest rates would continue well into the future. When global inflation took off, largely as a result of supply constraints due to the pandemic, Dr Lowe was forced to start lifting rates and eating humble pie. He was criticised for waiting too long to lift rates and allowing the inflationary challenge to get worse than should have been the case.

When Labor came to power, Jim Chalmers dispensed with Dr Lowe, declining to extend his tenure, and shook up both the make-up as well as the decision-making procedures of the RBA. Along with the changes came demands that the RBA pay more attention to employment in how it sets rates. Ahead of the last federal election, the RBA faced a full-court press from trade unions, former treasurer Wayne Swan and senior members of the federal government in calling for an early end to its rates tightening cycle. ACTU secretary Sally McManus said in September 2023 that the central bank needed to change direction, and focus on full employment and the impact of "excessive corporate profits" on inflation. In September 2024, Mr Swan unleashed an extraordinary attack on the credibility of the RBA, accusing the board of "hammering households", putting "dogma over rational economic decision-making" and of "punching itself in the face" through poor judgments in keeping rates high.

Ms Bullock started to cut rates in February 2025, and again in April – ahead of the May 3 federal election – but has subsequently been forced to change tack. At 4.6 per cent, the cash rate is now 0.25 percentage points higher than it was at the peak of the last rates cycle before the election. Another 25-basis-point rise in the cash rate on Tuesday positions Australia near the top of the list internationally for both inflation and interest rates.

In hindsight, the RBA started to cut rates too early and has been trying to repair its

mistake against a backdrop of volatile international markets. The latest CPI figures, released on Wednesday, cloud the outlook because while headline inflation at 4.0 per cent was below market expectations of 4.1 per cent, core inflation was steady at 3.6 per cent in the 12 months to July, well above the bank's target band of 2-3 per cent.

Ms Bullock has had her "Lowe" moment of indecision and indecision is now locked in a war of words with the government over who is to blame. Most economists are siding with Dr Bullock's view that government spending is too high and productivity growth has stalled, leaving no room for growth without inflation. Anthony Albanese and Treasurer Jim Chalmers are walking both sides of the street, accepting that domestic inflation is a problem but blaming high oil prices on the war with Iran.

The government can argue the atmosphere, but not the numbers. At 26.9 per cent of GDP, government spending is at its highest level for 40 years outside of the pandemic. And, as Judith Sloan has noted, it is a repeat performance for Labor. When Kevin Rudd took office in 2007 the budget deficit doubled from 2.1 per cent of GDP to 4.2 per cent in Labor's first year. Net debt went from zero to \$200bn by the time Mr Rudd lost office. Today, debt is \$1 trillion, with Dr Chalmers seeing no prospect of a budget surplus for the next 40 years.

Ms Bullock can take comfort from the fact Dr Lowe is finally getting the last laugh. In an interview this week, Dr Lowe said government spending was putting upward pressure on inflation. He said: "We now find ourselves running sizeable budget deficits at a time where we're at full employment and commodity prices are very high. We should be running sizeable surpluses." He added: "Public policy is no longer focused on expanding the size of the pie. It's more about the distribution of income and wealth."

As an economist, Ms Bullock must surely agree with her old boss. She must ignore the politicians and focus on the job at hand.

IR reform as vital as 40 years ago

Workplace reform is key to lifting productivity and living standards

If productivity is to be restored to counteract rising inflation, interest rates and debt, and reverse a precipitous fall in living standards, a better industrial relations system must be a pillar of an extensive reform process. Forty years after a young barrister, Peter Costello, among others, helped establish the HR Nicholls Society to promote the case against central planning of IR, and for workplace choice and freedom of contract, the economy needs those principles more than ever. In The Australian today, the society's chief executive, James Mathias, makes a convincing argument why the nation can no longer afford the burden of Labor's vast, complex and restrictive workplace system. Business, productivity, real wage increases and job opportunities are being smothered by 205,816 separate legal rules of pay. Awards run to 87,399 pages and have been amended 7568 times since 2009. "A tradesperson can fall under any of 87 awards and a labourer under 82, and which one applies depends not on the work, but on the industry the employer is deemed to be in," Mathias writes. The Restaurant Industry Award provides for a 64c per hour difference between the person who carries a plate to the table and the one who takes the plate away. The intolerable system, championed by the government's dominant union base, is keeping us all poor as it is a major factor in productivity growth grinding to its lowest rate in 60 years. Reform should not be beyond either side of politics, as the Keating-

Hawke government showed. IR reforms at the heart of the Howard government's agenda, which were despised by unions, produced real wage gains, growth in labour productivity and strong GDP growth. They were central to the 1998 dispute that led to major productivity gains at ports.

