

Freedom from obesity

The onus here lies both on people and governments

On the occasion of Independence Day, Prime Minister Narendra Modi did well to flag the growing obesity problem, and the need to break free of it by eating more sensibly — consuming and buying 10 per cent less oil, perhaps to begin with. Obesity, defined in terms of abdominal fat and body mass index (BMI), has been rapidly on the rise, bringing with it the risk of diabetes, hypertension and susceptibility to cardiovascular, kidney disease and cancer.



It would be a fallacy to believe that only the really rich are obese or that, as a corollary, non-communicable diseases (NCDs) afflict only the well-to-do. Covid, being lethal for those with NCDs, should have upended these stereotypes. A 2023 Lancet paper on abdominal obesity analyses National Family Health Survey-5 (2019-21 data) to show that obesity measured by waist circumference as well as BMI is high for a country where malnutrition is widespread. Surprisingly, 40 per cent of women are reported to be abdominally obese (with a waist circumference of above 80 cm), while the figure for men is much lower at 12 per cent (waist circumference below 94 cm). The BMI levels are more similar for women and men, at 23 per cent and 22.1 per cent, respectively. Abdominal fat can lead to health complications, even if the BMI is within limits.

The apparent correlation between this data and the incidence of NCDs does not come as a surprise. According to a recent paper on NCDs in Bihar, hosted on the website of the National Library of Medicine, the incidence of hypertension in women aged 35-49 was 17 per cent according to NFHS-5, and 21.5 per cent among men aged 35-54 years. It observes that NCDs have been on the rise both in developed and ruralised States. Rising NCDs among the less well-to-do calls for both a preventive and curative response. They are ‘silent killers’. Their treatment can be both tardy and expensive. Diagnostics at district level clinics must be looked into, with the role of ‘Ayushman Bharat’ or similar schemes being assessed in this regard. But NCDs, as the Prime Minister has urged, have to be prevented. Apart from consuming less oil (particularly unhealthy palm oil) and sugar, it is also important to ensure that packaged foods and dishes rustled up in hotels and restaurants meet certain standards.

The CBSE’s sugar awareness push in schools is a step in the right direction. Oils from sources endemic to the country such as groundnut, sesame, coconut and mustard must be promoted over imported ones such as palm oil. The FSSAI must check for purity in sunflower, groundnut and coconut oil, besides following up on its mandate to make package labelling specific, legible and accurate. Working India eats on the move, and to this end it is important that fresh meals are provided by the government (as with Amma canteens experiment in Tamil Nadu under the AIADMK regime). India needs to live and eat differently, and the onus for making this happen lies both on citizens and governments.

OTHER VOICES.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

The nationalisation of Intel?

The Trump Administration is reportedly negotiating to take a 10% stake in Intel Corp., in what would amount to a de facto nationalisation of the storied but struggling semiconductor firm. Does President Trump really believe that the same government that has so mismanaged air-traffic control can turn around the chip-making giant? News reports say the Trump team is looking to take an equity stake in Intel in return for funding for the company promised under the 2022 Chips Act. This is how industrial policy so often works in practice. Step one: Subsidise a struggling business. Step two: When subsidies aren't enough, nationalise it. Step three: Make sure it never fails. (NEW YORK, AUGUST 18)

The Washington Post

American housing policy needs a gut rehab

Good news, bad news on housing: The good news, released Tuesday by the Commerce Department, is that home-building unexpectedly increased last month, as construction began on 1.428 million new units, driven by strong demand for rental apartment buildings. The bad news is that single family housing is in the doldrums, and the worse news is that this improvement is nowhere near enough to fix a broken housing market. Nearly two decades after the housing bubble popped, America is still struggling with the aftermath. Collapsing home prices and contracting credit wiped out many builders. Tightening lending standards made it harder for buyers to get mortgages. These factors were exacerbated by regulatory barriers that make it harder for developers to deliver new supply: onerous permitting processes, bloated building codes and restrictive zoning. (WASHINGTON DC, AUGUST 20)

Why formalisation of jobs is vital

PROGRESSIVE STEP. It will not only help boost productivity but also bridge the wage gap vis-a-vis informal workers



KUNTALA KARKUN
SAMRIDHI PRAKASH

In a recent statement in Parliament, the government claimed to have created 17 crore jobs in 10 years. While the number of jobs created is important, India's journey to a \$36 trillion economy by 2047 hinges on closing the vast labour productivity gap between the formal and informal sector. Formal industrial workers generate an annual GVA (Gross Value Added) of ₹11.9 lakh, while informal workers produce just ₹1.4 lakh, per the Annual Survey of Industries (ASI) report 2022-23 and Annual Survey of Unincorporated Sector Enterprises (ASUSE) report 2022-23.

This vast productivity gap between formal and informal employment holds back both income growth and economic inclusion. Bridging it will require more than growth — it demands a structural transformation of India's labour market: one that links productivity to wages, skills to opportunity, and informality to reform.

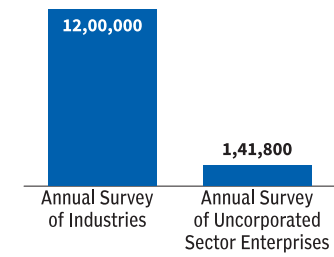
The productivity gap: The latest ASI 2022-23 estimates the GVA per worker in the formal industrial sector at around ₹12 lakh annually. In stark contrast, data from the ASUSE shows annual GVA per worker in the informal sector at just around ₹1.5 lakh — that is, an eightfold gap in productivity. If we assume India's annual per capita income, around ₹2.5 lakh essentially being a weighted average of these two productivity poles, a rough back-calculation suggests that nearly 91 per cent of India's workforce remains in the informal or unincorporated sector, while only 9 per cent is formally employed.

While this estimation simplifies the economy — excluding services, public administration, and other formal non-industrial sectors — it nonetheless serves as a stark reminder of the productivity divide between formal and informal employment.

Wages should follow productivity, but don't always: Neoclassical economic theory argues that in competitive markets, wages equal the marginal product of labour. That is, a worker is paid what he/she adds to the production process. However, this equilibrium is often disrupted in economies with high underemployment and a large “reserve army of labour” — a term used by Karl Marx. In such settings, excess labour supply puts downward pressure on wages, even if productivity rises.



Gross value added per worker (in ₹)



Snapshot of India's labour market

Indicator	Value/estimate (PLFS 2023-24)
Total Labour Force Participation Rate	45.10%
Female Labour Force Participation Rate	31.70%
Share of Regular wage earners / salaried workers	21.70%
Share of Self-Employed workers	58.40%
Unemployment Rate (overall)	3.20%
Unemployment Rate (youth 15-29 years)	10.20%

This is particularly visible in India today. While formal sector workers produce far more, the overwhelming presence of informal, unskilled, or underemployed workers means that aggregate wage growth remains tepid, and GDP growth doesn't translate into equitable income gains.

