

Editor's TAKE

Time to convert 'aapda' into 'avsar'

Trump's 25 per cent tariffs will have a negative impact but India can circumnavigate it by diversifying its exports

Ever since Donald Trump became the President of the United States, he has taken decisions which have disrupted the world order. No one knows how effective they would be in salvaging US economy but they have played havoc with the emerging economies. Though he had made it clear that the US would no longer allow countries to export their goods at the existing tariffs without lowering their own, the quantum of tariffs is overbearing and smacks of vindictiveness and reckless policy decisions.

India has always considered the US as a reliable trade partner but when it came to slapping tariffs on India Trump has shown no leniency. US President Donald Trump announced a 25 per cent tariff on Indian goods starting 1 August, coupled with an additional penalty over India's continued trade with Russia in energy and defence. Experts feel that the growth impact could reach 0.4 percentage points. With India's GDP currently expected to grow around 6.5 per cent, Trump's tariffs may well pull it below the crucial 6 per cent threshold. The move is especially disruptive because the US is India's largest trading partner, accounting for nearly 18 per cent of its total exports. India ships a diverse basket of goods to the US — from pharmaceutical and machinery to textiles and petroleum products. A 25 per cent levy on these would make Indian goods significantly more expensive in the US market, risking an estimated \$30-33 billion drop in exports. India's export-driven sectors, already navigating a fragile global demand environment, now face a dual challenge — loss of competitiveness in the US and potential investor uncertainty. Compounding matters is Trump's rhetoric, which signals an intent to harden US-India economic ties. However, it is not the end of the road for the Indian economy. It is robust and resilient. It is time to diversify and make the Indian economy more competitive. Despite the blow, India has options to mitigate the fallout. First, diplomatic engagement must be prioritised. India's trade negotiators will need to press for a bilateral resolution, leveraging the strategic importance of the US-India relationship. This is already on the horizon, though nothing concrete has been achieved so far.

Second, India could redirect its export thrust towards alternative markets such as the EU, Southeast Asia, and Africa, where demand for Indian goods is growing and tariffs remain moderate. Third, domestic policy must step in to cushion the impact. The Reserve Bank of India has room to further ease interest rates, monetary space exists to support investment and consumption. Additionally, the Government could extend targeted incentives to exporters in affected sectors, particularly MSMEs, to help them stay afloat and explore new markets. Finally, this disruption should be a catalyst for accelerating India's structural reforms — improving trade logistics, reducing compliance costs, diversifying the export base, and investing in quality standards that enable Indian products to compete globally beyond price alone. As India absorbs this shock, it must view it not just as a diplomatic or trade skirmish, but as a turning point — a reminder that economic resilience lies in diversification, self-reliance, and agility in a volatile global order.

Dhankhar Resigns Abruptly, Triggers Political Storm

With whispers of pressure from the Government, Dhankhar's departure has opened the door to fierce succession intrigue, including the possibility of Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar being considered for the post

The political circles were aghast when Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar abruptly resigned on the first day of the current Monsoon Session. His term was to end in 2027. He was the Prime Minister's direct choice. Dhankhar had previously stated, "I will retire at the right time, in August 2027, subject to divine intervention." But circumstances made it sooner. While the cited reason for Dhankhar's exit was his health, it's clear that other factors, including political pressure, contributed to his decision.

One source suggested that the Government may have instructed him to resign after admitting the Opposition — sponsored motion on the impeachment of Justice Verma. An Opposition-sponsored motion on Justice Verma's impeachment, tabled on July 21, the first day of the current Monsoon Session, created a flutter. Dhankhar's resignation coincided with the Government's contemplation of a Bill to impeach Justice Yashwant Verma in the Lok Sabha, adding to the day's swift and dramatic developments. In his resignation letter to President Droupadi Murmu, Dhankhar stated, "To prioritise healthcare and abide by medical advice, I hereby resign as the Vice President of India, effective immediately, by Article 67(a) of the Constitution." Why did Dhankhar resign? Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge commented, "Only he (Dhankhar) knows the reason. We have nothing to add on this matter. Either the Government knows, or he knows. It is up to the Government to accept his resignation or not." Media reports suggest that the Government was displeased with Dhankhar even earlier for various reasons. For quite some time, the Government was dissatisfied with Dhankhar making decisions without consulting them. The BJP began to suspect him of siding with the Opposition, including the recent impeachment motion against Justice Verma.

Never mind if the same Opposition wanted to bring an impeachment against the VP. His attack on the judiciary was also an embarrassment to the Government. Dhankhar began holding meetings with Opposition leaders.

On the whole, the Government felt he was becoming an embarrassment. July 21



KALYANI SHANKAR



was a day of significant development. At 2 PM, the Rajya Sabha Chairman accepted the Opposition-sponsored motion. By 9:25 PM, Dhankhar announced his resignation on X.

The President accepted his resignation at midnight on July 22. Insiders suggest that the message was bluntly conveyed to the VP, indicating that he should resign, or else... a kind of threat to the VP Dhankhar is not the first Vice President to resign before the end of his term; he joins the ranks of VV Giri, BD Jatti, R Venkataraman, Shankar Dayal Sharma, and KR Narayanan, who also resigned after being elected President.

Throughout his career, particularly as the Governor of West Bengal, Dhankhar was involved in a contentious relationship with Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee. However, she did not oppose his appointment when the NDA selected him for the constitutional role. The Treasury benches were taken aback when the Vice President stated in the Rajya Sabha, "Hon'ble members, I need to inform you that I have received a notice of motion to constitute a statutory committee for the removal of Justice Yashwant Varma. It is signed by more than 50 Opposition members, fulfilling the numerical requirement to initiate the process for the removal of a High Court judge." Dhankhar's move to admit the subject without consulting the Treasury benches in the Lok Sabha left the Government red-faced.

The Government did not appreciate the Vice President's action when the

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DHANKHAR BEGAN HOLDING MEETINGS WITH OPPOSITION LEADERS. ON THE WHOLE, THE GOVERNMENT FELT HE WAS BECOMING AN EMBARRASSMENT. JULY 21 WAS A DAY OF SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENT. AT 2 PM, THE RAJYA SABHA CHAIRMAN ACCEPTED THE OPPOSITION-SPONSORED MOTION. BY 9:25 PM, DHANKHAR ANNOUNCED HIS RESIGNATION ON X

Government was trying to build a consensus in the Lok Sabha. This raised questions about his acceptance of the Opposition's motion. A vacancy for VP could allow Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar to fill the role, adding a layer of political intrigue to the situation. Bihar Assembly elections are to take place at the end of the year. Regardless of the reasons behind Dhankhar's resignation, an election for the

position of Vice President will be conducted soon, and the Election Commission has already given notice.

This will once again create a setting for a clash between the ruling NDA and the Opposition. Several prominent names have already been suggested, including Ministers Rajnath Singh, former Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad, and Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan. It is also likely that a candidate close to the BJP will be appointed. Dhankhar is likely upset about the recent changes, which occurred unexpectedly. He has served as the political Vice President and has become quite ambitious. Prime Minister Modi tends to prefer leaders who maintain a low profile.

Dhankhar's time as Governor was marked by controversy, and he often clashed with Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee. But the Government did not curb him. Modi appointed him as Vice President in 2022, but now, after almost three years, he has had to leave his position quietly. Unlike usual practice, farewell speeches were not held upon his departure from the House.

The election for Vice President is expected to take place in approximately one month. The NDA is keeping its candidate choice confidential. It remains uncertain whether the next Vice President will be a unanimous decision or if the Opposition will field a candidate. The situation will become clearer soon.

(The writer is a popular columnist)

PICTALK



An Indonesian family watches kites during the Denpasar International Kite Festival in Sanur, Bali, Indonesia. PTI

India will never be the same again

SECOND Opinion

Operation Sindoor has changed the perception of India permanently, and it will not be the same again as it used to be since its independence. The clash in Galwan Valley was the beginning of this change in stance when it took its formidable enemy China head-on.

The whole world was taken a back by its grit, determination and resilience, as well as its economic capability to bear the cost of this long, painful and squeezing stand-off.

Operation Sindoor was a logical step ahead when it held Pakistan guilty of the Pahalgam massacre and, instead of preparing a dossier and taking it to international fora, it acted alone — that too, after giving a forewarning that the perpetrators of this crime would not only be adequately punished but also be given a hard lesson not to be easily forgotten.

India could take such a punitive action against terror and Pakistan because it accepted Pakistan-sponsored terror architecture as an extension of the Pakistan Army and the Pakistani nation.

Secondly, it decided to take on the nuclear bluff of Pakistan, which was well supported by America and the West. It was a proactive action against terror. The terror

architecture operating from Pakistan was devastated, and when the Pakistani Air Force tried to retaliate, it was completely neutralised, and several Pakistani airbases were attacked and made inoperative.

Pakistan was left with no option but to desperately seek ceasefire, which was arrived at when the DGMO of Pakistan requested it from the DGMO of India. It was a ceasefire without a proper declaration of war.

India agreed to it because it achieved its stated objective of dismantling terror architecture in Pakistan with a stern message that it would have to bear a huge cost for sponsoring terrorism.

India never wanted a full-fledged war and told Pakistan not to escalate, as the only Indian objective was to punish terrorists and dismantle their hideouts and training camps. It also taught Pakistan a lesson — that India could attack them and punish them without impunity, as and when the situation demanded.

It was a message to America and the West that India is capable of acting on its own and punishing its enemy without caring for world opinion.

India has arrived on the global stage as a big-league nation which is capable of striking its enemy at will. America and the West could not save Pakistan from this ignominy because all our communication architecture and air defence surveillance systems were either indigenous



BANSHIDHAR RUKHAIYAR

or Russian. Our indigenous technology and missile system outsmarted the Pakistani defence and surveillance system, which were largely Chinese and American. This exploded the myth of the impregnability of these systems, and it will have larger ramifications on the international weapons market. The growing demand for India-made weapons and other defence equipment is a testimony to it. Operation Sindoor is a declaration of India's capability and will to act. This is a paradigm shift in our foreign policy.

This has its consequences. America and the West will not accept India's right to defend itself the way they do. They will do their best to support Pakistan and keep it functional as a bulwark against India's march to power and self-reliance.

They will also do everything to play down your strong leadership. These are costs of breaking the glass ceiling. India is in an era of its own transition, and as you move up the ladder, your isolation is more pronounced than before.

The global sympathy is for those which are tools in the hands of global masters. It is for those which are weak and defeated. India has to tread its path more cautiously and resolutely than before. It will have to work hard — and that too silently — to achieve its goal.

(The writer is an eminent academic and political commentator)

Letters to the Editor

Trump's two-faced diplomacy

US President Donald Trump's recent move to pursue a business partnership with Pakistan to exploit its oil reserves is a farce, considering his own past statements labelling Pakistan as a "terror hub" full of "lies and deceit." His rhetoric that Pakistan may one day sell oil to India is not only unrealistic but also deeply incensing.

The glaring inconsistency between his words and actions highlights his erratic nature and cements his reputation as perhaps the most unpredictable and unstable President the United States has ever had.

Add to this, Trump's statement that the Indian economy is "dead" further reflects his ignorance and lack of wisdom regarding global economic trends. It stems from frustration, as India refused to succumb to US pressure to sign a trade deal on American terms. Moreover, India's clear stance on continuing oil and defence imports from Russia has only added to his irritation. With such instability in the White House, the Indo-US relationship — patiently cultivated over the past two decades — is now facing turbulence.

However, India must not be swayed by Trump's inflammatory remarks and unpredictable diplomacy. His outbursts should be met with strategic silence and steadfast resolve. India must continue to protect its sovereignty and uphold its independent foreign policy, free from external coercion and impulsive foreign leadership.

N SADHASIVA REDDY | BENGALURU

India's resilience can beat tariffs

Donald Trump's recent imposition of a 25 per cent tariff and penalties on Indian imports, coupled with his jibe labelling India a "dying economy," appears less an economic assessment and more a calculated act of frustration. His rhetoric is part of a broader strategy to provoke India into signing a trade deal skewed in favour of American interests — especially in agriculture.

India, a vast and sensitive market for US farm exports, has rightly been cautious. Safeguarding the livelihood of its farmers and ensuring equitable access terms is non-negotiable.

Trump's overtures to Pakistan — including hosting its army chief and announcing joint oil ventures — only reinforce this pressure campaign. These moves are designed to signal geopolitical alternatives, not genuine partnerships.

Yet, Pakistan's deep strategic and financial ties to China prevent any meaningful pivot to the US, reducing the threat to mere optics. India, meanwhile, must stay the course — negotiate on merit, not provocation. Trump's tariffs and rants are bluster, not policy. Strategic patience, not reactive signing, is the wiser path. Trump's aggressive trade measures are a negotiating gambit, not a genuine policy shift. India's principled stand on protecting its own market is the correct response.

GOPALASWAMY J | CHENNAI

When prosecution fails

It is with reference to the news "Pragya Col Purohit acquitted in Malegaon blast case", August 1. Almost 17 years after the Malegaon bomb blast which killed six people, a special NIA Court in Mumbai has acquitted all seven accused including the former MP, saying that the prosecution had failed to prove the case.

A few weeks ago, Bombay High Court quashed the judgement of the special MCOCA Court which sentenced five people to death and seven to life imprisonment for executing a series of bomb blasts in Mumbai's Western Railway station that killed 187 people, saying that the prosecution had utterly failed to prove the case against the accused.

In both cases, the failures of prosecution made the Court acquit the accused. It is unfortunate. In criminal cases, Court expects the prosecution to prove the guilt of the accused beyond reasonable doubt, which is a high standard to meet. When prosecution fails to meet this high burden of proof, acquittals are a necessary outcome. Acquittals also occur due to issues with evidence gathering, witness protection or human rights concern.

If people involved in terror activities are not awarded punishments, the rate of such crimes will increase and the Police as well as Judiciary will lose the trust of the public.

P VICTOR SELVARAJ | TAMIL NADU

DIVYA DESHMUKH BREAKS BARRIERS, WINS FIDE WOMEN'S WORLD CUP

Kudos to Divya and Koneru Humpy for their consistent and relentless efforts to ruin the dominance of the Chinese players in the international female chess domain.

Divya Deshmukh flipped the script and became the youngest chess player to win the FIDE Women's World Cup. It is certainly a red-letter day in the Indian Chess arena. It is absolutely a tremendous achievement.

The legacy of Indian chess has been heard since time immemorial. This flag of legacy has been held high by Viswanathan Anand. Later it has been upheld by the young chess prodigies like Gukesh, Arjun, Praggnanandhaa and so on. The domination of the Indian male players in the international chess arena has been an intriguing saga since the emergence of Viswanathan Anand as an internationally acclaimed player. Gukesh, who became the youngest World Chess Champion in December

2024 defeating Ding Liren, has added one more feather to the Indian chess cap. Arjun Erigaisi and Praggnanandhaa have also played a significant role to embellish the Indian chess world.

On the contrary, the female players of India couldn't make a noteworthy contribution except Koneru Humpy, who became the first Indian woman to achieve the Grandmaster title. Now Divya Deshmukh has rendered a spectacular performance and stunned the chess world by winning the FIDE Women's World Cup 2025.

Divya's victory marks a defining moment in Indian chess history. It signals a new era where Indian women are emerging as global contenders. Her triumph will surely inspire generations of aspiring female players.

PRABHAKARAN VALLATHI | KERALA

From Texas to Telangana: A Planet in Peril, But Who’s Listening?

The climate crisis is no longer a distant threat. Yet Governments continue to sacrifice forests — the planet’s most effective carbon sink — at the altar of short-term political gain and development. In Telangana, the large-scale misuse of the Forest Rights Act (FRA) has led to rampant deforestation gutting vital ecosystems

FIRST
Column

Catastrophic flooding in central Texas on July 4 killed 88 people and 41 still remained unaccounted on the fifth day of rescue and relief has been the deadliest in hundred years of US history. The flooding begun when months’ worth of rain fell in matter of hours, causing Guadalupe river to rise by eight meters in 45 minutes. Back home in India, cloud bursts in Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand have caused landslides and flooding claiming nearly hundred lives in last one month. The flash floods due to incessant rains have also made life difficult in other parts of the country from north east to Maharashtra, Rajasthan, Odisha etc.



B K SINGH

Three labourers were buried alive under landslide debris, while carrying out mining operations in manganese mine in Baitarani Reserve Forests, in Odisha’s Keonjhar district. Why were no precautions against flooding and landslides taken in an operational mine during the rainy season? Business as usual is not going to work in the warming world. As against this, the countries of southern Europe like Spain, Portugal, France, etc are reeling under heat waves with maximum temperatures rising above mid-forties, an all-time high. Instances of human death are also reported from among the vulnerable population, who work outdoors for municipal cleaning and construction.

It seems countries have not taken note of such disastrous climatic consequences and continue to expand fossil fuel consumption and favour projects requiring sacrifice of natural tree/forest covers. Forests are the best and cheapest source of absorption of Carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, and the only practical way to prevent extreme climate events is to prevent deforestation and go for massive afforestation.

Let me reiterate a tale from Telangana, where continuous misuse of Forest Rights Act (FRA) has led to large-scale deforestation in the state’s notified forests. Forum for Good Governance, Hyderabad, comprising some retired All India Services officers, a High Court judge and a social activist, have expressed concern over the approval of claims over lakhs of acres of forest lands in July 2023 under the FRA, before the November 2023 Assembly polls.

In a letter to the Secretary, Ministry of Tribal Affairs (MoTA) three months ago, the Forum has pointed out that the regularisation of 50,000 acres of forest lands by the Nizam Government in the 1940s and 2.41 lakh acres by the AP Government in the 1970s was done in undivided Andhra Pradesh before the promulgation of the FRA, 2006.

Ahead of the 2009 Parliamentary election, the state further approved claims over 3.31 lakh acres



of forest land and rejected claims over 3.7 lakh acres. The clamour for clearing more forest land continued, as large-scale claims were approved by incumbent Governments before every election. After the bifurcation of states in 2014, the Forest Minister of Telangana in 2018 directed district-level forest officers not to evict any encroachment on forest land.

Minister’s direction opens floodgates for deforestation on forest land. Within two days, the Head of Forest Department (HoD) wrote to the state Government asking for confirmation of the decision; the state immediately clarified that there is no such policy decision.

However, in 2023, the State’s tribal department took up a special drive by deliberately omitting the documentary and scientific evidence (Satellite imagery) listed in FRA Rule 13(1) and relying only on the village elder’s statement. The action of the Tribal department in manipulating the form provided under rule 11(1)(a) has violated the Central

statute. Despite objections from forest officers, several district level committees (DLCs) admitted the claims, but many times there were interdepartmental clashes resulting in delay.

Chief Minister on the floor of the Assembly on 12th February 2023 promised the distribution of 11.5 lakh acres of forest land (4 lakh acres for tribal and 7.5 lakh acres for other traditional forest dwellers). To facilitate the smooth sailing by DLCs, Telangana’s forest department HoD obtained facsimile signatures of district officers and shared them with respective DLCs for pasting on fabricated opinions of the Forest department on each case of the claim.

While the HoD in July 2018 referred the Minister’s instruction to the Government for confirmation, another HoD in February 2023 facilitated the state to approve the ineligible claims. What a contrast! The claim of tribal totalling 4 lakh acres in the state was approved by July 2023. Thanks to

the way shown by HoD. The certificates were distributed by political bosses across the state before the Assembly election.

Though the approval of claims of other traditional forest dwellers over 7.5 lakh acres of forest land has been paused, the tree growth over these areas is already cleared, and the parcels are brought under plough. The forests have lost their carbon sequestration potential.

The story of misuse of the FRA is similar in many other states like Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, etc, and the latest state forest report attributed the loss of forest cover to the FRA among other factors.

However, after 150 forest rights activists objected to this, MoTA has questioned its sister ministry (MoEF & CC) and asked for proof of such attribution. The state forest reports are finalised based on the satellite imagery data, whereas DLCs have been approving claims based on the village elders’ oral

evidence.

It is now MoTA’s turn to explain why satellite imagery data, which is more scientific than oral evidence, was overlooked.

Tree felling in Kancha Gachibowli, a 400-acre forested area near Hyderabad Central University was undertaken by the Telangana Government in April this year. The state intended to divert the area for real estate and was clearing the tree growth at quite a fast pace, to beat the university students’ protest. Finally, the Supreme Court had to step in and stop the felling.

The Court rejected the state’s argument that thousands of trees already cut in 100 acres were within the exempted category of species under the Telangana Water Land and Trees Act, 2002 and did not require any prior permission for cutting. Central Empowered Committee of the Supreme Court disputed the claim of the state and said that out of 1500 trees cut in the area, only 1399 trees were of the exempted category. Such blatant violation of the law of the land is taking place, and HoD is found to have been compromised.

The court further directed that the state should restore the 100 acres’ area where tree felling is already been done.

The direction was to compensate for the damage to the environment inflicted by the state of Telangana. Compensatory afforestation has been in vogue in the Forest Department’s system for a long time, and no forest land is diverted for any non-forestry use without identifying the land for growing compensatory afforestation, as well as without recovering the cost of growing such plantations.

The court expects the state to plant 100 acres of area, where tree growth is already cleared with suitable native species. With moderate to scant rainfall in the Hyderabad region, the survival of the seedlings in barren areas would be quite challenging, and like any other compensatory plantation, this is also likely to fail, unless special provisions for protection and watering are provided.

Supreme Court in TN Godavarman case had already directed states and UTs to constitute Expert Committees to identify all wooded areas, which are non-notified forests, duly taking into account the dictionary meaning of the word ‘forests’; and states/UTs should treat all such areas as forests for Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980. CEC has also said that Kancha Gachibowli has all the characteristics of forests.

One of the proposals of the state of Telangana is to convert the area into an ‘Eco-park’. It is a human-centric development activity and will not render the full potential ecological services it can provide. The entire area should be restored and managed as natural forests if we are to maximise its carbon sequestration potential.

The writer is retired Principal Chief Conservator of Forests (Head of Forest Force), Karnataka.

When the Guns Fell Silent: A Fragile Hope for Kurdish Recognition and Reconciliation

When Syrian President Bashar al-Assad fled to Moscow to evade imminent death — a moment that signalled the collapse of his regime’s grip on power — the repercussions extended far beyond Syria’s internal turmoil. For years, Damascus had offered refuge and covert support to the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), leveraging the group to exert pressure on Ankara. Assad’s escape thus marked a decisive rupture in the regional dynamics that had sustained such insurgent alliances. The PKK, a principal actor in the Kurdish struggle and long engaged in armed confrontation with the Turkish state, announced a deliberate transition away from armed resistance. The disarmament ceremony held on 11 July 2025 in Sulaymaniyah was neither triumphant nor final, but marked a meaningful moment in a decades — long conflict that has claimed over 40,000 lives and left a profound imprint on Kurdish political identity and collective memory.

The ideological development of the PKK, as shaped by Abdullah Öcalan, represents a significant departure from orthodox Marxism towards a synthesis of Kurdish nationalism, cultural self-determination, and democratic confederalism. Öcalan himself articulated this shift in his prison writings, emphasising the centrality of culture and identity as the foundation for political liberation. In Prison Writings: The Roots of Civilisation, he stated, “The liberation of the Kurdish people cannot be achieved by military means alone; it requires a revolution of consciousness grounded in history, language, and tradition.” Further distancing himself from classical dialectical materialism, Öcalan rejected the conventional nation-state model, advocating instead for “a democratic system in which multiple identities and autonomies coexist without domination” (Manifesto for a Democratic Civilisation). This ideological transformation has drawn both acclaim and criticism, yet remains key to understanding the PKK’s persistence beyond its military activities.

Yet what unfolded in Sulaymaniyah was not the triumph of ideology but its abdication — or perhaps, its transformation. Twenty-six guerrillas and four commanders set alight their arms before Kurdish regional officials, international observers, and a cynical press corps. Öcalan’s voice, still echoing from the penal archipelago of Imrali Island, declared: “This represents a voluntary transition from the phase of armed conflict to the phase of democratic politics and law.” In doing so, he invited a critical historical question: is the voluntary end of armed struggle an act of ideological maturity, or merely a concession to exhaustion?

There are no clean answers. For four decades, the PKK embodied both resistance and rupture —



NILANTHA ILANGAMUWA

repression remains inscribed in the psychic life of Kurdish society, not least in the sacrifice of individuals like Mazlum Dogan, who in 1982 set himself ablaze in Diyarbakir Prison. His final words — “Surrender leads to betrayal. Resistance leads to victory” — transcended martyrdom to become a doctrine of ontological refusal.

Zeynep Kinaci (nom de guerre: Zilan), the first female suicide bomber linked to the PKK, carried out her attack in 1996. In her farewell letter, she wrote: “The body is an instrument; the soul is the rebellion. I give one to save the other.” Her words reflect the PKK’s internal logic — where sacrifice and identity were inseparable from its mode of resistance. These narratives complicate any simplistic reading of the PKK’s disarmament as a redemptive denouement. They raise the spectre of what Giorgio Agamben has termed “bare life”: individuals reduced to bodies whose only agency lies in choosing the manner of their disappearance. In this context, disarmament may signal not only an institutional recalibration but also a painful decoupling of political meaning from historical memory. Even as the Turkish state publicly embraces the symbolic act, its deeper posture remains fraught with ambiguity. President Erdoğan’s statement that “Turkey began to close a long, painful and tear-filled chapter” may sound conciliatory, but it contrasts sharply with the ongoing application of anti-terrorism laws, the removal of elected Kurdish municipal officials, and the imprisonment of representatives from the Peoples’ Democratic Party (HDP). While a parliamentary commission has been announced to oversee the legal dimensions of reintegration, there is little indication that foundational constitutional reforms — namely, the legal recognition of Kurdish identity and language will follow.

This ambivalence is not lost on PKK leadership. Murat Karayilan, vice commander of the movement, stated unequivocally: “Legal steps and changes must be taken... Legal reforms must come first. Otherwise, it will be very difficult.” His phrasing — moderate in tone, urgent in implication — articulates the central tension of this new phase: disarmament without

enfranchisement remains an incomplete peace.

The legacy of the PKK makes it necessary to disentangle the justness of its grievances from the problematic tenor of its methods. While the organisation was born in response to systemic negation, its own internal structures mirrored the authoritarianism it opposed. Dissent within the ranks was often met with punitive measures. Child recruitment, internal purges, and ideological absolutism were documented even by sympathetic observers. In attempting to forge a new Kurdish identity, the PKK at times jeopardised the very plurality it claimed to safeguard. Yet it would be myopic to equate insurgency with illegitimacy. The Kurdish movement cannot be understood solely through the metrics of security and insurgency; it is a sociopolitical phenomenon rooted in a longue durée of exclusion. Armed resistance, in this context, was not the first choice — it was the terminal option following the foreclosure of all others. The current peace process, then, represents not a capitulation but a recalibration, predicated upon shifting geopolitical tectonics in Syria, Iraq, and within the Turkish polity itself. What follows from this transition remains precarious. The promise of democratic confederalism, if not rendered into constitutional scaffolding and civic inclusion, risks collapsing into abstraction. The reintegration of former combatants, the revocation of draconian security decrees, and the cultivation of pluralistic Kurdish political representation remain prerequisites — not guarantees — for a sustainable peace. Therein lies the enduring lesson: rebellion, particularly one born from marginalisation, tends to absorb the moral vocabulary of its oppressors unless consciously tempered. The PKK, in choosing to disarm, now engages in a high-stakes experiment of historical re-narration — one where its legacy may shift from martyrdom to civic transformation, if permitted by the state to do so.

Peace, in such contexts, does not arrive as a formal treaty or a public ceremony. It arrives in the ability of former combatants to walk unarmed into towns where they once hid in shadows. It arrives in textbooks printed in Kurdish. It arrives in elections where mayors are not replaced by bureaucratic trustees. And it arrives, above all, in the state’s willingness to no longer see its own citizens as existential threats. The plight of being rebellion is not only to fight and suffer, but to surrender the very instruments of that suffering with no guarantee of reciprocity. The disarmament of the PKK marks a potentially luminous moment — but only if the silence that follows is filled not with erasure, but with recognition.

(The writer is a Colombo based columnist)

India’s strength transcends tariffs: The rise of a self-reliant nation

In a rapidly shifting global economic landscape, India’s resilience is once again being tested — this time through a sweeping 25 per cent tariff announced by the United States on all goods imported from India. While at first glance such a measure appears daunting, the truth is far more empowering. India is no longer the hesitant emerging market of two decades ago. Today, we are a self-assured, self-reliant, and future-facing nation whose economic trajectory is shaped by its domestic strengths and bold strategic vision.

The timing of this external shock could not have been more telling. India has emerged as one of the fastest-growing economies globally, fuelled by a digitally enabled population, manufacturing reforms, infrastructure investment, and a renewed focus on sectors like agriculture, marine exports, and small enterprise development. With strong macroeconomic fundamentals, a rising GDP, record GST collections, and controlled inflation, India today has the capacity to withstand external turbulence — and more importantly, convert adversity into opportunity.

The 25 per cent US tariff is not a judgment on the quality or reliability of Indian goods. It is a geopolitical manoeuvre driven by internal economic compulsions and external alliances.

But it also serves as a wake-up call to strengthen indigenous capacities and reduce strategic vulnerabilities. For India, this is not a time to retreat, but to double down on long-term reforms and localised value chains.

We must commend the Government of India, led by our Prime Minister, for neither yielding to pressure nor reacting with short-sighted retaliatory measures. Instead, they have chosen to safeguard the interests of India’s backbone — our farmers, fishermen, MSMEs, and millions of rural entrepreneurs.

These are the very people who fuel India’s food security, innovation, and economic vibrancy. It is this trust-based ecosystem of grassroots enterprise that will shield India’s core economy from the worst effects of trade aggression.

The spirit of Atmanirbhar Bharat (Self-Reliant India) is not just a slogan; it is now visible in action across every state and every sector.

From solar power to semiconductor manufacturing, from sustainable fisheries to organic agriculture, from fintech startups to infrastructure corridors — India is building internally, scaling vertically, and exporting globally. And unlike the export story of the past, this new India exports not just commodities but value-added, traceable, and sustainable products backed by digital systems and compliance frameworks. In the specific context of the marine and aquaculture industry, India is already working towards reducing over-dependence on any single market. With new markets opening up in the Middle East,



SHAJI BABY JOHN

Southeast Asia, Europe, and Africa, Indian exporters are better diversified today than ever before. Moreover, the emphasis on high-quality, antibiotic-free, traceable seafood aligned with global ESG norms positions India as a preferred supplier in premium segments — less vulnerable to price shocks or protectionist tariffs.

The real opportunity lies in reorienting our focus from volume-driven exports to brand-driven, value-centric global offerings. And that is exactly where

the current disruption can catalyse positive transformation. Tariffs may momentarily slow trade lanes, but they cannot dampen the entrepreneurial spirit of India’s producers, technologists, and market makers. Moreover, India’s domestic market itself is becoming a powerful engine of growth. With rising incomes, urbanisation, and awareness around healthy, sustainable food, there is a massive opportunity to build Indian brands for Indian consumers — in everything from seafood to agri-processed goods. If the last decade was about export dependence, the next will be about dual resilience — global markets for scale, and domestic markets for strength.

This is also a moment for Indian companies and industries to speak in one voice — not just to defend their turf, but to lead the conversation on global trade fairness. Trade should not be weaponised. It should be a platform for shared growth. India’s commitment to WTO norms, sustainability, and cooperative development stands in stark contrast to punitive tariffs that risk creating instability in already fragile global supply chains.

Let us also recognise the power of collective optimism. Investors, entrepreneurs, and citizens alike must resist panic and instead look at the deeper structural opportunities. Just as India navigated past economic slowdowns, currency volatility, and supply disruptions with grace and grit, we will navigate this too — and come out stronger.

As someone closely involved in India’s aquaculture and rural development space, I believe this is the time to push forward, not pull back. We must invest in traceability tech, sustainable harvesting models, inland infrastructure, and digital trading platforms. We must empower our coastal communities to become exporters of knowledge, not just raw product. And we must tell our story boldly to the world — not as victims of global politics, but as leaders of the next economic transformation.

The world is watching how India responds. Let us show them the spirit of unity, strength, and foresight that defines our journey. For India’s strength — built on people, principle, and potential — truly transcends tariffs.

(The writer is Chairman and Managing Director of Kings Infra Ventures Limited and writes on Blue Economy and Sustainable Development)

Tariffs and Tensions

In announcing a 25 per cent tariff on Indian imports into the US ~ along with the threat of further penalties tied to India’s purchase of Russian oil and weapons ~ President Donald Trump has once again blurred the line between economic nationalism and geopolitical coercion. While tariffs are ostensibly trade tools, this latest move is unmistakably a political message: open your markets, fall in line with US strategic interests, or pay the price. Mr Trump has long criticized India’s tariff regime, branding it among the highest in the world and repeatedly highlighting America’s trade deficit with the country. From a purely transactional standpoint, his frustration is understandable. The US runs a deficit of over \$45 billion with India, and repeated trade negotiations have made little headway on market access for American agriculture and dairy ~ sectors politically significant in Mr Trump’s domestic calculus. But context matters. India’s agricultural sector supports hundreds of millions of livelihoods. Its protectionist posture is not simply a matter of out-dated policy ~ it is a political and economic necessity, one that even a naïve American must be aware of. Demanding sudden and wide-scale liberalisation of this sector ignores both the structural realities of India’s economy and the volatility that such reforms could trigger. The deeper concern, however, is not economic but strategic. The timing and tone of Mr Trump’s statement ~ coupling trade tariffs with a penalty for India’s ties with Russia - suggest a growing impatience with India’s attempt to walk a diplomatic tightrope. Since the Ukraine war began, India has carefully balanced its strategic autonomy, purchasing discounted Russian oil while maintaining strong ties with the West. For Washington, especially under Mr Trump’s assertive vision of foreign policy, this balancing act has grown intolerable. The implicit message is clear: loyalty has a price tag. In linking economic pressure to foreign policy alignment, Mr Trump is not merely seeking a trade deal; he is attempting to recalibrate the strategic behaviour of a sovereign nation. This goes beyond transactional diplomacy ~ it veers into conditionality reminiscent of Cold War-era alignments. India’s resilience will be tested not only in negotiations but in how it communicates its red lines ~ balancing assertiveness with diplomacy will be crucial in preserving its strategic independence. India must tread carefully. While it aspires to deepen economic ties with the US and expand bilateral trade - an ambition shared by both governments ~ it cannot afford to appear as capitulating under pressure. Doing so would undercut its long-standing position of strategic autonomy and non-alignment. The stakes are higher than a tariff dispute; they touch on the foundational principles of India’s foreign policy. Ultimately, this standoff is not just about tariffs or trade deficits. It is a contest over influence, autonomy, and the future of multipolar diplomacy. Whether the two sides can arrive at a deal before the August deadline may determine not only the direction of bilateral trade, but the contours of the emerging global order.

Tremor and Restraint

An 8.8-magnitude earthquake is no ordinary event. It is the sort of seismic jolt that history remembers, one capable of reshaping coastlines and triggering tsunamis that level towns. So when such a quake struck off the Kamchatka Peninsula in Russia, the world braced for calamity. Warnings rang out across the Pacific. Evacuations followed swiftly. Yet the anticipated destruction ~ especially from tsunami waves ~ did not materialise in the form many feared. And in that lies a story not of overreaction, but of resilience, science, and a bit of fortune. At the heart of the matter is a profound truth: the severity of an earthquake does not guarantee the scale of a tsunami. While the quake in question was a textbook megathrust ~ caused by one tectonic plate diving beneath another ~ it did not unleash the sort of towering, city-engulfing waves seen in the Indian Ocean in 2004 or Japan in 2011. Instead, the tsunami reached a comparatively moderate height in some parts of eastern Russia, sparing much of the region from catastrophe. Several factors played into this outcome. The depth of the quake, the configuration of the undersea fault line, and the shape of the ocean floor near the coast all influenced how much water was displaced. Even small differences in depth ~ say, 20 kilometers deeper ~ can significantly reduce tsunami wave height. Additionally, the land’s natural contours and offshore slopes may have dissipated the wave’s energy before it hit inhabited areas. But beyond the geology, this was also a test of human systems. And this time, they largely held. Early warning mechanisms, built painstakingly after past disasters, clicked into action. Sirens wailed, alerts were broadcast, and millions were guided to safer ground. That the toll remained low is not just a matter of seismic mercy ~ it is also a credit to those who studied, prepared, and invested in disaster management infrastructure. It’s tempting to think countries overreacted ~ but that’s the point of preparedness. When systems work well, disaster looks like a false alarm. The absence of tragedy is often the measure of success. This event serves as a necessary reminder: while we cannot stop tectonic plates from moving, we can blunt their consequences. Scientific advancements, accurate monitoring, and effective communication save lives. That said, it would be a mistake to grow complacent. Had the undersea landscape been different, or had the fault ruptured closer to a population centre, the outcome might have mirrored darker chapters of recent memory. The Earth trembled, but human systems held. That, in itself, is a quiet victory in the age of escalating climate and geological risk. Nature’s restraint this time should not lead to denial of its potential. Instead, it must reaffirm our commitment to readiness. For the next time tectonic forces stir beneath our feet, the window to respond might be even smaller ~ and the stakes even higher.

Strategic reset

The visit saw strong messaging from both leaders. President Muizzu publicly praised India as the Maldives’ ‘closest and most trusted partner’, noting the everyday impact of Indian cooperation on Maldivian lives. His statement that ‘no one can break India-Maldives ties’ was a significant rhetorical shift from earlier months. Prime Minister Modi, in turn, underscored that the Maldives holds a ‘special place in India’s Neighbourhood First policy’



The visit of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the Maldives on 25-26 July 2025, marks a defining moment in the recalibration of India-Maldives relations. His presence as the Guest of Honour at the island nation’s 60th Independence Day celebrations not only reaffirmed India’s traditional support for a close maritime neighbour but also symbolised the steady recovery of a relationship that had faced turbulence in recent years.

The timing, optics, and substance of the visit reflect the mutual recognition of strategic interests and the need for regional cooperation amid a shifting geopolitical landscape in the Indian Ocean.

Historically, India has enjoyed friendly ties with the Maldives, particularly since the island nation gained independence from British rule in 1965. India was among the first countries to recognize Maldives’ independence and has consistently played a pivotal role in its development journey. Bilateral relations remained largely stable during the initial decades, driven by geographical proximity, cultural affinities, and security imperatives.

However, the advent of multiparty democracy in the Maldives introduced political complexities that affected its external relationships, including with India. The oscillation of power between political parties ~ particularly between the India-friendly Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) and other more nationalist or externally influenced factions ~ brought periods of both warmth and frost.

Relations between India and the Maldives reached a new low following the ascent of President Mohamed Muizzu, who rose to power on the back of an “India Out” campaign. His administration adopted a markedly different foreign policy posture compared to his predecessors. One of his first acts in office was to formally request the withdrawal of Indian military personnel stationed in the Maldives ~ a demand that, though eventually managed diplomatically by India through replacement with civilian staff, signalled a clear departure from the “India First” policy.

The early signs of Muizzu’s

presidency were therefore worrying for New Delhi. His decision to visit China before India broke a longstanding diplomatic tradition and underscored his administration’s attempt to diversify strategic alignments.

Further damage was done when government-affiliated figures in the Maldives made derogatory remarks about Prime Minister Modi on social media, triggering a popular backlash in India and adversely affecting Indian tourist arrivals to the Maldives ~ a key sector of the island economy.

Despite the initial strain, a pragmatic course correction appears to be underway. President Muizzu, while continuing to engage China, has toned down his anti-India rhetoric, signalling a realisation that India’s geographic proximity, economic support, and diplomatic goodwill are too consequential to disregard. The presence of Prime Minister Modi at the Maldives’ milestone celebra-

tion was a diplomatic success for both sides and a public declaration of renewed partnership. That both countries used the occasion to issue a commemorative stamp symbolising 60 years of diplomatic ties reflects a shared desire to preserve historical continuity, even as they chart a new course.

The visit was not merely symbolic. It resulted in significant outcomes that suggest a deepening of bilateral engagement across key sectors. India announced a Rs 4,850 crore (\$565 million) Line of Credit for the Maldives, with special provisions to ease annual debt repayments. Negotiations for a proposed India-Maldives Free Trade Agreement were launched, which, if realised, would considerably expand the trade and investment space between the two nations.

India also reaffirmed its defence partnership with the Maldives, with the inauguration of a new Ministry of Defence building in Malé symbolising sustained military cooperation. In a strong gesture of goodwill,

India gifted BHISHM health cube sets to strengthen Maldives’ health emergency infrastructure, reaffirming its role as a partner in human security.