Labor's economic policy is too serious for the issue to be ignored in advance of the next election. The HR Nicholls Society's proposals for a reduction of the nation's 122 awards to 19 stripped-back awards, an increase in the small business definition from 15 to 50 staff, and the option of individual employment contracts for low-paid workers are sound principles.

Labor is wedded to the most rigid system for 40 years. That leaves the way open, amid low union membership and outrage over building corruption, for the Coalition to push for financial and job gains from a more flexible system. The policy directions outlined by deputy Liberal leader Jane Hume on Wednesday were positive. They include scrapping government procurement laws that favour contractors with union agreements and re-establishing the building industry watchdog, Ewin Hannan reports. Same-job, same-pay rules and multi-employer bargaining also need reform. The overarching aim must be restoring flexibility for businesses and workers to reach agreements beneficial to both, without the interference of a Big Brother bureaucracy and thousands of pages of red tape.

Activists should be interrogated

Royal commissioner Virginia Bell's not calling the Palestinian Action Group, Australia's most prominent pro-Palestine organisation, to give evidence at her inquiry raises an important question: How can royal commission into antisemitism and social cohesion be comprehensive if the most persistent demonstrators who have stirred up anti-Jewish sentiment since Hamas's barbaric attack on southern Israel three years ago are not interrogated?

The Palestine Action Group held weekly anti-Israel rallies for more than a year after the October 7 attack. It also co-ordinated the protest march across the Sydney Harbour Bridge in August last year, at which a large poster depicting Iranian supreme leader Ali Khamenei was held up.

The group is planning its next major demonstration for four days after the third anniversary of the atrocity that killed 1200 men, women and children, and saw a further 250 kidnapped.

The PAG wanted to play a substantial role in the royal commission. More importantly, its leaders should have been publicly cross-examined by Ms Bell and by barristers representing the 15 victims shot dead at Bondi Beach in December and Jewish groups whose members have

suffered other violent attacks and abuse. Many of our Jewish citizens live in fear, with fortress-like security around their synagogues, community centres and schools. Their leaders, as well as senior judicial figures, politicians and national security experts, believe protesters should be compelled to give evidence, as legal affairs reporter James Dowling has written.

Ms Bell's failure to call those leaders to testify is likely to weaken the impact of the commission, which is being wrapped up too quickly. Before Prime Minister Anthony Albanese reluctantly called the royal commission, Home Affairs Minister Tony Burke opposed that level of inquiry on the grounds it would undermine social cohesion by giving extremists a platform.

Protest leaders' testimonies would doubtless have made for uncomfortable listening, especially for Jewish Australians. But it would have been instructive, assisting authorities in dealing with hate speech and protracted demonstrations.

In the wake of October 7 and Bondi, it is clear that festering hatred behind closed doors is more dangerous than hostile protesters revealing their motivations and views under cross-examination. An important opportunity has been lost.

LETTERS

Rate rise punishes battlers, young mortgage holders

The Reserve Bank's decision to raise the cash rate by 0.25 percentage points to 4.60 per cent will add to the pressure on Australians already struggling with mortgages, rents and everyday bills, making life harder for households and small businesses.

It deserves scrutiny because Australia's inflation problem has more than one cause. Higher interest rates can reduce spending over time. But they cannot produce more homes, lower global fuel prices or bring down electricity costs.

Housing has been a major contributor to inflation, and the national housing council has warned that higher rates may delay construction. Raising the cost of finance risks making that problem harder to solve.

The RBA must explain why another increase is the right response to these price pressures, how long households should expect to wait for relief, and what evidence would cause it to change course.

Higher interest rates cannot lower the global price of oil, ease disruptions to fuel supplies or directly reduce the cost of moving goods around the country. Nor

can they quickly produce more homes or improve productivity. The RBA itself identifies global energy prices, domestic capacity pressures and weak productivity as part of the current problem.

A rate rise is so blunt and it falls hardest on borrowers who may already have cut every optional expense, while doing little directly to change global fuel prices or supply constraints.

Australians deserve an inflation strategy that addresses the causes of rising prices, rather than repeatedly asking indebted households to bear the burden. **Ange Kenos, Niddrie, Vic**

I'm not an economist but I can't help thinking that our country's dire economic situation is due almost entirely to the billions spent on this government's ridiculous climate change bonfire (and Malcolm Turnbull's self-aggrandisement). **Jim Noble, Fig Tree Pocket, Qld**

Treasurer Jim Chalmers says our budget is "in good nick". The facts say otherwise.

He says taxes were higher when Peter Costello was treasurer, but John Howard and Cos-

tello were paying off the Labor debt they inherited, whereas Anthony Albanese and Chalmers are rapidly adding to our national debt.