Moreover, 42 per cent of the workforce is still in agriculture, which contributes only 18 per cent to GDP (Economic Survey 2024-25). This mismatch signals massive disguised unemployment, where marginal productivity is close to zero, undermining any linkage between wages and output.

Why formalisation must be the policy priority: Bringing workers into

Without formalisation, India risks falling into a low-income trap where a small formal sector drives GDP growth while the majority of workers remain excluded from its benefits

the formal fold is essential for raising national productivity and aligning wages with output. Formalisation enables access to social security, stable employment, enforceable contracts, and the potential for upskilling and wage progression. Policy instruments like e-Shram, ESIC, and EPFO must be made universal.

At the same time, small enterprises and gig platforms need incentives like simplified regulations and tax benefits to adopt formal contracts. Tracking this transition through a “Formalisation Index” at national and subnational levels could help monitor progress, identify bottlenecks, and incentivise reforms.

Fixing the skills-productivity link: Formalisation alone is not enough. A major obstacle to productivity improvement is the country's severe skills deficit. Per the National Policy on Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, only 4.7 per cent of India's workforce is formally skilled, in contrast to 52 per cent in the US, 80 per cent in Japan, and 96 per cent in South Korea. This mismatch prevents workers from moving into high-productivity

roles, especially in services and manufacturing. The National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) and Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) must be scaled up, especially in rural and semi-urban areas. Curricula should be updated to meet the demands of emerging sectors such as digital services, artificial intelligence, and green technologies. Stronger industry-academia partnerships will be key to ensuring that training is relevant and leads to real employment.

Aligning wages with productivity through innovation: To better link wages to productivity, India should experiment with performance-based wage models. In organised sectors like electronics, textiles, and auto components, firms can tie compensation to output quality or efficiency. Even public programmes like MGNREGS could introduce small, performance-linked bonuses — provided worker protections are not compromised. These models should be developed through consensus among employers, governments, and worker representatives, and supported by digital tools like AI and IoT that can help objectively measure productivity in real time. Platforms such as ASEEM and DigiLocker can help build integrated worker profiles that track wage history, skill credentials, and career progression.

Harnessing the demographic dividend: India's demographic advantage represents an enormous opportunity. But it could just as easily become a liability if the workforce remains stuck in low-productivity, informal employment. Economic growth without wage growth leads to widening inequality, social unrest, and political backlash. For growth to be inclusive, wages must rise with GDP. This requires not just redistribution but transformation — raising the average productivity of every worker, and ensuring they receive their fair share of the economic pie.

The transition from informality to formality will not be easy. It will require investment, institutional reform, and political will. But the cost of inaction is far greater. Without formalisation, India risks falling into a low-income trap where a small formal sector drives GDP growth while the majority of workers remain excluded from its benefits. Formalisation, coupled with skilling, productivity enhancement, and wage transparency, is not just an economic strategy, it is a national imperative.

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GI tagged non-Basmati rice needs branding push

This will help create a niche in the global arena and ensure remunerative prices and income for farmers

Soumya Vinayan

Though India is home to more a than a lakh of paddy accessions, as per the National Bureau of Plant Genetic Resources in June 2025, only 31 rice varieties including Basmati are registered as Geographical Indications (GI). GI tag provides collective yet monopoly rights to farmers belonging to a specific region who have nurtured the cultivation of the paddy over a period of time.

The uniqueness can be attributed to agro-climatic conditions and methods of production that involve human skill, through traditional knowledge associated with cultivation. The non-Basmati GI rice varieties are spread across 16 States — one each in Uttarakhand, Tamil Nadu, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh, Jammu & Kashmir, Arunachal Pradesh and Andaman and Nicobar Islands; one jointly from Manipur and Nagaland; two each in Uttar Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Bihar; three each in Maharashtra and Assam; four in West Bengal and six in Kerala; covering 116 districts as per the GI application information. Twenty-four among these varieties are aromatic.

This clearly indicates the immense potential of establishing a brand image for non-Basmati GI aromatic rice varieties. In this context, the announcement to introduce new tariff

lines for rice (foodgrain) based on varieties (such non-Basmati, Basmati), on method of processing (parboiled or not) and GI-tagged (registered under the GI Registry of India) under the subheadings of HS CODE 1006-30, in Union Budget 2025-26, is a welcome move. This is an important step towards creating a niche in the global arena for non-Basmati GI tagged rice varieties that reflects authenticity with traceability, thereby creating an ecosystem beneficial for both producers and consumers.

SEVERAL CHALLENGES

These aromatic varieties vary in their flavour — from blossoms of mango (Ambemohar), jeera or cumin (Wayanad Jeerakashala), sandalwood (Wayanad Gandhakasala) to shape or appearance — sugar crystals (Adamchini), cumin or jeera (Jeeraphool), mircha or black pepper (Marcha), black in colour (Chak Hao), to name a few. Most of these are also intrinsically organic and thus opens up the possibilities of differentiated marketing rooted in the rich diversity to capture market. There are several challenges though in the cultivation of these varieties which include longer gestation, low productivity, inability to use machinery for harvesting due to probability of lodging, inappropriate harvest, storage and milling leading to loss of aroma and lack of proper marketing channels. Thus, building



KALANAMAK RICE. A success story

institutional mechanisms to ensure remunerative prices and income for farmers who continue to cultivate such traditional varieties is important.

The introduction of national GI logo with the tagline ‘Atulya Bharat Ki Amulya Nidhi’ (Invaluable Treasures of Incredible India) in 2018 has been an important step in strengthening the link between the producers and consumers of the products, especially in the era of mass production wherein the possibilities of ‘free-riding’ on the reputation of the goods are rife.

Similarly, the ‘One District One Product’ programme includes several of the GI tagged rice varieties such as Palakkadan Matta (Palakkad, Kerala), Katarni (Banka, Bihar), Chinnor (Balaghat, Madhya Pradesh), Tulaipani (Uttar Dinajpur, West Bengal) and Kalanamak (Siddharthnagar, Uttar Pradesh). This accorded the

much-needed visibility for these products through strengthening of institutional mechanisms across the supply chain. The case of Kalanamak Rice registered in 2013 is a success story with positive outcomes due to GI-tagging duly supplemented with post-registration activities. The production of Kalanamak rose from 2,000 hectares in 2018 to 18,000 in 2025, owing to an amalgamation of modern science and traditional knowledge, with farmers, scientists, officials working in tandem. The State agricultural department has undertaken door-to-door surveys of farmers, facilitated the setting up of farmer producer organisations, common facility centres, organised buyer-seller meets during harvest seasons and also the promoted the formation of Kalanamak Export Development Foundation. Several of these FPOs and farmer groups use GI tag in packaging and traceability systems like QR coding that provide detailed information about producer, stages of production, use of chemicals and fertilizers. Collaborations with State universities and international organisations such as International Rice Research Institute have also strengthened these efforts.