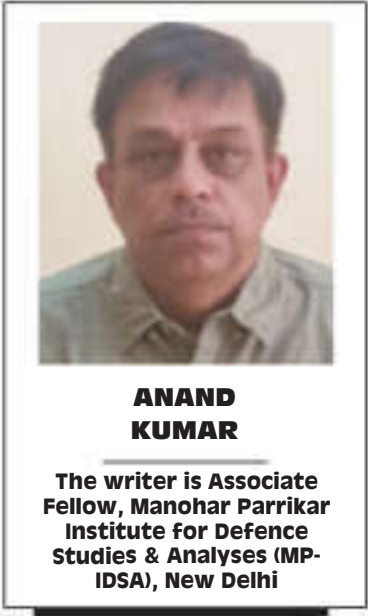
Development assistance remained a core component of India’s approach. Social and infrastructure projects were handed over, including 3,300 housing units in Hulhumalé under India’s Buyer’s Credit, roads and drainage infrastructure in Addu City, and six High Impact Community Development Projects. Seventy-two vehicles and other essential equipment were also gifted. These interventions reflect India’s development partnership model ~ demand-driven, transparent, and aligned with local priorities ~ offering a compelling alternative to China’s loan-heavy, high-interest infrastructure model.

The visit also saw strong messaging from both leaders. President Muizzu publicly praised India as the Maldives’ “closest and most trusted partner”, noting the everyday impact of Indian cooperation on Maldivian lives ~ from education and healthcare to trade and security. He acknowledged that the relationship predates modern diplomacy, rooted in centuries of maritime interaction across the Indian Ocean.

His statement that “no one can break India-Maldives ties” was a significant rhetorical shift from earlier months and recognition of the importance of India in maintaining regional stability.

Prime Minister Modi, in turn, underscored that the Maldives holds a “special place in India’s Neighbourhood First policy”. He reiterated that India stands by its neighbours not just out of diplomatic obligation but due to a deep sense of historical, cultural, and regional affinity.

Security cooperation formed a quiet but crucial undercurrent of the visit. President Muizzu condemned the Pahalgam terrorist attack of April 2025, in which 26 civilians were killed, and expressed solidarity with



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

editor@thestatesman.com

Time to dump the US

Sir, The report “Trump slaps India with 25 pc tariff”, published today, should motivate India to retaliate by imposing higher tariffs on imports from America.

The fact that Mr. Trump is an undependable politician is repeatedly getting proved. He claims to have used trade as a trump card to accomplish a ceasefire in the armed conflict between India and Pakistan.

If so, inspite of agreeing to a ceasefire, now 25 per cent tariff and an undisclosed amount as penalty for buying arms and fuel from Russia exposes his lack of ethics, principles or ideology.

Extra tariffs on BRICS members are further due. India has already yielded a lot. Now the

decisions of Trump are rendering the ongoing discussions on a Bilateral Trade Agreement waste.

In this background, many countries are longing to forge a new system that will be free from dollar domination. Now is the time to accomplish dollar-free world trade.

Though some initial hitches are likely, India should mobilise its courage, and use its Vishwaguru image and commitment to save domestic production, trade and employment opportunities to find a lasting solution to the threats from America.

Even the BTA discussions, as reported, are not likely to help India but to put us in deeper trouble. The auto industry is a lifeline for the Indian economy.

American terms are sure to finish this and collapse the Indian economy as a whole.

As India is not going to be an isolated entity in the tariff war ~ with giants like Russia and China with us ~ this opportunity should not be lost to foil the evil designs of the U.S. Let India hasten the process of concluding FTAs and BTAs with other countries as done with the U.K.

Yours, etc.,
A G Rajmohan,
Anantapur, 31 July.

DECEIVING OURSELVES

Sir, We don’t nip anything in the bud. Rather, we allow it to flourish, even if it is a fake embassy, located at Ghaziabad, just 30 odd kilometers from Delhi.

Westarcstar Embassy in Ghaziabad was being operated by one Harsh Vardhan Jain for

about nine years, starting in 2016 and continuing until it was exposed and shut down in July 2025.

Everything about his embassy (a rented house, in fact) was fake as fake can be ~ diplomatic insignia, fake passports, luxury cars with forged diplomatic plates, and even morphed photos with global leaders to create an illusion of legitimacy. But the most striking part was the fact that it took nine years to call Jain’s bluff.

There are umpteen other instances to show how tolerant we are to any and every kind of fakery. A few outstanding examples of financial wrongdoers are Vijay Mallya, who managed to pull the wool over our eyes for nearly eleven years, and continues to do so even now.

Close behind is Nirav Modi, the diamantaire whose period of

fraud spans seven years. “Babas” (godmen) too have thrived for a long periods of time and had humongous followings before being exposed.

Swami Nithyananda was able to run his religious empire for almost seven years before the law caught up. It took decades to nail Asaram Bapu.

It also takes years, and loss of human lives, to realise that a bridge is unfit for use, or that a wall or a roof needs urgent repair.

It also takes years and fatalities to realise that our railway tracks or signalling systems are outdated. It takes years to free our undertrials who are languishing in jail. Like it or not, we are a lethargic and self-deceiving nation, so much so, that we are loath to admit these faults.

Yours, etc.,
Avinash Godbole,
Dewas, 28 July.



IIC will stay a cultural hub

Founded in 1962, the India International Centre (IIC) in New Delhi has been a cornerstone of intellectual and cultural exchange, inspired by Dr. S. Radhakrishnan. Director KN Shrivastava discusses IIC's role in shaping Delhi's intellectual scene, its commitment to cross-cultural dialogue, and efforts to balance heritage with modernity, and from global conferences to supporting young artists, Shrivastava shares his vision for IIC's future with Ananya Dasgupta

Q: The India International Centre was established in 1962 and has been the cornerstone for cultural and intellectual exchange in India. How would you describe its role in shaping Delhi's intellectual and cultural landscape over the decades?

A: IIC was set up under the inspiration of Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, at that time he was the Vice President and later became President of India and he himself was an intellectual par excellence. So, in his conversation with Rockefeller III in 1957, you know, this idea of setting up the centre emerged. And the idea was that there should be a place like this in New Delhi, the capital of the country, where intellectuals from all over the world can meet, exchange ideas, develop understanding among world communities and through this promote fraternity and universal appreciation for it.

We have been working with that objective, which is also enshrined in our memorandum of understanding. So, because of the continuous efforts by several people in the past and present, the centre has emerged as a very important place.

Definitely it has shaped Delhi's intellectual circle quite a lot. You name all the important people in any walk of social life, they are associated with us. Many programmes are taking place here. About 1,500 programmes on an average take place, directly organised by IIC as seminars, conferences, talks, and book discussions. In addition,

about 3,000 programmes are held by others using our facilities. So if I have to sum up, I could certainly say that IIC has emerged as a key player in India's intellectual and cultural scene.

Q: As a former IAS officer with extensive administrative experience, how has your background influenced your approach to leading the IIC and fostering the mission of promoting dialogue and cultural diversity?

A: As an IAS officer, one has to work in various capacities. I was fortunate enough to work in the Ministry of Culture, first as Joint Secretary and thereafter as Director General of Archeological Survey of India.

Additionally, I had a long stint in the Ministry of External Affairs of about eight years. So perhaps, this background might have been kept in view by the board of IIC when they invited me to take charge of this post.

Q: The IIC is renowned for hosting distinguished global figures like the Dalai Lama. What upcoming programmes or events are you most excited about?

A: We have been having several programmes and many are in the offing, including international conferences. We recently had a seminar with Bruegel, the think tank of EU. That was a very useful exchange and one could get a clear perspective on the thinking of EU in economic matters. How they see the scenario unfolding in the world, post Donald Trump. We had an international conference on Latin America. We also had a international seminar on intellectuals moving in the Asian regions from one country to another country. This year, we are going to have an international conference on Atisa, a very famous and revered, personality in Buddhism, who hailed from India. And then he spread Buddhism in Tibet and is a highly regarded saint in Buddhism. We are having a seminar in November on his life, his teachings, and it there will also be an exhibition where we will display some rare artefacts or you can say relics of Atisa.

Q: IIC has a rich tradition of promoting the lesser known art forms and communities as well. What steps are you taking to support India's diverse cultural heritage in today's globalised world?

A: If you look at IIC memberships, it is broad based. It is not just confined to one section. We try to get every section of society, be it people associated with law and judiciary or medical profession or art and culture, academics, public service and all that. I would say that we try to not only to give due representation to artists and academic communities in IIC membership, but we also as a matter of a very conscious effort try to promote young artists. For example, we conduct something called the Double Build Programme three times in a month. Young artists from any part of India are invited. We pay for their travel, we also arrange local hospitality for them and we give them remunerations. So that has been a very, very successful and has enthused and encouraged a large number of artists all over the country.

In addition to that, we have also roped in the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Doner because they have got a lot of resources. So by using their resources, we are reaching out to artists even in the remote areas, including the northeast, and invite them. Overall it has been a very enriching experience not only for us, but even for those artists.

Q: What efforts are underway to modernise the infrastructure while preserving the centre's historical charm?

A: We are in a very iconic building designed by the famous architect Joseph Stein and the building is already more than 60 years old. IIC has near-heritage status but doesn't qualify under the AMASR Act.

Now things have really evolved. The rooms, you know, and venues, other facilities, kitchen that were designed then, perhaps they need upgrading. Sewer treatment becomes a very important environmental issue.



There's a lot of thrust on green energy usage generation. So taking all these things into consideration, we have taken up several infrastructure development projects.

Many have already been completed and many are in the pipeline. So while these facilities are being provided, but at the same time, the original structure has been retained and there's a technical team of architects to assist us in this matter. You will be happy to know that our waste management has also been very high class. The kitchen waste is used for biogas generation and also for fertiliser making. The bathroom waste, the sewerage waste, et cetera, is also processed and gets converted into manure. Recycled water is being used over here. We do not discharge anything into the municipal system. Several energy efficient measures were implemented. We have also harnessed solar energy wherever it was available to us, both

in the main campus and the annexe.

With all these measures, we have been able to save about Rs 1 crore a year. The manure that we produce here is used partly in our own lawns, and the rest is sold to members.

Q: As you look ahead, what's your vision for IIC as it navigates a rapidly changing world? And how do you plan to ensure it remains a vital platform for fostering dialogue and innovation?

A: As I mentioned to you at the beginning itself, this is a place for people to meet, discuss, deliberate and then come up with recommendations. So any new field which comes up or even the existing ones also are discussed and debated. Some of them are more intensely debated nowadays, a lot of thrust on AI. This exercise has been going on and will continue. And I'm sure that this approach will serve even future requirements.

Muslim world has met crises with rhetoric

AMIN SAIKAL

When it comes to dealing with two of the biggest current crises in the Muslim world – the devastation of Gaza and the Taliban's draconian rule in Afghanistan – Arab and Muslim states have been staggeringly ineffective.

Their chief body, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), in particular, has been strong on rhetoric but very short on serious, tangible action.

The OIC, headquartered in Saudi Arabia, is composed of 57 predominantly Muslim states. It is supposed to act as a representative and consultative body and make decisions and recommendations on the major issues that affect Muslims globally. It calls itself the "collective voice of the Muslim world".

Yet the body has proved to be toothless in the face of Israel's relentless assault on Gaza, triggered in response to the Hamas attacks of 7 October 2023.

The OIC has equally failed to act against the Taliban's reign of terror in the name of Islam in ethnically diverse Afghanistan.

Despite its projection of a united umma (the global Islamic community, as defined in my co-authored book *Islam Beyond Borders*), the OIC has ignominiously been divided on Gaza and Afghanistan.

True, it has condemned Israel's Gaza operations. It's also called for an

immediate, unconditional ceasefire and the delivery of humanitarian aid to the starving population of the strip.

It has also rejected any Israeli move to depopulate and annex the enclave, as well as the West Bank. These moves would render the two-state solution to the long-running Israeli-Palestinian conflict essentially defunct.

Further, the OIC has welcomed the recent joint statement by the foreign ministers of 28 countries (including the United Kingdom, many European Union members and Japan) calling for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza, as well as France's decision to recognise the state of Palestine.

The OIC is good at putting out statements. However, this approach hasn't varied much from that of the wider global community. It is largely verbal, and void of any practical measures.

Surely, Muslim states can and should be doing more.

For example, the OIC has failed to persuade Israel's neighbouring states – Egypt and Jordan, in particular – to open their border crossings to allow humanitarian aid to flow into Gaza, the West Bank or Israel, in defiance of Israeli leaders.

Nor has it been able to compel Egypt, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco to suspend their relations with the Jewish state until it agrees to a two-state solution.

Further, the OIC has not adopted a call by Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim and the United

Nations special rapporteur on Palestinian territories, Francesca Albanese, for Israel to be suspended from the UN.

Nor has it urged its oil-rich Arab members, in particular Saudi Arabia and the UAE, to harness their resources to prompt US President Donald Trump to halt the supply of arms to Israel and pressure Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to end the war.

In a similar vein, the OIC has failed to exert maximum pressure on the ultra-extremist and erstwhile terrorist Taliban government in Afghanistan.

Since sweeping back into power in 2021, the Taliban has ruled in a highly repressive, misogynist and draconian fashion in the name of Islam. This is not practised anywhere else in the Muslim world.

In December 2022, OIC Secretary General Hissein Brahim Taha called for a global campaign to unite Islamic scholars and religious authorities against the Taliban's decision to ban girls from education.

But this was superseded a month later, when the OIC expressed concern over the Taliban's "restrictions on women", but asked the international community not to "interfere in Afghanistan's internal affairs". This was warmly welcomed by the Taliban.

In effect, the OIC – and therefore most Muslim countries – have adopted no practical measures to penalise the Taliban for its behaviour.

It has not censured the Taliban nor imposed crippling sanctions on



the group. And while no Muslim country has officially recognised the Taliban government (only Russia has), most OIC members have nonetheless engaged with the Taliban at political, economic, financial and trade levels.

There are many reasons for the OIC's ineffectiveness.

For one, the group is composed of a politically, socially, culturally and economically diverse assortment of members.

But more importantly, it has not functioned as a "bridge builder" by developing a common strategy of purpose and action that can overcome the geopolitical and sectarian differences of its members.

In the current polarised international environment, the rivalry among its member states – and with major

global powers such as the United States and China – has rendered the organisation a mere talking shop.

This has allowed extremist governments in both Israel and Afghanistan to act with impunity.

It is time to look at the OIC's functionality and determine how it can more effectively unite the umma. This may also be an opportunity for its member states to develop an effective common strategy that could help the cause of peace and stability in the Muslim domain and its relations with the outside world.

(The writer is Emeritus Professor of Middle Eastern and Central Asian Studies, Australian National University; and Vice Chancellor's Strategic Fellow, Victoria University. This article was published on www.theconversation.com)

OCCASIONAL NOTE

OUR correspondence columns have recently borne witness to the fact that a considerable amount of interest is still taken in the question of Church education in Calcutta. The ripples caused by the stone flung by our correspondent CHURCHMAN into the apparently still pool of Anglican opinion have not yet died away: and from the letter which we publish this morning it will be seen that Sir Hugh Walmsley and Archdeacon Godber are anxious to take advantage of the troubling of The waters. This letter makes it more clear than before that the position of the Church schools in Calcutta is not only unsatisfactory but is becoming more so. They admit that the Church Education League, which furnishes the sinews of war, is dependent for the most part upon subscriptions from the chief business houses of Calcutta, whose conduct is largely in the hands, to put it tact-fully, of non-Anglicans—in short of North Britons professing Presbyterianism, where they profess at all. The Church people themselves, judging by the Church collections, are giving less and less to the cause. This is an anomaly which must be rectified. Heaven helps those who help themselves, and the business houses are entitled to demand that Church people shall at least bear their fair share of the burden of financing the work of the Church Education League

NEWS ITEMS

PRODUCTION COSTS

MANUFACTURE OF BAMBOO PULP

(FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT) SIMLA, JULY 31.

The original proposal of the paper making firms was that all paper should be subjected to a duty of 25 per cent. The Board examined this claim and found that it could not stand. For instance: newsprint, which was paper issued by important Indian newspapers, could not be made available in India at the same price as imported paper even if a 25 per cent protective duty were imposed. Firms admitted this difficulty and were in favour of issuing licences to newspapers to import newsprint at lower duty; but as this would have hit those who bought from dealers in India, the Board decided to exclude newsprint from the protection proposals.

The Board saw no ground for supporting the contention that dumping was proving injurious: in fact dumping, so far as it existed, was proving ineffective.

In regard to the cost of production, the Board says: "The lowest works cost at which paper has been made in India by mills using grass as their staple materials is Rs. 490 a ton. If a full output could be attained the works costs could be brought down to Rs. 460 a ton. Further economies are possible, and in course of time works costs in a reasonably equipped mill near Calcutta, or in the coalfields, might be reduced to some figure below Rs. 420, but not below Rs. 400 a ton.

MINES DISPUTE SETTLED

NEWS CHEERED IN

COMMONS

AGREEMENT TERMS

LONDON, JULY 24.

Cheers greeted Mr. Baldwin's announcement in the House of Commons on Friday that an eleventh hour settlement of the coal dispute had been reached, and that the owners had suspended notices.

It is understood that the Government aid to the industry will take the form of a Treasury grant for a period of nine months allowing wages during that period to be paid on the basis of the national agreement of 1924. In the meantime a searching investigation would be conducted into the condition of the industry.

The settlement is a personal triumph for Mr. Baldwin, who since the intervention of the Government in the dispute has worked untiringly as mediator between the parties to prevent a national disaster.

PEACE TERMS MYSTERY

FRENCH OFFENSIVE

DELAYED TILL

SEPTEMBER

(* "TIMES" SPECIAL SERVICE). LONDON, JULY 31.

THE mystery of what has happened to the reply sent by Abdel Krim to the Franco-Spanish peace proposals deepens, but the affair is considered to be of no great consequence, the Riff leader being suspected of a deep-laid scheme to out-wit Franco-Spanish combination.

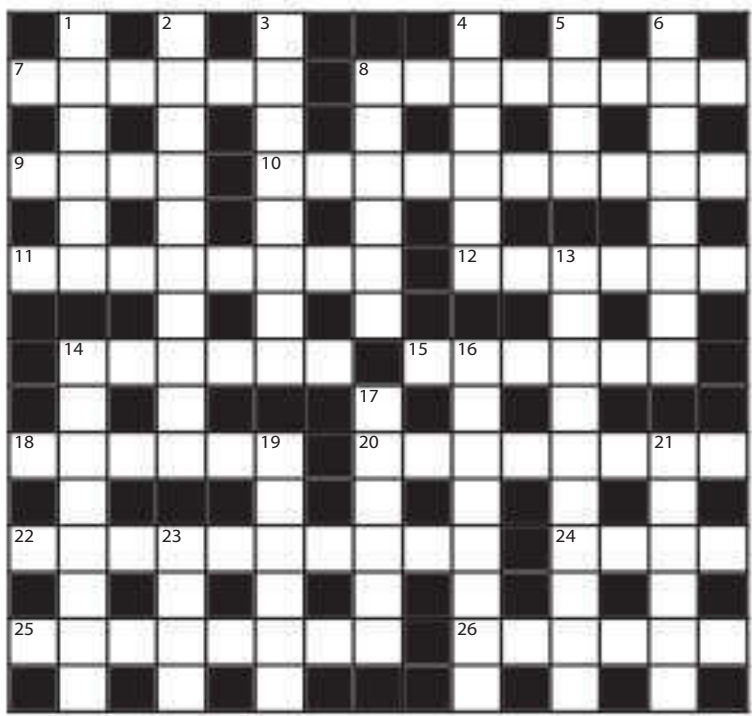
France and Spain have little time to organize an offensive as the present hot season virtually prohibits active hostilities, as will the wet season, due in October. Consequently, if France and Spain want to crush the rebellion it must be one in September.

Another difficulty lies in Abdel Krim's tactics. He refuses a large scale attack, whereby he might encounter a crushing defeat, preferring to sit tight, knowing that thereby he is giving the enemy a hard nut to crack. He is busy digging in preparation for a defensive campaign.

It is rumoured that Marshal Petain will advise the Government that two complete divisions of regulars are needed. Such a step will certainly encounter political opposition, as France is in no mood for warfare on such a scale so soon after the losses of the Great War. She does not want further casualties just yet.

CROSSWORD

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YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

N U R S E R Y R H Y M E
A E A X A E A
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I N H A R M O N I O U S

ACROSS

- 7 A chap apparently back in the country (6)
8 Repeatedly stove's beginning to ruin jelly (4-4)
9 Rating bowler's target (4)
10 TV science programme leading discussion mostly on the level (10)
11 Colouring agent is something recalled in bamboo? (8)
12 Minor performers no longer rubbish? Not entirely (6)

DOWN

- 14 Flower, one found in US state meadow (6)
15 Nuisance besetting European with a dated currency (6)
18 Restraint removing front feather from cockerel (6)
20 Ultimate issue: gold brought back in clutches of the Spanish (8)
22 On a mystic bent, adopting new expression of holiness (10)
24 Country air damaged court card (4)

- 25 Prince recalled a cheering cry in a fix (8)
26 Cheers, after bringing about a change: ditching unknown gaming figure (6)
1 Openings in Commonwealth area involving a Commonwealth state (6)
2 Sequential description of discussions in defence? (4-2-4)

- 3 Fabric Queen twice displayed in legal action (8)
4 Put on a show for father instead of turning up for crossword? (6)
5 Amusing to be around a pastoral deity (4)
6 A South American once enthralled by Egyptian god in religious epic (8)
8 Getting on, having provided billet for soldiers? Certainly (6)
13 Exaggerated consequence of

- chewing that eclair (10)
14 A research centre: graduate brought on board by an American resident (8)
16 Elevated title capturing most suitable figure in morality (8)
17 Supplied golden colour on a hat (6)
19 Oratorio, I judge, with sound rising around (6)
21 A river? Skill needed to secure a landing-point (6)
23 Grasp lead item in constitutional legislation (4)

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

A welcome recall

SC should penalise those who tried to game the system in the BPSL case, but liquidation is certainly not an option

THE SUPREME COURT’S (SC) decision to recall its May 2 judgment that had ordered the liquidation of Bhushan Power and Steel (BPSL) is a significant positive outcome for the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) and the overall framework for stressed asset resolution in India. The top court’s decision to hear the case afresh on August 7 acknowledges the implications of the earlier judgment on thousands of BPSL workers; on a company that has been turned around to a profitable and healthy going concern; and on investor confidence in the insolvency process. It’s also a realisation on the part of the apex court that on economic and commercial issues, it should consider the unintended consequence of its decisions.

The recall of the order was all the more necessary because of the inordinately long time taken by the apex court itself. In 2019, the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) had approved the acquisition of BPSL as part of the proceedings under the IBC. But the dramatic reversal came after five years, bringing uncertainty and chaos with it. Had this verdict been delivered within weeks of the case reaching the apex court, it might have served some purpose. It would have also sent out a strong signal to all resolution professionals (RPs) to be extremely careful in ensuring adherence to each and every aspect of the law. The delay negated that purpose.

The recall of an order, however, does not mean that the SC should turn a blind eye to all the irregularities that have allegedly been found out. The earlier judgment highlighted multiple failures by the RP, including the delayed submission of the plan and various other legal lapses. The top court had also accused the Committee of Creditors (CoC) of green-lighting an “invalid” plan despite clear violations of the IBC timeline and regulatory norms. Most importantly, the court condemned JSW’s conduct as mala fide, observing that it misused the process of the law and failed to fulfill its commitments after securing CoC approval. The court also found that JSW did not abide by its commitment to make upfront payments as per the resolution plan. The broad takeaway from the earlier judgment was that the procedures were not followed at almost any step. In that background, no one can suggest that either courts or tribunals should allow successful resolution applicants to flout legal requirements or delay the process under the guise of ongoing litigation. Abuse of process certainly has no place in the insolvency framework.

The fresh hearing by the SC should thus focus on the fact whether liquidation is the only “remedy” in this case. It’s common knowledge that keeping a company operational typically preserves, and often enhances, asset value far more effectively than liquidation. It is nobody’s case that the acts of omission and commission in the BPSL resolution should not be accounted for, but its liquidation must be avoided. The court should now consider asking the NCLT to look for a new bidder (JSW Steel could also be one of them), while imposing significant financial penalties on those who tried to game the system. Unlike previous legislation, the IBC establishes a clear preference for the resumption of a viable business over its piecemeal liquidation. A primary objective of the Code is the “maximisation of value of assets” of the corporate debtor. Liquidation will shake confidence in the finality and sanctity of long-settled commercial decisions. BPSL and its workers deserve better.

China humanoids will soon play the Hunger Games

BY FAR THE biggest crowd-pleaser at China’s top artificial intelligence summit this week was the march of the robots. An entire floor of the sprawling Shanghai exhibition venue was dedicated to droids, and onlookers went wild as what would’ve seemed like science fiction even just a few years ago came to life. They played drums, served popcorn, duked it out in a boxing ring or even just hung limply in the hallway as they awaited their turn in the spotlight. One had a beautifully uncanny human face, complete with eyeliner and rouge. Dog-like bots did backflips and stood on their hind legs as they greeted handlers, as if asking for treats.

At this stage, it’s easy to be sceptical that this is all just a novelty that will soon wear off. The robotics sector within China has been heavily propelled by propaganda. Even outside of the mainland, efforts to create human-like bots have sputtered, facing high costs and technology barriers. Many of the humanoids on display in Shanghai couldn’t seem to do much on their own, outside of their curated demos, which were heavily assisted by human handlers. Schools were on summer vacation, and many people who turned up brought along their kids. It was fascinating to see how children interacted with these machines—going in for hugs or selfies—but it also made them look like nothing more than glorified, expensive toys.

Quick reality check aside, their potential to transform the economy is undeniable. While they’re not quite ready for prime time, the sector is evolving rapidly. Cheap access to open-source AI software has significantly lowered the barriers to entry, even if training robots to navigate the physical world still requires significantly more data and time than getting a chatbot to understand text like a human.

Amid demographic changes, Beijing has long recognised the potential for automation and invested heavily in so-called “embodied artificial intelligence” as part of its industrial policy. The nation’s strengths in electric vehicle and tech manufacturing have also given it easier access to vast supply chains required for humanoid components. And Chinese robotics firms are emulating the DeepSeek-led open-source approach that has resulted in a collaborative innovation ecosystem.

Leading start-up Unitree Robotics, known for creating the humanoid dancers that performed at the CCTV Lunar New Year broadcast, open-sourced much of its technology earlier this year. The step between being able to perform specific, repetitive work in a controlled setting and taking on complex tasks in the real world is a gaping challenge, but Chinese firms have a huge amount of momentum taking this on.

I’ve written before that all hype aside, the US has no excuse to be caught off guard by China becoming dominant. During the summit, Unitree unveiled a humanoid with a starting price of ¥39,900 (\$5,900). It’s a significant markdown from the \$16,000 of its older generation. The price wars are likely just getting started, and the more entrenched they become, the harder it will be for international firms to stay relevant.

China’s exuberance for humanoids is making way for a *Hunger Games*-style contest to come out on top. A big takeaway from Shanghai’s robot rave was just how intense the competition has become. Not all of the prototypes on display will likely end up in mass production—let alone in people’s homes or workplaces any time soon.

During a keynote, Zhihui Peng, co-founder of start-up Agibot, brought a humanoid dubbed Lingxi on stage with him. Peng conducted an informal poll, asking the audience to raise their hands if they thought robots would end up being tools versus partners. The results were almost evenly split. Yet as much as we’re all compelled by the idea of robot companions, the firms that are most likely to survive are the ones who create machines that can be put to work in factories, retail stores or fast-food kitchens.

Perhaps the humanoids that make the biggest difference will be the least human-like of all. They don’t need to wear make-up or have realistic body parts. To quote Lingxi, their goal should be to “let humans return to their humanity and let me focus on the efficiency”.



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TRADE-OFF TIME

EMINENT ECONOMIC SENSE FOR INDIA TO DIVERSIFY EXPORTS VIA CLOSER COOPERATION WITH GLOBAL SOUTH

Look beyond US market

DURING THE PAST few weeks, it had become increasingly evident that the bilateral trade agreement (BTA) negotiations between India and the US had reached an impasse. Therefore, as Donald Trump’s August 1 deadline for concluding trade deals drew close, the Indian government must have anticipated that the US President would impose “reciprocal tariffs”. And not unsurprisingly, President Trump imposed 25% tariffs on imports from India. But what India would be more worried about is the threat of “a penalty” for buying “a vast majority of ... military equipment from Russia”, and for being “Russia’s largest buyer of energy”. This is particularly in light of Trump’s strong support for the Sanctioning Russia Act of 2025, a Bill aimed at pressuring Russian President Vladimir Putin to end the ongoing war in Ukraine. This Bill includes a controversial provision to impose a 500% tariff on imports from countries such as India and China that continue purchasing Russian energy products.

The 25% “reciprocal tariffs” have been imposed since the Indian government refused to buckle under Washington’s pressure to open its market for grains like corn and wheat as well as soya bean and dairy products. This pressure was the reflection of lobbying by the US agri-business, one of Trump’s strongest supporters. Given the strength of these lobbies, particularly their proximity to the US President, the government deserves credit for standing up to the Trump administration’s pressures and protecting the country’s farmers against the US agri-business. There is no doubt that the costs of yielding to the pressures and sacrificing the farmers’ interests would have been far more than the burden that the 25% tariffs would impose.



India has never included major agricultural commodities and dairy products in any free trade agreement negotiated thus far on account of the vulnerabilities of the farm sector. An overwhelming majority of India’s peasantry consists of small and marginal farmers; they are designated as “low-income and resource-poor farmers” in the World Trade Organization (WTO). The government, in its notifications to the WTO, has stated that 99.49% of Indian farmers belong to this category. It is, therefore, quite obvious that if US agri-business is allowed to enter India, the country’s farmers would be unable to compete with the behemoths and would lose their livelihoods.

The added advantage for US agri-business is the high level of subsidies they have been receiving. US farm subsidies, as reported to the WTO, are the highest in the world. These increased to \$21.6 billion in 2022 from \$61 billion in 1995. Subsidies have allowed producers of major commodities in the US to sell their products below their cost of production; in other words, US producers indulge in dumping. In the WTO, where negotiations for the reduction of tariffs and subsidies take place simultaneously—these two issues being the two “pillars” of the WTO Agreement

on Agriculture—India has consistently argued that its tariff reduction would be subject to the US reducing its subsidies. Unfortunately, Trump’s unilateralism gives no opportunity to discuss the tariff-subsidy trade-off in the bilateral negotiations. Thus, while the US is perpetrating unfair trade in agriculture, its President points fingers at its trade partners for indulging in unfair trade.

It is a no-brainer that by preventing dumping of cereals, tariffs provide adequate protection for India to maintain its domestic food security. In fact, it was the US which taught India the costs of remaining dependent on food imports. During the India-Pakistan conflict in 1965, the US used wheat exports under PL-480 as a political tool to influence India’s policies. The then government decided to avoid the scourge of food import dependence and, therefore, being politically manipulated, by adopting the policy of self-sufficiency in foodgrains. This policy has remained a cornerstone of India’s agriculture policy over the past six decades.

President Trump’s decision to impose additional tariffs on India’s exports goes completely against the spirit of a BTA, which the two countries are currently negotiating. The “bilateral” spirit makes it

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imperative for the partners to consider their mutual gains for deepening long-term relationship. However, the US trade administration has been conducting the BTA negotiations under the overall rubric of President’s Trump’s “America First” trade policy, which seeks to “obtain export market access for American workers, farmers, ranchers, service providers, and other businesses”, disregarding the interests of the partner countries. President Trump is, therefore, seeking unilateral concessions from a trade partner while negotiating a bilateral agreement.

Finally, what are the likely costs of the Trump tariffs for India? The main concerns would be regarding two product groups that have substantial exposure to the US market, namely mobile phones and pharmaceuticals. Of these product groups which account for a fourth of India’s exports to the world’s largest economy, President Trump had excluded pharmaceuticals (along with copper, semiconductors, and lumber articles) from “reciprocal tariffs” during his initial announcement in April, and these exceptions are maintained in his July 31 announcement. So, while India’s pharmaceutical exports would remain unaffected, mobile phone exports could be affected. However, the tariff differentials between India and Southeast Asian countries, including Vietnam, are in the range of 5-6%, not large enough to pose a serious challenge to India in the short run.

As many countries have realised to their peril, excessive dependence on the US market can be extremely destabilising. Therefore, it would make eminent economic sense for India to diversify its exports through closer cooperation with the countries of the South. This would also be in sync with the government’s growing emphasis on the Global South.

Towards industrial self-reliance



The ministry of heavy industries is building an ecosystem aligned with a self-reliant and developed India, ensuring growth with inclusivity, innovation, and sustainability

INDIA’S INDUSTRIAL LANDSCAPE is undergoing a transformation, propelled by the ethos of *Aatmanirbharta*, a vision of self-reliance positioning our nation as a global leader in innovation and manufacturing. I have had the privilege of steering the vital ministry of heavy industries (MHI) under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. His clarion call for Aatmanirbhar Bharat and Viksit Bharat by 2047 guides our endeavours to foster a self-reliant industrial ecosystem. At the launch of the Make in India initiative in 2014, he envisioned, “A self-reliant India will not only meet its own needs but also lead the world in innovation and manufacturing by 2047.” This vision drives the MHI to champion self-reliance.

A New Bharat is taking shape—vibrant, sustainable, and poised to lead in innovation and green technology. This transformation is driven by a commitment to reimagine India’s industrial landscape, with the automobile sector at the forefront. The MHI is building an ecosystem that is aligned with a self-reliant and developed India, ensuring growth with inclusivity, innovation, and sustainability.

The Prime Minister envisions an India that is self-sufficient, technologically advanced, and a beacon of industrial excellence. Achieving net-zero emissions by 2070 is central to this vision, underscoring the urgency of transitioning to cleaner technologies. At the MHI, we are ensuring the automobile sector becomes a key driver in this journey.

Key initiatives

Production-linked incentive (PLI)

scheme for automobiles and auto components: Launched with an outlay of ₹25,938 crore for FY23 to FY27, it incentivises domestic manufacturing of advanced automotive technology (AAT) products. Investments of ₹29,576 crore till March have already been made against a target of ₹42,500 crore, with a cumulative sales increase of ₹2,31,500 crore expected over five years. As of April, six champion original equipment manufacturers and seven component champions have begun manufacturing AAT products with minimum 50% domestic value addition.

PLI scheme for advanced chemistry cell (ACC) battery manufacturing: With an allocation of ₹18,100 crore, it strengthens India’s position in the global electric vehicle market (EV) by incentivising advanced battery production and reducing import reliance. Investments from leading manufacturers are enabling high-quality, cost-effective batteries powering two-wheelers, three-wheelers, and buses.

Faster Adoption and Manufacturing of Electric Vehicles (FAME): FAME I (2015) and FAME II (2019) have been crucial in boosting EV adoption and charging infrastructure. These schemes expanded EV penetration and encouraged domestic production, laying the foundation for a robust EV ecosystem.

PM Electric Drive Revolution in Innovative Vehicle Enhancement (PM E-DRIIVE): Launched in September 2024,

this landmark scheme comprehensively supports the EV ecosystem. It targets electric two- and three-wheelers, e-buses, e-ambulances, and e-trucks, while modernising testing and certification infrastructure. Sales of electric two-wheelers surged from 1,565 units in FY15 to 11.50 lakh in FY25, and electric three-wheelers (L5) from 19 units to 1.59 lakh units during the same period.

E-bus deployment and charging infrastructure: The MHI has committed to deploying 10,900 e-buses in Delhi, Bengaluru, Hyderabad, Surat, and Ahmedabad, revolutionising urban transportation and reducing pollution. Additionally, ₹2,000 crore has been allocated for installing 22,100 fast chargers for e-4Ws, 1,800 for e-buses, and 48,400 for e-2W/3Ws in cities and highways.

SMEPCI: The Scheme to Promote Manufacturing of Electric Passenger Cars in India requires applicants to invest a minimum of ₹4,150 crore, further boosting the EV supply chain through innovation and skilling.

India is now the third-largest automobile market, overtaking Japan. EV sales rose from 2,343 units in FY15 to 19.67 lakh units in FY25. Guided by the Prime Minister’s vision, the EV revolution is accelerating, driven by transformative MHI initiatives and industry collaboration. NITI Aayog projects that by 2030, 70% of commercial cars, 30% of private cars, 40% of buses, and 80% of two- and three-

wheelers sold in India will be electric.

Capital goods sector growth: MHI’s Scheme for Enhancement of Competitiveness in the Indian Capital Goods Sector, launched in 2014 and expanded in 2022 with ₹1,207 crore, empowers micro, small, and medium enterprises through Samarth centres and advanced skilling programmes. India’s heavy electrical industries have grown from ₹1.59 lakh crore in FY15 to ₹3.84 lakh crore in FY25. Machine tools, printing machinery, textile machinery, and heavy construction equipment have all recorded threefold growth over the decade.

Rare earth magnets: Recognising their strategic importance for EV motors, wind turbines, and electronics, the MHI is building indigenous capacity in magnet manufacturing through R&D investments and strategic partnerships, reducing import dependence.

Looking ahead

The MHI is committed to fulfilling the PM’s vision of Aatmanirbhar Bharat and Viksit Bharat by 2047. By fostering public-private partnerships and leveraging accelerators like the CAMRAS (Centre for Advanced Manufacturing of Robotics and Autonomous Systems) programme at ARPARK, Indian Institute of Science, Bengaluru, India aims to lead in green technology, defence, space exploration, and industrial innovation.

Through these initiatives, we are reducing fossil fuel dependence, enhancing energy security, and positioning India as a global leader in sustainable transportation and industrial excellence.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Disadvantage India

Just a day after Trump announced 25% tariff against India, he used sharp words lashing out at New Delhi’s close ties with Russia and saying that Indian economy was a dead one. Adding insult to injury, Trump announced a trade deal with Pakistan and said the US will work with it to develop its massive oil reserves. Trump’s words now threaten to undo the hard work that had made the two

countries strategic partners and had been framed as the defining partnership of the 21st century by former US President Barack Obama. The icing on the cake was Trump hosting Pakistan Army Chief Asim Munir for lunch at the White House, which had much more on the menu. The diplomatic challenge now is three-fold—how long can Delhi stand its ground against the US, whether India can engage with Trump’s inner circle, and whether they can

overcome the distrust fuelled by Trump’s comments in the long term. —Sanjay Chopra, Mohali

Dealing with the US

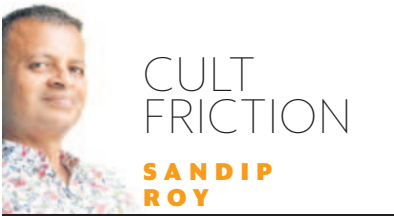
Apropos of “The reality check” (*FE*, August 1), India is caught between a rock and hard place where it is compelled to take a calculative move in ensuring a fair deal. The 25% tariffs, the undisclosed penalty on Russian oil imports, and a penalty on BRICS countries have exerted pressure on

India. After five rounds of negotiations, the US found at last that the Indian economy is dead. However, India knows its strengths and has a record of sustained growth post-Covid, which does not require any certification. India must be steadfast in resuming the trade talks with the US by spelling out the red lines on agriculture and dairy sectors. —RV Baskaran, Pune

●Write to us at feletters@expressindia.com

Don't understand a language? Enjoy the sound

It is oddly liberating to listen to the collage of sounds unique to a city without understanding the words



I looked and smelled like many other Indian markets. I could smell the jackfruit and guava, ripe and intoxicating. Women sold strands of white jasmine flowers and pink lotuses. A man was hawking a pile of multicoloured “Jockey” briefs of questionable provenance. The orange-yellow mangoes, a little longer and more lissome than I was used to, looked like the genuine article however. A goat nibbled at flower garlands strung around the front of a three-wheeler till the irate owner delivered a kick to its rear end. It all felt very familiar, yet I felt a stranger in my own country.

I understood nothing anyone was saying around me. In the bustling marketplace of Trichy everyone seemed to speak Tamil. Even the signs were mostly in Tamil. The usual smattering of English that is part and parcel of Indian metropolises was largely missing, except for an occasional store sign. Vasanth and Company promising “quality and trust” when it came to appliances, the mustachioed Mr Vasanth beaming at us from a billboard. Even the colas had different names from the ones I was used to. Now I could choose between Kalimark ice-cream sodas and Bovonto colas but I would have to choose blindly. The storekeeper was all smiles but could not understand my queries.

Having just visited the Rockfort temple, my forehead was smeared with sacred ash and I sported a *tilak*. I must have looked somewhat local. An elderly lady came up and asked me for help with something. I just smiled foolishly.

At first it felt a bit disconcerting as if cast out to sea without a life-jacket. As a writer I am used to eavesdropping on

conversations around me wherever I am. I tape interviews and select the clips that would move my narrative forward. There is power in that.

Here I was flailing, understanding neither head nor tail of the conversations in the market, at restaurants, in bars.

In hindsight that should not be so unusual in a language soup like India. India recognises 22 official languages. But the *People's Linguistic Survey of India* estimated in 2012 that there were at least 780 languages in India, putting it in the top 5 countries of the world, alongside Papua and New Guinea and Nigeria, when it came to linguistic diversity.