Everything comes back to how tax revenue is deployed. Adding to debt by spending tax revenue on nonproductive social issues does nothing to improve our national productivity, but does a lot of economic harm. **Brian Barker, Bulimba, Qld**

The RBA has been cutting increased interest rates for all Australians. This is cruelly, aimed squarely at mortgage holders and businesses – a sledgehammer approach to slow consumption.

The increase in interest rates benefits the banks.

Here is a simple suggestion. Australia is fortunate in having compulsory superannuation, so why doesn't our government, instead of increasing interest rates to combat high inflation, in consultation with the RBA have, say, 2 per cent taken out of every worker's wages or salary, with that money placed into their superannuation funds?

This simple endeavour would reduce money in circulation and

would have all workers contributing to the reduction of inflation rather than mortgage holders bearing the brunt of interest rate increases.

The other advantage is that mortgage holders would not be paying extra money to the bank but they would be contributing to their long-term savings. **Isabel Carria, Shenton Park, WA**

Anthony Albanese stated in 2022 that "after almost a decade of this Liberal-National government, the costs of essentials are out of control, real wages are falling, and now interest rates are rising by a quarter of a per cent".

Didn't take Albanese half that time to achieve the same result. **Terry Davis, Lindfield, NSW**

Israel has been at war for almost three years, yet its central bank has cut rates four times this year, to 3.25 per cent. Australia, at peace, has had four rises.

Perhaps the Treasurer could explain to every Australian mortgage holder why a nation fighting a war manages its economy better than our government managers. **Alec Savick, Elermetwick, Vic**

Caring for Indigenous kids must get priority on PM's agenda

I find it bewildering that, on returning from his recent trip to the US, the Prime Minister's first trip within Australia has been to Launceston for a sport-related handout, followed by Victoria because, come 2028, there will be federal funding for work on the airport link train. (We Victorians will believe it when we see it.)

Does he not understand that his first priority should have been to go to Port Hedland? His most urgent issue is the failure of the federal and Western Australian governments to protect many young Indigenous children whose living conditions are an utter disgrace. This should have precedence over anything else. **Liz Riordan, Newtown, Vic**

What Anthony Albanese needs to do is travel to Port Hedland, sit down with some local Indigenous folk, look them in the eye and ask them to tell him what it is like living the way they do.

Of course, such a course of action will never occur when it comes to our PM, who would be out of his comfort zone in such a situation. If he can travel to New York and rub shoulders and take selfies with his socialist mates – and even Donald Trump, whom he seems to privately despise – surely he can take the time to visit Port Hedland. **Peter D. Sarkitt, Sandringham, Vic**

Hidden cost of energy

With our 4.6 per cent cash rate higher than that of every other developed country except Iceland, it's an opportune time to reassess Labor's renewables tran-

sition and its contribution to our inflation challenge.

Without billions in taxpayer subsidies, the transition would have collapsed by now. Chasing unachievable targets by 2030 has driven out-of-control spending on a myriad of projects. Snowy 2.0 is the most egregious example, leaving taxpayers with unknown liabilities.

As well, there's the secret off-budget spending on Labor's Capacity Investment Scheme, which underwrites investor profits while socialising their losses. Industries like the Tomago smelter have needed a raft of support packages, every closure of manufacturing plants like Whyalla making matters worse.

Our energy bills have risen through the roof, with more pain to come when transmission and distribution costs are passed on. Just in the 12 months to July 2026, electricity prices had risen 22 per cent. It's no wonder that energy poverty is on the rise and will be exacerbated by the Middle East conflict.

With concern about the persistence of inflation driven by high levels of government spending, why is it that the Labor government refuses to make public its whole-of-system costs for its renewables transition? **Jennie George, Mooloolook, NSW**

Why would the owners of coal-fired power stations spend money on maintenance or replacement when Chris Bowen wants to use them, and subsidise renewables and batteries, and "invest" in Snowy 2.0?

On top of that, the electricity produced by solar and wind is given priority over coal on the grid and coal has to throttle back, making for more costly electricity



The Australian's front page, Wednesday, September 30

and higher maintenance costs. The energy policy egg seems to have hatched a very expensive chicken. **Jim Brough, Stanwell Park, NSW**

Lions dine late

With four minutes to go in the AFL grand final, Fremantle footy club committed the unforgivable sin of playing "wharfie time" before they had actually won, breaking a longstanding rule – never count your chickens before they are hatched. As the sound of that "wharfie" ritual reached the Brisbane Lions players, who were at this stage happy to rest on their laurels of past premierships, the fire in their bellies ignited. The Brisbane Lions responded with four miracle goals. What a painful lesson for Fremantle. **Doug Bolot, Yeppoon, Qld**

Food security risk

The price of food keeps rising at the local supermarket. There are multiple contributing factors,

despite the denials "food inflation" is being heavily impacted by government policy.