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EV push in transport

This refers to 'Betting on batteries, not barrels' (August 20). The writer's suggestion on prioritising heavy freights in the transport sector for switch over to electric holds merit as this sector is an oil guzzler and a major source of pollution. Electrifying the high density corridors with charging points at every 25 km with source of power from solar will help reduce the dependency on fossil fuel. Gradual elimination of fossil fuel based vehicles and stringent adherence to vehicle scrappage

policies would help to achieve a cleaner environment and reduce the oil import bill.

RV Baskaran
Pune

Securing subsea cables

This refers to 'Resilience of subsea cables' (August 20). Despite their critical importance, subsea cables face a range of vulnerabilities — natural disasters, ageing infrastructure, accidental human activities, etc. Multi-stakeholder dialogue, including among governments, regulatory

authorities, industry leaders, subsea cable experts, implementing advanced monitoring systems and bolstering cybersecurity are vital for enhancing the resilience of subsea cables and for safeguarding our digital future and global economic stability.

P Victor Selvaraj
Palayamkottai, TN

Hurting India-US ties

This refers to the editorial 'Himalayan realignment' (August 20). The US tariffs on India are not just about trade — they mark a turning

point in geopolitics. For years, Washington has worked to bring New Delhi closer as a partner in countering China's rising influence in Asia. But Trump's decision to slap steep tariffs on Indian goods threatens to undo that progress. Instead of deepening ties, the move risks pushing India closer to Beijing, shaking the very foundation of America's Indo-Pacific strategy. The US's transactional foreign policy inadvertently alienates traditional allies like India and incentivises nations to seek alternative partnerships.

This is especially strengthening non-Western blocs like BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Amid the shifting power play orchestrated by the US, India must remain vigilant. It cannot afford to become an object of poaching in a great-power contest. For India, safeguarding its autonomy and strategic space is as critical as pursuing partnerships — otherwise, it risks being reduced to a pawn in a geopolitical gimmick.

S Lakshminarayanan
Puvannur, TN

Troubled banks

Plug governance gaps for systemic correction

K Srinivasa Rao

The merger of New India Cooperative Bank (NICB) with Saraswat Bank, in February, boosts confidence in the stability of the banking system and provides relief to its 1,30,000 depositors and other stakeholders.

Lakshmi Vilas Bank's (LVB) merger with DBS Bank India Ltd (DBIL) was completed just 10 days after LVB was placed under moratorium on November 17, 2020.

In contrast, Punjab Maharashtra Cooperative (PMC) Bank, which was placed under moratorium on September 23, 2019, had to wait until January 25, 2022 to merge with Unity Small Finance Bank.

Merging weak banks with strong ones is a solution to protect the interests of stakeholders and to curb extensive collateral damage. But it is not a panacea, against systemic flaws that led to the bank's failure. Such a risk event – failure of a going entity should be able to provide an opportunity to evolve a systemic correction to avoid future episodes of risks.

A ROOT CAUSE ANALYSIS

Beyond offering merger solutions, it is crucial to identify and address the governance gaps that led to these failures. This involves conducting an entity-specific root cause analysis to assess the adherence to regulations, the compatibility of the organizational structure, the strength of the policy framework, the clarity of workflows, and the effectiveness of internal controls, audits, and external audits.

For the greater good of financial stability, it is crucial to identify weaknesses in the governance, risk, and compliance (GRC) framework.

MONITORING GRC

Most monitoring systems rely on data, which makes it difficult to capture the softer aspects of governance, such as ethical, behavioural, and attitudinal factors that can lead to the dilution of controls. The GRC framework hinges on strong execution, timely bottom-up reporting, and managerial interventions.

Ensuring early alerts related to GRC measures is challenging due to design deficiencies, weak data integrity standards, and organizational challenges that limit foresight. While best practices in GRC models recommend timely signals, mainly



BANKS. Governance matters
ISTOCKPHOTO

through Key Risk Indicators (KRIs) and continuous monitoring, many implementation processes fall short of these standards.

GRC data is frequently scattered across spreadsheets, legacy ERPs, audit logs, compliance tools, and external feeds, resulting in disconnected data. Without integrated data flows, KRIs only identify “what’s visible,” not emerging risks. This creates blind spots and delays in recognising the build-up of risk.

An overemphasis on outcomes can sometimes obscure qualitative factors, increasing risks that are not immediately apparent in the data.

BETTER CONTROLS

GRC should emphasise comprehensive documentation of the entire process, including policy development, dissemination, execution, implementation, and testing of governance quality. Enhancing GRC requires a detailed, phased strategy that combines strong board oversight, independent assurance, technological updates, and a risk-aware culture.

The REs should create a detailed scorecard model to identify specific control points in GRC, tracking deviations early to enable prompt corrective actions. The scope of the whistleblower policy needs to be expanded to include even signs of misconduct or risky attitudes of key individuals responsible for value creation, as their actions may affect the organization’s reputation.

AI tools can be used to capture more detailed insights into subtle deviations in GRC that humans might miss.

Taking cues from the repeated shortcomings in implementing GRC, stakeholders should focus on prevention rather than cure.

The writer is an Adjunct Professor at the Institute of Insurance and Risk Management, Hyderabad. Views expressed are personal

GST reform will help exporters

POSITIVE PROPOSAL. Textiles, auto component makers will benefit, if the proposed rate cuts come into effect



NILANJAN BANIK

One measure that will surely provide some respite to middle-class budgets is Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s proposal to the GST Council to reduce goods and services (GST) slab rates from the current four-tier structure of 5 per cent, 12 per cent, 18 per cent, and 28 per cent to a simplified two-tier system of 5 per cent and 18 per cent.

There will be another special tax rate for ‘sin’ goods, which is already in place. Many developed countries, such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and Japan, have a single GST rate, typically ranging between 5 per cent and 15 per cent. Higher multi-layered GST slabs always have the unintended consequence of dampening consumption and negatively impacting businesses.

Reforms in the GST framework are a welcome move, as the goods and services tax on items of daily consumption is likely to come down, if and when the GST Council approves the proposal. According to the specifics of the proposal that have been circulated among sections of the media, most items such as textiles and apparel, agricultural machinery, automotive components, healthcare and insurance products, and Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) and retail sectors are likely to come down.