Some Indian languages are mind-bogglingly ancient. The Great Andamanese, for example, are descended from the first migrants from Africa some 70,000 years ago. Their language still retains archaic structures long lost even in the mother continent. For example, they divide the body into seven parts and prefix nouns and words with monosyllables that indicate the relevant part. Linguist Anvita Abbi says for the rest of us, blood is blood. But the Great Andamanese need to know where the blood is coming from. Blood from the forehead is a different word than blood from inside from internal bleeding. Cultural activist Ganesh Devi talks about how Indian languages had a richer palette of colour terms which started disappearing after synthetic colours were created in the 19th century. Even today Gondi has more colour terms than Hindi, he says.

This linguistic diversity should fill us with pride; instead it often scares us. Some politicians think India would be more united as a country if everyone could rally around one official language like Hindi. States that don't speak Hindi resent any whiff of imposition of Hindi on them whether as first, second or third language, fearing it's really Hindi by the backdoor. Language has become a means to rouse passions and mobilise voters. West Bengal chief minister



The linguistic diversity should fill us with pride. Instead, it often scares us. ISTOCKPHOTO

Mamata Banerjee hopes to do that, kicking off her 2026 election campaign earlier this week in Rabindranath Tagore's Bolpur, claiming that Bengali-speakers are facing discrimination in other parts of India. WhatsApp forwards are popping up, offering quick linguistic tests to tell Bangladeshis from Bengalis from this side of the border. Who calls water *pani* and who says *jol*? Who calls salt *lobon* and who calls it *noon*? Oddly as some linguists point out in the middle of these charged debates both *pani* and *jol* share Sanskrit roots. But the meanings of words, their antiquity, their etymology can all be used to divide people into “them” and “us”.

Recently, a Bengali journalist for a Bengali publication asked Bengali superstar Prosenjit Chatterjee a ques-

tion in Bengali at a press meet in Mumbai. Chatterjee, who knew the journalist well, wondered smilingly why she was asking the question in Bengali given that the event was happening in Mumbai. In these language-sensitive times, the clip went viral. Chatterjee was immediately pilloried for allegedly disrespecting his mother tongue. He had to issue an official statement to explain that he was just trying to be sensitive to the linguistic preferences of everyone around him, requesting people to not read anything more into it.

In Trichy, words for me were suddenly leached of meaning. At first I felt as if I needed an interpreter. But slowly as I got used to the noise around me I realised what a relief it was to just experience a city without trying to eaves-

drop on its conversations. I didn't have to make sense of the words. I could just listen to the soundscape of the city.

At the Ranganathaswamy temple in Srirangam, as a flock of parrots suddenly took flight, I could listen to their squawks echoing around the candy colours of the *gopuram*. Lakshmi, the temple elephant, gently harrumphed as she took currency notes from devotees.

As I walked into the sanctum sanctorum of Andral, the only female saint of Tamil Vaishnavites, I came upon a group of elderly women singing together. They stood in a cluster, their white hair glowing, their saris, parrot green, teal blue, deep purple, almost iridescent in the lamp-lit darkness of the temple, their voices rising and falling hypnotically while the priest's little bell

tinkled.

I could not understand a word they were singing but I could have listened for hours. Later my writer friend Sudha Tilak told me those were verses from the *Tiruppavai* by Andal, songs of love, devotion and food. In one, Tilak said, Andal writes about her *akkara adisil*, a porridge made of rice and *ghee*, describing it as having “golden ghee that would melt and run down from the palms to the elbows.” I understood none of this when I heard the women singing but it didn't matter. The sweetness still came through.

Instead of listening for the meaning I could just listen to the sound of the words the way one feels a piece of fabric, its texture, its colour, its sheen. It was oddly liberating to listen to a collage of sounds of a city without reaching for a dictionary to figure out its meaning. Raw sound has its own beauty.

Later on that same trip I walked into an old Danish fort museum in Tharangambadi or Tranquebar. It had a modest little museum. Danish weapons, documents and ancient Tamil sculptures were just piled haphazardly around. In one corner was a giant whalebone weathered white by the sun.

A man asked me what it was. He spoke no English or Hindi. I spoke no Tamil. Whale, I said hesitantly. He looked confused. Big fish, I said somewhat incorrectly. That was no help either. For a moment we were stuck on either side of the language divide. Suddenly I had a brainwave. I opened my notebook and drew a cartoonish whale.

Oh like with a spout of water, he pantomimed. I drew a spout as well. He chortled and brought over his wife and children to admire my creation. And we beamed at each other because somehow despite having no language in common we had managed to be on the same page.

Cult Friction is a fortnightly column on issues we keep rubbing up against. Sandip Roy is a writer, journalist and radio host. He posts @sandipr.

'Vajpayee made Hindutva electable, respectable'

Author Abhishek Choudhary speaks about his two-volume study of Vajpayee and why he doesn't like to call it a biography

Gulam Jeelani Gilkar
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The late Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader and former Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee remains the first authentic “hero” from the Hindu right who was respected across the political spectrum, believes writer Abhishek Choudhary, who recently published the second volume of his biography of the man.

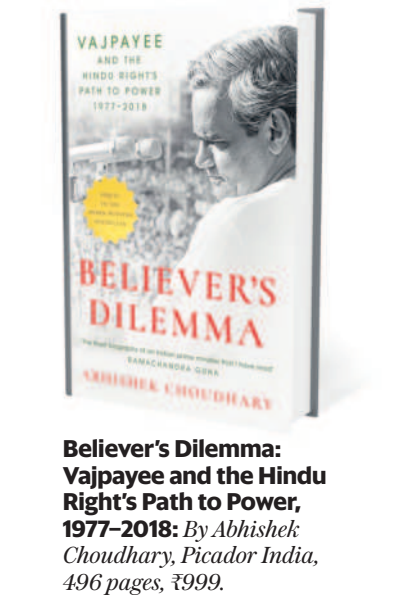
Divided into four parts, *Believer's Dilemma: Vajpayee and the Hindu Right's Path to Power (1977-2018)* examines the rise of the Hindu right from the end of the Emergency in 1977 to 2018, when Vajpayee died. Based on years of archival research, the book chronicles how the fall of institutions, mistakes made by the Congress Party, and fears of change were key to the ascent of Hindutva politics in India.

As Choudhary shows, Vajpayee played a key role in this phenomenon. Among his many contributions was helping the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) function as India's “deep nation,” which Choudhary describes as a parallel moral-political order shaping institutions without holding any formal power.

In an interview with *Lounge*, Choudhary spoke about his journey as a writer, why he doesn't like labelling his books as biography, and Vajpayee's role in bringing the Hindu right into the political mainstream. Edited excerpts:

Can you tell us a bit about the broad scope of this sequel?

Even though my new book is a sequel, it can easily be read independently. It picks up the thread from 1977 and charts out



how we arrived at our present political moment. It covers the years from the Janata Party's installation as the first non-Congress government until Vajpayee's final stroke-crippled vote against the nuclear deal (in 2008). I also write about the years 2009-2025 in the preface.

My broad argument is that India's tragedies implicate many of the Sangh Parivar's present-day haters. Attributing the Hindu right's early success solely to the demolition of Babri Masjid in Ayodhya in 1992 is lazy and misleading. Instead, I explain the sociological universe in which the Hindu right operated. I describe the Congress's role in plummeting the credibility of state institutions, the demise of global communism, and the rise of pan-Islamic militancy. Hindutva benefited by merging historical victimhood with new sociological and geopolitical neuroses.

Where did the title come from?

The title came long before the book did. It was sometime in late 2015, in my early days of visiting the Teen Murti Library archives (in New Delhi) to see whether a book like this was even possible. One weekend the phrase just arrived. I'm a failed economist, and it may have subconsciously come as a pun on “the prisoner's dilemma” problem from game theory. It seemed to capture what I intended to say.

Since then I have tried hard but never found a better—or a less worse—title.

The manuscript overshoot the proposed length and became three times its planned size. So my publisher and I split the book, and landed on *Vajpayee: The Ascent of the Hindu Right, 1924-1977* as the first volume. But I began regretting the change almost immediately. So, I reverted to the original title for the second volume.

Is Vajpayee still relevant in today's polity?

Vajpayee is relevant, and will stay so, because he is now firmly, if sometimes grudgingly, part of the Hindu-right iconography. If Vinayak Damodar Savarkar was the ideologue and M.S. Golwalkar the organiser, Vajpayee was the bridge, the persuader. He made Hindutva electable, respectable. We will keep oscillating every few decades towards a wobbly coalition era, and he will remain a study in successfully managing the contradictions.

There is often a comparison made between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Vajpayee.

Yes, and it bores me. It's like trying to quantify whether going from zero to X is more crucial than going from X to 2X. Sangh Parivar is irritated by hyper-fixation on superstars. What matters is that the RSS is among the few right-wing organisations in the world still expanding steadily in its centenary year. Vajpayee helped the Sangh Parivar function as India's “deep nation”.

Did you come upon any striking surprises while writing the book?

Let me emphasise just one. The familiar but clichéd explanation for the Janata Party's disintegration is that some members of it continued to hold “dual membership” of the RSS. In truth that was secondary. The most significant reason was that the Janata elders—especially Morarji Desai—failed to give former prime minister and party member Chaudhary Charan Singh or his middle-caste constituency their due. Neither Janata nor successive Congress governments grasped the sociological undercurrents.

Then, in 1990, the middle castes broke the door open. Suddenly we had Lalu Prasad Yadav in Bihar, Mulayam Singh Yadav in Uttar Pradesh, and a few months later, the Mandal Commission imbroglio.



Atal Behari Vajpayee on his first day after assuming charge as the Prime Minister. GETTY IMAGES

Lal Krishna Advani began his *rath yatra* partly to save a BJP vertically split on Mandal. Now we have a middle-caste Prime Minister. We will likely never again have a long spell by an upper-caste Prime Minister, and that's not such a bad thing.

We know little about the personal lives of most Prime Ministers, but a lot has been talked about Vajpayee's.

Neither is entirely true. In Vajpayee's case, the curiosity stems from the fact that he was never formally married. But the interest has mostly been salacious. No one before me wrote about the most fundamental fact: that he had a biological daughter. That one detail puts his life in perspective—including how the Prime Minister's Office-Prime Minister's family axis came to wield such a colossal clout during his years in office.

In a recent social media post you said

Based on archival research, the book chronicles how the fall of institutions, mistakes made by the Congress, and fears of change were key to the rise of Hindutva politics

you felt uneasy with your work being labelled 'biography'.

I'm uneasy with the label because, in our part of the world, a biography often ends up worshipping a great man (sometimes a great woman). That's not how I saw the life-writing craft—whether full-length books or journalistic or literary profiles—when I first began reading them seriously in my early 20s. My kick was to study the making of political power in its myriad ways.

Something shifted when I began working full-time on the book from 2017. The country was entering a phase of schizophrenic polarisation, one that continues. In that climate, anyone researching a right-wing icon raised suspicion. I got the cold shoulder from a certain section of the literati. Although I got stung, deep inside I know that this is an elite bubble, which, when faced with Hindutva populism, has retreated into the comfort of old social capital, and are content churning out op-eds with empty progressive clichés.

I never doubt their intentions to resist majoritarianism. But the truth is: few have bothered to make a real psychological or sociological inquiry of the aspirations and anxieties of the bottom 75%.

Can you briefly tell us about the process of your research?

My research process is terribly slow. After I got the New India Foundation (NIF) fellowship in 2017, I tried to look at every primary material on the Sangh Parivar I

could find from across the world. I also scanned the archives of dozens of newspapers and journals. I kept filing the material chronologically—by year, by date. In late summer 2019, once everything was in, including all interviews transcribed, I took printouts of the entire material. I would read a thousand pages, discern patterns, and write a first draft.

After completing three drafts, I would send three or four chapters to (writer and editors) Rivka Israel and Ramachandra Guha at the NIF, which funded the writing of the book. Since 2021, my agent Shruti Debi has been reading the chapters too, and her sharp comments are one of the reasons the second volume took so long to rework.

After the 1960s, the archives dry up—there aren't even the basic intel files that other third-rate democracies release. As for the Sangh Parivar, there is very little of value in their archives.

On the personal front, I was not born into humongous social capital. A project like this requires access at the highest level, and it took me much longer than it otherwise would have. Then there is the question of sustenance. I managed to win a few fellowships and residences along the way. But it's not a sustainable model. Towards the end, I was perpetually at the edge of anger. You could say that is the story of most struggling writers everywhere.



The IndianEXPRESS

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RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

THE CRUDE FACT

How much India should trade with any country must be guided by its own national interest, not Western diktat

BETWEEN 2020-21 AND 2024-25, India's imports from Russia have soared from \$5.5 billion to \$63.8 billion, much of it on account of mineral fuels (\$2.1 billion to \$56.9 billion). Out of the 244.5 million tonnes (mt) of crude petroleum that India imported last fiscal, Russia's share was over 87.5 mt, making it the country's top supplier. It's this trade that US President Donald Trump is now targeting by threatening to levy a "penalty", on top of the 25 per cent general tariff on Indian goods imports that he announced on Wednesday. By not specifying how much that additional penalty would be, he is basically nudging India to cut down, if not stop, energy (and defence) purchases from Russia. This comes just over two weeks after NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte warned India, China and Brazil of secondary sanctions if they continued to do business with Russia and help sustain its current war spending against Ukraine.

Whatever be the quantum, if at all, of the penalty — a new bill introduced in the US Congress seeks to impose a 500 per cent duty on all goods and services imports from countries "that knowingly engage in the exchange of Russian-origin uranium and petroleum products" — one thing is certain: The Western sanctions noose is tightening. For India, too, buying Russian oil cannot be business as before. The Narendra Modi government has so far — rightly — not been defensive over massively stepping up sourcing of Russian crude that is available at a discount relative to global benchmark prices. It has cited both the need to prioritise the energy security of India's people as well as the fact that the ban on imports of Russian oil by the US or European Union is not covered under any United Nations sanctions. That argument — about the purchase of this oil being well within India's legitimate and moral rights — still holds.

Pragmatic and matter-of-fact considerations have informed its expanding trade with Russia, even at the risk of Western displeasure, but at the same time, there are geopolitical costs. Those costs could significantly go up, as the EU and US (the Trump administration seems to have closed ranks) increasingly strike at Russia's war machine by targeting its energy revenue streams. That nearly 36 per cent of India's crude imports come from a single country isn't good in the best and safest of times. Prudence demands — and this is important from the standpoint of securing the country's long-term energy security — that costs beyond the immediate also be factored in. That would mean diversifying the sources of oil supply, similar to de-risking trade with China. Whether and how much India should trade with any country must be guided by its own national interest.

HERE COMES NISAR

The satellite, which could be a game-changer, is a reminder that high science requires global collaborations

THE LAUNCH OF the world's first remote sensing satellite, Sputnik 1, heralded the era of remote sensing. Since that epic moment in 1957, hundreds of Earth observation satellites have enhanced the understanding of the planet. The NISAR satellite, launched on Wednesday, will capture details on the Earth's surface, which are stunning even by the high standards set in remote sensing in the past 68 years. The satellite, jointly operated by India's premier space research agency ISRO and NASA, will generate 80 TB of data every day, three times more than any other existing Earth observation systems. It will enhance the understanding of ecosystems and enable the study of natural hazards such as earthquakes and landslides at a time when the chances of such environmental threats are much higher compared to any other period in recent human history. NISAR's radar systems will scan nearly all the planet's land and ice surfaces twice every 12 days, tracking shifts as slight as a centimetre. The satellite will be able to see through clouds, smoke, and even thick vegetation, both during the day and at night, in all weather conditions. The information is likely to be available in a matter of hours, enabling governments and even local communities to frame urgent responses during extreme weather events such as floods and storms. NISAR, therefore, promises to be a game-changer in disaster management.

The satellite's power comes from its two synthetic aperture radars (SARs), which are designed to capture complementary sets of images for the same location at the same time. This will provide a much more detailed view of the Earth compared to what has been possible so far. One of the radars can capture minute details, including the planet's undulations, and study trees even in dense forests — this can help estimate carbon stocks. The other SAR, which has a shorter wavelength, is equipped to capture features such as water bodies or fields and provide data on soil moisture and the maturity stages of crops. This could help agriculture research agencies pass on crucial information to farming communities.

Placing two SARs on one satellite was a major engineering challenge. That's one reason NISAR was more than 15 years in the making. The project was initiated by NASA in 2008. ISRO joined the endeavour four years later. The Indian space agency's contribution was crucial to the mission. It designed and built one of the radar systems, created the data handling and downlinking systems and provided NISAR's launch vehicle, the GSLV-F16. The collaboration was spared the funding cuts inflicted on NASA by the Trump administration. Its success is a message to the US President that high science is almost impossible without meaningful partnerships between nations.

SOMETHING ABOUT JEANS

American Eagle ads tried to fit in with the kids — till they didn't

WHAT DO THE biggest corporations in the world and that annoying uncle/aunt in every family have in common? They're both try-hards — attempting "coolness" to fit in with the kids. The latest desperate attempt at this "coolness" comes from clothing and accessories retailer American Eagle through a series of advertisements starring Sydney Sweeney. Unfortunately for the company, these have backfired and received widespread flak for "pandering to the male and White gaze." One of them has a lingering close-up of Sweeney's chest, another features her pasting a poster that reads: "Sydney Sweeney has great ~~genes~~ jeans." An ad that has been taken down by the company — it has been criticised as eugenics-speak — has Sweeney saying, "Genes are passed down from parents to offspring, often determining traits like hair colour, personality, and even eye colour. My jeans are blue."

From the woke moment half a decade ago to today, companies have made attempts, often clumsily, to tap into the political zeitgeist. At a time when the dominant political force in the US is rooting for "traditional" gender roles, and flirting with White supremacy, the American Eagle ad evidently attempted to reap the cultural moment. For companies looking for opportunities to balloon their profit margins, this is par for the course. Except when it runs into controversy. Remember the 2017 Pepsi commercial starring Kendall Jenner? When the Black Lives Matter movement was at the centre of the news cycle following incidents of police brutality and the acquittal of the alleged killers of Philando Castile, the ad featured Jenner walking up to a policeman, Pepsi in hand, while participating in a nondescript protest. Needless to say, it was ill received.

At the heart of it is a bottom line: If companies like American Eagle and Pepsi have one cause, it is to never lose a customer (read: Profit). A boycott, outrage and a half-hearted apology later, Pepsi learnt the lesson American Eagle might now wake up to. It goes something like this: Dear companies, a sure-shot way to avoid hot water? Stop trying so hard to play "cool".



RAJAT KATHURIA

TWO DECADES AGO, the idea of a trade deal between India and the US seemed pure fantasy. After all, the divide between the two on tariffs, standards and double standards, to be mischievous, seemed irreconcilable. Two decades, however, is a significant period in economic development — and an eternity in politics. Today, change is so rapid that what looked impractical just yesterday appeared to be within the realm of possibility. Or so it seemed.

How did we even get here? India's recent shift in trade diplomacy, moving from a cautious approach to actively pursuing free trade agreements, reflects a strategic imperative to diversify trade partnerships and enhance its position in global supply chains. It is also a reflection of the need to explore alternatives to trade liberalisation, albeit guardedly, to the multilateral system, currently in an extended coma. This pivot is therefore driven by self-interest, the desire to expand exports, attract investment and counter potential geopolitical headwinds.

For President Donald Trump, trade diplomacy is the equivalent of levying punitive import tariffs on those countries that he believes have free-ridden on the open US market for decades. The script aimed at the MAGA constituency is irresistible: Use tariffs as a negotiating tool to extract concessions from "errant" trading partners, bump up government revenues, reduce, or better, eliminate trade deficits and bring manufacturing back home to America. The fact that none of this, except strong-arming the EU, Japan, Vietnam, Indonesia, South Korea and perhaps India into concessions, will work does not restrain the President and his advisors for too long and need not detain us either. Trade deficits and limited but key manufacturing are manifestations of structural features of the US economy, but let that be a topic for another day.

For now, POTUS has announced a significant hardening of the trade stance against India, declaring a 25 per cent tariff on Indian exports effective August 1. The mini trade deal between India and US that was to be agreed upon after being deferred to August 1 is deferred again, but hopefully not abandoned. The 25 per cent threat, almost the same as the

Donald Trump's latest salvo is a negotiating strategy. The India-US trade talks will go on

What, then, could have been the sticking point? Perhaps agriculture and dairy. It is no secret that US lobbies are looking to sell more cheese, milk, maize, soy, corn, and other similar GM products. Throw in nuts and some fruits and you have the makings of a potential disruptor to the vast agriculture, including the dairy sector, in India, that accounts for roughly 45 per cent of employment. For India, this has been a red line due to the overwhelming number of small farmers, not to speak of potentially damaging political consequences.

unenforced April 2 "Liberation Day" tariff of 26 per cent, is accompanied by an additional, as-yet-unspecified "penalty" for India's continued substantial purchases of crude oil and defence equipment from Russia. The official justifications are India's "far too high" tariffs, its "most strenuous and obnoxious non-monetary trade barriers", and its strong energy and military ties with Russia. The fact that the President described India as a "friend" in the same breath softens the blow, leaving the door ajar for further negotiations, but does nothing to alleviate his transactional nature, disregarding the harsh asymmetries in levels of development between India and the US. Thus, restoring the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) under which India gets non-reciprocal, duty-free treatment for several products to push development, while on the negotiating table, looks improbable even if US per capita income at \$90,000 is 30 times that of India. Even if it were on the table, it is unlikely to have been a sticking point. A fallout of that is a dubious but de facto acknowledgement of the blunt narrative that India is the fastest-growing emerging market and soon to be fourth-largest global economy. In private, I think all negotiators will admit it is not a match of equals. In the parlance of golf, a handicap such as the GSP is justified.

What, then, could have been the sticking point? Perhaps agriculture and dairy. It is no secret that US lobbies are looking to sell more cheese, milk, maize, soy, corn, and other similar GM products. Throw in nuts and some fruits and you have the makings of a potential disruptor to the vast agriculture, including the dairy sector, in India, that accounts for roughly 45 per cent of employment. For India, this has been a red line due to the overwhelming number of small farmers, not to speak of potentially damaging political consequences.

Allowing highly subsidised US farm produce would spell political disaster. Especially, when the government has had to face severe criticism on the unsuccessful doubling of farmer income policy. Besides, the infamous farm laws had to be withdrawn and farmer protests managed. In this background, even a nuanced and limited opening of agriculture that protects small

farmer interest, as some have argued, would fall prey to a carefully constructed narrative of the deal being anti-farmer, and therefore, against national interest. For this reason, India has maintained this stance in recent FTAs with Australia and the UK.

The US negotiators perhaps already know this only too well. President Trump's latest salvo is no doubt a negotiating strategy, buoyed in part by the success of similar threats to other countries. For example, the US signed a significant agreement in July with the European Union (EU), where the EU agreed to a 15 per cent tariff on most European goods, down from a threatened 30 per cent. Ditto for Vietnam (from 46 per cent to 20 per cent), Indonesia (from 32 per cent to 19 per cent) and Japan (from 25 per cent to 15 per cent).

Some of these countries are our competitors for labour-intensive products such as jewellery, textiles, footwear, leather, toys and handicrafts and will have cheaper access into the US market, at least for now. Coercion has been defined as success in the US and countries have caved in to mitigate the risk of even greater economic disruption to their economies. India might be willing to give concessions in areas like data localisation requirements, digital services taxes and even digital trade rules. It should be noted that India abolished the Equalisation Levy, aka the "Google Tax", in 2024. It was a tax measure on digital transactions by non-resident companies earning revenue from users in India without a physical presence. Agriculture, however, is a different kettle of fish.

What a difference a few weeks has made. From being "very close" to being completed, the India-US mini deal hangs in the balance, although it is by no means dead. Scarlett O'Hara's line from *Gone with the Wind* — "tomorrow is another day" — captures the enduring optimism, but in the present, it reflects a capricious and fragile global state in which uncertainty reigns supreme and the exercise of discretion is a crafty manifestation of power.

The writer is dean, School of Humanities and Social Sciences, and professor of Economics at Shiv Nadar University. Views are personal



SHALINI LANGER

LOVE CAN STRIKE you across a room, a glance that parts a crowd; or it can hang as a question mark at the end of an incomplete encounter. More often than one likes to admit, though, love is what cannot be.

The best of love stories capture this yearning, this gap between probability and impossibility.

So, in the absence of obstacles, can there be a great love, one that makes it to stories? Or, can you only have a *Saiyaara*, a product of our times where every gratification is a phone click away — even Alzheimer's, a convenient inconvenience driving this story's plot?

But what is writer-director Mohit Suri to do, when nothing such as caste, class, religion, parents, society, even unsatiated raging hormones, seem now to stand in the way?

Whither the meaningless bus or auto rides just to hold hands? Whither the notes to be exchanged which could catch the wrong eyes? Whither the public places and the watchful unapproving glares? Whither the small salaries and unaffordable restaurants? Whither the long periods of not seeing, not hearing, not knowing? Whither that sudden sense of a presence, the tingle at the back of your neck or in the pit of your stomach? Whither even the lovers' tiffs that were waged only to be resolved?

Whither, whither, whither... However, as one raised on Shah Rukh Khan, and one raising two youngsters who

NOT LOVE, ACTUALLY

We need a new love story for the new age. 'Saiyyara' is not that

purportedly inhabit the *Saiyaara* world, let's give it to Gen Z that they deserve more credit than the film gives its two leads.

Just past 20 and getting married, in court? Getting dumped even as you are writing ever more love ditties into a notebook with seemingly endless pages? Falling for, and being whizzed around town helmetlessly and recklessly, by a guy with anger issues? Watching gooey-eyed as the guy barges into a newspaper office and bashes up a journalist over an article, and walks away unscathed? Picking fights with your friends and being generally a jerk, and being taken back by them, again and again?

Interning in the hope of a job and spending barely any time in the office? Getting record deals and tours, and having money and success fall into your lap as you sulk and skulk your way through life? Having a curfew hour of 8.30 pm on one hand, while aspiring to be a journalist, and then enjoying days of unencumbered bliss in a seaside, wind-swept cottage with a guy, on the other? Disappearing into an internet black hole so as to nurse your Alzheimer's in private, leaving your loved ones in the dark? And reappearing with not a hair harmed, or life interrupted for a second, out of an ashram in the hills?

As any adult would tell you, uh uh, that's not how it works.

As any parent would tell you, even Gen Z knows that. As self-centred or myopic as their universe seems — or maybe because it

is so — the young now are more preternaturally attuned against such self-destructiveness. Love may seem overwhelmingly blinding in these show-all, tell-all times, but love-blind our young are not.

And that's not the only problem with *Saiyaara*. There still are love stories to be told reflecting new tensions of the new age, even on Bollywood's slickly flattened canvas. *Badhaai Do* (2022), for example, about two homosexual individuals bound in a heterosexual marriage, conveyed more sizzle in just one person nudging the other with a shoe.

Plus, a better love story lies on the other side of where *Saiyaara* ends. Of two people living together, as one loses his or her memory — though even that is a story that has been told before (*50 First Dates* springs to mind, for starters).

So all the young out there, take this from a wiser, older romantic: Accept *Saiyaara* for what it is, a film that needs an IV shot of hype to give it a life, and not the last word on modern love.

Some things need not be "made new" after all — two people, one umbrella and a rain-soaked night; two people, mustard fields and a mandolin; or as Ahmad Faraz wrote for the ages, "*maana ke mohabbat ka chhupana hai mohabbat... chupke se kisi roz jataane ke liye aa* (Granted that love is all about hiding love... one day, even if silently, come show me)".

shalini.langer@expressindia.com

AUGUST 2, 1985, FORTY YEARS AGO

WHO KILLED MAKENS

LALIT MAKEN AND his wife, Geetanjali, were in all probability victims of terrorist bullets, police sources said. According to the sources, all the leads uncovered so far seem to indicate the involvement of terrorists rather than trade union or political rivals — particularly the sophisticated weapons used and the modus operandi of the killers. Although they are still trying to confirm whether the weapons were Sten guns or semi-automatic Mauser pistols, police suspicions are on the latter.

CHINKS IN SECURITY

HOME MINISTER S B Chavan's statement and

replies in both houses of Parliament on Thursday over the assassination of Lok Sabha member Lalit Maken and his wife, while failing to quench the anguish and concern being felt by members both inside and outside the houses, also laid bare the bureaucratic and procedural loopholes in the intelligence and law-and-order machinery in the capital. One question that was agitating the members was why Maken's security guard was withdrawn just two days before the assassination.

INDO-PAK TALKS

INDIA IS UNDERSTOOD to have again conveyed to Pakistan during the current round of talks between the foreign secretaries of the two

countries its grave concern about the assistance that the terrorists had been getting from across the border. It is understood that the concern was also about Pakistan's nuclear programme.

SHARING GANGA WATERS

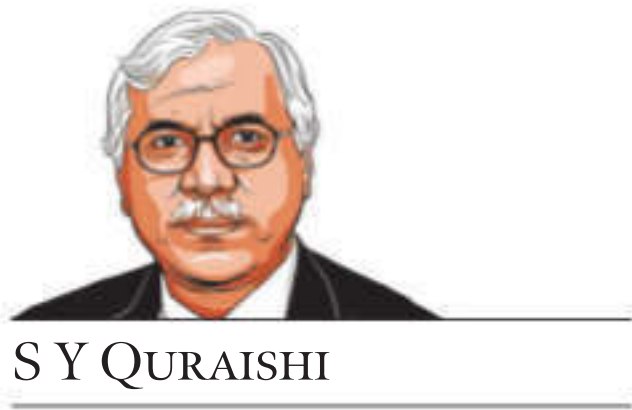
INDIA MADE A gesture of goodwill towards Bangladesh when it reportedly agreed to sign a fresh agreement on sharing of Ganga waters. Sources close to the Bangladesh Foreign Ministry said Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's special envoy, Shiv Shankar, during a meeting with President Ershad indicated the country's willingness to renew the agreement, which expired on January 31 this year. It may be made functional for three to five years.



THE IDEAS PAGE

A democracy grown at home

In referring to elections under the Cholas, PM invoked a historical truth, of indigenous traditions of collective decision-making, anchored in ethics, equity, and participation



S Y QURAISHI

WHEN PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi stood in the ancient temple town of Gangaikonda Cholapuram on July 27 and declared that Indian democracy predated the Magna Carta, he was not engaging in rhetoric — he was invoking a historical truth that has too often been forgotten.

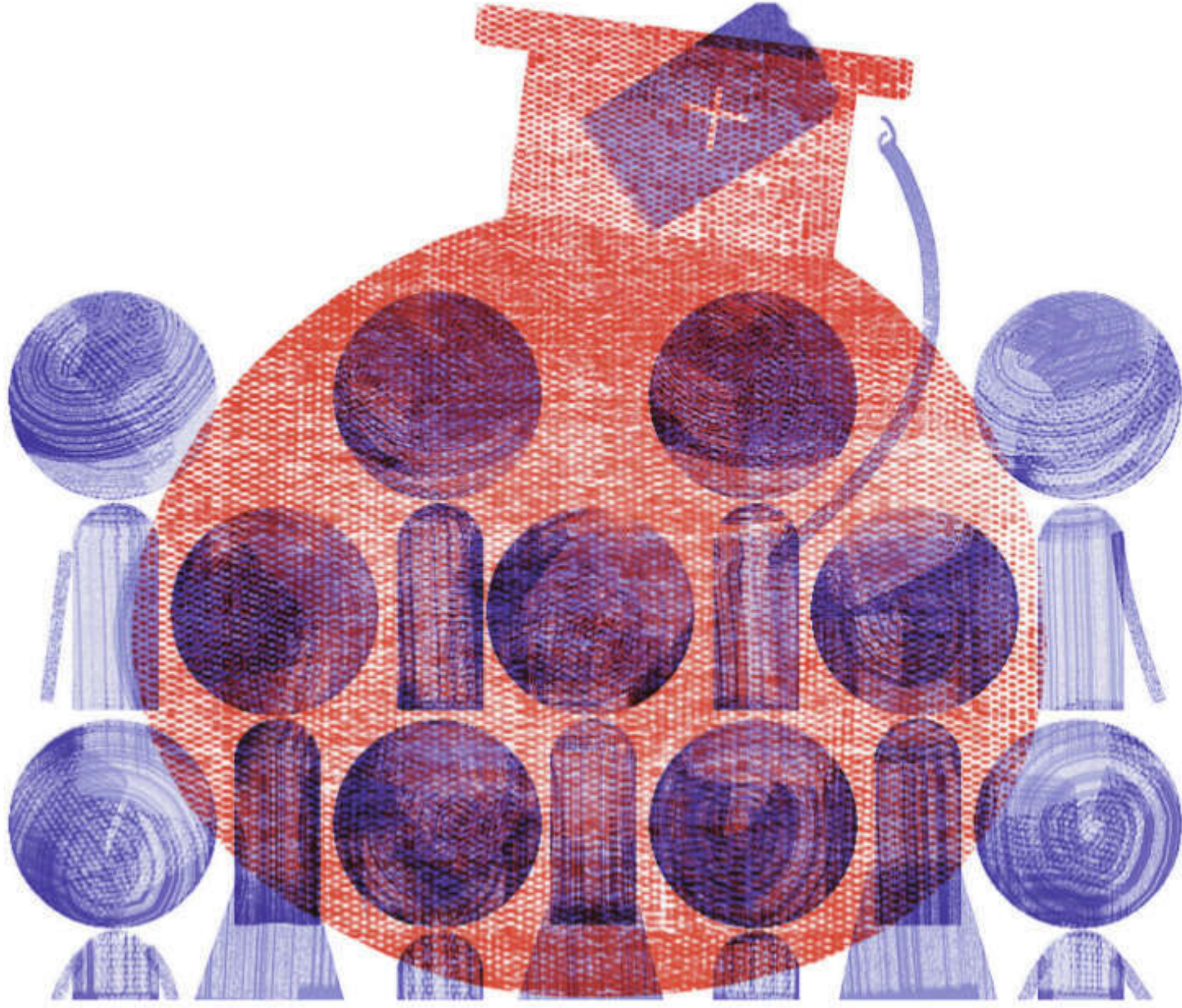
The *Indian Express* the next day carried a striking headline: ‘Long before Magna Carta, Cholas had ‘ballot pots’: What is the ancient voting system PM Modi lauded?’ The story detailed the astonishing sophistication of local elections held over 1,000 years ago in Tamil Nadu under the Chola dynasty, particularly in the village of Uthiramerur in Kancheepuram district. But the deeper message was one of reclaiming pride in a democratic legacy that is indigenous, ancient, and rigorously codified.

A decade ago, I had written about this in my book, *An Undocumented Wonder – The Making of the Great Indian Election* (2014). India was not entirely new to the concept of democracy as there is credible evidence that it existed in the country in various forms as early as the fifth century BCE. In small communities, villages and tribal societies, participation in decision-making through discussions was the normal practice.

Kautilya also describes, in his *Arthashastra*, the role of *samghas* or local unions and how the state can rule more efficiently through these structures. It is interesting to note that property and education were considered essential qualifications for a candidate. There was a maximum age limit of 70 years for contesting elections. Those deemed corrupt, tainted or guilty of moral turpitude were disqualified, as were their close relatives.

An inscription in Vaikuntaperumal temple in Uthiramerur, dated around 920 AD, during the reign of Parantaka Chola, gives astonishing details about the constitution of wards, the qualification of candidates standing for elections, of disqualification norms, the mode of election, the constitution of committees with elected members, the functions of these committees, the power to remove the wrongdoers etc. The villagers even had the right to recall the elected representatives if they failed in their duty. There were not just consultations of elders or feudal councils — they were genuine self-governing village republics, electing representatives through a system that is uncannily reminiscent of modern democratic principles.

The electoral process used in Uthiramerur was called the *kudavolai* system, or “ballot pot”. Names of eligible candidates were inscribed on palm leaves and placed into an earthen pot. A young, impartial boy — untainted by local politics — was chosen to draw the slips in public view. This ensured both transparency and neutrality. The selected members served for fixed one-year terms, after which the process was repeated.



CR Sasikumar

But the real marvel was not just in the voting method. It was in the comprehensive model code of conduct that governed who could contest, how they could be removed, and what moral standards were expected. To stand for election, a candidate had to be between 35 and 70 years of age, own tax-paying land, reside in a house built on that land and be well-versed in sacred texts or administrative procedures.

Those who had defaulted on debts, consumed alcohol, committed moral transgressions, or failed to present accounts from earlier office were automatically disqualified. What’s more, even close relatives of such individuals were ineligible. The idea was to purify public life — to ensure that those in power were beyond reproach.

There were also strict provisions for removal and disqualification. Anyone found guilty of embezzlement or dereliction of duty was not only removed from office but also barred from standing for re-election — sometimes for up to seven generations. Compare that to today’s politics, where convicted politicians return to the electoral fray with impunity, and the contrast is striking.

These ancient village republics represent a remarkably advanced model of participatory democracy. The elections were not just rituals; they were mechanisms of civic accountability backed by enforceable codes. The resonance with the Chola code is more than symbolic. It affirms that India’s democratic ethos has been shaped not only by its Constitution but by its civilisational DNA.

An inscription in Vaikuntaperumal temple in Uthiramerur, dated around 920 AD, in the reign of Parantaka Chola, gives astonishing details about the constitution of wards, the qualification of candidates standing for elections, of the disqualification norms, the mode of election, the constitution of committees with elected members, the functions of these committees, the power to remove the wrongdoers etc.

This is not to deny the contributions of British parliamentary traditions or the American Bill of Rights. But India’s democratic spirit did not begin in 1947, 1935, or even 1919. It stretches back to Vaishali, one of the world’s first known republics, and flourishes in the inscriptions of Uthiramerur, where the ideals of transparency, eligibility, accountability, and citizen participation were inscribed in stone — literally.

The Prime Minister’s invocation of this legacy is both timely and necessary. At a moment when democracy across the world is under pressure — from authoritarian populism, money power, disinformation, and shrinking civic space — it is vital to remind ourselves that India’s democracy is not a borrowed robe. It is rooted in indigenous traditions of collective decision-making, anchored in values of ethics, equity, and participation.

As the custodian of the world’s largest electoral exercise, the Election Commission of India must draw confidence not just from contemporary jurisprudence but from our own history.

Far from being a borrowed idea, democracy was homegrown, deeply institutionalised, and ethically bound, I had written in my book. It would be foolhardy to deny that India is the mother of democracy worldwide.

The writer is former Chief Election Commissioner of India and the author of An Undocumented Wonder — The Making of the Great Indian Election

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

“In securing a 20 percent tariff rate from Washington, Dhaka has navigated a perilous new era of US trade diplomacy.” — THE DAILY STAR, BANGLADESH

Operation Sindoor loose ends

It saw the readiness and capability of our armed forces. But even after the Parliament debate, there are lingering questions



NIRUPAMA RAO

IN THE AFTERMATH of the Pahalgam terror attack, Operation Sindoor was executed with admirable precision and purpose. The nation witnessed the readiness of our armed forces, the speed of response, and the confidence with which cross-border strikes were conducted. These are not small achievements. They reflect an India that no longer hesitates to act in defence of its people and territory.

Yet, amid the expressions of solidarity and triumph, a set of questions still lingers — questions that were not answered in Parliament, nor addressed in the official statements that followed. As someone who has served within the machinery of the Indian state, I believe these questions deserve not only to be asked, but to be sustained in the national memory. For, a nation’s strength is not merely defined by its ability to retaliate, but by its commitment to learning from what precedes the need for retaliation.

The first duty of the state is to prevent. That a group of terrorists could infiltrate and carry out a devastating attack in one of Kashmir’s most surveilled and strategically vital regions signals a breach not only of physical security, but of institutional coordination.

Where was the lapse? Was it a failure of intelligence collection, analysis, or dissemination? Were inter-agency protocols followed — or bypassed? What assessment has been made of the local support structures that enabled such movement? These are not peripheral queries. They go to the core of whether our deterrence posture is genuinely effective or primarily reactive.

The recent parliamentary debate was a welcome recognition that national security cannot be left to press briefings alone. But even as it brought key voices to the fore, the tenor of the conversation — on both sides — often veered toward performance rather than policy.

The Prime Minister was emphatic in defending the government’s response and underlined the support India received globally. Yet, one sensed a reluctance to dwell on the preceding failures that made a response necessary in the first place. That is the space Parliament is meant to occupy — not to second-guess real-time decisions, but to seek clarity about the frameworks that produced those decisions.

One is reminded that in parliamentary democracies, asking difficult questions is not defiance; it is duty. The absence of candour in response to such questions may win applause in the moment, but it leaves our systems unexamined and untested.

Among the more troubling loose ends is the claim by US President Donald Trump that he played a role in mediating a ceasefire during the standoff. While such assertions may not always be grounded in precise fact, the absence of a firm, official

rebuttal has only allowed ambiguity to grow. India has long prided itself on strategic autonomy. Our ability to act — and be seen to act — without external pressure is fundamental to the credibility of our security doctrine. To leave that credibility open to reinterpretation is to invite misperception not only among adversaries but also among allies.