This week, Treasurer Jim Chalmers claimed reduced backpacker numbers will not increase prices at the supermarket.

While international factors increase fuel and fertiliser prices, which also flow on to the supermarket shelf, other factors within our control are contributing to food inflation. Massive quantities of water are being removed from food production, with no consideration to the inflationary consequences or the impact on food prices and food security.

If our farmers cannot grow and harvest crops, we have less to sell and the price goes up. Why is such simple economics so difficult for the Treasurer and his colleagues to understand? Instead of putting hurdles in front of farmers at every turn, Australians need a government policy that improves their productivity, which helps deliver national food security and reduces food prices. **Shelley Scoular, Albury, NSW**

LAST POST

Jim Chalmers is right. The Australian economy is totally at the mercy of foreign wars, global forces, climate change and gamma rays from outer space, and there's nothing he can do about it. So why do we need a treasurer ("Homegrown harm", 30/9)? **Trevor Farrar, Hackney, SA**

Perhaps a national quiz could be held to guess the next reason our Treasurer, Deputy Treasurer and Prime Minister can devise to justify the country's economic disaster and rate increase. We've had Trump's elongated war in the Middle East and the global AI invasion already nominated for this week's collection. What will it be tomorrow? **Anne Lindsay, Stanthorpe, Qld**

Why have interest rates risen to the highest level in 15 years? Because they have been too low for 15 years? **Andrew Shaw, Buderim, Qld**

The government is continuing to alarm us by rallying against the AI hack of Medicare. It was no such thing. The agent accessed a public web page without the use of a password. This is something that a human hack could also have done. Enough of the scare campaign. **Peter Lindsay, Annandale, Qld**

Jim Chalmers tells us that interest rates are high because "the rest of the world" has high rates. As if that alone justifies the pain. If that logic holds, then the rest of the world also has nuclear power, so by his own reasoning Australia should too. **John Field, Cooles Creek, Qld**

Data centres are today's tulip mania. **David Z. Hughes, South Melbourne, Vic**

I would not complain if AI put an end to all wars. There's never been a good war or a bad peace. **Jannell Rolfe, Proserpine, Qld**

Australians who are no longer investing in housing need somewhere to put their dollars. Is the stockmarket the answer? Probably not. If recession or, God forbid, depression comes quickly, then it will be a double whammy for those investors and that, unfortunately, where we are headed under Labor. Cash is king, as they say. **Louise Dunbar, Cammeray, NSW**

The RBA governor and the Australian Treasurer are turning the subjects of fiscal responsibility, cash rates, inflation readings, et al, into barbeque and water-cooler favourite topics. Whoever said economics was boring? **Lenette Pauls, Buderim, Qld**

An undergraduate could tell the Treasurer that money drives prices, and presently there is far too much money in the system. **Brian Gallery, Mosman, NSW**

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BOOKSHELF | DOMINIC SANDBROOK

Horrors and heroism of war without varnish or clichés

We are on the banks of the Rhine in the spring of 1945, during the final weeks of the deadliest conflict in history. On one side of the great river are four million Britons, Canadians, Americans and Frenchmen are preparing for the attack, led by the Allied supreme commander, Dwight D Eisenhower. On the other bank wait almost a million Germans, weary, hollow-eyed, yet still loyal to their beloved Führer.

After six years and tens of millions of deaths, the stage is set for the endgame.

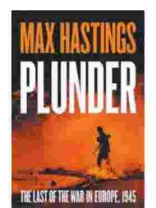
So begins Max Hastings's riveting account of the last days of the war in western Europe – a story he has covered before, but never in such richly colourful detail. If some readers roll their eyes at the thought of another book on the World War II, his many admirers will know exactly what to expect. Meticulously researched, constructed with a great journalist's instinct for switching from big to small and back again, and written with a keen eye for human foibles, this is the kind of book that gives military history a good name.

Two dangers confront historians writing about World War II. First, the risk of being very boring about trucks; and, second, the

tendency to lapse into tabloid jingoism. In this book, as always, Hastings avoids both with mastery ease. Soul-sucking details of military operations are nowhere to be seen, while he writes with no illusions about the costs and compromises of war. Indeed, anybody tempted to think of the Allied soldiers as comic-book heroes may find Plunder a sobering lesson.

At one stage, Hastings quotes the Allies' Psychological Warfare Division: "There is a tendency among the naive to think that only Russians loot and rape. After a battle soldiers of every country are pretty much the same." Some readers may be shocked by that, but other anecdotes hammer home the point. Reporting on French-occupied southwestern Germany, for example, one American officer wrote: "The situation in Stuttgart is the worst imaginable... Rape, pillage and plundering have been rampant." And in March 1945, a reporter for the US Army's paper Stars and Stripes even filed a story about the frequency of rape in the occupied Rhineland. Perhaps not surprisingly, the censors spiked it.