MULTIPLIER EFFECT

A lower GST will have a subsequent multiplier effect because of lower reduced logistics costs and simplified compliance. Most items under consideration are price elastic in nature, and a lowering of prices will increase demand and create employment. More importantly, when Trump’s tariffs are creating disruptions in global trade, it will make India’s exports more competitive.

Let us examine the impact of reduced GST rates on two important sectors, — textiles and automotive components. India is the largest producer of cotton in the world, and the textile and apparel industry is crucial for job creation and exports. This industry employs around 40 million people.

As of now, apparel items below ₹1,000 attract a GST of 5 per cent. For apparel items exceeding ₹1,000, the GST rate is 12 per cent. Even this low indirect tax can be detrimental to export competitiveness, thanks to inverted duties. It is important to note that no input tax credit can be claimed in the case of inverted duty, where tax on input



How GST makes apparel industry uncompetitive **

Particulars	%	Product price less than ₹1,000			%	Product price more than ₹1,000		
		Amount (₹)	GST rate	GST amount		Amount (₹)	GST rate	GST amount
Average selling price		600	5%	30		1,200	12%	144
Net selling price	100%	570			100%	1,056		
Less: Costs of goods sold on income statement	67%	382			67%	708		
Input GST purchase*			5%	19			5%	35
Less: Courier costs	9%	51	18%	9	9%	95	18%	17
Packaging costs	2%	11	5%	1	2%	21	5%	1
Payment gateway costs	1%	6	18%	1	1%	11	18%	2
Marketing costs	21%	120	18%	22	21%	222	18%	40
Warehousing manpower costs	3%	17	18%	3	3%	32	18%	6

*inverted duty not applicable **Author’s calculations

is higher than the output. Textile manufacturers also need to invest in value added services such as marketing, warehouse rentals, logistics, courier, and other product fulfilment costs; these additional activities attract on average a GST rate of 18 per cent.

The tables demonstrate how a higher average GST rate on ‘inverted duty’ inputs can increase prices by up to 7 per cent. For example, from Table 1, we find,

A lower GST rate for both the final products and their inputs would make Indian goods competitive in global markets, and be a way to counter Trump tariffs

courier costs, packaging costs, payment gateway costs, marketing costs, warehousing manpower costs add up to ₹36. An average 12 per cent GST on inputs of ₹36 is ₹4.32, which is ₹2.52 (or 7 percentage points) more than if the average GST rate on inputs were fixed at 5 per cent. The result is the same whether we consider apparel products less than ₹1,000 (5 per cent GST on output) and/or more than ₹1,000 (12 per cent GST on output). The current system is detrimental to export competitiveness as it raises final prices.

Costs of Goods Sold (COGS) is how much it costs to produce goods and includes direct material and labour expenses that go into production of each apparel. COGS does not include indirect costs such as overheads and marketing. For the apparel products, the higher GST rate of 12 per cent on average for

value added services as opposed to, say, 5 per cent on value added services (such as marketing) increases the net sale price by 4.4 per cent.

For the apparel product priced at ₹1,200, the corresponding figures for tax payment are ₹144 (with 12 per cent GST) and ₹60 (with 5 per cent GST), respectively. This is over and above the higher taxes in the event of inverted duty.

Additionally, the apparel industry which is into exports also suffers from refund of input tax credit. Since, March 2019, the government introduced Rebate of State and Central Taxes and Levies (RoSCTL) to refund the input tax. However, apparel industry owners still complain of an inability to get this refund on account of lack of coordination between the Ministry of Finance and Ministry of Textiles.

ADDITIONAL COSTS

When one includes interest costs, delayed payments, and COGS, a higher GST rate of 18 per cent on inputs translates to an additional cost of 8 per cent, which will certainly make our apparel items uncompetitive.

The story holds for manufacturers of aluminium automotive components. Aluminium automotive parts are finished products which are made with raw aluminium. The government has protected the raw aluminium industry (aluminium articles and thereof: Chapter 76) by imposing a custom duty in excess of 7.5 per cent. If one were to add the ad valorem and special duties, the figure goes beyond 10 per cent, which makes Indian manufacturers producing final aluminium products such as automotive components and agricultural machinery less competitive in the global market.

Additionally, the GST rate on aluminium automotive products is 28 per cent, which is the highest GST slab rate. The high GST structure lowers the trade margin for the makers of aluminium automotive products. This makes the business unsustainable even in the domestic market. For example, Chinese governments give 16 per cent subsidy to manufacturers of final aluminium automotive products, making the Chinese firms competitive in the world market.

The proposed reforms in the GST framework are a welcome move. Even for sectors such as health insurance, this will bring down the cost. Forty crore Indians are not covered by health insurance. Most lower and middle-income households will also get respite as prices of FMCG items fall. The proposed sGST reform can boost the economy as well as exports.

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thehindubusinessline.

TWENTY YEARS AGO **TODAY.**

August 21, 2005

GAIL eyes stake in Central European gas pipeline project

GAIL (India) Ltd is likely to bag equity participation in the Rs 25,000-crore Nabucco natural gas pipeline project, a transnational 3,300-km pipeline from the Caspian Sea to Central Europe. According to a company communiqué, GAIL has sent an expression of interest for participation in the project. A final decision on GAIL’s equity participation in this project is expected by the end of 2005.

Eleven consortia in race for Railways’ call centre services

Eleven consortia — each consisting of IT-enabled service providers and instant voice response system (IVRS) hardware equipment vendors and software players — have bid for setting up the call centre network of Indian Railways, according to sources. Those in the race include IBM, Wipro, Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) and Avaya.

Govt plans wine board to help industry grow

It’s cheers for connoisseurs of wine. The Government plans to set up a wine board at the Central level for promoting the domestic wine industry. Plans are also afoot to delink wine from other hard liquor as far as taxation and excise policy are concerned, a step aimed at lowering retail price of wine.

Powell’s global peers to cheer for Fed in rebuke to Trump

Central bankers meet at Jackson Hole, Wyoming from Aug 21-23 for annual symposium

Bloomberg

Central bankers gathering in Jackson Hole, Wyoming this week for the Federal Reserve’s annual conference are prepared to go beyond swapping research papers and savouring mountain views — they’re coming to defend Jerome Powell.

The Fed chair is facing relentless attacks from President Donald Trump for refusing to cut interest rates. Trump has also pledged to replace Powell next year when his term as chair expires with someone more compliant. The offensive has rattled policymakers from around the world, raising fears that central-bank independence — seen as

essential to keeping inflation in check — could be undermined.