Silence, in such cases, is not strategic restraint. It can be construed as tacit consent — or worse, uncertainty.

India’s deterrence posture has evolved in practice, but it remains largely undefined in principle. Repeatedly, we have responded forcefully to provocations — from Uri to Balakot to Pahalgam — but the absence of a clear, publicly articulated doctrine invites strategic ambiguity. At some stage, ambiguity begins to undercut deterrence.

Do we have a threshold doctrine that governs responses? What are the escalatory contours we are prepared to manage? How do we plan for hybrid threats that combine kinetic violence with digital disruption? These questions merit a formal treatment — not in partisan debate, but through institutional policy articulation.

There is a growing tendency in our political culture to view national security through a personal lens: The Prime Minister’s resolve, the Opposition’s tone, the media’s narrative. But true national security lies beyond personalities. It lies in systems that function regardless of who is in office, in doctrines that endure, and in institutions that are empowered to question, correct, and reform.

To that end, it is concerning that after such a significant breach and the massive deployment of military assets, we have not heard of any institutional accountability being established, any resignations considered, or any operational audits made public. Transparency in such cases is not a sign of weakness; it is the very basis of democratic strength.

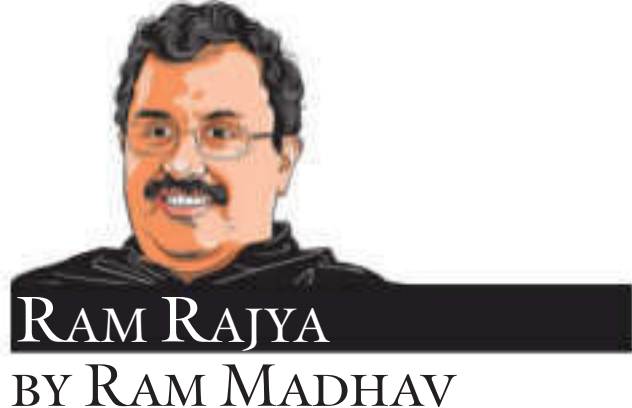
Operation Sindoor may stand as an example of India’s military responsiveness. But it should also serve as a reminder that vigilance, not retaliation, is the first responsibility of the state. When Parliament gathers, when the public listens, and when leaders speak, the goal must not only be to project unity, but to preserve credibility.

In the long run, India’s greatest strength will not lie in its ability to respond — but in its ability to anticipate, to prepare, and to self-correct without waiting for crisis.

And perhaps, most importantly, we must never lose sight of the cost of our lapses. The train of innocent lives lost — stretching back from the 1993 Mumbai serial blasts, through the horror of 26/11, to countless attacks in Kashmir, Delhi, and elsewhere — remains an open wound on the national conscience. Each act of terror that slips through the net of prevention leaves behind not just grief but a moral reckoning.

The lives lost in Pahalgam are not isolated tragedies. They join the unbroken line of innocents who have paid with their lives for our failures of anticipation. We must allow that reality to haunt us — not in despair, but as a driving force for better vigilance, stronger systems, and an uncompromising pursuit of security.

The writer is a former foreign secretary



RAM RAJYA

BY RAM MADHAV

Bangladesh, a year later

Ahead of 2026 elections, political space in the country is letting in fresh players

REPORTS IN THE Bangladesh media state that Muhammad Yunus, the chief adviser to the government, indicated recently that parliamentary elections will take place in February next year. August 5 marks one year since the ouster of an elected government led by Sheikh Hasina. Weeks of protests led by students and youth in July last year culminated in the Hasina government’s collapse. She was forced to flee the country on August 5. Ever since, she has been in exile while Bangladesh has been administered by Yunus, with the help of a group of student leaders and former bureaucrats.

What began as an interim arrangement is likely to continue until a new democratically elected government is put in place. While the installation of this non-elected arrangement in a country of 175 million people can rightly or wrongly be attributed to some outside authority, its continuance without much resistance for more than a year needs to be understood. Politics in Bangladesh was dominated for five decades by two major parties — the Awami League (AL) led by Sheikh Hasina, and the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) led by Khaleda Zia. Both parties have a dominant presence not only in the political arena but also among students, youth, women, farmers and factory workers through various party wings. The question is: How has Yunus’s administration continued to govern without any major challenge from the supporters of these two parties, which have ruled the country without interruption in the last three decades? In a country where massive street protests are not

uncommon, why have these two parties been unable to mobilise any resistance to the unelected regime and to push for early elections? Therein lies an important message for India and the world.

The immediate trigger for the protests against the Hasina government was its decision to reserve 30 per cent of government jobs for children of “freedom fighters”. In a country with a massive youth population and relatively high unemployment rates, this decision, which took the total reservation to 56 per cent, was bound to create unrest. In fact, bowing to a similar student agitation in 2018, the Hasina government had revoked the move for the same 30 per cent quota. At the time, many saw the policy as a means to fill government posts with AL supporters. The matter returned to haunt her again through a Bangladesh High Court ruling annulling her 2018 decision and reinstating the quota.

As an astute politician, having experienced the mood of the people on that issue six years before the protests last year, Hasina should have found better ways of dealing with the court ruling and adopted conciliatory measures. Sadly, when protests broke out at the country’s public universities in Dhaka, Rajshahi, Jahangirnagar and Chittagong, Hasina decided to respond with force.

The worst provocation came on July 14 when she allegedly commented at a press conference that “if the grandchildren of freedom fighters do not receive benefits, should the grandchildren of Razakars receive them

stead?” In Bangladesh, people who collaborated with Pakistan at the time of its freedom struggle are called Razakars. Equating the entire agitating student community with Razakars was an avoidable mistake. Hasina’s statement brought an important twist to the agitation. Not only did the agitation spread to private universities, but it also brought students of madrasas into it. Rough estimates put the number of madrasa students in Bangladesh at around three million. This marked an important dimension of the student movement — the entry of the Jamaat-e-Islami Bangladesh.

Jamaat and the AL have had a chequered relationship throughout. Bangabandhu Mujibur Rahman viewed the Jamaat as a collaborator during the freedom movement and banned it in 1972. General Ziaur Rahman, who succeeded Bangabandhu through a coup in 1975, lifted the ban, and Jamaat became a partner of the BNP in later decades, even joining the coalition government in 2001. After the Hasina government came to power in 2009, it went after the Jamaat leadership and prosecuted a number of its leaders for war crimes during the freedom struggle. The country’s Supreme Court had cancelled the Jamaat’s registration as a political party in 2013. Dormant since then, the Jamaat found an opportunity to return in strength through the largely apolitical student movement. The Hasina government banned it again on August 1, 2024, but this did not have much effect.

Two forces that have sustained the Yunus administration are the students and the

Jamaat. Whenever elections are held, it is these two forces that will play a crucial role. The Yunus administration banned the AL in May this year using a “fact-finding report” by the UN Human Rights Commissioner’s office on “violations and abuses related to the protests of July and August 2024 in Bangladesh”. The report’s findings, widely published in Bangladesh, were a damning indictment of Hasina’s regime. It alleged that upwards of 1,400 civilians, a large number of whom were students, were killed during the protests at the hands not only of the Bangladesh police but also the youth and student wings of the AL.

With the AL banned, the political space in Bangladesh remains open for new players in the coming elections. While the BNP remains the main contender, the rise of others, including the Jamaat, cannot be ruled out. Contemporary politics in South Asia is largely youth-led, and we have seen the decline of traditional parties and the rise of new ones that offered fresh hope in countries like Sri Lanka and Pakistan.

India is the only successful democracy in the region and an inspiration to all its neighbours. It always acted not as a Big Brother trying to pick and choose leaders in the neighbourhood but as an elder brother trying to help strengthen democratic systems. As Bangladesh prepares for its elections, India’s role cannot be anything more than that.

The writer, president, India Foundation, is with the BJP. Views are personal

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

PRESSURE TACTIC

THIS REFERS TO the editorial ‘Focus on big picture’ (IE, August 1) and related news reports. These articles highlight that the Trump administration’s announcement of a 25 per cent tariff on Indian imports, along with penalties related to Russia, is primarily a pressure tactic aimed at forcing India to agree to more favourable trade terms. However, the Indian economy is fundamentally strong, and its robust growth trajectory will enable it to withstand these pressures. The government’s strategy appears to be a combination of firm diplomacy and a focus on economic resilience.

Krishan Kumar Chug, New Delhi

BUNGLED PROBE

THIS REFERS TO the report, ‘Strong suspicion, no proof’: Court acquits Malegaon blast accused’ (IE, August 1). The verdict makes clear the prosecution’s bungling of the investigation. It dents the NIA’s credibility and rekindles communal tensions. It needs to be stated in this context that the NIA had, as early as 2016, filed a chargesheet stating that it could not find sufficient evidence against Pragya Thakur and three others and had recommended dropping the charges against them. Civil rights activists raised concerns about communal bias in probes. India must reform its anti-terror framework.

SS Paul, Nadia

NEED FOR SCRUTINY

THIS REFERS TO the article, ‘Dear Vice President’ (IE, August 1). As Chairman of Rajya Sabha, the Vice President should run the house in an orderly and efficient manner. A frequent grouse of the Opposition is that they are not given sufficient time to speak or raise questions. The V-P can address this by reducing time in observing many redundant formalities and by not adjourning the House for trivial reasons. A split video can be enabled to show both sides together on live TV. The V-P should also exercise caution about speaking on political issues outside the House.

Vaibhav Goyal, Chandigarh

THIS REFERS TO the article ‘Dear Vice President’ (IE, August 1). As Chairman of Rajya Sabha, the Vice President should run the house in an orderly and efficient manner. A frequent grouse of the Opposition is that they are not given sufficient time to speak or raise questions. The V-P can address this by reducing time in observing many redundant formalities and by not adjourning the House for trivial reasons. A split video can be enabled to show both sides together on live TV. The V-P should also exercise caution about speaking on political issues outside the House.

Kamal Laddha, Bengaluru



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

Why Arya Samaj marriages are under the scanner of courts

AMAAL SHEIKH & VINEET BHALLA
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 1

THE ALLAHABAD High Court last week directed the Uttar Pradesh government to investigate how “fake Arya Samaj Societies” that solemnise marriages without verifying the age of the bride and the groom, and in violation of the state’s anti-conversion law, “have flourished throughout the State”.

While hearing a case in which a Muslim man is accused of kidnapping, forcibly marrying, and committing statutory rape on a minor Hindu girl, Justice Prashant Kumar said that many marriages in the state, including those officiated by the Arya Samaj, bypass mandatory procedures under the UP anti-conversion law and marriage registration rules. The accused had claimed to have got married at an Arya Samaj temple.

The Allahabad HC’s directives are the latest in a series of judicial orders that have called for a scrutiny of marriages solemnised by the Arya Samaj. Such weddings are granted legal sanction under the 88-year-old

Arya Marriage Validation Act.

What is an Arya Samaj marriage?

The Arya Samaj was formally established by Swami Dayanand Saraswati in 1875 as a Hindu revivalist movement. It gained prominence in northern India, especially Punjab (including present-day Pakistan), in the late 19th century.

Among other things, the Arya Samaj made the very first attempts to convert persons from other faiths or ideologies to its version of Vedic, monotheistic Hinduism through a process it called “*shuddhi*” (purification).

One of the ways it facilitated this was by having a progressive view of inter-caste and even interfaith marriages. In effect, till the Special Marriage Act, 1954 came into force, the Arya Samaj provided the only way for a Hindu to marry out of caste or religion and to still retain their caste.

In 1937, the Arya Marriage Validation Act was passed to “remove doubts” and recognise the validity of Arya Samaj marriages. These weddings take place as per a specific set of Hindu rituals, but only require the bride and groom to be of marriageable age and de-

clare themselves to be Arya Samajis — regardless of their caste or religion.

The 1937 law states: “Notwithstanding any provision of Hindu Law, usage or custom to the contrary, no marriage contracted whether before or after the commencement of this Act between two persons being at the time of the marriage Arya Samajis shall be invalid or shall be deemed over to have been invalid by reason only of the fact that the parties at any time belonged to different castes or different sub-castes of Hindus or that either or both of the parties at any time before the marriage belonged to a religion other than Hinduism.”

EXPLAINED LAW

Why do eloping couples often prefer Arya Samaj weddings?

The Hindu Marriage Act, 1955 — which covers not just Hindus but also Buddhists, Jains and Sikhs — recognises Arya Samaj marriages. Those belonging to other religions simply need to convert to Hinduism before the wedding.

However, several Arya Samaj organisations complete this conversion ritual expe-

ditiously. This means that Arya Samaj weddings are fast, often not taking more than a couple of hours. This, along with the ease of paperwork and relaxed requirements, make Arya Samaj weddings popular among eloping or runaway couples, who often belong to different castes or religions.

Interfaith couples also have the option to marry under the SMA, which allows marriage without the couple having to give up their faith. However, under the SMA, couples must give a 30-day public notice before they marry, leaving them vulnerable to harassment from their families or the authorities.

Why have questions been raised on Arya Samaj marriages?

A petition on whether Arya Samaj marriages must comply with the requirements of the Special Marriage Act has been pending before the Supreme Court since 2022.

However, since a number of BJP-ruled states have passed stringent anti-conversion laws over the last 10 years, several HCs have raised questions on the validity of Arya Samaj

marriages. This is because the anti-conversion laws bar alternative legal processes for marriage involving religious conversion.

For instance, in Uttar Pradesh, Section 6 of the UP Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Act, 2021 renders void any marriage that is preceded by an unlawful or procedurally non-compliant religious conversion. Sections 8 and 9 of the law require both a pre-conversion declaration 60 days before marriage and a post-conversion declaration within a specified timeframe to the district magistrate. The law also mandates an inquiry to verify the voluntariness and legality of the conversion process.

Section 12 of the Act places the burden of proof on an accused to demonstrate that their spouse’s consent for conversion was not obtained illegally. The default legal assumption, thus, is that marriages through conversion are illegal and non-consensual.

This puts Arya Samaj marriages at odds with the UP anti-conversion law. The *shuddhi* performed before most interfaith Arya Samaj marriages does not comply with the onerous process for conversion prescribed in the anti-conversion law.

Courts have, over the last few years, expressed concern over the mass-scale solemnisation of marriages by Arya Samaj organisations without sticking to lawful conversion practices or verifying marriage eligibility conditions.

The Allahabad HC and Madhya Pradesh HC have ordered police investigations into instances where these organisations allegedly married minors using forged documents, and facilitated conversions without following procedures mandated by the anti-conversion laws of these states.

In 2022, the Supreme Court orally observed that the Arya Samaj has “no business” issuing marriage certificates, while the Delhi High Court last year directed an Arya Samaj temple to use verified witnesses to ensure that marriages performed by the temple were genuine.

Justice Kumar referred to one such judgment by the Allahabad HC from May in his order on Thursday. He observed that the marriage between the Muslim man and the Hindu girl would be invalid because the girl was a minor and the man did not convert as per the UP anti-conversion law.

EXPLAINED CULTURE

PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP: HOW PIPRAHWA GEMS RETURNED TO INDIA

DIVYAA
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 1

THE PIPRAHWA Gems, Buddhist relics which in 1898 were taken by an Englishman from their resting place in India, have been brought back to the country, the Ministry of Culture announced on Wednesday. This return was made possible by “an exemplary case of public-private partnership,” Culture Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat said on Wednesday. Here’s the story



The Piprahwa Gems were put up for auction in May. *Sotheby's*

The collection

In May, a collection of 349 gemstones came up for auction at Sotheby’s Hong Kong. These were a part of a larger collection of antiquities unearthed in 1898 by William Claxton Peppé, an English estate manager, at a Buddhist stupa in Piprahwa, a village in UP’s Siddharthnagar district, near the border of Nepal.

Viceroy Elgin donated the sacred bones and ashes in the collection, believed to be of Lord Buddha himself, to Siamese King Rama V. Much of the remaining collection, including caskets, a coffin, and various jewels, were sent to the Imperial Museum (now Indian Museum) in Kolkata, where they remain till date.

But a part of the collection was passed down for generations in the Peppé family. In 2013, they came in possession of Chris Peppé who decided to put the antiquities up for auction. Sotheby’s listed an estimated selling price of over \$100 million.

Pressure from New Delhi

On May 5, the Ministry of Culture served a legal notice to Sotheby’s and the Peppé family, demanding the “immediate cessation” of the auction, and repatriation of the relics to India. The Archaeological Survey of India too requested the Consulate General of Hong Kong to immediately stop the auction.

Pressure from New Delhi prompted Sotheby’s to halt the auction, originally slated for May 7. But India’s legal claim over the Piprahwa gems fell in a grey area. This is because the relics were excavated by Peppé on land allocated to him by the British government, and privately held for 127 years by his family, making it difficult to prove the illegality of their possession. Also, the gemstones were taken out of India long before India’s Antiquities and Art Treasures Act, 1972 came into being.

Nonetheless, New Delhi kept pressure up on Sotheby’s, the UK, and the Peppé family. The Ministry asked the Financial Investigation Unit to coordinate with its counterpart in Hong Kong to highlight the alleged illegality of the auction and ensure compliance with international laws.

Godrej facilitates return

In the end, the collection of 349 gemstones was acquired by Indian industrialist Pirojsha Godrej for an undisclosed amount. While unconventional, this allowed the government to not have to make a commercial transaction for the antiquities, which would have raised ethical issues.

Godrej has agreed to loan a “large portion” of the collection to the National Museum for a period of five years, and display the entire collection for three months upon its arrival, Shekhawat said.



UDIT MISRA

ON JULY 30, United States President Donald Trump announced 25% tariffs on India, as well as an unspecified “penalty” for buying military equipment and energy from Russia.

A day later, Trump posted on social media that he did not care if India and Russia “take their dead economies down together”.

Asked about Trump’s description of India as a “dead” economy, Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi said: “Yes, he (Trump) is right... Everybody knows this except the Prime Minister and the Finance Minister. I am glad President Trump has stated a fact... The whole world knows that India is a dead economy and that the BJP has killed it...”

Union Minister of Commerce & Industry Piyush Goyal pushed back, saying that India had rapidly transformed from being one of the ‘fragile five’ to the fastest growing major economy in the world in just over a decade.

“We have risen from the 11th largest economy to one of the top five... It is also widely expected that we will become the third largest economy in a few years. Today, international institutions and economists see India as the bright spot in the global economy. India is contributing to almost 16% of the global growth,” Goyal said in a statement to Parliament.

“In the last decade, the government has taken transformative measures to promote India as the manufacturing hub of the world... India’s young, skilled and talented workforce is driving innovation and competitiveness of Indian industry. Our exports have steadily increased during the last 11 years,” he said.

Economic growth

So, is India’s economy “dead”? While Trump, who seems annoyed with India’s hard bargaining in the talks for a trade deal, need not be taken literally, it stands to reason that one absolutely necessary attribute of a dead economy must be an absence of

economic growth.

The *Table* alongside contains data for gross domestic product (GDP) from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for a selection of countries over the past 30 years from 1995.

They have been selected in the context of Trump’s comments, and the recent trade pacts signed between his administration and countries such as Pakistan, the UK, and the EU (of which Germany is the biggest economy). Japan has been included because it is one of the world’s biggest economies.

The data throw up a picture that is obviously contrary to Trump’s contention that India, or even Russia, are “dead” economies.

Column 3 shows the number of times the GDP of each country has grown over the past 30 years. The top three countries are China, India, and Russia in that order.

While the US has now become four times its 1995 size, its closest trade partners like

the United Kingdom have grown by less than 3 times, and Germany has failed to even double its economy.

Japan’s GDP in 2025 is lower than what it was in 1995, which would, by this metric, qualify it to be not just a “dead” but perhaps a decaying economy.

In contrast, India’s economy is today almost 12 times its size in 1995.

Comparison with US

There is another way to look at these numbers: how did these economies grow relative to the US?

Columns 4 and 5 show there are only three economies that have grown in size relative to the US: China, India, and Russia. India was less than 5% the size of the US economy in 1995, but in 2025 it is almost 14%.

By contrast, all of America’s friends and trading partners have shrunk in size relative to the US.

WORLD ECONOMIES: WHAT THE NUMBERS SHOW

	GDP current prices*		GDP in 2025 relative to GDP in 1995	GDP in 1995 as %age of US GDP in 1995	GDP in 2025 as %age of US GDP in 2025
	1995	2025			
Argentina	288	684	2.4	3.8%	2.2%
China	738	19,232	26.1	9.7%	63%
Germany	2,595	4,745	1.8	34%	15.6%
India	360	4,187	11.6	4.7%	13.7%
Japan	5,546	4,186	0.8	72.6%	13.7%
Pakistan	99	373	3.8	1.3%	1.2%
Russian Federation	336	2,076	6.2	4.4%	6.8%
UK	1,345	3,839	2.9	17.6%	12.6%
US	7,640	30,507	4	100%	100%

Pakistan data available up to 2024. Source: IMF, The Indian Express Research *Billions of US dollars



I don't care what India does with Russia. They can take their dead economies down together, for all I care. We have done very little business with India, their Tariffs are too high, among the highest in the World.

DONALD TRUMP

China brings new childcare subsidy: can it increase country’s fertility rate?

RISHIKA SINGH
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 1

CHINA’S GOVERNMENT this week announced a childcare subsidy of 3,600 yuan (about Rs 44,000) per year for every child under the age of three. *The People’s Daily*, the Chinese Communist Party’s newspaper, described it as a way of “supporting fertility”.

China has previously tried similar measures locally, but the policy announced on July 29 was the first time it was rolled out nationwide.

The population of China, the world’s second most populous country (after India), has been contracting in recent years. There have been fewer Chinese births than deaths for three consecutive years since 2022. In fact, most parts of the world are grappling with declining Total Fertility Rates (TFR), which is the average number of children a woman is likely to bear in her lifetime.

What explains this trend? Can subsidies

encourage people to have more children?

What is the problem with declining fertility rates?

The Global Burden of Disease, Injuries and Risk Factors Study (GBD)-2021 estimated that globally, TFR more than halved from around 5 in 1950 to 2.2 in 2021. This signals better education and financial independence for more women, and greater agency in making reproductive choices.

However, an extremely low TFR can have long-term consequences for societies, including labour shortages, high dependency ratios (basically a product of an ageing population), higher taxation to fund the cost of healthcare for the large numbers of the elderly, and changes in social structures and relationships.

India’s overall TFR stood at 1.91 in 2021. This is less than the ‘replacement level’ — the number of children that a woman would need to have to replace herself and her partner in the next generation — of 2.1. (This figure assumes there will be no in- or

out-migration, which is not the case in reality.) India’s lowered TFR is the result of decades of government investment in family planning, changing social attitudes about family sizes, rising costs of raising children, and improvements in the education of women.

Many of these factors are common to other countries that have seen a decline in TFR. The only major region in the world with a high TFR today is sub-Saharan Africa, where medical advances have reduced child mortality, but fertility remains high due to cultural reasons, poverty, and the lack of decision-making powers for women.

To what extent have subsidies and tax credits helped?

As countries around the world grapple with declining fertility rates, many, like China, have introduced subsidies and tax incentives to encourage couples to have more children.

One reason for this is the understanding

that rising cost of living is a major deterrent to parenthood. Almost 4 in 10 respondents in an online survey of more than 14,000 adults in 14 countries carried out by the United Nations Population Fund and YouGov in June said financial limitations were stopping them from having the families they wanted.

But these measures have had only a limited impact. The Center for Strategic and International Studies noted in a 2023 article that “Representative studies on the expansion of financial assistance show that the effects are positive but limited.” The article

EXPLAINED GLOBAL

cited a 2013 study that reported that child allowances, even if doubled, lead to the probability of childbirth increasing by only 19.2%.

In 2006, demographer Peter McDonald identified two reasons for the decline in TFRs.

ONE, rising social liberalism, in which individuals in modern societies were re-examining social norms and institutions, and increasingly focusing on individual aspirations.

TWO, the withdrawal of the welfare state in major Western economies in the 1980s and 1990s, which led to “loss of trust in others, loss of a sense of the value of service (altruism), decline of community... and fear of failure or of being left behind”.

Both processes deprioritised having children as a mandate for living a good life, McDonald concluded. “The solution... lies in providing a greater sense of assurance to young women and young men that, if they marry and have children, they will be supported by the society in this socially and individually important decision,” he wrote.

McDonald argued that incentivising policies have failed in countries like Japan and Singapore because they targeted particular types of women (like high earners) rather than reforming societal institutions.

What more can governments do?

Guo Yanhong, deputy head of China’s National Health Commission, said the new childcare subsidy “works in tandem with

related policies regarding childcare, education, employment, taxation and housing”, *Xinhua* reported. Supporting childbirth requires a comprehensive policy package, including financial support, parental leave, and cultural measures, Guo said.

Anne Gauthier, professor of comparative family studies at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands, told the *BBC* that behind the higher-than-European-average TFR of France could be the generous social policies followed by the French Ministry of Families over the decades.

However, countries such as Finland, which have some of the most progressive policies for parental leave after childbirth, as well as subsidies, continue to see low TFRs.

While the specific context may be different in each country, it would seem that throwing money at the problem of falling TFRs can only do so much. Accompanying changes in how society treats the raising of children, and how people see work and fulfillment, are important as well.

Power trip

Market coupling of power exchange prices lacks merit

The Central Electricity Regulatory Commission (CERC) has initiated ‘market coupling’ of electricity prices on power exchanges — to what end, is less than clear. Under ‘market coupling’ the price at which electricity will be traded will be common for all the exchanges; a market coupling operator (MCO) will aggregate orders from all the power exchanges and match them, to discover a uniform market clearing price. CERC recently passed an order to initiate “the consultative process” with Grid-India Ltd, a PSU, and the three power exchanges in India to implement ‘market coupling’ and propose regulatory amendments for the same.



For starters, market coupling will be only for the Day-ahead market (DAM), which refers to sell and buy bids for the next day. The target date is January 2026. The regulator intends to extend market coupling to the real-time market (RTM — sell and buy bids for power supply in the next hour) and Term-ahead market (TAM, referring to beyond a day), later, in that order, based on the DAM experience.

Electricity consumption in India is about 1,700 billion kWhr (2024-25), 93 per cent of which is sold to utilities and bulk consumers through bilateral agreements — only 7 per cent is traded through the exchanges. Of the three exchanges, the Indian Energy Exchange (IEX) and the Power Exchange of India (PXIL) have been in operation since 2008; the third, Hindustan Power Exchange (HEX), has been in operation since 2022. IEX has over 99 per cent share of the DAM and RTM and 50 per cent of TAM. The high market share acts as a draw for higher volumes and traders. Notably, there have been no complaints about any abuse of the dominant position by IEX. CERC says that increased competition and enhanced transmission efficiency are the objectives of market coupling. It is hard to see how that can happen, when one exchange has almost 100 per cent share. CERC had a ‘shadow pilot’ study done by Grid India. The findings were underwhelming, making no case for market coupling. In the case of DAM, the price convergence improved 0.3 per cent and volume increased 0.2 per cent. For RTM, these numbers were 0.01 per cent and 0.01 per cent, respectively.

Market coupling is a solution in search of a problem. It will benefit none other than PXIL and HEX. Unlike the fragmented power markets of Europe, the Indian power market is already unified. Market coupling snatches two key functions of the exchanges — price discovery and settlement — and puts them in the hands of the ‘Market Coupling Operator’, which, curiously, will be one of the three exchanges and Grid India, by turns. Europe’s market coupling emerged as a partnership of the exchanges and transmission system operators, to avoid distortion of prices due to transmission capacity constraints — which is not the case in India. Redistribution of business by a regulatory fiat is anachronistic, disconcerting and anti-free market. Instead of fiddling around with business flows, CERC should address pending issues, such as longer-term contracts.

OTHER VOICES.

The Guardian

Trump’s tariffs: both a political and an economic threat
Donald Trump’s 1 August tariffs deadline did what it was always intended to do. It kept the markets and the nations guessing amid last-minute uncertainty. It attempted to reassert the global heft of the United States economy to take on and master all comers. And it placed President Trump at the centre of the media story, where he always insists on being. In the event, there were some last-minute agreements struck this week, few of them fair or rational in trade terms, most of them motivated by the desire to generate some commercial order. Some conflicts are still in the balance. There were 11th-hour court challenges too, disputing the president’s very right to play the trade war game in this way. Even now, no one, probably including Mr Trump himself, knows whether this is his administration’s last word on US tariffs. Almost certainly not. That’s because Mr Trump’s love of tariffs is always more about the assertion of political clout. LONDON, JULY 31

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THE YOMIURI SHIMBUN

Pressure from Trump to Cut Rates Invites Confusion
U.S. President Donald Trump’s repeated demands for interest rate cuts will only cause confusion. It is important for the U.S. Federal Reserve Board to continue to implement its policies without being swayed by pressure. The Fed has decided to keep its policy interest rate unchanged at 4.25%-4.50% per year. This is the fifth consecutive meeting this year where the rate has been left unchanged. Trump continues to put pressure on the Fed to cut interest rates with the aim of boosting the economy, and last week he visited the Fed headquarters. The Fed’s decision was apparently an indication of Fed Chair Jerome Powell’s intention not to bow to such demands. The Trump administration imposed “reciprocal” tariffs and other measures in April. The U.S. consumer price index in June rose 2.7% from a year earlier, and rate of increase is accelerating. TOKYO, AUGUST 1



R VENKATAKRISHNAN

India currently accounts for approximately 7 per cent of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, with total emissions estimated at around 3.26 gigatons of CO₂-equivalent annually. Corporates contribute significantly to this footprint, especially through sectors like power, cement, steel, logistics, and manufacturing. A conservative estimate suggests that businesses are responsible for about 30-35 per cent of India’s emissions i.e., over 1.07 gigatons annually. When one applies the OECD’s benchmark carbon price of \$60 per tonne of CO₂, the implied carbon tax potential from Indian corporates stands at a staggering ₹5.3 lakh crore. That is more than half of India’s total corporate tax collection for FY 2023-24. In a world where governments are under pressure to fund climate adaptation while ensuring economic stability, carbon taxation is not just plausible but prudent.

This is not a theoretical construct. The European Union’s Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), which takes full effect in January 2026, has already begun to alter trade dynamics. Exporters of carbon-intensive goods like steel, aluminium, and cement will soon face carbon import duties unless they can demonstrate credible decarbonization measures.

For India, where many firms operate with high embedded carbon, CBAM represents both a compliance challenge and a competitiveness threat. More importantly, CBAM has established a template that if countries do not price carbon domestically, their exports may be penalized at the border. Germany has gone a step further, stating that sovereign nations should be free to levy carbon taxes internally as a legitimate means of strengthening domestic resilience, encouraging cleaner production, and retaining the fiscal value of decarbonization efforts. This opens the door for India and other developing economies to evolve their own carbon-pricing regimes rooted in fairness but aligned to global expectations.

In this evolving regulatory and fiscal landscape, understanding the full spectrum of emissions of Scope 1, Scope 2, and Scope 3 is essential. Scope 1 emissions refer to direct emissions from a company’s owned or controlled operations, such as fuel combustion. Scope 2 covers indirect emissions from purchased electricity or energy. But it is Scope 3 that presents the greatest complexity and significance as these are all other indirect emissions across the value chain, including those from suppliers, distributors, end-users, and

India Inc must embrace internal carbon pricing

GREEN THRUST. Carbon pricing is no longer the domain of policy wonks or activist shareholders. It is a CFO issue, a boardroom concern, and a strategic opportunity



GETTY IMAGES

even employee commuting. For many companies, Scope 3 can constitute over 70 per cent of total emissions. Ignoring these emissions Internal Carbon Pricing: From Voluntary Signal to Strategic Imperative is no longer tenable. Global investors and large buyers are demanding carbon transparency across the entire chain, and companies that fail to measure and manage all scopes risk being excluded from sustainable supply networks and green finance pools. Internal carbon pricing, when aligned with Scope 1 to 3 data, enables more holistic risk assessment, incentivises cross-functional collaboration, and ensures that carbon efficiency is embedded not just in operations, but in procurement, design, logistics, and customer relations.

It is in this backdrop that internal carbon pricing becomes not only relevant, but essential. By applying a shadow carbon price, firms can simulate

If companies begin integrating internal carbon pricing into their BRSR disclosures, they can turn what is often a compliance exercise into a platform for performance accountability

future risks in present-day decision-making. It can influence project viability assessments, capital allocation, and procurement strategies. More advanced models go further creating internal carbon fees where business units are financially accountable for emissions, with the proceeds reinvested in sustainability initiatives. This is where ICP transforms from a signal to a system.

I read about this first in the case of Danone under former CEO Emmanuel Faber. The company applied an internal carbon price of €35 per tonne and created a new metric carbon-adjusted earnings per share. In one financial year, this adjustment reduced reported EPS from €3.85 to €2.38. Yet, because Danone succeeded in lowering its emissions, its carbon-adjusted EPS grew faster than the headline figure. By embedding carbon costs into financial reporting, divisional performance metrics, and executive compensation, Danone hardwired sustainability into its corporate governance architecture.

India has already taken an important step through SEBI’s Business Responsibility and Sustainability Reporting (BRSR) framework, now mandatory for the top 1000 listed companies. Yet in practice, much of the reporting remains narrative-driven and detached from financial analytics. The true potential of BRSR lies in its ability

to bridge the worlds of ESG and finance. If companies begin integrating internal carbon pricing into their BRSR disclosures, they can turn what is often a compliance exercise into a platform for performance accountability. It enables a firm to quantify its carbon liabilities, benchmark them year-over-year, and signal credible decarbonization pathways to investors and regulators alike.

There is also a growing investor expectation that sustainability should be measurable and financially material. Integrating ICP into disclosures helps build investor trust, aligns with global ESG metrics, and prepares firms for emerging regulatory frameworks. It also offers first-mover advantages in cost optimization, access to green capital, and preferential terms from customers and financiers increasingly focused on Scope 3 emissions across supply chains.

Ultimately, this is not about ticking ESG boxes, as unfortunately it is currently, it is about strengthening enterprise value in a carbon-costed economy. Carbon pricing is no longer the domain of policy wonks or activist shareholders. It is a CFO issue, a boardroom concern, and a strategic opportunity. The cost of inaction will not just be reputational but fiscal, competitive, and potentially existential.

The writer is Partner, RVKS and Associates

Will women’s quota in Bihar make a difference?

There are significant education gaps that need to be addressed. Support systems like creches and safe transport are vital

Jyoti Thakur

In 2016, Bihar made headlines by reserving 35 per cent of all government jobs for women. It was a bold move — an attempt to do more than just include women on paper. The policy extended beyond just classrooms and panchayat halls, signalling that woman belonged in the workforce, in power, and in public institutions.

Past forward to 2025, another election year. In a move aimed at localising the benefits of this reservation, the Bihar government has now said that only domicile women — those who are residents of the state — can claim that 35 per cent quota.

While this may bring the focus squarely on Bihar’s own women, it raises an important question: Are we enabling them to actually reach these jobs, or just limiting the pool without changing the playing field?

The good news is that more women in Bihar are participating in the workforce. According to the PLFS, Bihar’s female Worker Population Ratio has jumped from a dismal 4 per cent in 2017-18 to nearly 30 per cent in 2023-24. Much of this growth is happening in rural areas. But here’s the catch — it’s not stable

or formal work. In rural Bihar, self-employment has ballooned from 35 per cent to a staggering 85 per cent — but mostly as unpaid “helpers” in family enterprises, not as owners or entrepreneurs. Urban women saw a similar trend. The number of those running small businesses or working on their own remained steady, while “helper” roles jumped from 3 per cent to 29 per cent.

Meanwhile, despite quota in place salaried jobs have been shrinking — rural women in regular jobs fell from 27.8 per cent to just 3.6 per cent. Urban salaried jobs among women halved too, from 63 per cent to 30 per cent.

So, yes, women are working more. But they’re not climbing up the ladder — they’re being pushed into informal, often unpaid or insecure roles. That’s not empowerment. That’s survival.

THE EDUCATION GAP

For a job reservation to work, women have to be eligible. And that starts with education. In rural Bihar, nearly 45 per cent of women were still illiterate in 2023-24. In urban areas, it’s 27 per cent. Just 3.1 per cent of rural women and 13.4 per cent of urban women held a graduate degree in 2023-24 — barely an increase from 2017-18. Higher



WOMEN AND WORK. Major challenges

secondary education is slowly improving but remains out of reach for most.

Even where girls are enrolled in school, a 2024 study from IIT Patna found that gender norms continue to push them away from competitive subjects like science, law, and public administration — fields that often lead to government jobs.

So, while the quota exists, how many women will actually qualify to claim it?

Another invisible hurdle is time — or the lack of it. According to the Time Use Survey 2024, Bihari women, both urban and rural, spend about five more hours a day than men on unpaid domestic and care work. That’s cooking, cleaning,

caregiving — tasks rarely counted as “real work,” but which fill the majority of their day.

Unsurprisingly, per IWWAGE data, around 70 per cent of women in Bihar cite domestic duties as their main reason for not being in the workforce.

Without support systems — like child care centres (creches), safe transport, or flexible work — many women simply don’t have the time to take on paid employment, even if they want to.

On paper, Bihar’s 35 per cent reservation for women looks visionary. And the new domicile clause may seem like a push to make it more targeted. But without investments in education, skilling, child care, housing, and public perception of women’s roles, the policy risks becoming another missed opportunity.

What we need isn’t just a quota. We need to clear the road so that women can walk it.

It’s time Bihar stops framing women’s employment as a symbolic gesture and starts treating it as a structural priority. Otherwise, we’re just making promises on paper — when what women really need is a chance to show up and thrive.

The writer is associate fellow at NCAER, New Delhi. Views expressed are personal

On businessline.in

US driving hard bargains in its trade deals

While the current 25% tariff on Indian goods may not be final, peer economies like Vietnam and Indonesia securing more favourable terms places India at a



https://tinyurl.com/ypwrmf2p

relative disadvantage for now, says Namrata Mittal



House of wars

Attacking political rivals cannot be a way to evade responsibility

The government and the Opposition crossed swords in Parliament during a discussion on Operation Sindoor this week. There was unanimity in praising India's armed forces, but there was little common ground beyond that. Operation Sindoor was India's military response to the terrorist attack in Pahalgam, on April 22, 2025, which claimed 26 lives. The elimination of three terrorists behind the attack, just before the parliamentary debate, helped the government's case. It told Parliament that these terrorists were Lashkar-e-Taiba members from Pakistan. The Narendra Modi government's strident approach seeks to change the behaviour of Pakistan and reassure its domestic audience. The success of this approach is debatable and the Opposition sought to put the government on the spot on both counts. A demonstrated willingness to use force against Pakistan in the event of a terrorism incident is a definitive turn in India's strategy, and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) takes pride in that. But there is no evidence yet that it is working though there has been chest thumping around it by the ruling party. The discussion in Parliament barely addressed the implications of this approach, which is being touted as the new normal. The Opposition and the government agreed on the need to punish Pakistan, and also disagreed on who would do it better.

The government claimed success in meeting its objectives of launching a military operation and denied that it had acted under pressure in ending the war. Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi demanded a pointed response to repeated claims by U.S. President Donald Trump that he mediated the ceasefire but the Prime Minister evaded a direct response on it. The government contradicts itself when it says that the operation was a success, and that it is continuing. It is also exasperating to hear a party that is now in its eleventh year of uninterrupted power, blame people who passed away decades ago for any challenge that India faces now. There was little self-reflection regarding the lapses that led to the terrorism incident, and whether and how the government plans to address them. The government had sent joint teams including several MPs from the Opposition abroad to garner support for India in the aftermath of the operation, but that sign of statesmanship was a short-lived aberration, as it turns out. The world is changing rapidly and India's capacity to navigate those changes will be largely determined by its own character. Questioning the patriotism of political opponents is an easy route to take to evade tough questions, but the BJP must realise that such an approach has diminishing returns.