Not all horrors were deliberate. In a bleakly memorable passage, Hastings recounts the story of



Plunder: The Last of the War in Europe, 1945
By Max Hastings
William Collins, 424pp, \$39.99

REVIEW

More book reviews in The Weekend Australian

Operation Carthage, an RAF raid to destroy the Gestapo headquarters in the centre of Copenhagen. During the first wave, a Mosquito plane hit a lamp post which tore off its wing and caused it to crash near a small Catholic school, 160m from the target. As the fire spread towards the school, the next wave of Mosquitos assumed that this must be the Gestapo building and began to pound bridge at Remagen, virtually the last intact link across the Rhine.

The hero of the hour was a young American lieutenant, 22-year-old Karl Timmermann, who led his company to seize the bridge in the knowledge that the Germans had prepared it for demolition and might blow it up at any moment.

There are often slides that linger in the mind. At one point Hastings reflects on The Times's coverage of the war's final days, notably a series of articles and editorials discussing Hitler's rise and fall. Yet "one aspect of the paper's coverage," he remarks, "seems to a modern reader extraordinary: nowhere in many columns of narrative and commentary is the word 'Jew' mentioned". After that he moves on. Quietly, devastatingly, the point has been made.

George S. Patton, whom Hastings describes as a monster of arrogance and instability, with a "spoilt child's mouth" to boot.

Almost all this, Hastings sets the decency and courage of untold numbers of ordinary British, Canadian and American soldiers, as well as the murderous barbarism of Hitler and his henchmen. In one of his most thrilling chapters, he recounts the battle for the crucial bridge at Remagen, virtually the last intact link across the Rhine.

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THE TIMES

DAILY CARTOON | JOHN SPOONER



PETA CREDLIN

Albanese harnesses AI to silence the critics



The recent confirmation that multiple Australian government systems were infiltrated by a leading US artificial intelligence company, Open AI, should surprise no one. After all, the Albanese government is far more concerned with censoring what you access on the internet than it is with protecting the sensitive information it holds, and keeping it safe from compromise.

The federal government has chronically underperformed on cyber-security and failed to pass policy in an area of rapid technological change that's frankly beyond the capacity of the bureaucracy to keep pace with. In a July speech, his most significant on AI to date, Anthony Albanese only mentioned cyber-security once, in passing. Earlier, in February, he scrapped plans for a permanent AI advisory body, made up of globally recognised leaders like UNSW professor Toby Walsh. Yet without expert input, what's becoming clear is that Australia is flying blind as the rest of the world moves fast in the arms race of AI.

AI is a powerful tool for good, but there are also very real and significant risks. We know it will transform business and reform productivity, but that will cost jobs, as well as deliver economic gains. We need to have our eyes wide open on this. Just as we must be ahead of the military and national security challenges of AI.

Instead, the only real AI debate the government is up to having is about data centres and whether they use renewable power. Overseas, they're laughing at us as we try to power AI with Chinese-made wind turbines and solar panels, while they use Australian uranium to power modern nuclear reactors, or our coal and gas, ensuring they have reliable baseload to run their AI while we muddle along, caught between a rock and a hard place, saying we're all for AI and net zero, when you cannot have both.

It is critical that voters are not fooled here. Albanese is using this OpenAI breach and his lack of cyber-security preparedness to turbo-charge his new digital duty of care legislation. He is desperately trying to conflate the issue of AI safety with

his new online censorship bill, but they are two very different things.

AI safety and a properly resourced cyber-security apparatus in Australia involving our spy and military intelligence agencies is a good thing and, in broad terms, so too are global guardrails on the use of AI, provided they are sensible and limited. But Labor's legislation is about censorship. It's about restricting or blocking the information that adults can access. Albanese himself belied the fact when he admitted in UN hearings last week that he was focused on the challenge of "misinformation, disinformation and increased polarisation" with voters "moving away from the centre and more and more to the extremes".

Australia already has a myriad of laws to deal with illegal online content, such as child exploitation and the dissemination of terrorist propaganda, as demonstrated by recent arrests. By contrast, this bill is about "harmful" content – and that is a very different thing. It's likely to be legal, otherwise it would be captured by existing laws. What's more, the definition of "harmful" is in the hands of a politician, the communications minister, using regulations made post-hoc, making the bill currently before the parliament a Trojan horse. And nothing highlights its political intent more than the way it grants the government power to use AI-generated anonymous bots, so-called "sock puppet" identities, to disseminate information.