Among those making the trip to the Teton Range are European Central Bank President Christine Lagarde and Bank of England Governor Andrew Bailey. Expect them to voice their strong support for Powell and warn of the dangers that come when elected officials put pressure on monetary policy-makers — especially if political leaders in more fragile economies feel emboldened by Trump.

“Independence is part of the DNA of central banks,” Bundesbank President Joachim Nagel told Bloomberg News. “It would be more than desirable if this were recognized everywhere.”



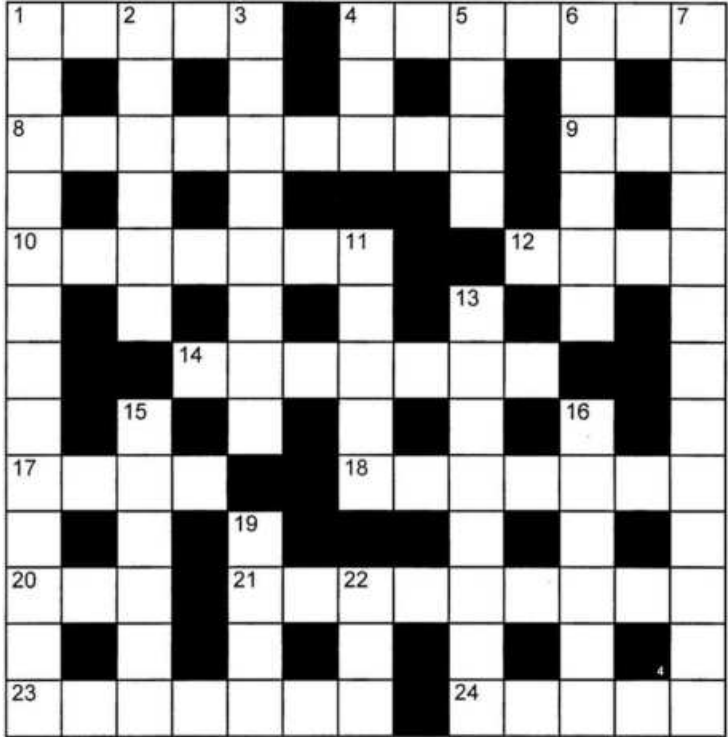
For Powell’s counterparts, the August 21-23 symposium is another opportunity to bring that message to the front lines of the war on independence, as they have at prior gatherings this

year. At the Bank for International Settlements’ annual meeting in late June and the European Central Bank’s Sintra conference in early July, “it was the world of central bankers rallying around Jay and the Fed, publicly backing Fed independence,” said Adam Posen, president of the Peterson Institute for International Economics, who attended both.

“Now, this is their opportunity to do it for a US audience,” said Posen, who wrote his doctoral dissertation in economics on the history of central bank independence.

Until recently, such messaging wouldn’t have been needed on US shores.

BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2766



EASY

ACROSS

- Sped (5)
- Egg, milk preparation (7)
- Essential feature, nature (9)
- No longer available (3)
- Colouring substance (7)
- Faithful (4)
- Is left (7)
- Slit in wall (4)
- Spokesman of deity (7)
- Cha (3)
- Incendiary madness (9)
- Offended indignation (7)
- Get stuck; pass the night (5)

DOWN

- Again went over the chief points (13)
- Impose a fee (6)
- Afflicted by loud noise (8)
- Slice (3)
- Category (4)
- On, in, a ship (6)
- To distinguish (13)
- Hobo (5)
- Irregular, unceremonious (8)
- One lacking bravery (6)
- Uttered plaintive cry (6)
- Recess at east end of choir (4)
- Ladder in stocking (3)

SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2765

ACROSS 2. Humus 5. Face 7. Cram 8. Reporter 9. Baratheia 11. Bark 12. Psychological 15. Skit 17. Sticking 19. Converse 21. Teal 22. Flow 23. Estop
DOWN 1. Surpass 2. Ham 3. Mirth 4. Soprano 5. Fur 6. Clear 10. Ascot 11. Blink 13. Observe 14. Annuals 16. Knoll 18. Inept 20. Vow 21. Tap

NOT SO EASY

ACROSS

- Quickly went when Lebanon’s tree was put out (5)
- Pour it on pie for slapstick (7)
- It may have been Indian marijuana (3)
- Obsession with fire no pair may make up (9)
- Resentment at failure, gone awry (7)
- Settle where freemasons will meet (5)

DOWN

- Surrendered for second time and went back over main points (13)
- Put new life in one’s battery for a fee (6)
- How it fed a need to be rendered unhearing (8)
- A joint that has been adulterated (3)
- It is kind to separate it into lots (4)
- A table in a ship (6)
- If fried, eat ten varieties one can tell apart (13)
- Live as a vagrant on a cargo-boat (5)
- Relaxed in class with a Liberal (8)
- One who lacked the courage to be a playwright (6)
- Peevishly complained when I’d been moved (6)
- Part of the church will fall from the faith without a leader (4)
- Show a film of the shoal (3)



Making a point

The election of the Vice-President is an opportunity for parties to score points

The BJP-led NDA and the Congress-led Opposition parties have announced their respective candidates for the post of the Vice-President of India, which fell vacant after the abrupt and intriguing resignation of Jagdeep Dhankhar on July 21, 2025, setting the stage for a fresh face-off. The numbers are foretold and there is no surprise in store about the outcome. However, this is a significant ideological battle, and both sides see it as such. The NDA's candidate, C.P. Radhakrishnan, is a veteran RSS activist from Tamil Nadu, who has served as a two-term Member of Parliament, from 1998 to 2004. He is the Governor of Maharashtra. The INDIA bloc parties have chosen B. Sudershan Reddy, a retired judge of the Supreme Court of India, born and raised in undivided Andhra Pradesh. The NDA has a majority and is on a drive to canvas additional unattached individual voters and parties such as the BJD and the BRS. The YSRCP, bitterly opposed to the TDP, the NDA's partner, in Andhra Pradesh, has pledged its support to Mr. Radhakrishnan. Justice Reddy's candidacy has set off some regionalist political posturing in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, while Mr. Radhakrishnan's has caused the same in Tamil Nadu. On this count, the INDIA bloc managed to push back the NDA's attempt to put the DMK on the defensive ahead of the State Assembly election. The BJP hopes that Mr. Radhakrishnan's elevation will gain it some mileage in the Assembly election.