Deep ties

India needs to engage its neighbours more closely

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to the Maldives last week, after an invitation by Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu to be a special guest for the country's 60th Independence Day, signalled the full return of relations to the closeness they held during the previous Ibrahim Solih government. Although the two leaders had not gotten off to the best start in 2023, after Mr. Muizzu's surprise win, backed by an "India Out" campaign – this was followed by a "Boycott Maldives" social media campaign in India – they have been on the mend for the past year. During Mr. Muizzu's 2024 state visit to India, India had announced measures including lines of credit and a currency swap arrangement to support the Maldives during its economic troubles. Mr. Muizzu reflected gratitude when he described India's role in the Maldives as "pivotal" and Mr. Modi reciprocated the warmth. India announced a line of credit worth \$565 million (₹4,850 crore) and reduced the annual debt burden for Maldives on previous Indian lines of credit by 40%. There was also the launch of India-Maldives Free Trade Agreement negotiations, which will be a significant driver of future engagement. There was the signing too of MoUs for cooperation in fisheries, meteorological sciences, digital solutions and pharma, as well as a digital and rupee-rufiyaa national currency payments agreement. Over the past six decades, India has cultivated a strong security partnership with the Maldives, including trilateral national security consultations with Sri Lanka, and it is significant that after Mr. Modi's visit, Mr. Muizzu welcomed Sri Lankan President Anura Kumara Disسانayake for a state visit. The Maldives visit was also a reaffirmation of the importance of India's "Neighbourhood First" policy, at a time when Indian foreign policy is facing headwinds linked to the U.S.'s trade tariffs and the conflicts in Ukraine and Gaza. The conflict with Pakistan after the Pahalgam attacks, and tensions with Bangladesh have engaged the government's attention. New Delhi has also been preoccupied with reaching out to different countries, following Operation Sindoor, but did not send delegations to neighbouring countries. It is heartening that New Delhi is preparing to welcome Nepal Prime Minister K.P. Sharma Oli, who has not been invited to India since he took office a year ago. A commemorative stamp by the Maldives for its national day celebrations showed traditional Indian and Maldives boats, which Mr. Modi described as a reflection of India and the Maldives being not just neighbours "but also fellow voyagers on a shared journey". In a time of global economic turmoil, a closer engagement with the neighbours – one that shores up their economic needs and supports their plans for development where possible – is essential.

The India-United Kingdom Free Trade Agreement (FTA), called the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), has been lauded by the Union Commerce and Industry Minister, Piyush Goyal, as the 'gold standard' for all India's trade deals. Mr. Goyal has asserted that no compromise was made in any sensitive sector. Evidently, the Minister seemed to be counting only agriculture and labour-intensive manufacturing as sensitive sectors – which they are. But remarkably, despite the wide coverage the FTA has received, the impact on India's other, highly sensitive digital sector, which permeates every sphere of national activity and holds the key to our future, has gone without official comment or media scrutiny.

We argue that the compromises made in the digital sector through the India-U.K. FTA have profound consequences for India's digital sovereignty – a term frequently invoked in high-level political discourse. India has completely flipped on several core positions that it has long maintained at global forums, including at the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Source code disclosure

The most surprising giveaway is on India's sovereign right to seek ex ante access to the source code for foreign digital goods or services, even for those deemed sensitive. This is very different from getting source code ex post for a specific investigation or remedy, which is allowed under the agreement. Regulators in different sectors often have strict disclosure rules, such as for food and medicine ingredients. Software now permeates nearly every product, including telecom, Artificial Intelligence (AI) and health applications, whereby it may be crucial for the regulators to be able to 'look under the hood' of software, for safety, security and general compliance requirements, and to enable urgent, real-time upgrades.

Giving up this right is a 180-degree turn from India's steadfast stand at the WTO and other forums. Even the United States, which first included source code related prohibitions in its FTAs and at the WTO, withdrew this formulation last year, recognising its domestic regulatory, law enforcement and security imperatives. In the U.S. driven Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP),



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The compromises that India made in the digital sector through the India-U.K. Free Trade Agreement will have profound consequences for India's digital sovereignty

the 'source code disclosure' provision applied only to mass-market software such as Microsoft's operating systems – meaning not to niche and custom-made software. It specifically excluded software for critical infrastructure. In the U.K. FTA text, the prohibition applies to all software. Businesses are always free to enter, or avoid, transactions requiring disclosure of source code. What is sacrificed here are India's regulatory rights in this regard, for all times to come, in a sector that has just begun to take shape.

Surrendering a critical national resource

Granting equal and non-discriminatory access for U.K. parties to 'Open Government Data' – a term from the pre-digital era which then meant government transparency, and access to its statistics – constitutes another major giveaway. This is because data is not what it used to be. Today, it has acquired an entirely new avatar, being the digital era's most valuable resource. AI, where heated competition for global mastery is raging, is but patterns derived from data, which is why data is deemed to be priceless.

This concession is very significant, even though this provision is yet at a 'best endeavour' level, and non-binding. It is incomprehensible why India (where the intention to be an AI superpower is a staple of top-level political rhetoric), has conceded that national data held by the government is not a sovereign resource but an international free for all. Facilitating foreign access to such data poses risks of eroding India's competitive advantage in using India's own data to create Indian AI products, and also serious security risks as national data can be weaponised.

The most contested issues in digital trade are the 'free flow of data' and 'data localisation'. While India seems to have largely stood its ground on these issues, its commitment to "enter into consultations to extend appropriate equivalent disciplines" to the U.K. if India agrees to any concessions with another country, denotes a dangerous regress, and visible vulnerability, with regard to India's long-held positions on these key issues.

This matter links to the one above on India's data being an important national economic resource as well as the need to safeguard it from a security point of view. Again, last year, owing to similar considerations, the U.S., the original proponent of 'free flow of data' and 'prohibition

on data localisation', withdrew from these stances at the WTO.

It is difficult to understand how Indian negotiators could be so naive or negligent in agreeing to the above concessions. Digital trade concessions are not like those on commodities, where tariffs can be applied one day and removed on another.

Digital trade texts are essentially about rule making for a new global digital order. We either fully opt into western, Big Tech -oriented, digital architectures, or we maintain sufficient autonomy and sovereignty. This is because once the digital rules and agriculture are set, they are almost impossible to roll back. India's digital concessions are thus buttressing a set of rules for a global digital ecosystem from which India cannot extricate itself later. And India is doing all this in a reactive mode without a clear road map of its own.

It seems that the U.K. was able to extract all the above concessions, the absolute opposite to what India has stood for till now, because, unlike manufacturing and agriculture, there is no specific political 'constituency' for digital sovereignty. But it is perhaps an even more important issue in the mid to long term. We may be seeing a repeat of how India lost out on early industrialisation and had to suffer grievous colonial exploitation, causing a loss of wealth and independence. In making these digital concessions, we may be giving up our digital future, independence and prosperity.

India must act quickly

India needs to develop and negotiate towards a global digital architecture that protects and furthers its digital sovereignty. As a late starter in 'digital industrialisation', it should create the space required for India to become a digital superpower and not a digital colony.

For this, India needs to urgently formulate a full-fledged digital sovereignty and 'digital industrialisation' policy which should then inform and guide its trade negotiations. Our negotiators must be accompanied by digital sovereignty experts with access to the top political leadership, which has the core responsibility for safeguarding India's long-term digital interests. These interests are often not so visible, and, therefore, tend to get by-passed and not fought for.

The fact is mangroves drive business

Mangroves have, historically, been on the margins of planning and policy priorities in spite of their vital role in anchoring coastal economies and protecting millions from climate extremes. Their loss is not just an environmental concern. Their loss erodes natural infrastructure that acts as a buffer for urban coastlines, underpins fisheries, and quietly contributes billions in ecosystem services and avoided damages.

As the world grapples with extreme weather events and rising sea levels, blue carbon ecosystems such as mangroves are critical to climate and economic resilience. Yet, their value rarely features in balance sheets or policy frameworks. How can businesses, governments, and communities reimagine these ecosystems as active drivers of sustainable growth and security? Three pillars of our work through the Mangrove Coalition offer ideas for the path forward.

Mapping with technology

First, embracing technology can help us better understand the value of "Natural Capital". Satellite and drone data with advanced geospatial Artificial Intelligence algorithms have improved accurate mangrove mapping and blue carbon quantification. This is crucial for informing policies and restoration efforts. The economic and ecosystem services valuation of mangroves ranges from ₹3,535 million in Pichavaram (Tamil Nadu) to ₹664 billion in the Sundarbans (West Bengal). Carbon sequestration alone is valued at ₹462 million per year in the Sundarbans, reflecting the ecological and economic importance of this habitat. Communities that possess deep knowledge of mangrove ecosystems

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Sejal Worah

is the Programme Director of WWF India

It is unfortunate that the value of blue carbon ecosystems such as mangroves rarely features in balance sheets or policy frameworks

and rely on them for their livelihoods, must be prioritised and equitably benefited – socially and economically.

Involving communities

Second, community-led conservation efforts are key to strengthening symbiotic and mutually respectful relationships of people and nature. Fisherfolk especially value the role of mangroves as nurseries for juvenile fish. Healthy mangroves often translate into robust fish stocks, ensuring sustainable catch. The livelihoods of these coastal communities are intrinsically linked to the quality of mangrove and estuarine systems.

In dense urban settings such as Mumbai and Chennai, mangroves are often distressed, polluted and degraded. Since they are unable to support flourishing biodiversity, coastal livelihoods and socio-cultural interdependencies are compromised. However, when communities directly experience the benefits (more fish, cleaner air, protected homes) and are empowered to make decisions about their local environment, they become effective and enduring stewards. Mangroves and other coastal ecosystems can also create opportunities for alternative livelihoods such as aquaculture, beekeeping and eco-tourism. Integrated ownership models such as Eco-Development Committees (EDCs) or Joint Forest Management Committees (JFMCs) can be translated for urban mangroves.

Third, citizen science can engage stakeholders to generate wonder and investment in this undervalued ecosystem and mobilise collective action for conservation. When community members from varied backgrounds are skilled to

understand and monitor ecosystems, this can either supplement existing assessment efforts or substitute for formal monitoring. Mangrove health is intertwined with the vitality of associated ecosystems and wetlands, and the health of rivers from source to the sea, as they contribute freshwater, sediments and biota. Regular monitoring can provide a good indication of how the system is faring.

Platforms can play a pivotal role

Key components of a mangrove health tool should include indicators around changes in mangrove area; quantity, quality and timing of freshwater flows; avian, floral, molluscan and fish diversity; and, crucially, community dependence and a perception of the ecosystem services. Such assessments can provide key insights to support management actions. Engagement platforms such as "Mangrove Mitras" or Friends of Mangroves can open avenues for urban citizens and local communities to engage constructively in the conservation of mangroves. This could help to rebuild a people-wetland-river-mangrove connection through an immersive experience on the magical value of mangroves.

Sustainable stewardship is not a top-down mandate but a symbiotic relationship where mangrove health and people's well-being are mutually reinforcing. Policymakers and businesses must recognise mangroves as vital climate and economic infrastructure rather than mere biodiversity zones. Protecting and restoring these ecosystems demands a coalition where science, business and community voices work in harmony – each bringing unique strengths to secure their future.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Misplaced remark

U.S. President Donald Trump's remark, calling India a "dead economy", is both inaccurate and disappointing, especially when leading global institutions continue to recognise India as among the fastest-growing major economies. That the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank have all projected India's economic stability is a clear indication of economic vitality, not decline. With a young and dynamic population – in sharp contrast to aging demographics and slowing growth in many advanced economies, India's demographic strength, combined with prudent macroeconomic policies and digital advancement, positions it as a key driver

of future global growth. Mr. Trump's comments appear to be politically charged rather than fact-based.

Rukma Sharma,
Jalandhar, Punjab

What is odious is that Mr. Trump did not stop with just announcing tariffs. He has revived the U.S.'s old myopic game of trying to maintain a geo-political strategic balance in South Asia by supporting Pakistan, India's war-happy neighbour. One cannot but notice the fact that Mr Trump has been upping the ante against India ever since it successfully carried out post-Pahalgam retaliatory strikes against Pakistan's terror infrastructure. That India proved its military prowess with minimum collateral damage and the

use of indigenous armaments has not gone down well with the Trump administration.

Nalini Vijayaraghavan,
Thiruvananthapuram

The cartoon (Inside pages, 'On the draw' August 1), on Mr. Trump's decision, may be a correct portrayal. The U.S. President is publicity savvy and wants to take the credit when it comes to all major global events. He wants the Nobel Prize and has shamelessly expressed his desire. He is just another politician and not a statesman. Imposing shockingly high tariffs will hurt the business of the exporters to the United States of America, which will, in turn, affect the economies of many countries. Mr. Trump does not care one bit about the sufferings of others. He is

whimsical, which is a bad trait for anyone in power. Here is an elected leader who is an example of how one should not be.

V. Lakshmanan,
Tirupur, Tamil Nadu

One cannot help notice these contrasts — ISRO and NASA have successfully launched their NISAR satellite into orbit, which highlights the power of science and cooperation, but the U.S. President seems intent on giving pinpricks to India and the Indian government. One wonders how things will play out.

Dhanaraj S.,
Bodinayakanur, Tamil Nadu

The debate in Parliament

The parliamentary debate on Operation Sindoor unfolded as expected, with few surprises. The ruling

party remained determined to portray the operation as an unqualified success, while key questions raised by the Opposition were left unanswered. Vital issues deserving serious deliberation such as Mr. Trump's repeated claims of brokering a ceasefire, and the alarming security lapses in Pahalgam were largely ignored. From the outset, the ruling party's reluctance to engage in a substantive debate was unmistakable. Repeated references to events under the past dispensation did little more than deflect attention from the core concerns. One can only hope that future parliamentary discussions will rise above partisan posturing and offer genuine, meaningful exchanges.

V. Nagarajan,
Chennai

Civic responsibility

India-Bangladesh relations may be strained but there are areas of policy in that country which may be worth considering in India. I recently came across a video on YouTube, on an organisation called BD Clean (bdclean.org). It is a platform of 50,000 volunteers who work with the aim of ensuring a clean Bangladesh and bringing about a change in mentality in the disposal of garbage. The transformation in the country has been spectacular with heavily polluted areas undergoing remarkable transformations. It is an idea that is worth emulating in Indian cities and towns.

V. Subramaniam,
Chennai

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

GROUND ZERO



Billboards advertise fertility centres in Hyderabad. The city, along with Secunderabad, is a significant hub for medical tourism in India. G. RAMAKRISHNA

The business of selling babies

In August 2024, a couple from Rajasthan travelled to Secunderabad for an IVF procedure. A doctor at a clinic they approached convinced them to opt for surrogacy instead. After paying ₹30 lakh and getting a baby a year later, the couple realised through DNA testing that the child was not theirs. **Serish Nanisetti and Siddharth Kumar Singh** report on the surrogacy scam in Telangana

The Secunderabad railway station in Telangana is a noisy transit hub. Thousands of people enter and exit the concourse every day. Ad jingles in Hindi, Telugu, English, and Bengali, about the various medical procedures offered by hospitals across the city, blare over the din. Billboards outside the station feature smiling couples with babies. The city, along with Hyderabad, is a significant hub for medical tourism in India.

In August 2024, after having done some research, Sonam Singh and her husband Akshay travelled to Secunderabad from Kuharwas village near Jhunjhunu in Rajasthan for an in vitro fertilisation (IVF) procedure. They rented a house near the railway station and began searching on the Internet for hospitals nearby.

Near the railway station, they found the Universal Srushti Fertility Centre, which promised them an 85% success rate for an IVF procedure. The hopeful couple met the owner, Pachipala Namratha aka Athaluri Namratha, 64.

“The test results showed that we were medically fit to conceive,” says Sonam, speaking over the phone from Kuharwas. “But the doctor insisted that we opt for surrogacy. She told us that it was safer and more reliable. She also assured us that the clinic would use our sperm and egg, and also handle all the paperwork and legalities.”

While an IVF procedure can cost anywhere between ₹2 lakh and ₹6 lakh per cycle, Namratha told the couple that surrogacy would cost them ₹30 lakh. She asked Sonam and Akshay to transfer half the amount through their bank account and pay the remaining in cash, supposedly for the surrogate. Convinced, the couple made their first payment on August 16, 2024. According to the First Information Report filed by Akshay, Namratha also promised the couple that “a healthy child [would be] delivered... after DNA confirmation.”

Nearly a year later, on June 5, Sonam and Akshay were handed a baby at Lotus Hospital in Visakhapatnam. However, the couple grew suspicious when Namratha’s clinic refused to perform the DNA test. They took the infant to the DNA Forensics Laboratory in Vasant Kunj, Delhi. To their shock, the results showed that the baby was not theirs. When they returned to Secunderabad to confront Namratha, she had disappeared.

Sonam and Akshay approached the Gopalpuram police in Secunderabad, which investigated the matter and uncovered a baby-selling racket. The police booked Namratha under Sections 61, 316, 335, 336, and 340 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita Act, 2023, which deal with criminal conspiracy, criminal breach of trust by carriers, forgery of documents, and related offences. They also booked her under Sections 38, 39, and 40 of the Surrogacy (Regulation) Act, 2021, which deal with prohibitions, punishments, and penalties related to surrogacy practices.



Instead of getting ₹15 lakh, the couple from Assam got ₹90,000 for selling their baby

POLICE OFFICER

couples. Promising these couples a baby through surrogacy, it has charged them between ₹20 lakh and ₹30 lakh each, and handed them babies not related to them. It has also furnished falsified documents, say the police. An investigation has revealed that the clinic paid commissions to smaller centres for referrals of potential surrogate mothers and women who wanted to undergo abortions, forged medical reports, and operated without proper licensing.

According to the police, an agent called Dhanasri Santoshi struck a deal between a couple from Assam and the clinic. They say the Assamese couple’s baby was given to the couple from Rajasthan. The police have arrested the couple from Assam on charges of selling their baby.

“Instead of getting ₹15 lakh, the couple from Assam got ₹90,000 for selling their baby,” says a police officer. The baby has been moved to foster care at Shishu Vihar, a childcare centre under the Women and Child Welfare Department.

The police add that they have discovered a disturbing pattern in how surrogates are sourced. The sealed medical facility in Secunderabad is surrounded by lodges and bed-and-breakfast rooms. These lodging facilities were used to house women. A police officer says, “The agents would approach vulnerable women, particularly those seeking abortions, and offer them money to continue their pregnancy so that they could take the baby later. These newborns would then be passed off as children conceived through surrogacy. This is how people were misled into believing that the babies were biologically theirs.” In at least four known cases in Telangana, women were not paid at all and completely abandoned post-delivery, the officer adds.

On November 26, 2024, a woman engaged as a surrogate by a couple died after falling from the ninth floor of a building in Raidurgam in the western part of Hyderabad. According to the police, the victim and her husband, both natives of Odisha, were given accommodation by Rajesh Babu and his wife at their residence. When Rajesh allegedly tried to sexually assault the 26-year-old woman, she tried to escape through the balcony and slipped and died. She was purportedly brought to the city through middlemen for



A view of the Srushti Fertility Centre in Secunderabad. G. RAMAKRISHNA

surrogacy for ₹10 lakh, say police reports.

Donors in queue

As the police widened their probe, they raided a facility operating under the name, Indian Sperm Tech, near Secunderabad East Metro Station, located about 400 metres away from the fertility clinic. They found 17 sperm donors and 11 egg donors waiting in queue at the facility.

“The women donors were brought from Delhi, and the men from Andhra Pradesh and other parts of Telangana. The sperm donors, mostly aged between 22 and 30, were paid ₹1,000-₹1,500 per sample. The men were in need of quick cash,” says a police officer who led the raid.

L. Shiva was among the people arrested by the police in the midnight raid. Shiva, 35, from Vizianagaram, brought egg and sperm donors and connected them to the hospital. Another broker who was arrested hails from Indore in Madhya Pradesh. One of the egg donors caught in the raid was a 30-year-old resident from Baksa, Assam.

Indian Sperm Tech, reportedly headquartered in Ahmedabad, had allegedly set up the sperm collection unit in Secunderabad without a valid license. “It is a diagnostic centre,” says an officer from the District Medical and Health Officer’s office. “They collect sperm samples, freeze them, and send them to Ahmedabad. The processed samples (isolated and concentrated to select the healthiest sperm) are then returned with reports and sold to clinics across Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, and Chhattisgarh. The place has been operating for two years without registration.”

In trouble before

It is a typically busy weekday afternoon on St. Johns Road in Secunderabad. But just a short turn away from this arterial road, the noise fades. A narrow bylane, about 20 feet wide, is almost hidden in plain sight. Two old gates, one swung wide open and the other barely ajar, lead into it. Two policemen sit here, silent witnesses to what the North Zone police uncovered.

The building of Namratha’s clinic has been sealed and the clinic shut down, following an investigation that exposed the baby-selling racket running under the guise of fertility treatments. “The hospital operated only on the first two floors. The rest were empty,” says one constable. The two floors were filled with equipment required for childcare and fertility treatment.

Rajesh Ravi lived here for 16 years before moving closer to the city centre. He is shocked by the revelations. “You live somewhere for over a decade and you think you know your neighbourhood. I found nothing suspicious. The only time we were mildly inconvenienced was when too many patients came and there would be many cars on the street,” he says.

Rajesh says there was a police case involving the same place about 10 years ago. “No one talked about it much because back then, news on social media did not reach us as fast as it does now,” he says.

“We knew what was happening here,” says Manu, a lawyer who lives across the street of the four-storied Rushi Test Tube Bab Cent. While the name in English has missing letters, the name in Telugu etched beneath it reveals the complete name – Srushthi Test Tube Baby Centre. “This place was sealed five times earlier. But eventually things got back to ‘normal’. This time I think it is serious and she (Namratha) will not be allowed to carry on the business.”

The Telangana Medical Council says Namratha was involved in a surrogacy scandal in 2016. A U.S.-based couple, who had used the clinic’s services, had discovered that the child born to them through a surrogate was not biologically related to them. “Following a police case and court hearings, we suspended the doctor’s license for five years, with a lifetime ban on conducting surrogacy procedures,” says Dr. G Srinivas, Vice-Chairman of the Council.

Yet, when the suspension period ended, the doctor returned, seeking to have her license rein-



This place was sealed five times. But things got back to ‘normal’. This time I think it is serious and Namratha will not be allowed to carry on the business

MANU
Lawyer

stated. “We refused. She was still involved in a court case, and our rules are clear on that,” Dr. Srinivas adds.

A stringent law

As surrogacy has become an increasingly popular option for couples grappling with infertility, Indian law has become more stringent to ensure that the practice remains ethical and free from commercial exploitation. What once operated in legal grey zones is now bound by clear rules, thanks to the Surrogacy (Regulation) Act, 2021.

Under the Act, only altruistic surrogacy is permitted in India. This means a surrogate mother cannot be paid for carrying a child, except for her medical expenses and insurance coverage. Commercial surrogacy, any arrangement involving monetary compensation or profit, is banned and is a punishable offence.

According to the Act, all surrogacy procedures must take place at clinics registered under the Act and authorised by the office officially designated as the State Appropriate Authority.

These clinics must comply with strict medical standards and ethical norms. Any attempt to bypass the law, whether through brokers, unregistered clinics, or financial inducements, is considered a criminal offence, punishable with imprisonment of up to 10 years and fines reaching ₹10 lakh.

Fertility specialists say the Assisted Reproductive Technology (ART) Regulation Act, 2021, and the Surrogacy (Regulation) Act, 2021, have brought much-needed order to what was once a loosely regulated and, at times, opaque system.

Dr. Preethi Dayal, who runs the Preethi Fertility Centre in Jangaon district, says prior to the enforcement of the ART law in January 2023, “many centres operated without oversight. You could bring in any random donor, collect the sample, and proceed with checks or documentation. But we are now bound by very strict protocols. Every donor must be sourced only through a registered ART bank, which keeps Aadhaar-linked records of every sample, though the identity is never disclosed to either doctors or patients.” She adds that the new law mandates comprehensive screening of all donors, including genetic testing, and imposes tight eligibility criteria based on age and health. “There is no room for ambiguity now. Everything has to be documented and traceable.”

Dr. Preethi also points out that, legally and ethically, all third-party donor procedures must be conducted with confidentiality. “Patients are never informed about the identity of the donor. The child born through surrogacy belongs legally and emotionally to the intended parents. That is the framework we follow,” Dr. Preethi says.

To reduce the risk of human error, the doctor says many IVF clinics have now adopted the RI Witness system, a high-tech safety protocol that tracks every sample using barcode verification. “Every patient is given a barcode-linked card. Before processing a sample, we scan the card in the system. If there is any mismatch, the entire hospital is alerted,” she says.

While many corporate hospitals have already adopted this system, Dr. Preethi says smaller or less-regulated clinics may not yet have the infrastructure or the will to comply. “Some centres are still conducting 10 to 15 IVF cycles a day. Without safeguards like the RI Witness system, the chances of mix-ups increase,” she says.

Additional reporting by Naveen Kumar
Names have been changed to protect privacy



Nuns' arrest: A familiar plot

The arrest of two Catholic nuns in Chhattisgarh on charges of human trafficking and forced religious conversion is the latest incident of harassment against minorities in BJP-ruled states. It has led to strong protests from the community, especially in Kerala, the nuns' home state. The nuns were arrested at the Durg railway station last week, when they were headed to a convent in Agra, along with three tribal girls. They were apprehended on a complaint by a Bajrang Dal member. According to reports, the nuns, the girls, and the brother of one of the girls who accompanied them were intimidated and manhandled. The Railway personnel had reportedly informed the Bajrang Dal about the nuns' presence at the station. Following cases registered on the Bajrang Dal activists' demand, the nuns are now held in a jail in Durg. Two courts have rejected their bail petitions, which will now be heard by an NIA court.

Trafficking is a serious offence, making bail difficult to secure. The girls were going to take up jobs in the convent. They are adults and had their families' consent to travel. One of them has said that they were coerced to make false statements. There was no reason to invoke charges of forceful conversion and trafficking. However, Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai has backed the police and defended the charges. Chhattisgarh has a strong anti-conversion law that has been used indiscriminately in the past against members of the Christian community. The BJP government and Hinduva organisations have maintained that there are large-scale efforts for the forceful conversion of tribals. The state has a large tribal population, and Hinduva groups consider them to be part of the Hindu fold, though many tribal groups do not accept this classification.

Controversies over conversions have erupted regularly in states where Hinduva groups have influence. The Constitution gives citizens the right to profess and practise any faith, and the right to convert to other faiths. But there is a tendency among Hinduva outfits to dub all conversions as forced and target Christian priests and nuns. Killings and assaults have taken place, and Christian places of worship have been vandalised. The case against the nuns has attracted attention when the BJP is making serious efforts to lure a section of Christians in Kerala. The party's Kerala leadership has tried to intercede with the Chhattisgarh government and the Centre. But its overtures to the community are now bound to be seen as insincere and hypocritical.

NISAR and new space frontiers

The successful launch of the NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar (NISAR) satellite on July 30 is possibly the most significant milestone for the Indian Space Research Organisation since the soft-landing of Chandrayaan-3 on the Moon in August 2023. The world's most sophisticated and most expensive earth observation platform will scan the planet's entire surface in astounding detail, every 12 days, creating a dataset unmatched in scale and clarity. About the length of a pickup truck, the satellite's main body contains engineering systems and a first-of-its-kind dual-radar payload — an L-band system with a 25-cm wavelength and an S-band system with a 10-cm wavelength. Each system's signal is sensitive to different sizes of features on Earth's surface, and each specialises in measuring different attributes such as moisture content, surface roughness, and motion. These characteristics are important for studying a variety of natural surface conditions. When operating together, the two radars will collect data synchronised in time and location, extending the sensitivity of the measurements. For example, the S-band data will allow more accurate characterisation of shorter plants, such as bushes and shrubs, while the L-band data will sense taller vegetation such as trees. Terabytes of data generated each day will be free for researchers, who can more accurately predict the consequences of climate change, biodiversity loss, and the melting of the polar ice cap.

The decade-long collaboration between the two space agencies must not end with NISAR. Rather, it should inspire more advanced joint programmes as envisaged by the political leadership of the two nations. Long-duration human spaceflight missions, spaceflight safety, and planetary protection have been identified as some of the areas for initial collaboration. Space cooperation can also advance through industrial collaboration in connectivity, advanced spaceflight, satellite and space launch systems, space sustainability, space tourism, and advanced space manufacturing. India is also a signatory of the US-LED Artemis Accords, which seek to provide a set of principles to enhance the governance of civil exploration and use of outer space.

The Indo-US space collaboration has come a long way from the days when Washington tried hard to prevent New Delhi from acquiring the cryogenic technology for rocketry. It was ironic that NISAR was launched using a GSV that has a cryogenic engine in its core. The collaboration has led to the entry of Indian astronaut Shubhanshu Shukla to the International Space Station. His inputs will be vital in designing India's own space station. The two countries would do well if they shield joint exploration of the outer world from the ongoing friction on the trade front.

The mission must chart a course for future collaboration between the two space agencies

Financial incentives, world-class infrastructure, and merit-driven career prospects are non-negotiable

ARINAMD GOSWAMI AND
SRINIVASAN YENGAR

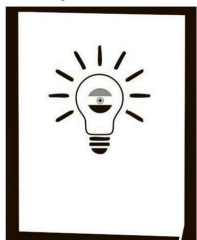
India's saga with intellectual brain drain is one of missed opportunity, chronic structural lapses, and complex stimuli that have propelled some of the brightest minds out of the country's research landscape, despite India today commanding global admiration for its prowess in digital technology, frugal innovation, and homegrown talent fuelling Silicon Valley. The government's recent claim that the Vaidya Fellowship scheme has retained just 36 scientists is a bracing reminder of the size of our problem: a high-tech, networked diaspora numbering in the tens of thousands, contrasted with token attempts to win them back. This predicament is the cumulative result of deep-seated "donor country" and "recipient country" stimuli — forces that shape the flows of global expertise.

The idea of intellectual migration, or "brain drain," is well-explained by the interaction of two groups of stimuli: those that drive talent away from their home nations (donor country stimuli) and those that irresistibly attract them to other destinations (recipient country stimuli). This cycle has repeated with striking consistency throughout the 20th century. In the aftermath of World War I, the devastated Balkans, especially Hungary, saw waves of scientists fleeing war-torn cities for intellectual salons and safely funded labs in the West. Donor country pressures — political instability, lack of opportunity, scientific persecution — routinely combine with recipient country attractions — robust research ecosystems, social tolerance, generous funding, and prestige — to channel human capital across borders.

The 1930s furnished an enduring template: as fascism strangled academic life in Germany and Central Europe, Jewish scientists escaped rising antisemitism and existential danger. Names like Albert Einstein and John von Neumann found a haven in the United States, whose land-grant university system and insatiable demand for scientific advancement made it the recipient par excellence. The migration of Soviet physicists and mathematicians in the 1950s, disenchanted with the demise of state-funded research and a collapsing economy, reinforced further the hypothesis of stimuli-based talent migration. The United States, already the gravitational hub of science, actively attracted

these brains.

For decades, Chinese researchers gravitated toward Western institutions, seeking freedom from bureaucratic inertia, censorship, and underfunding. But as China systematically reformed its higher education and research ecosystem — investing billions in R&D, offering competitive salaries, and streamlining career incentives — it succeeded in converting itself into a "recipient country." Tsinghua University, once dismissed as an also-ran, began luring home talent from Stanford, MIT, and Berkeley, dramatically improving its publication and patent output, and establishing Beijing as a global node for AI and computer sciences.



India faces the paradox of being both a donor and, at most, a reluctant recipient. India is globally famed for its vaccine exports, space missions, and fintech innovations. However, it has yet to create the institutional lures necessary to aspirationally attract, let alone repatriate, its most ambitious scientists. Our diaspora may lead AI labs at Google or cancer centres at Harvard, but the domestic academic ecosystem fails to ignite their return.

Although hosts entrance exams that are among the most competitive in the world, Indian universities suffer from deep-rooted structural issues. Where Indian professors are typically granted long-term job security from day one, institutions in the West — especially in the US — enforce a grueling tenure-track process. The latter demands sustained research productivity, success in securing external grants, laboratory leadership, exceptional teaching, and doctoral mentorship over a 5-7 year probation. Lacking equivalent mechanisms, Indian academia often breeds frustration or inertia.

Further, starting salaries for assistant professors are disproportionately low relative to the cost of lengthy doctoral study. Departments are underfunded, infrastructure is often inadequate, and faculty must negotiate capricious bureaucratic obstacles just to access research funds or procure laboratory

equipment. While Western universities typically shield research faculty from the brunt of bureaucracy and allow instruction-heavy roles to be handled by teaching-focused staff, Indian institutions pile large undergraduate class sizes atop research expectations, hindering focused scholarly inquiry. Unless India introduces differentiated faculty tracks and invests substantially in research capacity, the country's brightest minds will not see academia as a viable career.

Back to the drawing board

India requires a foundational overhaul to position itself as a true "recipient" country.

First, it must dramatically ramp up financial incentives. India should consider establishing a prestigious national programme for "Frontier Fellows" that also attracts international experts, and offers five-year fully funded group leader packages, rapid lab set-up support, and a promise of meaningful influence in shaping national research agendas.

Second, India must invest in world-class infrastructure that matches the standards of the best Western institutions. The creation of Special Science Zones within and beyond existing campuses, exempt from bureaucratic and procurement delays, could revolutionise the environment for both local and returning scholars.

Third is the introduction of rigorous, transparent, and structured career incentives. The tenure process of academics needs to be revamped: contract hiring, senior mid-career review, strong mentorship systems, merit-based promotion, and differentiated teaching and research tracks must become the standard.

Fourth, research grants should be merit-based, disbursed with minimal bureaucracy, and protected from political interference. Empowering university leaders while reducing administrative red tape will allow creative governance models in academia, India should pilot "academic senates" within major universities, where representatives of returning and local researchers, graduate students, and industry partners have an explicit role in faculty recruitment, research evaluation, and infrastructure planning.

Finally, the integration of Indian academia with global networks must be made seamless. Young researchers will not choose India because of patriotic sentiment alone; they need the same scale, freedom, and recognition as elsewhere. Scientists and engineers, *(Arindam is a research analyst in the high-tech geopolitics programme at the Takshashila Institution; Srinivasan is the CTO for the energy and resources industry in Asia at a multinational technology company)*

RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE

Dip-Idli pangs on Mt Kilimanjaro

What's in a name? Not desi food, as the tired trekkers learnt...

ARUNA PARANDHAMA

Home is where the heart is — but more importantly, where the idli-vada is. As a devout Dravidian, my spouse feels that the farther you stray from your homeland, the louder the craving for idli-vada grows. This truth hit home — quite literally — when he and his colleagues returned from scaling the mighty Mt Kilimanjaro in Kenya.

After battling torrential rain, bone-chilling cold, and the toll of exhaustion that makes your soul want a nap, all of them descended the mountain with only one thing in mind: piping hot Indian food. The dream wasn't

Everest-level complicated; just some spicy, soul-stirring, desi food.

As they stumbled into a local market, their eyes darted like desperate food-sniffing dogs, scanning for any sign of Indian-ness, or the neighbouring Malay, Thai, or Sri Lankan — even fusion food that had been written near consolation. And then, it appeared, like a mirage in a desert... Anna's Cafe.

Men will be men. They practically sprinted into the cafe with the prospect of something close to home food. The menu was flipped, turned, read diagonally, and possibly sniffed for masala residue, but to no avail — no idli, no vada, no sambhar in sight. With growing anxiety and growling stomachs, they summoned the waiter and asked, "Do you serve idli vada?" The man looked puzzled. "No sir," he said, "we serve English breakfast all day!" in his heavy African accent.

That was the Eureka moment, the

moment of awkward silence when the realization struck: the idli vada was not to be found. This was Anna's Cafe, not Anna's Café — as in, not the beloved South Indian "Anna" (brother) who serves up dip-idlis with a smile, but just a regular English girl who liked baked beans, French toast, and sausages.

Fatepalm moment! Pride bruised. They settled for insipid eggs and toast. However, the moment they touched back home, they made a beeline to the nearest Darshini, where crisp vadas and soft idlis swimming in sambhar brought all the hungry trekkers' appetites and common sense back to life.

Moral of the story: Always double-check your Annas when on foreign soil, and especially when hunger fogs your brain. And never, never underestimate the power of a well-timed dip-idli! It is a force to reckon with in the culinary world, and it is a powerful motivator for people to come back home.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

India must diversify its export markets, bolster manufacturing

US President Donald Trump's remark calling the Indian economy "dead" reflects both ignorance of global economics and frustration over India's refusal to yield to America's unfair trade demands. India's decision to reject a trade deal favouring US farm and dairy exports was a prudent move to protect its agrarian economy. Moreover, Trump's assertion that Pakistan could one day sell oil to India is strategically naive and geopolitically baseless.

Missed opportunity

This refers to your edit 'Operation Sindoor; No clear answers' (Aug 1). The four-day debate in Parliament on the Pahalgam terror attack and Operation Sindoor was a missed opportunity for transparency and accountability. While questions were raised regarding the security lapse, the scope of the military operation, and the ceasefire's timing, the government's responses were evasive. Parliament is the appropriate forum

to inform the nation on such matters, yet the discussion veered into political point-scoring rather than meaningful engagement. Matters of national security demand a bipartisan approach rooted in facts, not rhetoric.

K Chidanand Kumar, Bengaluru

Ensure freedom

Apropos 'Nuns' arrest: Victim alleges coercion by Bajrang Dal' (Aug 1), the government should ensure justice and religious freedom. The arrest

of two nuns, which appears to be on false grounds of forcibly converting three girls, is deeply concerning.

Fabian Mae Richard, Bengaluru

'50 Years Ago' under 'Our Pages of History' did not appear on August 1 due to technical reasons. We regret the omission. —Ed

Our readers are welcome to email letters to: letters@deccanherald.com (only letters emailed — not handwritten — will be accepted). All letters must carry the sender's postal address and phone number.

SPEAK OUT

The Election Commission has said there are 70 lakh voters (in Bihar) whose whereabouts are not known. Rahul Gandhi wants to win the election with these 'invisible voters'.



Rajiv Pratap Rudy, BJP MP

Numbers don't lie. Liars use numbers. —Vadav Smil

TO BE PRECISE

MELANCHOLIC, HE SPENT ALL DAY FLIPPING THROUGH OLD PHOTO ALBUMS!



IN PERSPECTIVE

EU and China: A growing rift

Beijing's market distortions, backing for Russia's war push ties with the EU towards an inflection point

GURJIT SINGH

The 25th EU-China Summit in Beijing, intended to commemorate 50 years of diplomatic relations, unfolded under an atmosphere of tension and discord. Far from a celebratory occasion, the summit, abruptly shortened to a single day at China's request, was dominated by unresolved disputes over trade, industrial policy, and geopolitics. The meeting took place against the backdrop of mounting pressure on the EU from the United States for a re-balanced transatlantic trade deal. Together, these developments underscored a deeper truth: the EU remains structurally ill-equipped to credibly escalate tensions with either Washington or Beijing, limiting its diplomatic leverage on both fronts.

There was speculation that tensions within the transatlantic alliance might prompt China to adapt to a more assertive stance towards Europe. However, Beijing has taken a more assertive posture, repurposing tools initially designed for leverage in the US-China trade dispute to exert pressure on the EU. Indeed, among these is China's export control regime, now used to constrain European assertiveness, threaten escalation, and extract concessions. One of the clearest illustrations of this is China's tightening grip on rare earth exports, vital for European industries and defence modernisation. Although the summit produced a vague commitment to create an "upgraded supply chain mechanism" to manage disruptions, confidence remains low that these controls will be eased in any meaningful way. European companies reliant on critical materials are warning that dwindling stockpiles could halt production within weeks. For China, the so-called "upgraded supply chain mechanism" is likely to serve not as a solution, but as another platform to push back against EU policies.

While the European defence sector represents a relatively small portion of demand for Chinese rare earths, value terms, access to these materials is strategically indispensable. European defence firms are taking steps to diversify supply chains, but the urgency is growing. It would be unrealistic to expect China to willingly support Europe's rearmament while the EU actively seeks to deny advanced technologies to the Chinese military.

The European Commission now officially describes the EU-China trade relationship as "critically unbalanced". Brussels continues to activate trade defence instruments targeting Chinese market distortions, particularly in the electric vehicle and medical device sectors. Despite these efforts, the Chinese trade surplus with the EU exceeded €300 billion in 2024

and continued to grow in 2025. Beijing has largely deflected European negotiators' complaints about market access in sectors like cosmetics, food, and pharmaceuticals by flooding the relationship with a barrage of smaller, intractable disputes, effectively distracting from a broader strategic recalibrating effort.

The EU has managed to prevent its member states from pursuing bilateral "green corridor" deals with China that would have undermined collective bargaining power: one of the few positive takeaways from an otherwise fractious summit.

The Russian connection
China's second key objective vis-à-vis the EU is to preserve its strategic alignment with Russia while minimising European consequences. Remarkably, Beijing has succeeded thus far. One week ahead of the summit, the European Council adopted its 18th sanctions package targeting Russia's war machinery. It included seven Chinese entities implicated in circumventing export restrictions, including the supply of UAV components.

Unlike previously, Beijing reacted strongly to the inclusion of two banks from Northeast China — Suihe Rural Commercial Bank and Heilong Rural Commercial Bank — accused of facilitating cross-border military trade with Russia. MOFCOM pledged necessary retaliatory steps, indicating a heightened sensitivity to financial sector sanctions. Beijing may now leverage its export control regime in response.