For what purpose, you ask? Until now, the global left has claimed to be outraged by online anonymity and fake accounts. But with the rise of the populist right, which critics have attributed to online platforms that are outgunning the traditional news and information services long dominated by the woke left, Labor's plan is to constrain free speech under the guise of harm reduction, while at the same time flooding the online world with government-sponsored bots to doctor debate.

Labor's plan is to constrain free speech under the guise of harm reduction, while at the same time flooding the online world with government-sponsored bots

same government wants the legal right to create fake accounts to distribute what's essentially propaganda. And the only conclusion that can be drawn is that this will be used by the government to silence its critics, and halt the rise of populist movements, such as One Nation. If this legislation gets up, template versions are likely to be used in the UK, US and Europe to stop the right gaining ground in the face of mass migration and the resultant voter backlash against rapid cultural changes.

With Labor at a near record-low primary vote of 27 points in the latest Newspoll and the Prime Minister racking up a dissatisfaction rating of 62 per cent, "what-

ever it takes" in the cyber world gains a whole new Orwellian meaning. As the Communications Minister confirmed in a recent News24 interview, the reach of these proposed online censorship laws will include news and general interest websites, search engines, streaming services, hosting services and app stores.

This is the left's Holy Grail. Imagine trying to fight against the voice referendum under this new regime? I guarantee my work in exposing the far-reaching agenda of the Uluru Statement and its 26-page push for treaty and reparations would never have got off the ground, despite the evidence obtained via FOI. Imagine discussing the rise of radical Islam under the scope of these new laws. Or being attacked by an army of government-generated bots to silence critics.

Labor's digital duty of care legislation has almost nothing to do with protecting children online or algorithm choice for adults. It's about silencing critics and keeping Labor in power amid growing voter dissent. Labor is bleeding support over its inability, indeed unwillingness, to rein in record high immigration. It has to keep the numbers high, despite the backlash, or it will expose the bad-gest Ponzi scheme at a time when spiralling inflation and rising interest rates are taking ordinary income earners to the brink. Add in a catastrophic budget, 40-year high rates of government spending and these are dark times for the Australian economy and for households.

This is why a new digital Big Brother, in place before the next election, is now Albanese's highest priority. Rather than take on his critics, it's Control+AI+Delete for the most underwhelmingly and weak Prime Minister.

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JAMES MATHIAS

And the award for the worst system goes to ... IR

Australia's industrial relations system is a lottery with no winners. Consider a small-business owner who sits down this morning to do the pay run. They have 122 modern awards to choose from, containing between them 1900 employee classifications and 205,816 separate legal rates of pay.

The awards run to 8739 pages and have been amended 7568 times since 2009. Get anything wrong and the owner has broken the law and faces severe fines. It is impossible to believe anyone would design a system this complex by choice, but somehow we did. In 2009 the then minister responsible, Julia Gillard, asked for modern awards that were "simple to understand and easy to apply".

Seventeen years later, HR Nicholls has done the work de-

tailing what that reform produced. Awards have grown by 3602 pages, more than 200 per year, and across the system they are updated more than once a day. There is now a different legal rate of pay for every 16 workers they cover.

There are 14 different definitions of "wages" and 66 different formulations of how often they must be paid, against a single rule in the act for each. The awards have failed the "simple to understand and easy to apply" test and we have ended up with the most complex and irrational system of minimum wages in the developed world.

New Zealand runs on three, Britain about five, France on 12 and Australia on 205,816. What chance does a small business have? A tradesperson can fall under any of

87 awards and a labourer under 82, and which one applies depends not on the work but on the industry the employer is deemed to be in.

Under the Restaurant Industry Award there is a 64c per hour difference between the person who carries a plate to the table and the person who takes the same plate away.

It is wickered to run a pay scale under which an honest employer is more likely to get it wrong than right, and even the federal department that administers the Fair Work Act has been caught underpaying its own public servants. How is it logical to prosecute the corner shop for failing where the department itself failed?

Even the legislated review into awards turned into a farce. The act required the awards to be reviewed every four years, but it no longer does because the first review was only halfway through when the second was due.

By the time that first review finally concluded eight years later, it had held more than 1300 days of hearings, published more than 25,000 documents and issued more than 700 decisions and statements.

With no apparent rhyme, the commissioner's own full bench observed during the review that

"an award should be able to be read by an employer or employee without needing a history lesson or paid advocate to interpret how it is to apply in the workplace".

The Productivity Commission found that the decade after the Fair Work Act delivered the slowest labour productivity growth in 60 years, and that award complexity is driving employers away from the enterprise bargaining that lifts wages and output. And nothing since suggests it has changed on the productivity front.