The political messaging cannot be clearer. By offering the second-highest office in the country to a life-long adherent of Hindutva, the BJP has fastened its ties with its mother ship, the RSS. Mr. Radhakrishnan's profile is in stark contrast with Mr. Dhankhar, who was a late entrant into the Sangh Parivar and failed to fit in. The BJP has used state power, which it controls, in a systematic and effective manner to advance Hindutva. Numerous personality clashes notwithstanding, these shared convictions hold the Sangh Parivar together. Not only has the BJP managed to hold its existing partners firmly behind its candidate but it has also managed to win over the YSRCP. As for the Congress and the Opposition, Justice Reddy's candidacy is an assertion of its resistance to the Parivar and an attempt to amplify their social justice slogan. Justice Reddy recently headed the 11-member independent expert working group that had analysed and interpreted the data collected during the Telangana Congress government's Socio, Economic, Education, Employment, Political and Caste (SEEEPC) Survey 2024. They also hope to use this contest as a rallying cry for the Opposition to consolidate against the BJP.

Punishing process

Gender identity recognition must not be trapped in bureaucratic hurdles

The Manipur High Court's order to the State to issue fresh academic certificates to Beoncy Laishram is at once a matter of individual justice and a larger commentary on the state of transgender rights. What should have been a simple administrative correction became a legal battle, not because the law lacks provisions but because its implementation remains frustrated by inertia and bureaucratic rigidity. In *NALSA vs Union of India*, the Supreme Court recognised the right to self-identify gender and ordered the state to treat transpersons as socially and educationally backward classes entitled to welfare measures. The principle was codified in the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act 2019, which also obligated authorities to recognise a person's self-identified gender and issue official documents. Together with Articles 14 and 21 of the Constitution, transpersons are thus entitled to having their affirmed identity seamlessly recognised in all institutional records. Yet, their lived reality is very different. Despite the law being clear on self-identification, bureaucratic setups often do not act unless compelled by higher authorities. In Dr. Laishram's case, her university refused to update her educational records citing procedural hurdles – symptomatic of a systemic malaise. Administrators routinely defer to the most restrictive reading of procedure rather than the spirit of the law. In the present matter, the university and education boards insisted that corrections must begin with the earliest certificate, qualifying recognition on a cascading set of bureaucratic approvals.

Where the law envisages gender as a matter of self-determination for transgender individuals, many officials remain wedded to the binary markers assigned at birth, and the mismatch translates into a stunted application of a simple idea. The insistence on sequential corrections or elaborate justifications is essentially a refusal to accept that gender identity is not derived from paperwork. Dr. Laishram's struggle also shows how institutional reluctance to operationalise this principle forces transpersons into prolonged legal contests over what should be routine matters. Such episodes reveal a troubling truth: transpersons, navigating stigma and discrimination, are forced to expend disproportionate time and resources to access rights that are legally theirs. The High Court judgment is undoubtedly positive: it also sets a precedent that may help other transpersons and signals to administrators that procedural rigidity cannot override constitutional and statutory guarantees. Bridging the gap between legal rights and their application will require both institutional reform and cultural change within the bureaucracy that draw from an understanding of gender as lived reality.

India's first Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Sukumar Sen (March 21, 1950 to December 19, 1958) was a man of few words. But he was a man of great action. He published no memoirs but is credited with having conducted one of the world's largest and most inclusive elections. His life is a lesson for those who are now in office: History remembers your work. Not your words or your excuses.

Reeling from a damning Supreme Court of India's interim order on August 14, 2025 (to publish the names and reasons for excluding 65 lakh electors from the Bihar draft roll), and facing a litany of questions following a game-changing exposé by the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, the Election Commission of India (ECI) is now facing what is arguably the thorniest credibility crisis in its history. And, going by the reactions to the ECI's recent press conference on Sunday, August 17, it is likely to get worse.

It is unclear what the ECI wanted to achieve by holding this press conference. Oscillating between vague self-congratulatory rhetoric to placing the onus on political parties regarding the integrity of voter lists, and then calling out (without naming) the Leader of the Opposition, with incorrect references to the law, the ECI seemed unsure of the message that it sought to be communicated.

Unconvincing answers

If it was to clarify the doubts with regard to the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in Bihar exercise, it did not do so. If it was to reassure voters of the sanctity of voter rolls, it did not do so. If it was to answer the questions with regard to voter anomalies raised by the Opposition parties and independent journalists, it did not do so.

What the ECI did succeed in doing was vindicating the Opposition claim of the ECI being neither bipartisan nor administratively savvy. The Internet was flooded with clips of the CEC, Gyanesh Kumar, giving unconvincing answers to important questions.

One example was the CEC's reason for the ECI's refusal to share video footage. This footage, which is essential to identify dual voting, cannot be given apparently on the grounds that it would violate the privacy of women, which is



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The Election Commission of India is solely responsible for facing a loss of public confidence and voter trust

outrageously absurd. Here is another example. The CEC asked why politicians raise these issues after the election results and not when the draft voter lists are shared with the Booth Level Agents before the election. The answer is that electoral fraud becomes apparent only after voting. Bogus voter patterns can only be identified after the results are declared. That the Chief Election Commissioner of India does not know this is cause for concern.

And, what the CEC did not tell the public is how the ECI has steadfastly refused to share the same voter list data (which it provides before an election) after the results are declared.

Denial of data

Let us give other examples based on experience. The first writer of this article, on behalf of his party, the Indian National Congress, wrote to the ECI on December 27, 2024, asking for the electoral rolls related to Maharashtra and Haryana. The ECI did not even bother acknowledging the writer's requests despite another communication on January 17, 2025.

Given this stone walling, the writer had no other option but to approach the Delhi High Court. There could be no justification to deny data which had already been provided to political parties and the refusal of which could not be justified by invoking any legal provision. As a result, on February 25, 2025, notice was issued by the Delhi High Court. On the same day, the ECI submitted that it had directed the respective Chief Electoral Officers (CEOs) to decide the representation in accordance with the law and through a speaking order. Accepting this, the High Court imposed a time limit of three months to decide the same.

The writers of this article appeared in person before the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO), Maharashtra (in compliance with this order), while their colleagues appeared before the CEO, Haryana. On May 22, 2025, the CEO, Maharashtra, passed his order, while the CEO, Haryana passed his order on May 24, 2025.

Both were the same to a substantial extent. They did not provide any voter lists but noted that the data had already been provided before the election (the same argument made *ad nauseum* by the CEC in his defence); some of the information was available on the website, and,

India's democracy is failing the migrant citizen

In a democracy of 1.4 billion, every vote matters. But for millions of migrants from Bihar, democracy is quietly leaving them behind. A silent crisis is unfolding, where the State's Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of State electoral rolls, and at short notice, has led to the mass deletion of nearly 3.5 million migrants (4.4% of the total voters). These are the migrants who have been labelled as "permanently migrated" for being absent during house-to-house verification. These voters now face permanent disenfranchisement not just in their places of work but also at home.