China's Foreign Trade Law allows it to impose "countervailing measures" against any "prohibitive, restrictive, or other similar measures". Evidence continues to appear of Chinese support for Russia's war effort. The latest regulations show Chinese-made engines, falsely labelled as refrigeration units, reaching Russian drone manufacturer IEMZ Kupo. These engines are being used in Ukraine. As drone usage intensifies in Ukraine, Europe's patience is wearing thin. Beijing's dual-track strategy has not yet triggered a full-blown rupture in EU-China relations, but the tension is mounting.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen described the EU-China relationship as reaching an "inflection point". The EU's summit press release clarified what this means: while they remain open to constructive dialogue, it will no longer hesitate to take "proportionate, legally compliant action" to protect its interests.

More trade defence measures against China's market distortions are almost certain. The result will be a continuing cycle of confrontation and tit-for-tat as Beijing treats access to the European market as a given and continues to support Russia's war effort without consequences, the EU-China relationship is likely to remain stuck in a slow but steady state of deterioration.

(The writer is a former ambassador of India to Germany, Indonesia, and Ethiopia)

DECCAN
Chronicle

2 AUGUST 2025

Has justice been denied
in Malegaon blast case?

Seventeen years after the 2008 Malegaon bomb blast claimed six lives and injured nearly a hundred, we still don't know who did it. Justice has not just been delayed and denied — it has been sacrificed at the altar of political expediency — as major political parties continue to use the trial court verdict to settle scores over the "saffron terror" narrative. From the very beginning, the investigation became a political flashpoint. The Maharashtra Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS), led by the late Hemant Karkare, arrested individuals linked to the right-wing Hindu group Abhinav Bharat, including Sadhvi Pragma Singh Thakur and Lt Col Prasad Purohit. It was the first time a Hindutva-aligned organisation was implicated in a terrorist act.

The Congress and its allies seized the moment to coin the term "saffron terror", using it as a political weapon. The BJP, in turn, condemned the label as an insult to Hindu sentiment and accused the ATS of acting at the behest of its political masters. Both sides exploited the investigation hoping for electoral gain.

Muslim organisations had welcomed the ATS arrests, viewing them as long-awaited justice. When Karkare was later killed in the 26/11 Mumbai attacks, an attempt was made to link Hindutva forces to it. The unsubstantiated claim further politicised the tragedy. Later, a road in Malegaon was named after Karkare, which was also a politically motivated move.

After the national regime change in 2014, the investigation took a different approach. It was transferred to the National Investigation Agency (NIA), which soon dropped charges against several key accused and declared there was no conclusive evidence. Witnesses turned hostile. Forensic findings were revised. The explosives, initially reported to contain RDX, were later said to have shown no trace.

Former Special Public Prosecutor Rohini Salian, who was eventually replaced by advocate Avinash Rasal, alleged publicly that she was told by the NIA to "go soft" on the accused after the BJP came to power. Opposition parties accused the agency of becoming a political tool, rather than a neutral institution dispensing justice.

Amid this political tug-of-war and shifting narratives, the truth was lost, and the families of the victims forgotten. For them, the court's verdict is not closure; it only deepens their trauma. The prolonged investigation, procedural failures, and political interference have left glaring questions unanswered.

If the arrested individuals were falsely implicated, who planted the bomb? Was the prosecution's failure a result of incompetence, or intentional sabotage? Do our institutions have the resilience to resist political pressure and uphold truth even when it's inconvenient? The Malegaon case has become a sad tale of how terror investigations can be manipulated, how narratives are rewritten, and how justice can be sidelined by electoral calculus.

It is not an isolated failure. It mirrors the trajectory of the 2006 Mumbai train blasts case, where all 12 accused were acquitted after 19 years. These cases reflect a broader pattern of dysfunction in India's judicial process in terror-related cases, where trials drag on for decades, evidence is compromised, and public faith is eroded. Justice, in its truest form, requires more than just arrests and convictions — it demands facts, integrity, and above all, accountability.

Nisar symbol of space diplomacy

The Indian Space Research Organisation (Isro) has recently launched the Nasa-Isro Synthetic Aperture Radar (Nisar) satellite, which is considered the most sophisticated radar that could spot the minutest of changes anywhere in the world, in partnership with the American space agency National Aeronautics and Space Agency (Nasa).

Nisar is the first satellite in the world to use dual-frequency radar — L-band (NASA) and S-band synthetic aperture radar (SAR) — on a single platform, enabling high-resolution, all-weather, penetrative day-night imaging of the Earth's surface.

The satellite could monitor climate change incidents such as melting glaciers in the Himalayas, detecting subtle ground movements caused by earthquakes and landslides, tracking forest cover, biomass and carbon stocks, and assessing agricultural health and wetland dynamics. Nisar's data, which will be stored in an open-access model and used by both India and the US, will provide key insights for scientists, policymakers, and disaster management agencies.

Previously, Isro has developed and operated SAR satellites like RISAT-1A and RISAT-2B, which primarily use S-band and X-band radar. However, the L-band SAR, built by Nasa, gives Indian scientists access to data that penetrates forest, snow, and soil and enables better tracking of environmental and geological changes.

This is also the first time that Isro has used GSLV Mk II rocket for launching an earth observation satellite into a sun-synchronous polar orbit, which is around 600-800 km from the earth compared to elliptical Geostationary Transfer Orbit lying at 200 km to 36,000 km away. This launch enhances India's capabilities in deploying heavier and more complex payloads.

Beyond the scientific benefits, Nisar represents the maturing strategic partnership between India and the US and stands as a testimony for science diplomacy. It also provides a welcome relief from ultranationalist rivalry and protectionism among nations across the world in the Donald Trump era.

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Subhani



Trade row: India lags as
Trump browbeats world



K.C. Singh

The debate over Operation Sindoor in the Lok Sabha earlier this week had ended with acrimonious exchanges between the Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, when the former sought a public declaration that the US President's repeated claims of mediating the May 10 ceasefire between India and Pakistan were just "lies".

Hours later President Donald Trump fired a fresh salvo against India, on his Truth Social platform, when he announced the imposition of 25 per cent tariffs on Indian exports from August 1. Even more significantly, he condemned China and India for importing energy from Russia. He demanded that Russia "STOP the killing in Ukraine", and ended with "ALL THINGS NOT GOOD". He threatened additional punitive tariffs if the energy imports from Russia continued. As if that were not enough, a fresh diatribe on India and Russia followed. He taunted that "they can take their dead economies down together", saying the US had done "very little business with India". The Indian government was caught off-guard, as the next round of trade talks were scheduled in New Delhi in the second half of August. Logically, till then, the US was expected to respect the status quo.

Two elements emerge from President Trump's remarks. One, he resents India not agreeing to open its markets to meet his expectations. A stumbling block, as per reports, is India's stiff resistance to opening the agriculture and dairy sectors, besides barring the entry of genetically modified crops or oils produced from them.

The second element is Russia. President Trump's frustration with Russian President Vladimir Putin

has mounted over recent weeks. Mr Trump has gradually moved away from claiming the ability to end the Ukraine war quickly because of friendship with Mr Putin. Signalling transition is the US resumption of weapons supply to Ukraine. The US sees as problematic China and India continuing to purchase Russian energy, indirectly funding the Russian military operations against Ukraine. China has promptly rejected the US demand. India merely ignored it.

Noticeably, President Trump has also simultaneously targeted Brazil, announcing 50 per cent tariffs and sanctions on the judge investigating former President Jair Bolsonaro. It is hardly coincidental that President Trump is now picking on the five original members of Brics — Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. He has threatened additional tariffs on any member which adopts an "anti-American" agenda. In particular, he has been agitated over a Chinese proposal for a new currency for trading amongst Brics members to replace the US dollar.

President Trump has been emboldened by his recent success in signing trade deals with many countries. Out of the 10 Asean members, the US has concluded deals with the Philippines and Indonesia, with 19 per cent tariffs, and Vietnam with 20 per cent. Trade discussions have been concluded with Thailand and Cambodia, despite their distractions with border skirmishes. After a trade deal with Japan, the US has now finalised one with South Korea. Most importantly, during his golfing trip to Scotland, on July 27, a trade deal with the 27-member European Union was announced. America's trade deals with the EU and South Korea have some similarities, revealing the US preferences.

The EU has committed to

The anti-immigrant crusade in the US has compromised the Indian diaspora's ability to influence Mr Trump's decision making. For the BJP, too, the optics of him threatening Indian interests is also hard to market.

buy \$750 billion of US energy over three years, a period co-terminus with the Trump presidency. It also committed to invest \$600 billion in the US. Similarly, South Korea agreed to buy \$100 billion of US liquefied natural gas, besides investing \$350 billion in America. However, unlike conventional trade deals, these arrangements lack details or implementation mechanisms. Hence, CNN's Richard Quest has called them "largely garbage". South Korea was vulnerable to punitive US tariffs as export of its goods and services constituted 44 per cent of the country's GDP.

Some EU members are murmuring dissent. French Prime Minister Francois Bayrou called it a "dark day" when an alliance of free peoples, instead of defending their values, "resolves to submit". The European critics argue that instead of accepting 15 per cent tariffs, Europe could have threatened to retaliate against US digital services, besides excluding US technology companies from public contracts. In any case, the EU cannot compel any member or company to buy US energy. Furthermore, the quantities of energy that the US would need to export to match the commitment are unavailable till 2030.

What then are the options for India? First, the import of Russian energy by India would require visible curtailment to satisfy President Trump. Noticeably, the US has allowed South Korea to limit US beef imports and also restrict trade in rice. That is the kind of opening India must negotiate, instead of a blanket ban on American agricultural and dairy products. With the Bihar Assembly polls approaching, the BJP under-

standably wants to be seen as protecting the interests of small and medium farmers. Working around it is the challenge.

Like the EU, India must plan to manage trade with the US over the next three years of the Trump presidency. Pinpricks may continue like Mr Trump announcing a trade deal with Pakistan, involving a US company handling the "huge" newly-found oil reserves in the Rahim Yar Khan area of Pakistan. Negotiating with President Trump involves handing him ostensible gains, even though the substance of the deal may vary.

Over the last decade, the BJP government treated two elements as critical to India-US relations. One was an assumption that the United States found India vital to "balancing" China. Mr Trump's transactional approach negates this, as he treats India and China like distinct business clients. The other was the role of the Indian diaspora in influencing the US government. The anti-immigrant crusade against non-white US residents has compromised the Indian diaspora's ability to influence Mr Trump's decision making. On the contrary, because of the BJP's hype about the close interpersonal Trump-Modi relations, the optics of an aggressive Mr Trump threatening Indian interests becomes difficult to market in India.

India thus faces a choice. It can either, like Canada, Brazil and China, prepare to tolerate some pain and confront President Trump. Alternatively, it can emulate the EU, compromise tactically, and swallow the medicine. However, a diplomatic lesson emerges which the Narendra Modi government needs to imbibe. Diplomacy ultimately is about the interests of nations. Thus, public theatre, involving slogans and hugs, may facilitate domestic projection but is ineffective in balancing interests in a world transitioning to new trading, investment and strategic paradigms.

The writer is a former secretary in the external affairs ministry. He tweets at @ambkcsingh.

LETTERS

MALEGAON BLAST
CASE VERDICT

The verdict of the NIA Court acquitting all the seven accused who are alleged to be involved in the Malegaon blast in which 6 people died and 100 people were injured, has shaken the conscience of the nation. It is curious that they have been acquitted for the reason that the prosecution had failed to produce concrete evidence to sentence the accused who have been let off giving the benefit of doubt. As expected, the RSS and BJP have expressed their jubilation over the judgment and the BJP-led Maharashtra government has said that they will not appeal against the verdict.

Tharcus S. Fernando
Chennai

SPOT ON

Your editorial under the caption "TT Manthra: Adapt or Perish, July 31" is spot on. It could not have come at a more appropriate time. In the wake of Artificial Intelligence's dramatic entry into every sphere of human activity, giving pink slips to the employees of IT companies has become the new normal. You have rightly mentioned that life-long learning is the necessity for survival. Continuing to thrive in a software company is totally a different cup of tea compared to securing a not-so-demanding government job or for that matter getting a post in banks or PSUs. While hire and fire has become the order of the day, perform or perish should be the watchword for all employees irrespective of where they work.

S. Vaithianathan
Madurai

WHY NO BUMRAH?

What is the logic behind leaving out Jasprit Bumrah from the playing XI for the Oval Test when the series is on the line and the track provided at the Oval is a green top? Bumrah has been rested as part of a pre-planned workload management strategy. After the current series, India play two Tests each against the West Indies and South Africa in Oct-Nov. There's ample time for the speedster to rest his tired back. The team management should have considered this and included Bumrah for the decisive final Test.

S.Sankaranarayanan
Chennai

Mail your letters to
chennaidesk@deccanmail.com

Farrukh
Dhondy
Cabbages
& Kings



Could UK, France
push on Palestine
lead to a swift
2-state solution?

*"O Bachchoo loss in life is no surprise
As it goes on and expectation dies
Confront it without fantasies like 'fate'
Or 'destiny' — these are consoling lies!"*

— From Rubaiyat of Kundum Maal, by Bachchoo

The UK Labour Party has forced Prime Minister Keir Starmer to advance his and the British government's stance on a Palestinian state. He has now joined France's President Emmanuel Macron in announcing that he will recognise a Palestinian state in September this year "unless the Israeli government takes substantive steps to end the appalling situation in Gaza, reaches a ceasefire, makes clear there will be no further annexation of land by Zionist settlers in the West Bank, and commits to a long-term peace process that delivers a two-state solution".

Of course, Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu retaliated against these announcements, arguing that they support or sanction the "terrorist" actions of Hamas. US President Donald Trump has so far expressed absolute support for Mr Netanyahu's position, but he hasn't stooped to criticise Mr Macron and Sir Keir Starmer.

But... one never knows with the Orange one — he has said Gaza should be the Riviera of the Middle East, presumably with some Trump hotels and golf courses to attract the international rich.

What can Mr Macron and Mr Starmer hope to

achieve with these announcements? Will other nations join them? Even if every member of the United Nations, bar the United States, supports the establishment of a Palestinian state and ultimately a two-state solution, without US support they will have no means of bringing it about.

There is as yet no clarity about what territory Mr Macron, Mr Starmer and whoever joins them will "recognise" as Palestine. The speculation is that this state will include Gaza and the territory of the West Bank as it was before the 1967 war and will require the evacuation of the Israeli settlers who have, through force and ethnic cleansing, acquired land in Palestine's West Bank. Hope springs eternal.

Of course, even the slightest move towards such, or any other, solution will mean the proscription of Hamas and an assurance from any elected Palestinian organisation that all antagonism towards the existence of Israel should cease.

Again, does hope await eternity?

In the months since the October 7, 2023, attack by Hamas on the Israelis, killing hundreds and taking hostages, it seemed clear that this act of terror was a strategic miscalculation. Hamas' leadership could have had no doubts about the retaliation that would follow. They must have known that Bibi Netanyahu's extreme Zionist government would wreak incalculable vengeance on the Palestinians in Gaza, perhaps murdering hundreds. Thousands at the least count.

They may not have foreseen such genocide, but

probably calculated that any Israeli retaliatory action would be severe and radically alter the international view of Israel in Palestine's favour.

It didn't happen. The US and Britain continued to supply Israel with weapons. The Arab states, while mouthing stuff about negotiations and ceasefires, did nothing to stop the slaughter in Gaza. Iranian surrogates such as Hezbollah attempted some retaliation but were soundly and roundly seen off. So, with Iran's attempt.

Yes, there was condemnation of Mr Netanyahu's government and he was indicted for war crimes, but these were, in the circumstances, symbolic gestures. Nuremberg wouldn't have happened if the Nazis had won!

But now one must ask if the intervention of Mr Macron and Mr Starmer and the possible formation of a larger coalition with the same demand, has proved that Hamas' terror strategy has finally yielded some result? Even the French-British statements will lead to the dissolution of Hamas and the probable proscription of any organisation that supports strategies which echo the "from the river to the sea" slogan, which in most interpretations means the annihilation of Israel.

Even if in the end some compromise is worked out and there is a two-state solution — which very many Israelis and even past politicians of Israeli governments have been and are still in favour of — there will be those in the world population who insist that no people have the right to drive another population,

of different ethnic or religious persuasions from themselves, off their homeland.

Though one can sympathise with this principle, let's just think history. Aryans in India? The European occupation of Native American USA? Australia and New Zealand...?

Gentle reader, I grew up in Poona (now Pune) in western India with a handful of Baghdadi Jewish close friends whose families had settled in our town. I used to go to their houses and was aware of their fervent support for the Israeli State. At their family gatherings they would sing patriotic songs about turning the Negev desert into fertile land. They would boast about the socialistic, collective life of the kibbutz!

Then came the opposite view. The editor of the popular weekly rag called *Blitz*, R.K. Karanjia, wrote a book called *The Dagger of Israel*. It argued persuasively against the existence of the country. My deep friendship and my reading of the book pulled in opposite directions.

With the arrogance of adolescence, I thought that a one-state solution, in which Palestinians and Israelis would share a secular state and democratic country with absolute safeguards for the minority community — one or the other — should settle the problem.

Unfortunately, this world is not a make-believe utopia without religious prejudices and books proclaiming the allocation of land by God. That won't change.

Stop the slaughter — bring on the two-state

Amid IMF’s enhanced growth projection, three caveats can’t be ignored

THE International Monetary Fund (IMF) has revised India's economic growth forecast upwards, reinforcing the country's status as a leading performer among major global economies. IMF's latest World Economic Outlook (WEO), released on July 29, points out that India is now expected to grow at 6.4 per cent in both 2025-26 and 2026-27, marking an increase of 0.2 and 0.1 percentage points, respectively, over the April projections. This upgrade mirrors a broader, albeit modest, improvement in its global growth forecast. As per the updated assessment, the IMF now anticipates global GDP to expand by three per cent in 2025 and 3.1 per cent in 2026—both figures slightly higher than those projected just three months ago. It has also

raised its expectations for emerging market and developing economies, which are now projected to grow by 4.1 per cent, up from 3.7 per cent, a revision largely driven by improved prospects for China, the world's second-largest economy. The IMF attributes India's stronger outlook to a "more benign external environment" than was assumed in its April forecast. While the report stops short of listing specifics, the phrase suggests a combination of factors: easing inflationary pressures in advanced economies, stable commodity prices, and continued global demand for goods and services—all of which are expected to provide a more favourable backdrop for India's growth.

India's resilient performance continues to stand out. Even amid

geopolitical volatility and uneven global recovery patterns, the country has maintained a robust growth trajectory, supported by public capital expenditure, an expanding services sector, and digital infrastructure gains. The IMF's revision reflects this resilience, though the path ahead may still be complicated by emerging external and domestic challenges. Meanwhile, three key caveats deserve closer scrutiny. First, US President Donald Trump's 25 per cent tariffs on goods imported from India, "plus an unspecified penalty" for buying Russian oil and weapons, pose a major risk to India's growth rate, apart from straining bilateral ties between India and the United States, which have been steadily improving in the last few years. The new tariffs on

certain imports could create headwinds for Indian exporters. Second, how India responds to these US moves will significantly influence its medium and long-term economic prospects. Whether New Delhi chooses a retaliatory stance or seeks a diplomatic compromise could affect investor perceptions, trade flows, and diplomatic goodwill. India's choices in navigating this delicate phase of economic diplomacy will be watched closely, not only in Washington but also in global markets.

Third, and most crucially, the sustainability of India's growth momentum will depend on how the Narendra Modi government implements its domestic economic policies. While headline growth figures remain robust, challenges such as

sluggish private investment, labour market rigidities, and regional disparities persist. Economic ministers and other senior government functionaries wax eloquent about liberalisation and the ease of doing business, but executing reforms in letter and spirit will make all the difference. Trump's tough stance can be a blessing in disguise if it forces India's decision makers to focus on effective policy execution. The IMF's upgraded forecast underscores India's strong economic fundamentals and its continued attractiveness as an investment destination. However, this positive outlook is tempered by emerging global risks and internal policy variables. Navigating these will be crucial to maintaining India's position as a bright spot.

LETTERS

MLAs defections: SC directions praiseworthy

THE Supreme Court ordering the speaker of the Telangana Legislative Assembly to take decision on the ten MLAs who are facing charges of defection within three months is praiseworthy. The speaker has been taking time longer than it should be to decide the matter, subverting the spirit of the anti-defection law. Though there is no mention of time limit in rule books for speakers to take a call on defections, the inordinate delay makes a mockery of well laid down democratic norms. It's good that the apex court has set the record straight and hopefully the speaker will act per the court ruling.

Dr DVG Sankara Rao, Vizianagaram

Put a permanent stop to defections

THE speakers of Parliament and that of the State legislative bodies have often been found undermining democratic values when it comes to defections by elected people's representatives. Indian democracy has always been subverted by opportunistic politicians, who derive tacit support from speakers, who misuse their constitutional authority in taking decisions vis-à-vis the detectors. It is now for the Parliament to "listen" to the sentiments expressed by the Supreme Court in this regard and set the record straight. But none of the political parties would want to close doors to their pursuit of power, by hook or crook. And for them 'defection' is the biggest weapon even if it means subverting democracy! The Supreme Court can't order the speakers to take decisions within a stipulated time frame. It is for the Parliament to reconcile and bring in legislation to permanently settle the issue, so that the menace of defections is stopped once and for all.

Govardhana Myneedu, Vijayawada

Historic ruling by the Supreme Court

SC giving the Telangana Legislative Assembly speaker three months to decide on the defection of 10 BRs employees to Congress is a historical decision. However, it raises a crucial question: why not work out a robust constitutional provision to prevent defections altogether? In instances where MLAs switch loyalties after winning elections, a clear provision could mandate resignation from the incumbent party before joining another. This would uphold democratic values and prevent the erosion of public trust. Notably, many political leaders, including K Chandrasekhar Rao, K T Rama Rao, and N Chandrababu Naidu have encouraged such defections, undermining the integrity of the electoral process. In this context, the Supreme Court's role becomes pivotal in protecting democratic principles and ensuring accountability. A strong constitutional provision would help prevent future incidents and restore faith in the system. The judiciary's proactive stance is crucial in upholding the nation's democratic fabric.

Dr. Venkat Yadav Avula, MASS Hyderabad

Calling Trump's tariff bluff

AN increasingly fractious world order, the U.S. fired another salvo in its trade war targeting India with a hefty tariff on exports effective from August 1, besides additional penalties for buying Russian oil and arms. This only goes to show that US President Donald Trump has been a vitriolic opportunity offender, who cannot be fully relied upon. However, India's response to Trump's provocations has been measured and non-combative by saying that India will protect the interests of its farmers and MS-MEs. Apparently, Trump must understand that like earlier, India is not a soft state now with deep economic resilience, vast domestic absorption capacity, therefore, there can be no giving in to his pressure tactics. Despite Trump describing closeness of India and Russia as "dead economies", it is imperative that India refrain from reacting in a knee-jerk manner by keeping calm while trying to explore fast-track deals with the EU and other destinations more or less on the deals signed with the UK. India must adopt a cautious approach while at the same time remaining firm in its dealings that sends a strong message to Trump to agree to even terms in trade policy because his likes and dislikes of BRICS and global South is not going to help America in any manner in the long term both in trade and foreign policy matters with India.

K R Srinivasan, Secunderabad-3

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BENGALURU ONLINE

Minimum auto fare is now at Rs 36

BENGALURU: Commuters in Bengaluru will now have to shell out more for auto rickshaw rides, as the revised meter fares come into effect starting today. The minimum fare has been increased from ₹30 to ₹36 for the first 2 kilometers, while the per kilometer rate beyond that has been hiked from ₹15 to ₹18.

While the auto driver community has welcomed the fare revision, many passengers have expressed frustration over the increased travel costs. Under the new fare structure, ₹36 will be charged for the first 2 km for up to three passengers. Beyond that, every additional kilometer will cost ₹18. Additionally, a night fare (one-and-a-half times the regular rate) will apply between 10 pm and 5 am.

Waiting charges will kick in after the first five minutes of halt time, with ₹10 levied for every subsequent 15 minutes. Passengers can carry up to 20 kg of luggage free of cost.

For luggage above that weight, ₹10 will be charged, and a maximum of 50 kg is allowed.

The fare hike follows discussions held by the Auto Fare Revision Committee in March. Several auto driver unions participated in the meeting and presented their demands. After reviewing the committee's report, the respective district authorities approved the fare hike. The revision marks a significant change in urban transportation costs in the city and is expected to impact daily commuters the most.

Read more at <https://epaper.thehansindia.com>



They say you can wake up a sleeping person, but you cannot wake someone who is pretending to be asleep. This aptly describes the Congress party and the disjointed I.N.D.I.A bloc today. Their posturing in Parliament during the debate on Operation Sindoor and Operation Mahadev proves one thing: if they continue down this path, they are inching towards a political wipeout by 2029.

Let me begin with a small anecdote.

In Tamil Nadu, sworn opponents DMK and AIADMK, despite their ideological battles, once presented a united front before Singapore authorities regarding a delayed project. The Singapore officials were stumped to see both parties in the same room. The Tamil leaders simply replied, "Our fight is only within the state. When it comes to protecting Tamil Nadu's interests, we are one."

In stark contrast, look at Andhra Pradesh's YSRC, a Congress offshoot led by former chief minister Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy. They shamelessly wrote to Singapore, urging them to withhold investments in Andhra Pradesh, citing a potential change in government at a time when the incumbent Chief Minister and the official delegation were in talks to attract investments to the state. And in Delhi, the Congress and allies act in a similar fashion — prioritising petty politics over national interest.

During the parliamentary discussion on the military operations that neutralised terrorists and upheld national

honour, Congress and its allies insulted the armed forces by questioning the names of the operations — Operation Sindoor and Operation Mahadev — calling them communal and divisive. Seriously?

They don't ask how our armed forces entered deep into Pakistani territory, destroyed their airbase and effectively called Pakistan's nuclear bluff and how the homemade missiles caught the attention of the world and how our forces neutralised drones.

Instead, they obsess over how many aircraft India may have lost and why the operation was named "Mahadev", even going so far as to claim—without a shred of evidence—that five jets were downed. What a distorted sense of priorities. Some argue that terrorists don't care about religion when they kill. But how can they dismiss the words of a young widow whose husband was brutally murdered before her eyes—after the terrorists explicitly asked about their religion?

Former Union Home Minister P Chidambaram even shamelessly asked, "Where is the proof that they came from Pakistan? They could be home-grown terrorists." Does he want to be Pakistan's defence lawyer? Is there no empathy left in the Congress leadership for the families of those who died in the Pahalgam attack?

The grieving families found some solace on coming to know that the killers were neutralised. But the opposition? They were busy crafting conspiracy theories and playing communal politics. Their hatred for the current government has become so blind that they've started echoing the words of US President Donald Trump over the statements made by India's own ministers in Parliament.

— a laugh, a cry, an angry shout — activate dogs' auditory cortex and the amygdala — a part of the brain involved in processing emotions. They are also skilled face readers. When shown images of human faces, they exhibit increased brain activity. One study found that seeing a familiar human face activates a dog's reward centres and emotional centres — meaning your dog's brain is processing your expressions, perhaps not in words but in feelings. Dogs don't just observe your emotions; they can "catch" them too.

Researchers call this emotional contagion, a basic form of empathy where one individual mirrors another's emotional state. A 2019 study found that some dog-human pairs had synchronised cardiac patterns during stressful times, with their heartbeats mirroring each other. This emotional contagion doesn't require complex reasoning — it's more of an automatic empathy arising from close bonding.

The oxytocin effect: The most remarkable discovery

The Congress party and its I.N.D.I.A bloc allies have once again exposed their deep-rooted bias and misplaced priorities by mocking names like Operation Mahadev and Operation Sindoor. In their desperation to attack the government, they've stooped to questioning military operations, insulting our armed forces, and echoing hostile foreign voices like Donald Trump. From denying Pakistan's role in terror attacks to staying silent on the Malegaon verdict, the opposition's selective outrage and appeasement politics have crossed all limits. They refuse to show empathy to victims, seek justice for the falsely accused, or respect national sentiment which exposes their dangerous hypocrisy and reminds them that secularism doesn't mean shaming Hindu symbols or compromising India's integrity.



Trump falsely claimed on multiple occasions that he brokered peace between India and Pakistan. The opposition clowns couldn't even decide how many times Trump said it — some said 25, Rahul said 29. Maybe they should learn basic arithmetic before jumping into geopolitics. They should have also spoken about Trump's theatrics of sharing an AI-generated video of the arrest of former president of US Barack Obama, something which is not expected from people in such high positions.

When Trump called India's economy "dead," Rahul Gandhi — ever eager to join anyone who criticises the country just to attack Prime Minister Narendra Modi — promptly echoed the statement. But Trump's comment wasn't surprising, considering that the U.S. is now courting Pakistan to explore so-called "massive oil reserves." This has sparked scepticism: Does Pakistan really have oil reserves significant enough to attract major American interest?

Official Pakistani data tells a different story. In 2019, Pakistan produced only 89,030 barrels of crude oil per day. By 2025, this figure is projected to

fall further to 64,262 barrels per day — hardly a sign of a booming oil economy.

Meanwhile, what truly seems to irk the U.S. — and by extension, Trump — is that India has become the world's fourth-largest economy, trailing only the US, China and Germany.

Even more disruptive was India's launch of the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) — a revolutionary digital platform that brought cashless convenience to over one billion people, many of whom never had access to traditional banking systems. While much of the developed world remains tethered to credit cards and slow, fee-laden payment models, UPI leapfrogged ahead — empowering everyone from small-time vendors to global entrepreneurs.

India's digital economy is flourishing. Per capita income has doubled in the last 11 years, and the country is now a global leader in GDP growth.

In such a scenario, calling the Indian economy "dead" is not just false — it's absurd. When your country is unfairly criticised, a patriot stands up in its defence. But not Rahul Gandhi — for him, attacking



They are also skilled face readers. When shown images of human faces, they exhibit increased brain activity. One study found that seeing a familiar human face activates a dog's reward centres and emotional centres — meaning your dog's brain is processing your expressions, perhaps not in words but in feelings.

ery in canine-human bonding may be the chemical connection we share. When dogs and humans make gentle eye contact, both partners experience a surge of oxytocin, often dubbed the "love hormone". In one study, owners who held long mutual gazes with their dogs had significantly higher oxytocin levels afterwards, and so did their dogs. This oxytocin feedback loop

reinforces bonding, much like the gaze between a parent and infant.

Astonishingly, this effect is unique to domesticated dogs: hand-raised wolves did not respond the same way to human eye contact. As dogs became domesticated, they evolved this interspecies oxytocin loop to glue them emotionally to their humans. Those soulful eyes your pup gives you are

chemically binding you two together. Beyond eye contact, dogs are surprisingly skilled at reading human body language and facial expressions. Experiments demonstrate that pet dogs can distinguish a smiling face from an angry face, even in photos. They rely on multiple senses to discern how you're feeling. A cheerful, high-pitched "Good boy!" with a relaxed posture sends a very different message than a stern shout with rigid body language. Remarkably, they can even sniff out emotions.

In a 2018 study, dogs exposed to sweat from scared people exhibited more stress than dogs that smelled "happy" sweat. In essence, your anxiety smells unpleasant to your dog, whereas your relaxed happiness can put them at ease. Bred for friendship How did dogs become so remarkably attuned to human emotions?

The answer lies in their evolutionary journey alongside us. Dogs have smaller brains than their wild wolf ancestors, but in the process of domestication, their brains may have been rewired to enhance social and emotional intelligence.

Clues come from a Russian fox domestication experiment. Foxes bred for tameness showed increased grey matter in regions related to emotion and reward. These results challenge the assumption that domestication makes animals less intelligent. Instead, breeding animals to be friendly and social can enhance the brain pathways that help them form bonds. While your dog's brain may be smaller than a wolf's, it may be uniquely optimised to love and understand humans. Dogs excel at picking up on what you're projecting and respond accordingly.

So, dogs may not be able to read our minds, but by reading our behaviour and feelings, they meet us emotionally in a way few other animals can. In our hectic modern world, that cross-species empathy is not just endearing; it's evolutionary and socially meaningful, reminding us that the language of friendship sometimes transcends words entirely.

(The writer is associated with the London South Bank University)



INDIAN EXPRESS IS NOT AN INDUSTRY. IT IS A MISSION.

— Ramnath Goenka

PURSUE STABILITY WITH U.S., REDUCE RISKS WITH OTHER TRADE DEALS

THE keenly-awaited India-US trade deal has unexpectedly hit a wall. Until recently, it was anticipated that the two countries would either reach an interim deal or that Donald Trump would extend the deadline, just as he did with a 90-day snooze on reciprocal levies. But none expected Trump to charge at India with a 25 percent tariff, which will kick in from August 7, plus unspecified penalties and a warning of further punitive levies later. Though the tariff shocker was disappointing, the Indian government maintained calm, indicating that intimidation would not resolve tensions; tactful diplomacy will. Trump, on the other hand, seemed restless and issued a series of provocative statements about striking an oil exploration deal with Pakistan, whose product can then be sold to India, and terming Russia and India as ‘dead’ economies. Separately, he warned Indian companies of sanctions over Iranian petroleum purchases.

What’s unsettling Trump is India’s rising energy and defence purchases from Russia, which he claims is feeding the latter’s war machine. So by wielding the trade weapon, he hopes to undercut countries doing business with Russia and force Vladimir Putin to agree to a truce with war-torn Ukraine. While India values its diplomatic ties with Russia, it will be interesting to see if the escalating trade tensions and sanctions will force it to alter its economic strategy under pressure. In other words, the proposed India-US deal is not about trade alone, but is a potent tool to declare supremacy. Unarguably, this is Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s biggest challenge yet to retain economic and diplomatic stance with both Russia and the US without compromising on credibility and preserving strategic trust. But unlike China, which too teetered between confrontation and conciliation while negotiating with Trump, India only has a few bargaining chips in its negotiation arsenal.

While India remains committed to a fair trade agreement, the government has vowed to protect the welfare of farmers, entrepreneurs and small enterprises. Besides the moral aspects, India must carefully calibrate the economic risks and get as many trade deals with other countries as possible to gain leverage and reduce risks. At the same time, the government should explore options to get the US deal going without ceding ground and losing out on the existing trade ties. Such a task needs not political grandstanding, but a sensible strategy that prizes stability over spectacle.

NO POLITICS OVER METRO PLAN REVAMP IN ODISHA

JUST a year-and-a-half after the foundation stone was laid with great fanfare by former Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik, the Bhubaneswar Metro Rail project has been grounded. The Delhi Metro Rail Corporation, the turn-key consultant for Odisha’s largest infrastructure project, cancelled project-related contracts awarded to two major firms last week, signalling the state government’s intention of revisiting the whole plan. BJD chief Patnaik described the cancellation as a great betrayal of the people of the state. In its pushback, the BJP government made it clear that the ₹6,255-crore project was not feasible in its original form and a more sustainable plan is being devised. The urban rail project, announced in April 2023 by Patnaik, envisaged a 26-km elevated corridor in the first phase connecting Bhubaneswar airport and Trisulia, a point where the expanding state capital merges with neighbouring Cuttack. With a 2027 deadline, the previous government had prepared a detailed project report (DPR), formed the state-owned Bhubaneswar Metro Rail Corporation in August 2023, and awarded contracts.

The project had received mixed reactions back when it was declared, too, over the cost-benefit analysis, length of the network and per-hour passenger carrying capacity. The BJD clearly had timed and designed the entirely state-funded project with the 2024 elections in mind. Work had started, but it was on a slow track. However, after the BJP came to power last June, it wanted to tweak the project and the DPR was put on hold in March amid talks about taking the project underground. Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi, however, put it back on track by constituting a ministerial committee headed by Deputy Chief Minister K V Singh Deo to look at alternative models for the project. A mass rapid transit system will not only offer improved mobility options, but would also bring tremendous socio-economic and environmental positives. Since plans are afoot to extend the network well into Cuttack city and the project will have to start afresh, the government must ensure that it does not fall victim to partisan politics, because continuity in governance must be maintained. After all, the need for an urban rapid transit system for the greater capital region of Bhubaneswar is beyond dispute.

QUICK TAKE

PIGEONS vs HUMANS

CREATING an unexpected flutter, the Bombay High Court has ordered the city’s municipality to book people who feed pigeons. While hearing a petition filed by a group of animal enthusiasts, Justices G S Kulkarni and Arif Doctor observed that the matter primarily concerned public health and highlighted the serious health risks pigeons posed to people of all ages. Even the Delhi administration has soured on the avians who pose traffic risks as they flock to be fed by the roadside. Discouraging them is a far more humane thought than that harboured by Tom Lehrer, a Harvard mathematician who wrote darkly-comedic songs: “My pulse will be quickenin’ / With each drop of strychnine / We feed to a pigeon / It just takes a smidgin’.”

A century-old dispute along the 817-km border between Cambodia and Thailand suddenly degenerated into a military conflict when the world’s eyes were firmly on Gaza. The conflict jolted ASEAN, the regional association focused largely on economic issues. A shooting war over a dispute that includes the ownership of a 11th-century Hindu temple—Preah Vihar, a Unesco heritage site perched on a hilltop overlooking the two Buddhist-majority countries—was unexpected.

Direct talks between the Thai and Cambodian prime ministers, mediated by the Malaysian PM, have resulted in an unconditional ceasefire, though Thailand had earlier rejected third-party mediation. Cambodia alleged that Thailand had agreed to a Malaysian proposal but then backed off, possibly owing to pressure from the Thai military. The Thai foreign minister made the ceasefire conditional on Cambodia showing “genuine sincerity in ending the conflict” and indicated his country was open to dialogue.

The UN Security Council held an emergency meeting to discuss the situation; China and the US also offered to mediate. For Donald Trump, it was yet another opportunity to grandly announce that he had called upon both countries to accept a ceasefire and threatened to withhold trade deals if they didn’t comply. He added slyly that he was reminded of his role in the India-Pakistan ceasefire. Trump seems desperate to shore up his peace-making credentials that have been severely dented by his failure in Ukraine and Gaza despite threats and deadlines.

In the short and sharp conflict, the two Asian militaries lobbed rockets and artillery shells into each other’s territories claiming self-defence. Thailand deployed drones on Cambodia’s military targets. Thailand, a non-Nato ally of the US, is better equipped with American weaponry; whereas Cambodia’s smaller military is armed with old Chinese and Russian weaponry. An estimated 45 civilians and soldiers were killed and over 2 lakh inhabitants fled their villages near the border.

It was the second skirmish in 3 months since a Cambodian soldier was shot dead after landmine explosions injured five Thai soldiers. Both countries recalled their ambassadors accused the other of “war crimes”. Thailand blamed Cambodia for targeting villages, civilian establishments like a hospital and petrol stations, while Cambodia alleged that Thailand had used banned cluster bombs.

Tensions had been reignited in 2008, too, when Cambodia sought Unesco heritage

Old border disputes between Thailand and Cambodia have often led to violent clashes over a century. The latest conflict threatens to weaken China’s hand in the region

WHY TWO BUDDHIST NATIONS ARE FIGHTING OVER A HINDU TEMPLE

PINAK RANJAN CHAKRAVARTY

Former Secretary, Ministry of External Affairs, and former Ambassador to Thailand



SOURAV ROY

status for Preah Vihar, leading to violent clashes that caused 28 deaths. This time, Thailand declared martial law along the border and sealed it. Cambodia stopped importing Thai fuel, fruits and vegetables, and banned movies, TV shows and some websites from across the border.

India, which has good relations with both countries, issued a statement: “India... hopes that both sides will take measures for a cessation of hostilities and prevention of further escalation.” Indian embassies in Bangkok and Phnom Penh have issued advisories cautioning Indian nationals to avoid visiting places near the border. Though Thailand is India’s maritime neighbour, the conflict does not pose a security challenge for India.

Simmering tensions over the dispute have persisted since 1907. Both sides

blame the former colonial ruler of Cambodia, France, for the poorly-demarcated border running through dense forests dotted with ruins of old temples. Thailand disputes the ownership of the land adjacent to the temples, citing maps drawn by colonial-era French cartographers as inconsistent; Cambodia claims territories that are now in Thailand.

Control over popular temples like Preah Vihar and the smaller Ta Muen Thom are disputed. In 1962, the International Court of Justice awarded Preah Vihar to Cambodia, though the territory surrounding it remained under Thailand’s control. Issues of access for pilgrims and sovereignty have remained a flashpoint ever since. Cambodia views any challenge to the ICJ ruling as an attack on its sovereignty.

The hostilities run so deep that former

CONVENIENCE TRUMPS OIL SANCTIONS

“It is better to discuss things, to argue and engage in polemics than make perfidious plans of mutual destruction.”

— Mikhail Gorbachev, former President of the Soviet Union

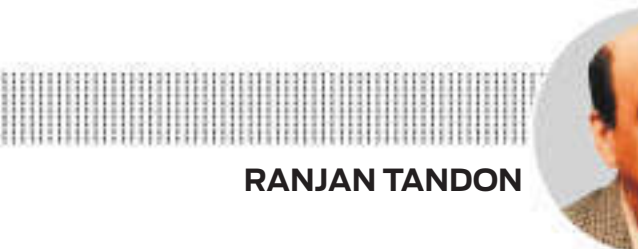
Oil remains a weapon of consequence in the intriguing world of geopolitics. The EU’s adoption of an 18th package of sanctions is aimed at escalating economic pressure on Russia. Once they are rolled out, the financial and trade restrictions could rattle the global oil market and singe the authors of the directive as well.