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And here is the point – how does anyone expect productivity from a system where every worker is a number on a scale? Under an award you are not a person who works hard, learns fast or turns up on the days nobody else will. You are a Level 3 or Grade 2. The award pays the box, not the person in it,

JACK THE INSIDER

Poliburo vibes: inside the Greens' leadership fight

Dusting off their keffiyehs, hemp trousers and sensible shoes, the Greens descended upon a retreat in or near Sydney. After some brief gnashing of teeth and wailing, the party has appointed David Shoebridge as its new leader.

Where was this location? Shh, it's a secret but for those who fret about the energy expenditure at this clandestine gathering, worry not. The retreat was powered entirely by Mehreen Faruqi's sense of self-importance, a wholly renewable energy source that could one day replace the sun.

Retiring as leader of the party for health reasons, Larissa Waters appears to be one of a rare few who didn't throw her felt beret made from 100 per cent recycled banana loaves into the leadership ring. Remember, meat is murder and wool is assault occasioning actual bodily harm.

First beret flung skyward was Faruqi and the Tasmanian Green Nick McKim. In the lead-up to the retreat, Faruqi had issued a statement declaring her candidacy for the top job with McKim as her deputy. Oddly, Faruqi referred to herself in the third person, a grammatical grey area, only universalised when uttered by an Australian Test cricketer. Faruqi, 63, and McKim, 61, spoke of "a broken economic system that rips off young people".

In Green terms at least, the sexagenarian warhounds had the look and the feel of the Soviet Politburo circa 1970, with little intimidating eyebrows.

Sarah Hanson-Young ran on a solo ticket to the top job, but received the dreaded "yeah, nah" from the party room. Shoebridge paired up with Victorian newbie, Steph Hodgins-May who has elbowed Faruqi out to take the deputy's position. The Greens' only MHR, Elizabeth Watson-Brown, was overlooked entirely. So many hyphens, so little time.

Outside the party room, Max Chandler-Mathis (remember him?) demanded the party's leader

be selected by the rank-and-file party members. It was another rookie error. The Greens talk up democracy quite a lot, they just don't do it.

As participation awards were handed out at the undisclosed location, the charisma drama continued as the party's salad days of Rob Brown and Christine Milne. Faruqi was possibly overlooked because she has anti-charisma, a little known personality trait best understood that when someone with anti-charisma enters a room, every one else in it wants to leave. This might explain why a number of Green MPs phoned their votes in rather than attending the retreat.

Perhaps the party room opted for Shoebridge because when he walks into a room, most people expect him to take the coffee cups away and give the table a quick wipe down.

Winners are grinners. Shoebridge issued a statement of his own before the ballot declaring, "We do not seek to reform Labor, but to replace them." I hate to get the red pen out again but while I'll offer a golf clap for the Oxford comma, surely someone in Shoebridge's office would have recognised that Labor is not a them.

The problem with Shoebridge's confrontational rhetoric is that it deflates reality. Not so long ago, the Greens' parliamentary cricket team (10 senators and 1 MHR) was on a run-rugby league side. The high watermark for the Greens at the 2022 federal election was wiped out last year.

We might see this as the fate of minor parties in Australia. A little boost followed by a crippling loss. Swings and roundabouts with the threat of oblivion never far away. The simple fact is that the Australian Greens should be enjoying unprecedented support but they are not. Indeed in some of the more recent by-elections, their candidates have struggled to get their deposits back.

Australian politics is in a state

of flux. Support for the major parties is in the doldrums, due in large part to the rise of One Nation. Political science tells us that there should be a surge of support for leftist minor parties like the Greens at the expense of Labor, but polling led by Newspoll shows no sign of it, with a polling average sitting neatly around the 12.2 per cent of the vote the Greens won in 2025 and managed to lose three of its four lower house seats in the process.

Meanwhile, membership of the Australian Greens has plateaued, with around 15,000 rank-and-file financial members.

Across the western world, green political parties are growing. In New Zealand, a resurgent Green Party commands 17 per cent of the vote in recent polling and has 15 members in the House of Representatives. In the UK, the Green Party, under the leadership of Zack Polanski, has enjoyed a huge spike in membership, nudging 100,000, and in numbers alone now surpasses Canada's active Party membership.

In Germany, the Alliance 90/Greens have rebounded since the February 2025 federal election with aggregate polling showing the party enjoys around 16 per cent of the vote. In Austria, the Green Party was in government, after forming a coalition with the conservative Austrian People's Party. The Green Party in the Irish Republic has had its hands on the levers of power through coalitions of convenience on and off for much of the past two decades.

Could it just be that the Australian Greens are stagnating because they have largely turned their backs on environmental and social justice issues in favour of a grab bag of lamentable left populist pursuits which, if you're not from Elwood or Glebe, have zero appeal?

Like the charisma decline, the Greens' identity crisis has been around for a long time, driven by the NSW branch's dominant role in the party, where its members are more likely to have cut their activist's teeth using the construction of an overhanging pedestrian crossing instead of chaining themselves to old-growth forests.