In a State where migration is not just an economic choice but also a survival strategy, this sweeping administrative action is threatening to erase millions from India's democratic record. For decades, out-migration has sustained Bihar's economy and its households. Locked homes, especially among poor and most vulnerable migrants, are a common sight across villages. Increasingly, migrants either migrate with their families or shift their families to marital homes for their care and safety. Yet, this reality of circular and split-family migration is now being read by the state as an abandonment of electoral rights.

The 'sedentary citizen' is the issue

The deeper issue lies in India's electoral infrastructure, which is still designed around a sedentary citizen. Voter registration is tethered to proof of residence and in-person verification. But for migrant workers – many live in rented rooms, at construction sites, on foot paths or in slums – such documentation is either unavailable or denied.

This exclusion deepens in the context of regionalism and sub-nationalism, where migrants are often seen as job-stealers or political threats. Growing demands for job quotas in private sectors and strict domicile-based norms for government jobs reflect the larger political sentiments, which curtails the political inclusion of migrants. In host States, migrants are treated as outsiders and fears of altered electoral outcomes fuel resistance to their



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A migrant's dual belonging, which is economic participation in a host State and political identity in his home State, is being demonised by the state

enfranchisement. It discourages voter registration at destinations. As a result, migrants remain stuck: unable to register in destination States, and now removed from their origin rolls.

The findings of a study

A Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai study in November 2015, funded by the Election Commission of India, titled 'Inclusive Elections in India: A Study on Domestic Migration and Issues in Electoral Participation', confirmed the marginalisation of migrants in a host State's electoral processes. The study identifies a triple burden – administrative barriers, digital illiteracy, and social exclusion – preventing a migrant from effectively participating in electoral processes. Crucially, the study found that lower voter turnout was directly correlated with the higher migration rates in the source States. And yet, rather than bridging this turnout gap, Bihar's SIR initiative is widening the democratic deficit.

This is not just a bureaucratic failure. It is a democratic rupture. The average turnout rate in Bihar's last four Assembly elections was only 53.2%, the lowest among major Indian States. In contrast, Gujarat and Karnataka – States with fewer outbound migrants – reported an average of a turnout of 66.4% and 70.7%, respectively, in the last four elections.

Our own estimates, based on mobile visitor location register data, suggest an annual outflow of approximately seven million circular migrants from Bihar. Out of this number, 4.8 million migrate seasonally between June and September. However, half of them (2.7 million) return home during the festivals of Durga Puja, Chhath and Deepavali between October and November. This year, where there will be an Assembly election, many of the return migrants will be unable to vote as their names have been struck off. Without coordination with destination States to verify or re-enrol these voters, the deletion process becomes a de facto disenfranchisement of the poor migrants.

The limited uptake of the 'One Nation One Ration Card' Scheme in the last six years, since its launch in 2019 (nation-wide portability of ration

third, had a line that said to "seek additional copies of the same documents/information subject to compliance with the requirements of the rules, from the respective competent authorities under the rules".

The response speaks for itself. Five months after the request was first made, the ECI had invoked every excuse that it could in order not to provide machine-readable digital voter lists. This was a plain and simple case of stonewalling any meaningful scrutiny by hiding behind bureaucratic jargon.

On the Bihar SIR, the ECI has tried a similar strategy but with disastrous results. The ECI was forced to reply to why it was refusing to provide any data on the 65 lakh voters names it had deleted. And it was forced to explain its decision of excluding a range of widely used identification documents, including Aadhaar.

As highlighted, the Supreme Court, on August 14, rejected the arguments presented by the ECI to deny this data and directed that the names of all those who had been deleted had to be published, along with the reasons. Further, all of this was to be in searchable mode alongwith the Electors Photo Identification Card (EPIC). The Court also directed that the ECI accept the Aadhaar as a valid identification document in the cases of the persons aggrieved.

Losing voter trust

In the press meet, the CEC spent much of the time making remarks about the transparent nature of the ECI's workings and its commitment to voters. But he did not say anything about why the ECI had to be directed to carry out its basic duty.

The ECI has no one else to blame but itself. This is a crisis that is entirely of its own making.

The ECI has already lost the faith of all the major political parties except for the party that is in power. This is an indictment in itself. The ECI is now losing the trust of the voters that it claims to serve.

Perhaps, this disconnect was best illustrated by the analogy used by the CEC in his press meet when he declared that the ECI stands with voters like a mountain.

The CEC must remember this. In a democracy, the people – and not the CEC – are the mountain.

card holders under National Food Security Act, 2013), underscores the constraints of migrants in the host States. Most migrants from Bihar avail rations in their home State, with only 3.3 lakh households availing portability in destination States as of May 2025. Dual residency, fear of losing entitlements and bureaucratic hurdles deter transfers. The same logic applies to voter IDs – they keep origin-based documents not because they are indifferent to civic duties, but because they lack security and acceptance in host States.

This dual belonging – economic participation in host States, political identity in home States – is now being demonised by the state. Migrants are being told bluntly that 'if you're not home when we knock, your right to vote vanishes'.

Along the 1,751 kilometre-long open India-Nepal border, the issue becomes even more complex. The region has long celebrated the "*roti-beti ka rishta*", a tradition of cross-border economic and marital ties. Many Nepali and Indian women migrate post-marriage, yet new documentation norms and restrictive citizenship interpretations now threaten their legal and electoral status. Here, disenfranchisement is not just regional or class-based but also gendered and xenophobic.

Time for a portable identity system

The way forward is clear. India must move toward portable, flexible, and mobile voter identity systems. The Election Commission of India must halt blanket deletions of migrants and adopt a cross-verification model with destination State voter rolls. Civil society and local governance bodies such as panchayats should be empowered to conduct migrant outreach and re-registration drives.

It is high time that the Kerala model of migration surveys should be replicated among high internal migration origin States such as Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. If these steps are not taken, India risks scripting the largest silent voter purge in post-Independence India – a purge not of enemies, but of the hard-working poor who leave home only in search of bread, dignity and work.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Vice-President, the contest

The Vice-President is expected to embody neutrality, remain above partisan politics, and uphold an unbiased stance that is free from any rigid political ideology. Traditionally, these posts have been held by eminent individuals whose contributions to society and the nation have been exemplary. By these standards, Justice B. Sudershan Reddy is a good choice. His is a distinguished judicial career. In contrast, C.P. Radhakrishnan, the NDA's

nominee, is a seasoned political figure with a long record in public office, and, therefore, may not be perceived as a non-partisan choice for this esteemed role. One hopes that Members of Parliament exercise a "conscience vote". May wisdom guide this decision.