Inhibiting oil and gas supplies from Russia, the second largest OPEC+ oil producer, will heat up energy prices. The price cap of \$47.60 a barrel, effective from September 3, purports to strangle Kremlin’s revenues and weaken its military ambitions in Ukraine. An import ban on refined products derived from Russian crude January 21, 2026 onwards could lead to a high premium for oil out of West Asia.

However, the wider landscape reveals a different narrative. An estimated 5 million barrels per day of spare capacity with OPEC+ members could be configured to fill the gap. Kazakhstan, Iraq and the UAE have constantly exceeded quota allocations and plan to further raise production. Substantial new Caribbean and South American supplies will also hit the market early next year. Should the sanctions trickle down to the ‘Siberian supplies’, the fence-sitters will promptly fill the ensuing void. Thus, a price spike will be short-lived.

The present round of restrictive measures could be far less effective to attain EU’s objective in the absence of US support via secondary sanctions. Complexities surface as Beijing engages with Moscow and Tehran in the energy sector. India continues to patronise Russian oil in tune with a judicious economic agenda. America’s keenness to increase its presence in the Chinese and Indian markets—the two largest consumers—could propel Washington to restrict Moscow’s flows, leading to cost pressures.

However, the dilemma is that astronomical premiums would render Washington susceptible to inflationary woes, while, at substantially lower prices, US shale would ‘underperform’. It will be a tightrope walk to balance prices in such fluidity. Only a sustainable equilibrium will usher in new activity in the Permian basin, facilitating Asian imports from the US, and initiate favourable trade ties for Washington.



RANJAN TANDON

Senior markets specialist and author

Crippling sanctions on Venezuela over the last two decades have throttled the OPEC member that’s the largest holder of proven reserves in the world. US major Chevron is active in the South American country since 1923 and, despite US sanctions, was accorded a short reprieve during Joe Biden’s presidency after Nicolás Maduro’s re-election. Last week’s approval by the White House of Chevron’s restricted involvement is a move to resurrect the supply of Venezuelan heavy crude to US Gulf Coast refineries.



Market dynamics might override the threat posed by EU’s latest sanctions, making any price rise short-lived. Asian, Caribbean and South American supplies can fill the void left by Russia. Meanwhile, despite having imposed sanctions, the US wants to import Venezuelan crude

However, deteriorating infrastructure, mismanagement and lack of investment have hampered revival of the ailing Venezuelan state oil company, PDVSA. The latest move hints at leveraging America’s share in Asian demand. The sanctions were rendered ineffective to an extent as independent refineries in India and China patronised Venezuelan oil from the Orinoco belt, as they are specialised to refine the heavy crude. China continues to import oil from Venezuela in an arrangement to pay off Caracas’s debts. About two-thirds of the oil exported by Venezuela in 2023 landed in China via Malaysia.

China also imports more than 45 percent of Russian crude, a significant portion of which is carried through the Eastern Siberia-Pacific Ocean (ESPO) and

other pipelines such as Skovorodino-Mohé and Atasu-Alashankou. With over 2 million bpd of Russian oil entering Chinese territory, it will continue to be an important bridge in their trade alliance. ESPO pipeline facilitates Russian exports to Japan and South Korea, too.

Historically, oil has been covertly transported on the high seas via ‘shadow and dark fleets’. Though restrained conveyance through secondary sanctions could exacerbate the pain and impact supplies to an extent, surface transportation shall continue to provide succour for Kremlin’s fossil fuel exports.

Sanctions get easily watered down by convenience. In an earlier column, I had mentioned the restrictions and embargoes ‘adjusted’ in the past and tailor-made for specific needs of some EU nations. Continuing the pattern, Budapest intends to proceed with the building of a new pipeline between Serbia and Hungary, facilitating Russian crude imports. Last week, Bratislava extended an agreement with Moscow to continue to receive “economically advantageous” gas supplies from Gazprom until 2027, even while Brussels attempts to shut off Kremlin’s energy ingress.

The energy equation is evolving and natural gas is viewed as an ethical alternative to oil in the future. But within that alternative, it’s imperative to accept the role of present actors. With Moscow’s noticeable share in natural gas, LNG and coal supplies to Europe, the UK and EU need to adopt a long-term view, lest the sanctions’ tremors destabilise their energy sufficiency goals.

Depleting reserves and rising costs of extraction in the existing North Sea fields have impacted oil production in the UK. BP and Shell continue to pursue exploration and production in parts of Africa though the region’s geopolitics continues to be volatile. Any tightening of the market will entail a shrewd calibration to manoeuvre the pitfalls.

In October 1939 as Winston Churchill said, “Russia is a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma”, he was prescient of what would follow decades later, too.

(Views are personal)

Thai PM Paetongtarn Shinawatra lost her job when Cambodian strongman Hun Sen released the recording of a phone call with her. In the leaked call, Paetongtarn had called Hun Sen “uncle” and criticised the Thai military leadership for triggering the conflict. She came under severe criticism and was accused of disrespecting national sovereignty.

Regional history paints the conflict in an intriguing shade of blue. Hun Sen and Paetongtarn’s father—another former Thai PM, Thaksin Shinawatra—were long-term friends. Hun Sen, one of Pol Pot’s anti-US commanders during the 1970s, ruled Cambodia with an iron hand for 38 years before giving the reins to his son Hun Manet in 2023. The leak he sprung on his friend’s daughter blew up into a political deluge. The opposition joined hands with the Thai deep state comprising royalists and the military, and accused Paetongtarn of being weak-kneed and critical of the military.

The Pheu Thai party-led coalition government was ditched by its main partner, the Bhumjaithai party. Despite Paetongtarn’s subsequent apology, the Constitutional Court ruled to suspend her as PM and the defence minister took over as the caretaker. It doesn’t help that Paetongtarn, 38, is perceived as a proxy of her influential father Thaksin, who is regarded as the *de facto* leader of Pheu Thai. She, however, remains in the cabinet as culture minister, a new appointment following a reshuffle before her suspension.

It throws new light on Thailand’s long history of military as well as ‘constitutional’ coups. Since the early 2000s, the country’s royalist-military establishment has overthrown democratically elected governments by weaponising the Constitutional Court, which it controls via nominated members loyal to the deep state. The Constitutional Court has previously ousted three PMs and banned two others from power. Paetongtarn was also suspended temporarily earlier by this court when a case was filed by some senators over the conversation leak.

The Cambodia-Thailand conflict poses a dilemma for China. Beijing has invested heavily in both countries’ infrastructure. It has a large naval base in Cambodia, which is crucial for its high stakes in ASEAN. No wonder it has adopted a “just and impartial position” and has said it would promote peace talks. Meanwhile, there is intense speculation over a covert American role in stoking the conflict that refuses to die down, as the US uses various levers to constrain China geopolitically in Asia.

(Views are personal)

MAILBAG

WRITE TO: letters@newindianexpress.com

Parliament order

Ref: *Lost opportunity to show unity at Sindoar debate* (Aug 1). At long last, parliament functioned uninterrupted for three consecutive days. It is hoped that parliament would deliberate on all issues in an orderly manner and avoid wasting taxpayers’ time and money.

Parthasarathy Mandadi, Tirupati

Clouded justice

Ref: *Malegaon: Justice, truth casualty of delays, lapses* (Aug 1). The recent acquittal of all accused in the Malegaon blast case exposes how communal biases can influence investigative and legal processes, casting suspicion on entire communities. This case reflects the dangers of linking terrorism with any religion, leading to deep societal divisions and injustice.

Narayanan Kizhmundayur, Thrissur

Chatbot therapy

Ref: *Perils of chatbot counselling* (Aug 1). The growing reliance on all-purpose AI for emotional support warrants serious reflection. While anonymity and accessibility appeal, mental health care demands nuance, training and human empathy. Chatbots may offer convenience, but they lack clinical judgement.

Veda Chidanand, Bengaluru

Balancing verification

Ref: *Setting stage for everlasting electoral angst* (Aug 1). The author misses the risk of fake voter IDs in border states. These areas face distinct security threats like cross-border infiltration and identity fraud. A careful balancing act is essential that strengthens verification without disenfranchising legitimate voters.

B Abbharna, Chennai

Magnet mantra

Ref: *Supply link from mines to magnet* (Aug 1). Despite having rare earth reserves, India does not have any domestic capacity to produce critical magnets. Investment is deterred by volatile pricing and lack of demand assurance. Without urgent policy action, ambitions in EVs, defence and renewables face a long-term threat.

M Barathi, email

Congress leadership

Ref: *Warning up to outlanders, the Sangh way* (Jul 31). The Congress, India’s Grand Old Party, has lately not paid heed to its voter base. The Gandhi family helming the high command has no vision or discipline for the country’s development, and rarely gives any leadership position to party stalwarts.

Sreenivasan Raman, email

The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Defective law

Make it robust to curb defection

THE RE is undoubtedly something defective about the anti-defection law. It's been four decades since the 52nd Constitutional Amendment introduced the Tenth Schedule, which deals with provisions for disqualification on the grounds of defection, but the menace of party-hopping by elected representatives continues unabated. The law's inefficacy is underlined by the go-slow tactics of the Speaker concerned on petitions seeking the ouster of defectors. This constitutional functionary's role is under judicial scrutiny in Telangana, where 10 Bharat Rashtira Samithi MLAs switched allegiance to the ruling Congress during a six-month period following the 2023 Assembly elections. Asserting that defections can disrupt democracy if not curbed, the Supreme Court has fixed a three-month timeline for the Assembly Speaker to take a call on the disqualification pleas against these legislators.

The Telangana Speaker did not take the trouble of issuing notices on the disqualification pleas for more than seven months. He was roused to action only after the matter reached the apex court. The SC has insisted on timely adjudication, lamenting that the trust reposed by Parliament in the Speaker's high office has not been honoured in many cases. It's a double whammy for democracy: lawmakers first defect at the drop of a hat and then remain in office for an inordinately long duration. The Speaker, of course, is at fault for allowing things to reach such a pass. It is unpardonable to let him/her get away with dereliction of duty.

The MLAs and MPs who jump ship betray not only their respective political parties but also the voters of their constituencies. The whole electoral exercise is reduced to a sham when large-scale defections are engineered by the ruling party or alliance. There is a dire need to review the law and make it robust through provisions such as prompt disqualification upon defection. Constitutional safeguards are a must to combat horse-trading and ensure that the mandate of the electorate is not subverted.

A calculated gamble

HP bets on lotteries to plug budget hole

HIMACHAL Pradesh's decision to lift the two-decade-old ban on state-run lotteries marks a pragmatic turn in fiscal policy-making. With debt piling up and revenue streams strained, the cash-starved hill state is turning to an old but proven source of income — lotteries. Though controversial, lotteries are legal and revenue-generating, as seen in states like Kerala, Maharashtra and Punjab, where lottery revenues contribute significantly to the exchequer. Kerala is projected to earn a whopping Rs 13,244 crore from ticket sales in FY25 alone while Punjab expects Rs 235 crore this fiscal.

In fact, in Kerala, lottery proceeds are used to fund welfare schemes, including health insurance for the poor. If regulated well, lotteries can serve a dual purpose: mobilising resources and financing social development. Himachal, currently grappling with the financial aftermath of natural disasters and a sluggish economy, has few easy options left. The expected revenue from lottery sales can ease its fiscal burden. It is argued — not without reason — that lotteries are a 'sin economy', exploiting the poor and leading to personal financial ruin. Incidents of addiction and suicides must not be brushed under the carpet. However, the modern regulatory regime offers tighter control and GST already imposes a 'sin tax' on lottery sales, akin to alcohol and tobacco. It is not the lottery that ruins families — it is lack of oversight, financial illiteracy and unchecked marketing.

The question is not whether lotteries are perfect but whether they are better than borrowing more or cutting public services. In the absence of a bailout from the Centre and amid mounting Opposition attacks, the Sukhu government needs immediate, sustainable revenues. If run transparently, with a clear earmarking of funds for welfare schemes, Himachal's lottery revival could be a bold yet responsible gamble.

ON THIS DAY...50 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

CHANDIGARH, SATURDAY, AUGUST 2, 1975

Economic breakthrough

WITH the notable upswing in both farm and factory output in recent months, Union Finance Minister C Subramaniam's highly optimistic appraisal of the nation's economy appears warranted. The inflation spiral has at long last been broken and according to the FM, an inflation rate of 'minus 2.5 per cent' had been achieved in the week ended July 12. India's achievement in containing inflation, he has said, is being cited as an example at international conferences. Less than two years ago, this country was listed among the 33 worst affected by the oil crisis and the consequent distortion of the economy. Even if the benefit of the price fall has not yet percolated down to the common man at all retail levels, the achievement is commendable. Until the autumn of 1974, nothing that the administration did would reduce prices and the traders had the last laugh. Besides, the rain gods are smiling continually this year. Given some showers later in the season, there seems no reason why the expected 5 to 6 per cent increase in the national income against barely 2 per cent last year should not materialise. The FM would appear to be leaving others way behind in optimism. The distinct improvement had not been foreseen by most financial experts. And even the Economic Survey issued shortly before the last Budget had warned that in the context of many imponderables in critical areas, we have only a limited margin of manoeuvrability in bringing about a sharp acceleration in the rate of growth. Economic policy planners, it added, would have to grapple hard in 1975-76 with the task of raising the growth rate beyond the trend of 3-3.5 per cent.

OPINION

Trump stirs the South Asian pot

He has changed power equilibrium by cutting a deal with Pakistan and slamming India's 'dead economy'



THE GREAT GAME

JYOTI MALHOTRA

THIS feeling, on this monsoon morning after Donald Trump announced the US had signed an oil deal with Pakistan, feels a bit like those mornings in the wake of India's victory over Pakistan at Kargil back in 1999 — quiet, almost unreal. Except this time, the shoe is on the other foot.

Back in July 1999, Atal Bihari Vajpayee firmly told Bill Clinton to tell Nawaz Sharif — whom Clinton was seeing in Washington DC in an effort to end the Kargil conflict — that India would only compromise when the last Pakistani soldier walked back from the Line of Control across which he had walked into Kashmir. Nawaz Sharif had no choice but to agree. The Kargil conflict ended. A year later, Clinton was on a five-day visit to India, bathing in rose petals in Jaipur. On his way out, he stopped in Pakistan for five hours.

This weekend, as India examines the shift in US policy in favour of Pakistan — a shift so dramatic that heads should roll if it was not foreseen in the Indian establishment, from DC to Delhi — Pakistan will underline its new best friendship by importing one million barrels of oil from the US in October.

For the first time since 1989 — when the last Soviet soldier left Afghanistan and the Americans, soon after, flushed with the victory of having evicted the godless Communists from Kabul, stopped the pipeline of armaments and dollars to Rawalpindi — the Americans are returning to Pakistan.

It's another roll of the dice in the unending great game, but this time around India is bound to get hurt.

Remember that Pakistan is an ally of China. Remember, too, that Trump began his second



PROVOCATIVE: Trump's power play is certain to aggravate the international chessboard. AP

term by imposing wild tariffs against Beijing because he realised the Chinese had undercut the American economy from under its feet; bringing back manufacturing from China, Trump knew, was central to Making America Great Again.

But Trump changed the power equilibrium in South Asia this week by cutting a deal with Pakistan and slamming India's "dead economy." It must have been the heat in DC or something he ate in Mara-Lago, because he forgot that only five years ago, Modi had declared, "Ab ki baar, Trump Sarkar" in Houston, sending the Indian-American crowd into a frenzy and delivering more than a few precious Indian-American votes into Trump's kitty.

Make no mistake, Trump's power play is certain to aggravate the international chessboard. It is too soon and too simplistic to say today that old friendships will rearrange themselves around a 21st-century version of the Cold War. Everyone will still talk to everyone, of course, especially in Quad meetings — there's a summit in Delhi coming up in November, which means Trump is sure to show up. But with the US President having thrown Modi into the arms of the Russian bear ("the dead economies of India and Russia"), Modi may have no option but to warm up to Vladimir Putin.

The thing about friendships and foreign policy — which is,

The question the Modi government must ask itself is why Pakistan was able to trump the India story.

essentially friendships between nations — is that they have to be between equals. That's why the unusual embrace between India and the US wasn't just between the world's largest and oldest democracies or that Indian Americans later grew to be among the most influential ingroup in America — from Sundar Pichai to Shantanu Narayen and Sanjay Mehrotra — but that despite the economic inequality, both nations weren't afraid of treating each other as peers.

Roosevelt understood the uniqueness of India, even if Eisenhower didn't. Kennedy understood — a photo of his friend and then Ambassador to India, John Kenneth Galbraith, hangs in the tiny library upstairs at the Government Museum in Chandigarh, on the other side of the pillar on which MS Randhawa's photo hangs — even if Kissinger didn't.

And even when Kissinger openly defended his pro-Pakistan tilt and criticised the exo-

dus of ten million Bangladeshis into West Bengal in 1971, K Subrahmanyam, an erstwhile top defence analyst, wasn't afraid of admonishing him and asked if he remembered the escape of his fellow Jews from Germany. (In the wake of the 1998 nuclear tests, when the dust finally settled, India's Ambassador to the US Naresh Chandra and Kissinger became fast friends.)

The opposite was also true. Vajpayee understood the incredible importance of the US — and described the two nations as "natural allies," even when US anger over India's 1998 nuclear tests had barely subsided. And when Manmohan Singh, that brilliant PM who hated public speaking went and told George Bush that "India loves you" — it was true in a Hollywood sort of way, because the US had brought India into the exclusive club of de facto nuclear nations with the 2008 nuclear deal.

Modi, too, with "Ab ki baar, Trump Sarkar" in 2020 understood that flattery was the direct route to the White House. It boggles the mind, therefore, why External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar has stubbornly refused to give Trump the credit for ending the Op Sindoor conflict, including during the Parliament debate, though Trump has claimed this at least 15 times. (In contrast, the shrewd Pakistanis nominated him for the Nobel Peace Prize.)

To be fair, India has always rejected third-party intervention in India-Pakistan matters, insisting that the bilateral track, via the Simla Agreement of 1972, holds supreme over everything else. But what happens when India refuses to have any communication at all with Pakistan, whether it's over water-sharing or playing sports, leave alone a formal dialogue?

Here's what is really believed to have happened on the intervening night of May 9-10, when Modi unexpectedly gave the order to bomb 11 Pakistani bases. The IAF action shook the Pakistanis badly. The Pakistanis called the Americans and the Americans called Jaishankar. Tell the Pakistanis to tell us, Jaishankar responded. Which is when the Pakistani DGMO called his Indian counterpart on the afternoon of May 10 and both sides agreed to call it off.

But India, then, went ahead and insisted that "Pakistan," not just the Pakistani terror group, The Resistance Front (TRF), was responsible for the Pahalgam attack — even as Trump was preparing to receive Pakistan's Field Marshal Asim Munir for *halal* lunch at the White House. The Americans were not going to take that lightly.

Note that the US has, since, made a very fine, if distinct, difference by condemning "cross-border terrorism" and even naming TRF as a terror group — but Pakistan has never been named as the direct mastermind of Pahalgam. The rest of the international community has followed suit.

And so it ends, the world in a different place from when the week began. India's leaders are rightfully taking a deep breath in the hope that the India-US relationship will stabilise soon, but the truth is that it will be a long haul.

And if there is ever an honest self-examination, the question the Modi government must ask itself is why Pakistan was able to trump the India story — when it's a terror-ridden state, its economy is in the dumps, a former PM is in jail and the current PM is mortally afraid of his own Army.

Perhaps the honest question may yield some answers these monsoon mornings.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

It may be dangerous to be America's enemy, but to be America's friend is fatal. —Henry Kissinger

The adventures of jamun hunters

MA KRISHNAPRASAD

DURING my schooldays, I loved three trees with all my heart and soul — *jamun*, guava and mango. No other tree is as generous to children as *jamun*. You don't have to throw stones at its tree to make it part with its fruits, unlike mango and guava. It sheds its berries unasked for. Decades ago in Madras, there were many houses with a big backyard, each having a variety of fruit trees.

While the mango season arrives during the summer months, *jamun* trees bear fruits in July-August. Janmashtami is celebrated during the *jamun* season. At our home, *jamun* continues to occupy a pride of place among our offerings to Lord Krishna.

My friends and I were crazy about this fruit. We dedicated Sundays and holidays of July and August to what we called the *jamun* hunt. We used to invade backyards of our locality like a troop of monkeys to stuff our mouths with fruits. Mango is delicious, guava is tasty, but a ripe *jamun* is heavenly. All *jamun* trees are not the same. Some bear small berries with relatively big stones; others, big berries with small stones.

There was a big *jamun* tree in my uncle's house which literally carpeted the ground under its branches with supersized succulent berries that used to fall non-stop like a drizzle. One had to just lie down on one's back with the mouth open. A berry or two was sure to drop straight into it with a plop.

Every time we came home after our *jamun* expeditions, our faces, hands and dresses bore juice stains which could not be removed easily. Mothers used to struggle hard to rid their children's clothes of these tenacious stains. Our street had big houses with *jamun* trees. Those who owned these houses were nice people. During the *jamun* season, they used to throw open their gates to children of the neighbourhood.

In one house, there lived a retired Army officer with a Sam Manekshaw moustache. He used to spend his afternoon hours sitting in an armchair, reading one of his favourite books under a nearby *neem* tree. He allowed us to enter his premises on one condition: We should not hurl stones at his beloved *jamun* tree.

"Pick up and eat the fallen fruit as much as you like and go contentedly. But if you throw stones at my tree, I will throw you all out" was his military order. He also did not permit us to climb his tree as there had been an accident in which a boy fractured his leg when he fell off his perch. In an attempt to please him, we used to chant loudly 'Jai Jawan' when we entered and 'Jai Jamun' when we departed.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

One big FTA without the US

Apropos of 'India should play the waiting game'; under Trump 2.0, the international trade architecture has changed from a global order monitored by multilateral institutions to hurriedly cobbled deals and FTAs. Trumponomics has led to a scramble for FTAs among allies and even adversaries to mitigate the impact of US tariffs on their economies. BRICS nations have been singled out for special treatment by the US with a clear message to either fall in line or face high tariffs and penalties. Perhaps the best option for the global economy would be to come together and work out one big FTA keeping the US out. It would perhaps restore some balance in a world being increasingly weighed down by American economic muscle.

CHANDER SHEKHAR DOGRA, JALANDHAR

Pragmatism will save the day

In response to 'Trump's onslaught'; India must pursue a calm, measured response to the US trade offensive. While strategies with the US are important, India cannot be pressured into abandoning its decades-old partnerships, especially with Russia. Rather than give in to US demands, New Delhi should reinforce diplomatic channels highlighting the mutual benefits of cooperation. Simultaneously, India must diversify its trade partners and strengthen regional alliances to mitigate future economic shocks. Becoming self-reliant in critical sectors, expanding export baskets and maintaining a multi-aligned foreign policy will help India safeguard its national interests. Amid global uncertainty, pragmatism and not panic, should guide India's response.

AMARJIT SINGH, BY MAIL

Rahul Gandhi agrees with Trump

Apropos of 'Trump's onslaught'; India is walking a tightrope over Trump's provocatively high tariffs. But his remark calling Indian economy "dead" has been lapped up by Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi as gospel truth. The US President's messages are a mix of pressure tactics and frustration over India's firm stand. Does Trump's trumpet sound sweeter to the Congress leader than the statements made by the government on the floor of the House?

DV SHARMA, MUKERIAN

India leading the Global South

Apropos of 'Trump calls Indian economy dead, announces Pak oil deal'; the US President will repent his tariff policy sooner than later. In a fit of arrogance and frustration over trade deal talks with India, he forgot that India is the fastest-growing major economy in the world. The global economy will gradually shift to the Global South, where India is a major player; whereas developed economies are struggling. The Indian diaspora's contribution and our country's talent pool, especially in the IT sector, too cannot be ignored.

UPENDRA SHARMA, BY MAIL

Rethink land pooling policy

Refer to 'Roll back land pooling policy: Punjab farmers hold tractor rallies'; the policy framed by the government appears to be framed without taking into consideration many important aspects. This policy does not seem to be in the interest of farmers and the state as well. Quite a huge area of fertile land will be acquired which will drastically shrink arable land, affecting food-grain production adversely. Since Punjab is a major contributor of wheat and rice to the central pool, the nation's food security will also be at stake. The policy is a long-term proposition and will take years to implement and finalise. It will be prudent to give it a second thought. In the meantime, the PURA (Providing Urban Amenities in Rural Areas) scheme proposed by then President APJ Abdul Kalam in 2003 may be considered so that benefits of government schemes could percolate down to villages.

RAJ KUMAR KAPOOR, ROPAR

Air safety should be top priority

Refer to 'Air safety audit'; probably it took a massive tragedy like the Ahmedabad air crash for the national air regulator DGCA to wake up. Over 260 safety-related lapses were detected in various airlines. With India set to become the third largest aviation market in the world and the number of flyers increasing by the day, it is imperative that their safety gets top priority. It is prudent on the part of the airlines to self-report about lapses to take transparency to another level. The DGCA must pinpoint the lapses and monitor the action taken by the airlines on a weekly basis to keep tabs on them.

BAL GOVIND, NOIDA

The dirty secret in the India-UK trade deal



JAYATI GHOSH
PROFESSOR, UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS

THE tariff policies of US President Donald Trump have unleashed global economic turmoil and a wave of protectionist measures. While many of his frequently changing tariffs may prove short-lived, their use as geopolitical weapons is poised to reshape international trade for years to come.

But the current fixation on Trump's tariffs diverts attention from the larger goal: the US is leveraging its economic power to push for market liberalisation and preferential access for American firms, often at the expense of lower-income countries' development prospects.

Today's US-China standoff is a prime example. America's hostile posture toward China — maintained under both Trump and former President Joe Biden — has never been just about trade. Rather, it reflects a strategic ambition to preserve US technological

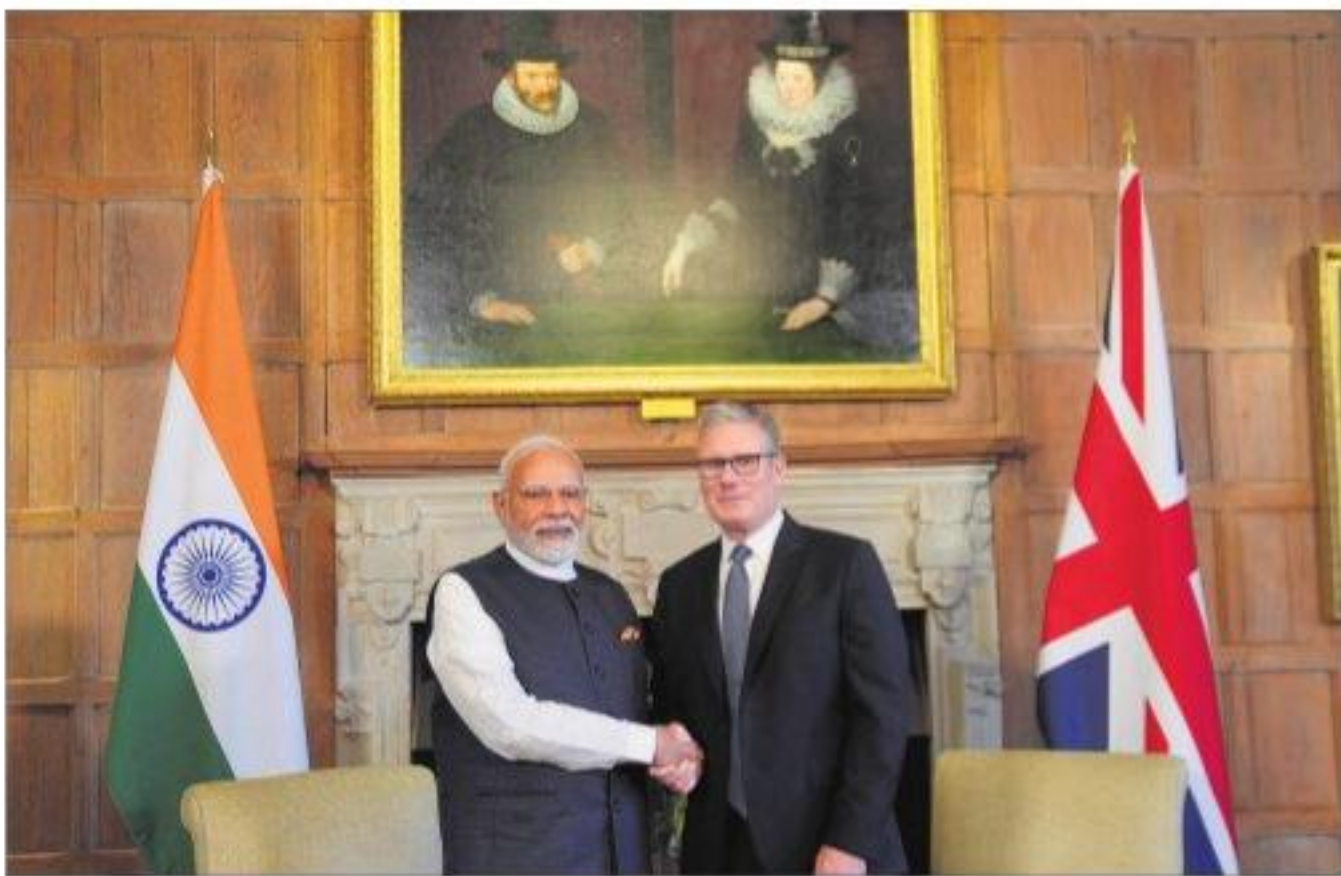
dominance by preventing China from catching up in key sectors.

That effort has since become part of a broader campaign to restrict access to advanced technologies across the developing world. The primary tool for achieving this goal has been the imposition of increasingly restrictive intellectual-property (IP) rules that aim to privatise knowledge through patents, copyrights and industrial designs.

This helps explain why the trade agreement with Indonesia includes several provisions designed to limit the country's ability to move up the value chain into knowledge-intensive industries. Tellingly, Indonesia will eliminate 99 per cent of its tariffs on American industrial, food and agricultural imports, while Indonesian exports to the US will face an average tariff rate of 19 per cent.

The immediate impact will be felt most acutely by Indonesian farmers, who must now compete against subsidised US agricultural products. But the longer-term risks lie in the dismantling of non-tariff barriers, which could severely constrain Indonesia's ability to diversify its economy and curtail its access to critical technologies.

According to the joint statement announcing the deal, US



UNFAIR: The deal with UK jeopardises the future of India's pharmaceutical industry. REUTERS

firms will receive sweeping privileges. Indonesia will remove all content requirements for US-made goods and accept American vehicle-safety and emissions standards, which are far more lenient than its own. It must also recognise Food and Drug Administration approvals for medical devices and pharmaceuticals, exempt US food and agricultural imports from local licensing regimes, and accept US certifications for meat, dairy and poultry products.

Indonesia has also agreed to eliminate tariffs on intangible goods and support a global moratorium on digital customs

The most consequential element of the India-UK deal is its IP provisions, which tilt the regulatory balance in favour of Western patent holders.

duties — issues that remain highly contested within the World Trade Organisation. Even more troublesome are the intellectual property (IP) provisions: the deal compels Indonesia to resolve key disputes over traditional knowledge, genetic resources and compulsory licences. In effect, this will make it easier for US companies to exploit traditional knowledge without consent or compensation and avoid compulsory licensing measures aimed at curbing monopolistic and abusive practices.

The US is not alone in pursuing this agenda. While Indonesia's concessions are

baffling, India's recent trade agreement with the UK raises even more questions. Despite being years in the making, the deal has little commercial significance as bilateral trade accounts for less than 2.5 per cent of either country's exports. Nevertheless, both governments have hailed the agreement as transformative.

Once again, media coverage of the UK-India deal has focussed on tariff reductions: 92 per cent of UK exports to India will receive full or partial tariff relief, while up to 99 per cent of Indian exports to the UK will be tariff-free. Optimistic forecasts suggest the agreement could double export volumes in certain sectors: textiles, clothing and jewelry for India; alcoholic beverages and automobiles for the UK.

But, as with the US-Indonesia deal, the most consequential element of this agreement is its IP provisions, which tilt the regulatory balance in favour of Western patent holders. By prioritising the interests of Big Pharma over those of Indian citizens and domestic producers, it poses a serious threat to India's pharmaceutical industry and public health.

For example, the deal promotes the use of "voluntary licences" over compulsory ones, potentially discouraging future price reductions. Another clause endorses the

harmonisation of patent standards, opening the door to "evergreening" — the extension of patents through minor tweaks to existing drugs.

A particularly damaging provision extends the deadline for disclosing how a patented product is being used in India from one year to three. This change will make it significantly harder — if not impossible — for applicants to prove unmet demand, a necessary step for invoking compulsory licensing protections.

It is deeply disturbing that the Indian government has accepted these terms, which jeopardise not only the future of its pharmaceutical industry but also the global supply of affordable drugs. India may also have limited its access to green technologies, impeding the transition to a low-carbon economy.

India's willingness to make such concessions to a weakened former colonial power — one that is no longer a major trading partner — makes the potential outcome of its trade talks with the European Union and the US all the more alarming. To ensure India's economic future, Prime Minister Narendra Modi must stop cracking down on domestic dissent and start defending India's interests on the global stage.

Courtesy: Project Syndicate, 2025

The growing gap between our civic sense & civilisation



SIDDHARTH PANDEY
HISTORIAN, ARTIST & CULTURAL CRITIC

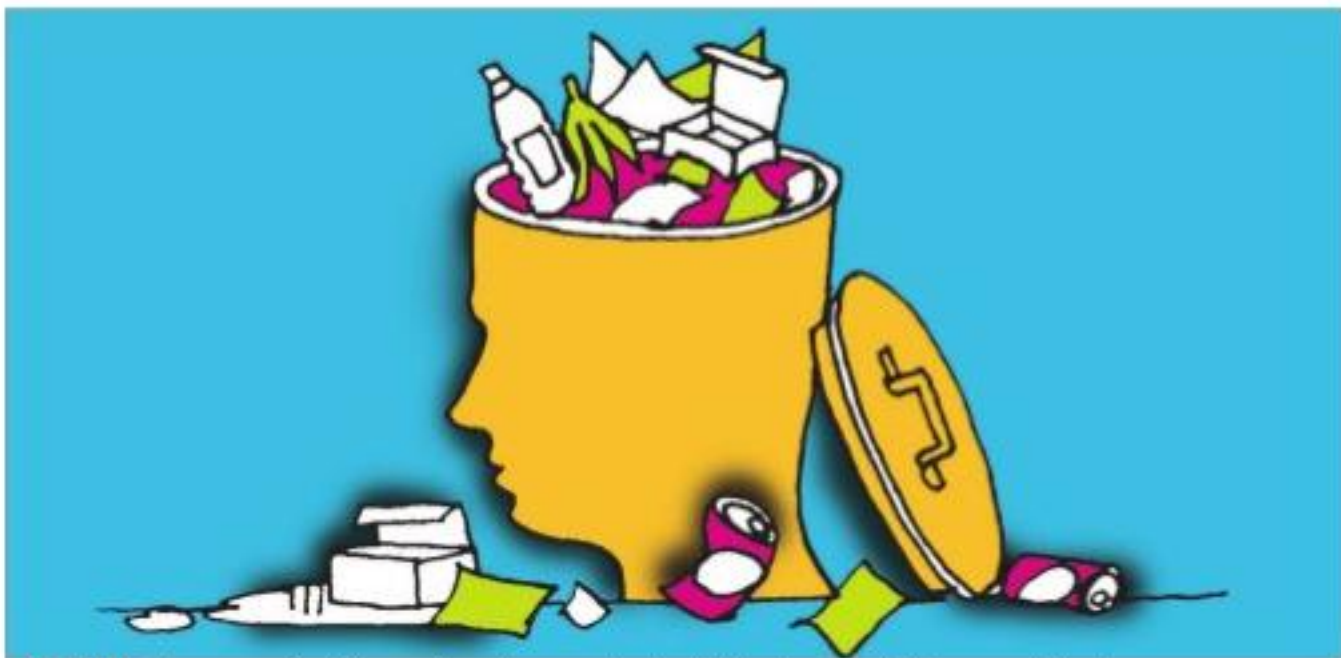
INCIVILITY has become the order of the day and if everyday occurrences are anything to go by, we seem to be setting new records at a supersonic pace.

Earlier this year, as the Maha Kumbh frenzy gripped the nation, numerous videos emerged from the event where people were seen pouncing upon *pooja* articles in river waters, even before the items had been properly immersed as part of the *visarjan* rituals. Around the same time, and from the same state (Uttar Pradesh), a wedding reception in Bijnor transformed into a battlefield when members from the groom's side expressed dissatisfaction over the delay in food being served from the bride's side. Food again became a flashpoint when, at the 8th Madhya Pradesh Global Investors Summit held in February, a large number of participants rioted over the free buffet. It did not take much for the limelight to shift from promoting MP as a major financial destination to the unruly conduct of the attendees, who abrasively disrupted the catering service, stealing plates and platters.

The same behaviour had a re-run at two recent events. During the celebrations of the much-touted International Yoga Day on June 21, the gathering at Visakhapatnam's RK Beach descended into an absurd scramble for yoga mats from stacks reserved for later distribution. Resembling a stampede and a shoplifting situation, the objective of practising yoga for instilling serenity and balance got miserably upended by the tragic, if comical, grabbing match. Then, in early July, sundry men and women attending Lucknow's Mango Festival were observed snatching and stuffing mangoes from the display counters, undermining all decorum. It's an event that has been jokingly described by netizens as this year's 'mango heist'.

It is difficult to come up with 'one' reason behind all of this chaos. The phrase 'we are like that only' perhaps comes closest to defining our shared identity as a chaotic people, but it doesn't quite tell us why we are like this. What it does point to is a certain sense of resignation and an acknowledgment of a 'naturalness' that somehow seems smugly contended with itself. It is as if we acknowledge that there is a gaping hole in our individual and social comportment, but also that that is how things are going to stay.

Of course, there lies a grave danger in accepting this line of argument, for it proposes an essentialist attitude, just like the other seemingly positive homilies routinely dish out: "India is going to take



CHAOTIC: A sense of entitlement and aggressive individualism underlines our behaviour. SANDEEP JOSHI

over the world soon"; "India is the world leader in such and such sector"; "India has the greatest civilisational history and legacy", etc. This last belief is of particular interest, because civilisational glory is very often used as a buffer to fend off any criticism of the ways in which we behave. At best, the examples cited above are treated as aberrations, random and rare. What's more, we readily allow ourselves to slip back into the cosiness of our imagined greatness, our splendid *sabhyata* to feel good collectively.

A telling moment in Ashutosh Gowariker's cult film *Suades* (2004) illustrates this point powerfully. Upon returning to his ancestral village in India, when Mohan Bhargava (Shahrukh Khan), an NRI, succinctly appreciates the US standard of living in front of the village council, an elderly member arrogantly retorts, "We have something that no other country has," the old man immediately claims,

Whether it is people wrangling over the pettiest of things or treating other classes as scum, incivility remains a constant.

by which he means "*sanskara* (values) and *parampara* (traditions)." He adds that "India is the greatest country of all." To which, a miffed Bhargava cogently replies that whenever we falter as a society, we begin blowing the trumpet of our values and tradition, diverting attention from the issues at hand. Whereas the truth is — Bhargava argues — that many of these age-old customs end up sowing seeds of internal acrimony, making us enemies of one another *within* the country.

It is this animosity that frequently becomes pronounced in our society. In its latest avatar, it can be seen in the barefaced hooliganism of *kanwariyas* and Marathi-speaking fundamentalists. Of all the examples demonstrating the falling standards of propriety at a public level, these two issues seem to take the cake. While the self-appointed custodians of the Marathi language have gone on an open rampage to harass random

people speaking Hindi in Maharashtra, the saffron-clad *kanwariyas* have indulged in brazenly damaging public property and attacking common people, including government security men. Any behaviour is permissible in the garbs of regional and religious pride, it seems.

A sense of entitlement and aggressive individualism underlines all of these cases that easily cuts across classes. Anyone wanting to equate incivility with unemployment or 'poverty' should merely cast an eye on the nouveau and ultra-rich circles, where such incidents thrive in huge measure as well. Whether it is people wrangling over the pettiest of things or treating other classes as scum (while simultaneously maintaining a hypocritical persona elsewhere), incivility remains a constant. The freshest survey on the widespread prevalence of abusive language in India (conducted over a course of 11 years by Maharshi Dayanand University and Selfie with Daughter Foundation) further testifies to our rude and coarse nature. Reading the news of Delhi topping this exercise was hardly surprising, as it brought back distressing memories from my university days when I first observed vitriol vitiating the capital's air on a daily basis. Those angry abuses habitually hurled by rich car-owners on poor rickshaw-wallahs trudging alongside still ring loudly in my head.