If a political party pretends to be something it is not, it is fair to conclude that voters will sort them out by the ballot box.

Debate chairs now continually shuffle and deal behind closed doors with the Albanese government and continue to offer compliance, if not complicity.

TONY GREY

Power needs force: urgent rethink on our nuclear ban

Australia's energy policy has suddenly come under a new and serious challenge. The accelerating development of large-scale data centres with high power needs 24 hours a day, seven days a week to feed the current AI boom, raises major questions about the government's energy reliance on intermittent renewables. Data centres cannot tolerate power interruptions when the wind doesn't blow and the sun doesn't shine.

Australia has 162 data processing centres with plans for another 90, including a 1 gigawatt centre in western Sydney which will be Australia's single biggest energy consumer. Use has been growing in strength for 20 years, but has exploded since the development of ChatGPT and Open AI after 2022. The acceleration in AI use is being driven by global players Microsoft, Amazon, Open AI and Anthropic.

According to the Australian Energy Market Operator, in 10 years time, data centres will need seven times more electricity than they consume today. That would represent 13 per cent of the National Electricity Market, as much as all homes use in NSW and Victoria combined.

With snowy hydro falling and batteries insufficient, coal and gas are the only reliable sources presently available to support renewables. Where else can we look other than emissions-free nuclear power? But it is banned. If Climate Change and Energy Minister Chris Bowen is serious about reaching zero net carbon emissions by 2050, he cannot allow fossil fuels to be the only firming agents for the huge increase in electricity demand that is coming. Bowen is facing a choice over what to do, notably from the affected communities. Opposition is growing to the widespread rollout of wind turbines over areas of forest, wild animal habitats and agricultural land.

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Around the world, nuclear power is booming. The World Nuclear Association reports that about 80 reactors in 15 countries are under construction and another 120 are planned. It's the highest number since 1990. This alone would increase the world's nuclear fleet by 45 per cent. And a further 35 countries are considering going nuclear. At the COP 30 held in Brazil last year, 33 countries pledged to triple their nuclear output by 2050, and 16 of the world's leading financial institutions made commitments to help finance their construction. This was a resounding free market endorsement of nuclear's economic viability.

Despite the burgeoning international commitment to emissions-free nuclear, Bowen keeps conjuring up false claims that nuclear would be too costly and take too long to establish in Australia. People knowledgeable about nuclear, such as nuclear engineer Tony Irwin, who has commissioned and operated eight nuclear plants in the UK, have shown that a nuclear program could be constructed at half the cost of renewables when all costs are fully included.

Bowen's other misguided claim that reactors would take over 20 years to build in Australia, is also debunked by the experts. Tony Irwin has said publicly that a 1000MW reactor could be built in Australia within five years, and a small modular reactor (up to 300MW) in three or four. To that needs to be added rapid construction time. The total exercise would take up to 10 years, half of the minister's biased assertion.

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600 sqkm (60,000ha) of remnant forest to be cleared, with 4600 km of new highway roads to be pushed into the wild. The Institute of Public Affairs has estimated that the area needed for wind and solar farms (on a 50:50 basis) for the Albanese government to meet its net zero commitments would be greater than the rest of South Australia. By contrast, a 1000MW nuclear reactor that would power a million homes needs only 0.1 sqkm (10ha) and can be plugged into the existing transmission grid.

Unfortunately, the debate about nuclear has become toxic, with wild claims and exaggerations thrown around by Bowen. One Nation is threatening to call a royal commission into the costs of the government's renewable energy support programs. People are switching off. They are confused, unsure of the real facts.

For the potential importance that emissions-free nuclear could be for Australia's future, credible market analysis is necessary to determine whether it is adopted or not. That needs to be done by the nuclear plant builders, and electricity network suppliers, not politicians or bureaucrats.

An opportunity to participate in an Australian nuclear industry would motivate international reactor manufacturers and investment entities to conduct scoring or feasibility studies to reveal the true costs and timing. For this to happen, the federal government only needs to remove the ban on nuclear, as the Coalition proposes. Otherwise, this nationally critical endeavour to find the best energy mix would be pointless.

The quixotic conundrum is that, among the 20 wealthiest economies, Australia is the only one not using nuclear power or actively considering it. This demands a transparent answer only the market can deliver. If Bowen's claims are right, he has nothing to worry about, because in that scenario the market would vindicate him by choosing the other hand, continuing to lurch behind the ban while making unsubstantiated claims about costs and timing creates the natural suspicion that it's not high cost and long building time that prevents him to oppose nuclear, but ideology.

When ideology demands reason, disaster tends to follow.

Tony Grey is a former chairman of the Australian Institute, now the World Nuclear Association.