Living in the age of social media and manufactured news, the assaults on civility

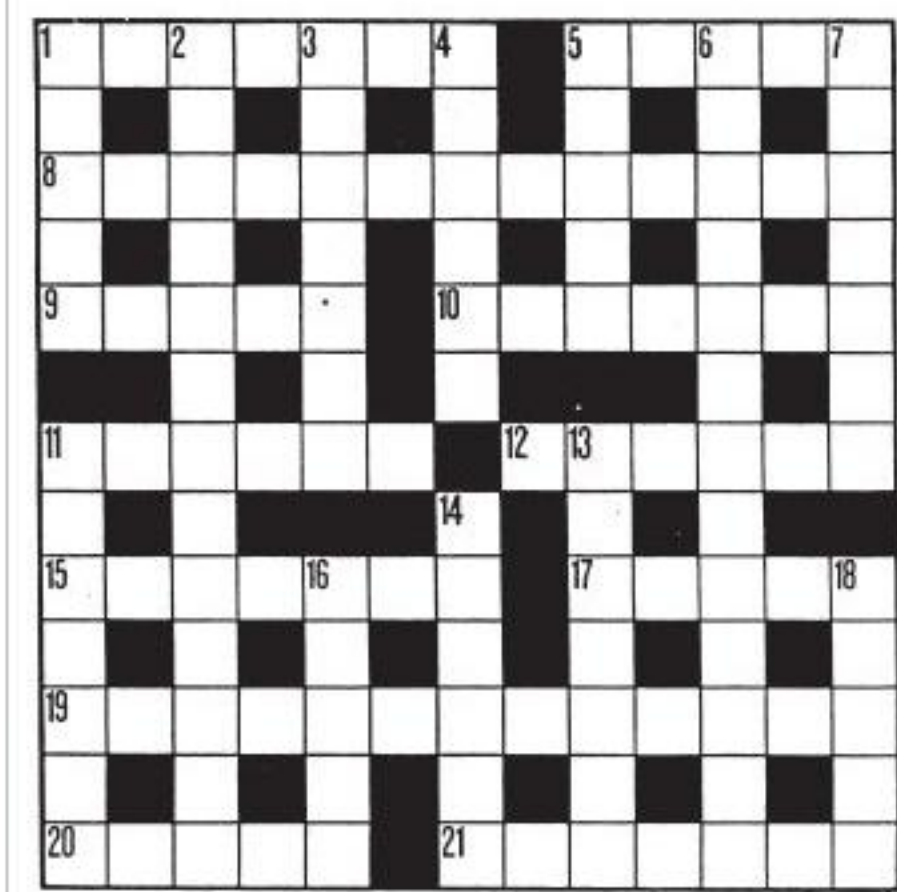
invariably gain greater traction than ever before. As fake identities and alternative digital personas take us further and further away from any semblance of accountability, our 'right' to comment and say whatever we want also gets fouler. As social commentator Santosh Desai had pointed out half a decade ago, today, "anyone can be harassed and discredited if one sets out to do so. Nothing is sacred — personal abuse, doctored quotes, photo-shopped pictures, deepfake videos, attacks on family members, false news reports about alleged misdeeds — everything is easy to manufacture and circulate. The new codes of propaganda are so powerful while being invisible that they are almost impossible to counter."

In his century-old lectures, Rabindranath Tagore had exhorted people to think about being civilised not only in terms of politeness or good manners, but also in terms of "*dharma*," by which he meant "that principle which holds us firm together and leads us to our best welfare."

Ever critical of the colonial baggage that customarily underscored the idea of the "civilising mission", he expanded on the idea of a healthy civilisation as onewhere "some creative ideal binds its members in a rhythm of relationship."

It is this 'rhythm' that seems to have increasingly gone awry today. Unless we work at its revival and restoration, the gap between '*sabhyata*' and '*sabhyata*' will only continue to grow.

QUICK CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 1 Hesitating (7)
- 5 Bereaved wife (5)
- 8 Nevertheless (2,3,4,4)
- 9 Eminent (5)
- 10 Urged strongly (7)
- 11 Like better (6)
- 12 Shade of meaning (6)
- 15 Decisive (7)
- 17 French sculptor (The Kiss) (5)
- 19 Lapse morally (4,4,5)
- 20 Provide food (5)
- 21 Convince (7)

Yesterday's solution

Across: 1 Image, 8 All there, 9 Wispy, 10 Take part, 11 Essay, 12 Bed, 16 Make do, 17 Earwig, 18 Gun, 23 Snake, 24 Cut short, 25 Rabat, 26 Long shot, 27 Perky.

Down: 2 Mainstay, 3 Go places, 4 Cleave, 5 Utter, 6 Medal, 7 Jetty, 12 Bog, 13 Den, 14 Frontage, 15 Kickback, 19 Uproot, 20 Scold, 21 Atone, 22 Chasm.

DOWN

- 1 Constant outflow (5)
- 2 Face up to unpleasant duty (4,3,6)
- 3 Past the time when expected (7)
- 4 Dish of large prawns (6)
- 5 In what situation (5)
- 6 Small scattered amounts (5,3,5)
- 7 Coax by flattery (7)
- 11 Peaceable (7)
- 13 Strictly honourable (7)
- 14 Flowers (6)
- 16 Deduce (5)
- 18 Impoverished (5)

SU DO KU



MEDIUM

YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

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

CALENDAR

AUGUST 2, 2025, SATURDAY

- Shaka Samvat 1947
- Shravan Shaka 11
- Shravan Purnima 18
- Hijari 1447
- Shukla Paksha Tithi 8, up to 7.24 am
- Shukla Yoga
- Vishakha Nakshatra
- Moon enters Scorpio sign 11.53 pm

FORECAST

SUNSET:	SATURDAY	19:35 HRS
SUNRISE:	SUNDAY	05:43 HRS
CITY	MAX	MIN
Chandigarh	31	25
New Delhi	35	25
Amritsar	30	25
Bathinda	31	25
Jalandhar	30	25
Ludhiana	29	25
Bhiwani	31	25
Hisar	31	25
Sirsa	31	25
Dharamsala	27	19
Manali	25	17
Shimla	23	17
Srinagar	32	22
Jammu	33	25
Kargil	38	15
Leh	26	15
Dehradun	31	23
Mussoorie	21	17

TEMPERATURE IN °C

India should not submit to American bullying



SHYAM SARAN

The past week has been a wakeup call for India. Optimistic assumptions of an upward trajectory in India-United States partnership during Donald Trump's second presidency have been rudely shattered by a 25 per cent tariff on his "friend" India, threats of unspecified penalties for buying oil and weapons from Russia and petroleum products from Iran, and for

being a member of Brics Plus. He has also disparaged the Indian economy as a dead weight bound to go down the drain, just as he expects his erstwhile friend Russia to do. This is no longer a trade and tariff war — it is a geopolitical challenge that uses commercial instruments to bend friend and adversary alike to the current whims of the US President. Some countries have surrendered to his extravagant and discriminatory demands by promising large investments in the US, which may or may not materialise, by which time Mr Trump may be gone. Others like China have resisted using their own commercial leverage over the US. India does not have much leverage, so should it just grin and bear it?

The way to deal with a bully is to resist bullying, because submission in the first instance only invites even more overbear-

ing demands in future. What may seem like a small price to pay now will lead to a much higher price later. Not standing up to Mr Trump's demands now will trap India in an attrition process which will progressively demand even bigger concessions than now. Not drawing a line is fraught with long-term consequences for India's national security and its credibility and influence in the world.

Will there be a price to pay for India's resistance? Most certainly, and the country should be prepared for this. What is the extent of our economic and commercial relationship with the US?

India-US trade volume is at around \$186 billion, comprising 10.73 per cent of the total. About 18 per cent of India's exports go to the US and India sources 6 per cent of its imports from the US. A 10 per cent dependence is significant but not

unbearable. In terms of foreign direct investment, the US is only the fourth-largest investor, with 11 per cent of a total inflow of \$81.04 billion in 2024-25 — an important but not irreplaceable source. It is estimated that India may lose a couple of percentage points in gross domestic product terms if the higher tariffs are imposed on August 1, but that is a modest price to pay. Even as a much weaker country, we have paid much more in the past to take a stand on our vital interests.

The geopolitical ramifications of Mr Trump's actions are even more worrying. He is demanding a veto over India's relations with other countries. This should be firmly rejected. India has good reasons to be part of Brics Plus, just as it does to be part of the Quad. The relationship with Russia continues to serve India's interests in many areas, though there is a diversifi-

cation under way but for our own reasons. The very volatility in US foreign policy, where friend and foe can be changed on a whim, makes it all the more necessary to maintain and strengthen India's network of partnerships. The most important asset for India in its external relations has been its credibility and predictability. Nations can rely on India to follow a consistent path. We should not lose that asset to cater to a mercurial leader, even if he leads the most powerful country in the world. The credibility and reputation that has been earned over decades should not be sacrificed to assuage a transactional partner.

India should make its economy more outward-oriented but for its own reasons — not to cater to Trumpian demands. It is good that India has concluded some trade deals and it should double down and finalise others, as with the European Union. It has inexplicably dealt itself out of the most dynamic economic region of Southeast Asia for fear of China using that route to

dump its goods in India. This has not led to any reduction in Chinese exports to India, which are now at an all-time high. We must find a way to reconnect economically with our eastern flank because that has an important geopolitical dimension. Most countries in this region want India to be a credible countervailing power to China, but that is not possible without a strong economic pillar. India should apply to become part of the Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership, where currently neither China nor the US is present. In the current circumstances, insulating ourselves from the vagaries of Trump's policies may be best served by this bold initiative.

A final word — to those who think we should just buckle down and ride out the Trump presidency because better times will soon return. Once the facts on the ground have been altered for whatever reason, they are difficult to reverse.

The author is a former foreign secretary



ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA

With his Chandra Shekhar legacy ...



PLAIN POLITICS
ADITI PHADNIS

The lot of a deputy chairman (as deputy presiding officers are known in the Rajya Sabha; in the Lok Sabha, it is deputy speaker, a position that has been vacant since 2019) is not an easy one. The chairman presides over the question hour, rising when it is over. The so-called zero hour (when members are allowed to raise issues at relatively short notice, and do so sometimes with no notice at all) is usually handled by the deputy chairman. This is when the placards come out, papers are torn up, and mayhem sometimes rules. It is the deputy chairman who presides over important and sometimes contentious debates. One needs to have eyes at the back of one's head.

Harivansh Narayan Singh, or Harivansh as he prefers to be known as, first became Rajya Sabha member in 2014 and was elected deputy chairman in 2018. His name was forwarded by his party, the Janata Dal (United), or the JD(U). In his position, he remained unmoved by the acrobatics by his party in Bihar. His Rajya Sabha term came to an end in 2020 and with it his position as deputy chairman. But his party, which had returned to the National Democratic Alliance, again nominated him for the Rajya Sabha and also for deputy chairmanship. At his re-election, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said: "He is an outstanding umpire and belongs to all aisles of the House."

JD(U) leader Nitish Kumar had picked him for politics. But Harivansh's real calling was journalism and his real idol was former Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar. They belonged to the same linguistic region — eastern Uttar Pradesh/Bihar. Chandra Shekhar was from Ballia, which is in Uttar Pradesh. Harivansh's family lived in Jayaprakash Narayan's (JP's) village, Sitab Diara. The two families had many connections.

Chandra Shekhar was a socialist. Harivansh was a follower of Rammanohar Lohia. The two first met at the Jaslok Hospital in the 1970s, where JP was admitted for kidney failure. Harivansh was working for famed Hindi magazine *Dharmayug* and interviewed Chandra Shekhar — he was to do so many times and was struck by the constancy of views. Later, when Chandra Shekhar became Prime Minister (1990-91), he became additional media advisor in the Prime Minister's Office.

It is Chandra Shekhar's influence and his training as a journalist that shaped his core beliefs: That there are two sides to everything; and at the end of the day, it is the last man who must get justice. When he joined the Ranchi-based *Prabhat Khabar* (1989), its circulation was 500 copies. It would grow to 200,000 over the next eight years especially after the bifurcation of Bihar. Harivansh achieved this by localising the news content. In the process, issues like corruption and land-grabbing became campaign matters and the newspaper's tagline was: "Not just a newspaper, a movement". *Prabhat Khabar* was among the first to report on the fodder scam during Lalu Prasad's chief ministership and, with the help of leaders like Sushil Modi, followed it doggedly right to the end.

After he segued into politics, Harivansh's unflinching politeness

stood him in good stead. The Opposition moved a motion of no-confidence against him after he allowed a voice vote on two farm Bills (2020) while it had demanded they be referred to a select committee for a second look. Predictably, the motion was rejected by then chairman Venkaiah Naidu. But this was an aberration. His sense of balance and fair play during an era in the history of Indian Parliament when suspension of MPs became commonplace (46 Rajya Sabha MPs were suspended in the winter session in 2024, the highest ever), was evident in the way he handled the issue of breach of privileges. For instance, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) Member Raghav Chadha was charged with claiming to but not actually obtaining the signatures of colleagues in seeking a motion to refer the Government of National Capital Territory of Delhi (Amendment) Bill, 2023, to a select committee. Union Home Minister Amit Shah demanded stringent action against him, charging falsification of signatures. Mr Chadha was suspended. Harivansh tactfully and deftly navigated the proceedings of the privileges committee and the suspension was ended. An Opposition member said: "When Harivansh sits in the chair, you feel your voice will be heard. The same cannot be said of other presiding officers."

A new Vice-President will be elected on September 9. Given the composition of the electoral college (the elected members of the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, and the nominated members), the government's victory is a foregone conclusion. Three names are in circulation: A Union minister, the governor of a southern state, and the deputy chairman. If elevated, Harivansh's career will acquire a new trajectory.

Losing it over Washington

To protect ourselves from irrationality, we must first introspect the bipolarity within our establishment discourse. You could start with Modi's rise in the summer of 2014

Psychoanalysing Donald Trump is a booming global business. We in India are doing our bit. The only objective, however, is to find a way of surviving him for about two more years. It can't be to cure him. Nobody has a pill or therapy for him. India has to look at ways to protect itself from his industrial-scale irrationality.

To protect ourselves from Trumpian diplomacy on social media, we must first introspect the bipolarity within our establishment discourse. Establishment here means not just the Modi government but also much of its support base in public debate, from social media to TV panelists and Op-edists, in that order of significance.

You could start with Mr Modi's rise in the summer of 2014. That's when this establishment was celebrating the end of the 30-year wait for a strong leader to consummate India's strategic, economic, political and moral weight. In short, its comprehensive national power. The first warning shot came from Xi Jinping as his troops came for a stroll in southern Ladakh's Chumar region exactly when he was being feted by Mr Modi in Ahmedabad. Their actions worsened over time. On China, however, India has had a long view.

Trudeau's Canada, the rest did not make a public spectacle. The first evident setback was then US Ambassador Eric Garcetti announcing that Joe Biden had been invited to visit New Delhi in January for a Quad summit and also to attend the Republic Day parade as chief guest. He cancelled, and the French saved us greater embarrassment.

By this time, our bipolarity was evident, and growing. All of these were seen as deliberately hostile actions. For a decade, the belief was that the West saw India as a vital, indispensable strategic ally. There was even some quiet acknowledgement of American help in the crisis with China, in both the north-western and eastern sectors.

Now the muscle memory was back. The West was hostile, couldn't accept the rise of an *aatmanirbhar* India, wanted to strangle our roots and clip the branches to diminish us into a strategic bonsai. It was delusional to think that the



NATIONAL INTEREST
SHEKHAR GUPTA

West would accept us as an equal. From hailing ourselves as indispensable, essential, natural allies for a decade, large sections of this establishment were returning to Indira-era prickliness.

The purchase of Russian oil was flaunted as an expression of strategic autonomy rather than quietly letting it be what it actually was — prudent purchase within the sanction-prescribed price band. This was a smart business decision. Smarter diplomacy needed it to be kept low-key.

To be fair, the boasts of defiance, thumbing our nose at the West, came not from our diplomats or politicians but from the larger Bharatiya Janata Party ecosystem. It was a bit like, see we can stand up to them as China does.

By around this time last year, this victimhood pole had begun to overwhelm the earlier euphoria. Sheikh Hasina's collapse was blamed on Washington, liberal foundations and the "evil" Clinton-Obama Deep State. They certainly helped along what they saw as democratic forces, in the same way as the Arab Spring, but with much lower involvement. It angered the Modi establishment even more as it came within eight weeks of the election where its score stopped at 240. The "world" was again up to its own tricks and weakening him.

This hurt us in two different ways. One, the 25-year post-1998 investment in a new American relationship was being lost. Second, we became too angry, too victimised to ask how come our diplomacy and intelligence were defeated so easily. India had made phenomenal investments in Bangladesh, and it wasn't just

thumbing our nose at the West, came not from our diplomats or politicians but from the larger Bharatiya Janata Party ecosystem. It was a bit like, see we can stand up to them as China does.

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A eulogy to Eunice

EYE CULTURE
CHINTAN GIRISH MODI

To be a student of English literature at St. Xavier's College, Mumbai, and not be taught by the legendary poet Eunice de Souza (1940-2017), is the worst kind of misfortune, I am told. She had retired by the time I joined the college but tales and tributes shared by her students, peers and colleagues make me wonder about the kind of teacher she was. Instead of mourning what could have been, I enjoy getting to know her through the poems that she left behind.

One of these, titled "Meeting Poets", is among my all-time favourites. She writes, "Meeting poets I am disconcerted sometimes/ by the colour of their socks/ the suspicion of a wig/ the wasp in the voice/ and an air, sometimes, of darkness." These lines strike an instant chord, especially because poets are no longer mysterious figures emerging out of their self-imposed solitude only a few times a year. They are easily accessible at literature festivals and on social media platforms. Many of them feel compelled to be there in the hope of selling a few copies.

de Souza goes on to write, "Best to meet in poems/ cool speckled shells/ in which one hears/ a sad but distant sea." This neat conclusion seems to be a cautionary tale in disguise. One might expect a warm demeanour, and be greeted by a mercurial temperament instead. The incongruence

might seem baffling because one tends to expect the object of adulation to be perfect and pleasing, free of the insecurities that human beings tend to struggle with.

The college where she taught commemorates her birthday — August 1 — as Poetry Day. This is a momentous occasion because it is rare for poets and teachers to be celebrated in a capitalist system that champions only profitable pursuits. Teaching does not qualify, and neither does poetry. Their value in our lives cannot be summed up in terms of monetary gain. One hopes that this celebration will introduce a new generation of readers to her work.

de Souza will be remembered for her distinctive voice, articulating various facets of her life as a woman of letters, a feminist, and a Goan Catholic. Her poems seem free, unlike much other Indian poetry in English, of the need to impress with obscure allusions and pretentious references. Her language is direct, unsentimental and sharp yet so intimate. The poems reflect an acceptance of her place in the world, a sense of ease that is earned.

In her poem "Bequest", we witness a relationship with faith that is playful and irreverent rather than submissive. She writes, "In every Catholic home there's a picture/ of Christ holding his bleeding heart/ in his hand. / I used to think, ugh." The poem evokes piety at first, then leaves the reader in a state of shock with the "ugh" placed there to provoke.

Clearly, the poet is not interested in being just another sheep in the flock, meekly obeying diktats of church elders — mostly men — who have defined how humans must relate to the divine.

In this poem, she goes on to write, "I wish I could be a/ Wise Woman/ smiling endlessly, vacuously/ like a plastic flower. / saying Child, learn from me." One cannot help chuckling because her sense of humour seems more like gentle ribbing than full-blown satire. There is no doubt that some believers might take umbrage but she is anything but a plastic flower. She reminds us that there is no beauty or fragrance to be had without an encounter with thorns.

For a person whose career revolved around words, she seems acutely aware of the spaces between them and the need to leave those spaces vacant and undisturbed. In her poem titled "It's time to find a place", which appears to be addressed to a lover, she writes, "It's time to find a place/ to be silent with each other. / I have prattled endlessly/ in staff-rooms, corridors, restaurants. / When you're not around/ I carry on conversations in my head. / Even this poem has forty-eight words too many." Silence can be a source of discomfort, evoking a feverish urge to fill it with chatter. de Souza invites us to walk away from it, and sit still.

The author is a journalist, educator and literary critic. Instagram/X: @chintanwriting

Should brands attempt campaign reruns?



YES, BUT...
SANDEEP GOYAL

Sanam Teri Kasam was originally released in 2016. Starring Harshvardhan Rane and Pakistani actress Mawra Hocane, it was at best a tepid success, and went almost unnoticed. In February this year, its producers Radhika Rao and Vinay Sapru re-released the film in cinemas. On Friday itself it collected ₹5.14 crore at the box-office. On Saturday, at ₹6.22 crore, the collections were even better. In the first two days of its theatrical re-run, the movie crossed its total box-office pickings of its initial run. It finally amassed ₹41 crore in the rerun — 400 per cent of its first theatrical exposure.

Tumbbad, a Hindi language period folk horror film, was released theatrically in 2018. It grossed only about ₹15.4 crore. But it received eight nominations at the 64th Filmfare Awards, winning three for Best Cinematography, Best Art Direction and Best Sound Design. Over time, it has

gained a massive cult following and is today considered to be one of the best among Hindi horror films. The film was re-released in 2024, collecting ₹1.65 crore on its opening day and ₹2.65 crore on the second. For the next 11 days, its box-office collections exceeded ₹1 crore every day. The dream run eventually culminated in gross collections of ₹40.6 crore, with a reported footfall of over a million.

Yeh Jawaani Hai Deewani, the Ranbir Kapoor-Deepika Padukone superhit grossed upwards of ₹190 crore when it first released in 2013. *Yeh Jawaani Hai Deewani* was re-released on January 3. The film earned ₹1.15 crore on its opening day and reported first week net earnings of around ₹13.05 crore. It collected approximately ₹26.25-₹26.75 crore in its re-release run, emerging as a major success.

Ghilli, a Tamil film, amassed around ₹30 crore in its theatrical re-run. *Murari*, *Gabbar Singh*, *Kushi*, *Salaar*, *Businessman*, and *Arya 2* — all Telugu movies — have grossed ₹5-9 crore each in their reruns. In Bollywood, *Sholay*, *Rockstar*, *Laila Majnu*, *Kal Ho Naa Ho*, and *Veer Zaara* have also had good encores. The same is true of Malayalam films like *Devadootham*, *Manichitrathazhu*, and *Spadikam*, which have also done well in their second innings.

If movie reruns can bank on

nostalgia, fill up theatres and gross crores in their second lives, why can't brands revive old campaigns and rerun them too? Nostalgia marketing has been tried by a number of companies in the recent past — the Ambassador car, Garden Vareli sarees, Yezdi bikes, Nirula's QSR, Bajaj Chetak scooter, Rola Cola candy, BPL TVs, Kelvinator refrigerators and more — but few, if any, have really succeeded. The only visible exception has been Campa, which under the Reliance umbrella has shaken up the fizzy drinks market, and how.

But what we are discussing here is the possibility of reviving old campaigns for existing brands and rerunning them in the media, not reintroducing near-forgotten brands of yesteryears. Take the "Give Me Red" campaign of Eveready. The original was created in 1990 or so. The Mahesh Mathai-produced commercials from 35 years ago are even today vastly superior in content and creative execution compared to the ads the battery brand is running today. Eveready needs to get inspired by the successful rerun of movies discussed above and seriously attempt a rerun of the original "Give Me Red" campaign. My bet is that it will, despite its vintage, do wonders for the sagging fortunes of the brand.


Airtel's AR Rehman commercial first aired in 2001 — the music

composed by Rehman went on to create a Guinness record for the most downloaded tune in the world. It is still the ringtone or caller tune for millions of Airtel subscribers. As the ad nears its silver anniversary, it may be a good idea for Airtel to re-air the commercial. My guess is that it will do rather well.

Cadbury India did recreate its iconic "dancing girl" advertisement from the 1990s with a modern twist, swapping gender roles. The original ad featured a woman dancing onto a cricket field to celebrate her boyfriend's winning run. The revamped version showcased a woman cricketer hitting the winning shot, with her boyfriend then running onto the field to celebrate. #GoodLuckGirls, maintained the original music and choreography, blending nostalgia with gender inclusivity. The buzz and hype, however, was short-lived. The ad overall fell short of expectations by a mile. Moral: Don't tinkertoys with the original.

"Thezing thing" of Gold Spot, Parle's "Melody *itni choolaty kyon hai?*", Tata Sky's "*Lagaa dala to life jingalala*" — all deserve to come back. Each rerun would surely be fun. It just requires a bit of guts and some faith in the past. Any takers?

The author is chairman of Rediffusion



A thought for today
When you have no basis for an argument, abuse the plaintiff
MARCUS TULLIUS CICERO

Shape Of Justice

Police, prosecution & court exemplary on Revanna

Former JDS parliamentarian Prajwal Revanna's conviction in less than a year in one of four cases of sexual abuse and rape, is a rare and welcome glimpse of how JUSTICE should work. Prajwal, former PM Deve Gowda's grandson, is accused of multiple rapes and recording his own crimes. Explicit videos surfaced in pen drives ahead of LS polls last year, including clips, photos, and screenshots. Troublingly, all the victims could be identified by locals who saw those videos. Police estimated about 100 women had been abused – house-help, staff, party and govt workers. Family clout ensured silence. Prajwal's first reaction was exactly how powerful, entitled abusers respond: allege political conspiracy, bully media, get gag orders and go scarce. Obnoxiously, Prajwal's parents even kidnapped a victim. Prajwal chose Germany to lie low, no doubt assured the triad of privilege – politicians, police and lower judicial staff – would 'take care' of the matter using bribery, coercion, threats and intimidation. But public uproar, political opponents and multiple victims kept up the pressure.

The point where the case took a road less travelled by political elite is when Deve Gowda drew a red line, and in a long letter on X told Prajwal "to return immediately...and subject himself to the legal process. He should not test my patience." Gowda's sanction certainly played a part in ensuring no political interference in the probe. Investigation was by the book, no evidence was botched up, prosecution was on point. The swift trial and conviction simply go to show that minus political protection and privilege, and with police given a free hand, victims, especially of sexual assault, may get a stab at justice. Despite public outrage, it took Supreme Court's intervention to file an FIR against Brij Bhushan. That case is cold. And the message is chilling.

Deadly Stuff

Trump's dead economy jibe says a lot about him

World's most powerful man telling the biggest countries by population and landmass to "take their dead economies down together" deserves "bigly covfefe" – Trump-speak for big coverage. Why say such a silly thing – Trump was being a churl. How an economy dies is a riddle, though. If it's dead, who takes it down? An economy isn't dead while its last two humans are in touch. One swaps a tea bag for biscuits with the other, and you have a trade. The ECG of economics registers a beat. India has over 1.4bn humans, raising the possibility of some 980-million-billion unique barter trades. Hardly a "dead" economy.

And if India is a dead economy, why is Trump itching to sell soy, maize and butter to it? A dead economy doesn't produce, or export, so unless you are hallucinating, how do you have a negative balance of trade with it? Why bother to negotiate with it for four months, and then slap 25% tariff in exasperation? If "deadness" is about slow growth, India's actually the fastest growing major economy. Besides, an economy with slow or no GDP growth is no more dead than a full-grown tree. Just look at Japan. But with Trump, "dead" can also be a tribute. Like he told steelworker Scott Sauritch in 2018: "Your father Herman is looking down...proud of you." When Scott said his father was alive, Trump said, "Well then, he's even more proud of you."

Growth's Losing Steam, Govts Must Steer Better

Infinite growth won't end poverty, better distribution will

A motorcar is made of steel, aluminium, copper, glass, rubber, and numerous other things. All of these are finite resources. Steel is also needed for buildings and machinery. Glass for bottles and watch dials. Aluminium for pressure cookers and soda cans. When finite resources have competing uses, it's a miracle that the production of cars, etc, keeps increasing year after year, and the world becomes a wealthier place with it. It wasn't always so, though.

Two centuries ago, economists were a grim lot, and Robert Malthus was more pessimistic than most. He worried that there wasn't enough land on Earth to feed the increasing population, which was nudging 1bn then. But we're 8bn-plus now, and growing, without exhausting Earth's carrying capacity. In fact, we've become so used to the idea of growth that a 6.5% increase in GDP seems lacklustre, 5% dismal.

In his new book, *The Invention of Infinite Growth: How Economists Came to Believe a Dangerous Delusion*, Christopher F Jones, associate professor of history at Arizona State University, examines how growth became a modern "ideal", and its impact on the planet.

GDP may be an abstruse idea for most, but it's become the default measure of growth – up is good, down bad, and the faster it rises the better. Some say it's the most powerful number in the world. But as Jones points out, GDP is a relatively recent concept, developed in 1934, and applied only after WW2. The real big change that came with it was that growth – through its proxy GDP – came to be seen as key to jobs, peace and prosperity. Hence, for the first time in history, it became govt's responsibility. Using different policy tools, govts were expected to

mindfield
SHORT TAKES ON BIG IDEAS



make national economies run faster. Those that couldn't were booted out in democracies.

The idea of infinite growth, however, didn't form for almost 20 years after it. It happened in the 1960s when US and USSR were pursuing growth intensely during the Cold War, and oil production in West Asia doubled in a decade, even as the known oil reserves trebled. These developments gave rise to irrational exuberance among economists and policymakers. In 1992, when he was World Bank's chief economist, Larry Summers declared: "There are no limits to the carrying capacity of the Earth."

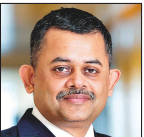
But ask scientists if infinite growth is possible, and they'll say no. They're also deeply concerned about the ecological impacts of unbridled growth. So, why are economists divorced from observed reality? Jones says it's because they trust technology to overcome natural limits, and don't concern themselves with the natural world. As long as the "delusion" of infinite growth shapes policy, clearing forests for highways and mines will be seen as "progress". But Jones at Arizona State University, examines how growth became a modern "ideal", and its impact on the planet.

It's known that economic growth and well-being don't increase in tandem beyond the mid-income level. Billionaires are *not happier* than millionaires – at least not because of their wealth. Since infinite growth is not sustainable, govts should now focus on income distribution rather than maximisation, Jones says. Growth can't be an end anymore – it has to be targeted at those who need it most, and away from those who don't.

No Putin Oil? Bad News, For Trump

If India stops buying Russian energy, it won't lose much because the price advantage per barrel vis-à-vis Brent is down to two dollars or so. But were India & China to stop buying from Russia, global oil prices will likely jump, hurting everyone, US consumers included

Neelkanth Mishra



Chief Economist, Axis Bank

The White House executive order amending import tariffs ends a period of significant global economic uncertainty. The 25% duties on imports from India are likely to hurt, especially as they are higher than for peers. However, the impact on India's economy is likely to be much lower than the rise in duties paid by Indian exporters, as most of the tariff burden so far has been borne by US importers and consumers.

But the US threat to penalise India for buying Russian oil and armaments, which is yet to be announced, is a separate matter. Can this put India at a significant disadvantage? Not really.

Despite Russia accounting for more than a third of India's oil imports last year, the India-specific impact is unlikely to be significant, in our view. Here's why.

The price gap between Brent (the grade of crude oil closest to India's benchmark) and Urals (Russian oil grade) has narrowed to just five dollars per barrel, close to pre-war levels.

In the immediate aftermath of sanctions on Russia in 2022, this had widened to more than thirty dollars. It has progressively narrowed, falling to twenty dollars in 2023, and around ten dollars last year.

Once adjusted for the higher cost of insurance and the somewhat longer shipping route for Russian oil to reach India, the gap in landed price is not more than two to three dollars per barrel. Annualised, that means a saving of around one to two billion dollars a year.

The calculation is simple. Imports of 1.5mn to 2mn barrels per day from Russia (30% to 40% of India's crude oil needs) mean 550mn to 730mn barrels per year. A saving of two to three dollars per barrel means one to two billion dollars annually. For a four-trillion-dollar economy, that is not meaningful.

Despite such small numbers, Western media and politicians have for the past three years pilloried China and India as culprits for the continuing Russia-Ukraine war, and even declared that the two are benefitting from the misery of Ukrainians.

It is easy to spin this story. China and India account for nearly three-fourths of seaborne Russian crude. Russia produces around 9.5mn barrels per day.

After accounting for domestic consumption, it exports around 7mn barrels equivalent of oil and refined products, of which around 4.5mn barrels are crude oil exports.

Slightly less than 4mn barrels are shipped by sea, and a bit less than half of that now comes to India. However, specific gains for India are insignificant, as we saw above.



Whereas the demand-supply of dollars in India (called the balance of payments, or BoP) is capable of absorbing swings in the oil import bill of a few billion dollars, a twenty to twenty-five billion dollars increase, as would be likely if oil prices rise by ten to fifteen dollars per barrel, can create some stress.

However, such an increase would be stressful globally, significantly raising the risks of stagflation, and adding to political pressures in US too, where fuel prices would rise at the pumps.

Oil prices have already risen by more than five dollars per barrel since the US administration began talking of controls on Russian oil exports again.

The Biden administration had learned its lesson after initial attempts to gain negotiating leverage to end the Russia-Ukraine war via sanctions on Russian oil. It appears the current administration is going through the same learning curve.

While US is one of the most successful economies in human history, its policymaking, especially at turning points, tends to be chaotic, and often error-prone, before self-correcting.

The starting point of Trump's current term was in no way as chaotic as that of FDR (Franklin Roosevelt), on whose inauguration day in 1933, among other things the US banking system was shut to stall a banking contagion. But there are distinct parallels.

FDR's election promises of restoring agricultural commodity price levels back to levels seen in 1926 saw him experimenting with a range of America-first policies that in hindsight appear ridiculous (like FDR setting gold prices every morning from his bed). Only much later, and via trial and error, did the team arrive at solutions that worked.

US policymaking, especially at turning points, tends to be chaotic, and often error-prone, before self-correcting

What if India and China were to stop buying Russian crude and switch to other sources? Global oil prices would rise. Current global demand weakness, rising OPEC supply and elevated oil inventories can provide a cushion, but a ten to fifteen dollars per barrel price increase is possible.

Is Love Worth It? Does It Ask Too Much Of Us?

After unpacking all the patriarchal propaganda, the imagination of a new idea of romance eludes us. But we really, really want it. Films like *Saiyaara* and *Animal* grapple with this yearning

Paromita Vohra



As we waited for cabs after a late night at work, in the quiet city dark, I wondered aloud to my two colleagues, one 50 and married, the other 25 and in a relationship: Is love unfashionable right now?

The 50-year-old looked perplexed. The 25-year-old instantly responded: "Yes, at least among all the people I know. No one talks about being in love or falling in love with anyone. And when you ask them about it they look dismissive." They say, "Please, this is all so cringe."

My older colleague and I are astonished and we laugh: "But that's right. Love is cringe!"

The state of being in love makes cliché inescapable. It is steeped in wanting, to a degree very removed from cool sophistication. That has always made love a little cringe, even subject to snobbery.

It seems we began this journey in a place of unpacking the past. Of analysing all the ways in which romance was a form of patriarchal propaganda – and let's not kid ourselves, it was. But once the ideological unpacking has been done, the imagination of a new idea of love eludes us. Why is that?

Perhaps cringe has come to mean something quite different today. It's synonymous with transparently desiring something and thereby leaving oneself open to rejection and failure. In an online ecosystem shaped by the illusion of choice and speed, this has little traction.

What began as an invitation to frolic – keep playing, keep swiping – has now become an imperative. To move on, to say "this doesn't work for me" so I will find something better that suits me, is the norm. And love, inherently a confrontation with the imperfect in ourselves and others, an encounter with unpredictability, is an awkward fit on this efficient timeline.

J, a 26-year-old queer photographer, has a spreadsheet

on which they note carefully all their potentials. It's a kind of spatial rendition of the dating app. They have columns for names, how much the interest is, what the person is potentially good for – something casual, something more sustained, something to check out.

J's spreadsheet might seem comical but it's also a somewhat touching symbol of imagining oneself as always having choices, of insuring oneself against risk



through a constant calculation of options. If you never put all your eggs in one basket, perhaps you can prevent them from breaking. Hurt and rejection dog J's footsteps anyway, but in a way are postponed via the possibility of another horizon, even if it's a cell on an excel sheet.

Much like the old days, when one prevented oneself from falling in love, because only an arranged marriage was socially acceptable, now you don't fall in love so you can keep playing the field, keep dating, in order to be socially acceptable as someone detached from consequences, while desperately trying to control them.

In the midst of this, a series of new shows and movies seem like intriguing throwbacks. There is the peculiar reboot of *Sex and the City: And Just Like That*. For those

who were in their 20s in the show's heyday, it's a strangely deflating experience. All that money seems vaguely embarrassing and the romantic entanglements only faintly interesting, rather than cheerily libidinal. But many young people report an inability to stop watching it, even while finding it blah.

Perhaps it's the show's unquestioning acceptance of love, in all its versions, as a great pursuit of humanness and its equanimity in the face of disappointment and hurt that feels like the real luxury here – not Carrie's shoes.

Lena Dunham's new show *Too Much* suggests that love is both the final quest and conquest. That it always asks too much of us, and we may in fact have to step away from each other often, because of that, but return always, to a kind of untidy acceptance. Though typified by a white millennial self-involvement, the show's several odd couples argue for human imperfection, a kind of cringe, if you like, as the essential ingredient of love. It's a choice you work out, more than one you make.

On the other hand, the surprise hit *Saiyaara* seems like a return to the past of gendered love, submission and unabashed suffering. Most fans agree: "It's cringe, but we needed cringe right now."

Are these works merely throwbacks that signal a return to convention? Or can we read something else into their success? Perhaps we can see *Saiyaara* as being in conversation with an unlikely partner – the monster hit (pun maybe intended) *Animal*. Perhaps we can see in their ideological flaws a literal turn to toxicity. Or perhaps we can also read their subliminal suggestions, as signalling a deep yearning for yearning itself; for intensity, forbidden in times of analytical detachment.

And maybe in an era of consumerism, pressurising us to be the perfect consumer-citizens in every domain of life, these films provide a different register, where to be consumed by something might seem like a delicious taboo, a radical something which might yet birth that new language of love, bring it into vogue again.

The writer is founder, Agents of Ishq

Calvin & Hobbes



Walk Away From Disappointment And Bitterness

Dada JP Vaswani

Betrayal, hurt, anger, disappointment – sometimes or the other, we must face these negative emotions in our lives. When we dwell on other people's rudeness and insensitivity, we walk into the trap of bitterness and negativism. You constantly think about your disappointment, and then you begin to talk about it, and you are trapped in resentment.

How best can we face such disappointments and frustrations? You can choose to react differently by taking responsibility for your own emotions and feelings. You do this in the full awareness that others do not 'cause' your feelings. You choose your own.

It may be a cliché to say that it is useless to cry over spilt milk. But it's

only too true. We have to learn to let go of disappointments and get on with our lives. We need to forgive. This is especially difficult when other people don't seek our forgiveness, or indeed when they are clearly in the wrong and don't deserve to be forgiven. Never mind – let go! In such situations, forgiveness allows you to let go of a no-win situation and walk out of it unhurt, unscarred by bitterness.

People, alas, are not perfect. At home, at work, people are going to hurt you or let you down at one time or another. If we remain in charge of our feelings and are in control of ourselves, we can be two steps ahead of the situation. We will not be victims of circumstances.

Let me give you a small exercise. Think of two people who have hurt you, made you angry or let you down recently – two people about whom you still feel animosity. Now ask yourself: What is my animosity doing to me? Do I feel happy holding on to it? Does it make me feel happier? Does it improve my sleep? Is my life better, richer, more meaningful because of my resentment?

If the answer to all the above questions is *no*, then take a courageous decision. Let go! Walk away from disappointment and bitterness.

To arrive at forgiveness, one has to pass through four stages. The first is the stage of hurt. 'Someone has wronged me, done something mean to me. The



THE SPEAKING TREE

Sacredspace



It's not just other people we need to forgive. We also need to forgive ourselves. For all the things we didn't do. All the things we should have done.

Mitch Albom, Tuesdays with Morrie

hurt keeps on throbbing within me.' We must remember that it is not 'i' who feels hurt, but the ego. Hurt leads to hate, which is the second stage. 'In some cases, i hate the person so much that i want him to suffer, as much as i am suffering.'

Then comes the third stage of healing. 'God's grace descends on me, and i begin to see the person who has hurt me in a new light. My memory is healed, and i am free again.'

The fourth stage entails coming together. 'I am anxious to make friends with the person who has hurt me; we both move to a new and healed relationship.' To choose to let go of resentments is to walk the way that leads to a life of freedom and fulfillment.

Dada JP Vaswani's birthday is celebrated as Global Forgiveness Day on Aug 2

The writer is CEO-director, Microfinance Industry Network (MFIN)