Varghese George,
Secunderabad

While the Vice-President of India is also the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha and, therefore, has the duty to conduct proceedings in the House of Elders impartially,

it was expected that a scholar with sound knowledge in the tenets of the Constitution would be elected as the next Vice-President in consultation with all the stakeholders, particularly the Opposition. Alas, it is not to be. With the ruling BJP dispensation announcing the candidature of C.P. Radhakrishnan, a hard-core member of the RSS and the BJP, and bypassed going in for a consensus candidate, we now have a situation of a contest. It is unfortunate that some in the BJP in

Tamil Nadu have invoked the son of the soil line. The people of Tamil Nadu are well aware that the Union government has always been acting against their interests. One can expect Mr. Radhakrishnan to be another spokesperson of the saffron party.

Tharcus S. Fernando,
Chennai

India-China de-escalation

We do need de-escalation at the Line of Actual Control. We also need the display of strong political will at the Centre and robust diplomacy to

negotiate peace with China. We must not lose sight of the economic front. We need to settle a trade deal, bypassing American sanctions and also Chinese moves.

Manas Agarwal,
Shahjahanpur, Uttar Pradesh

Urban parks

Rapid urbanisation in India has only highlighted a key issue – an insufficient number of public parks. Parks serve an important purpose of bringing people from all walks of life together and creating harmony ('Open Page, "For

urban lung space", August 17). Parks improve the aesthetic value of the area and are a major source of green cover in the urban pockets, keeping the temperature under control. According to a study conducted by Pennsylvania State University, the amount of time spent in parks and green common spaces has a direct correlation with the well-being of an individual.

R. Sivakumar,
Chennai

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

Nuclear laws and the role of Opposition

Political parties in India, especially the Opposition, will soon need to take a view on a critical subject with a bearing on the country's energy security and climate change mitigation. The proposal to amend the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damages Act (CLNDA), 2010, and the Atomic Energy Act (AEA), 1962 – which in the past witnessed intense debate – sooner or later, is expected to come up in Parliament.

With the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led National Democratic Alliance government indicating its intention to introduce it during the monsoon session, Parliament will revisit the issue whenever the Bills are introduced.

The plan is to amend the CLNDA and the AEA to address the vexatious issue of liability on the suppliers of equipment and permit private parties in the field of nuclear energy, respectively.

The India-U.S. Civil Nuclear Agreement and the enactment of the CLNDA led to a series of standoffs between the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance government and Opposition parties – the BJP and the Left parties led by CPI(M).

Historical context

Fifteen years ago, the government introduced a Bill to write laws for compensation to the people for nuclear accidents, as India was not a party to any of the existing conventions. Parliament was engaged in a lengthy debate, as the government preferred the passage of liability along the lines of international covenants.

Lack of requisite strength in the Rajya Sabha, dreadful memories of the suffering of people from the 1984 Bhopal gas leak, the Gulf of Mexico oil spill, and the damage to the nuclear reactor at Fukushima, Japan, following an earthquake, provided the backdrop. Sensing an opportunity, the combined opposition pressed to raise the compensation bar on suppliers of nuclear reactor equipment and beyond the immediate



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compensation liability on the operator. The insertion of the clause rendered the Act dead on arrival. Western country equipment suppliers shied away. An attempt to tweak it a decade ago made little difference, and international response remains lukewarm.

In 2007, during the debate around the nuclear deal, questions were raised about whether it was considering amending the AEA, allowing private sector participation. The government then noted that the 1997 report of the Dr. Raja Ramanna Committee had been examined, and a review of the Act had been under consideration since then. Now both issues are scheduled to return on Parliament's agenda.

Raising concerns

In February this year, the Congress raised objections to the announcement to amend the Acts. It said the move dilutes accountability of suppliers, raises domestic risk, and protects equipment suppliers, reflecting the Convention on Supplementary Compensation, compromising the citizens' safety, and leaning in favour of international corporations. The party also alleged that the move was intended to appease foreign interests, particularly France and the U.S., ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit.

Back in 2010, then-Prime Minister Manmohan Singh stated that the process for compensation for nuclear accidents began in 1999, and such a law was needed. The government then dismissed claims that the proposed law was timed with a visit by President Barack Obama.

Now, the central issue is whether the Congress will take a studied stance on the proposed legislation. There is a serious debate taking place outside on the move to build small modular reactors, with many countries vying to have a piece of the pie. The contribution of energy from

nuclear power is estimated to be slightly over 3% of the total power generation. At the end of last year, the installed capacity of 24 nuclear power plants stood at 8.8 GW, the government informed Parliament. This was when the country set a target of 10 GW by the year 2000. The government now aims for 22.48 GW by 2031-32 and an ambitious 100 GW by 2047.

In the past, the Opposition took an about-turn on three key issues. At the turn of the century, opposition led to a delay in enacting an amendment to the Patents Act, 1970. Eventually, after a change of sides, the Opposition's support resulted in the mandatory amendment. A decade ago, on two other contentious issues, the Opposition stalled laws, one on insurance law to raise the foreign direct investment ceiling, and the ratification of the exchange of enclaves with Bangladesh under the Land Border Agreement. Finally, these proposed laws were enacted with the then-Opposition offering support, with minor or no concessions. Leaders across the aisle walked together to arrive at an agreed position as the governments of the day worked, in their assessment, to further the national interest.

Need for a debate

Today, the NDA government does not have to look across the aisle for support.

The current issues have long-term implications, and there is a need for a well-rounded discussion that takes into account all factors around nuclear energy, the shift towards small modular reactors, the larger question of disposal of nuclear waste, and allied subjects. The Opposition should play a leading role in initiating this discussion and decide accordingly.

Otherwise, during a debate on a contentious issue two decades ago, a member on the Treasury Benches remarked to another member of the Opposition that a change of sides should not result in a change of stand.

A historic move, but still unequal

Karnataka's SC reservation favours strong groups, leaving the marginalised behind

STATE OF PLAY

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Hoping to bring down the curtain on the three-decade-old struggle for internal reservation, the Karnataka government on Tuesday agreed on a matrix for slicing up the over-all 17% reservation for the Scheduled Castes (SCs) in the State. The Madiga community (Dalit left), who led the struggle from the front, will now get a 6% share in the overall matrix. The relatively better-off Dalit right (Holey) group will receive 6%, while the “less backward” communities of Lambanis, Bhovis, Korama, and Koracha – along with 59 microscopic communities – have been allocated 5%.

The demand for internal reservation, which gained momentum over the past decade and a half, received judicial clearance last August, when the Supreme Court upheld the constitutional validity of creating a matrix within the larger SC quota. In Karnataka, 101 castes have been notified as SCs. The government mostly relied on the recommendations of the one-man commission headed by retired judge H.N. Nagamohan Das, who submitted a report on August 4. The report recommended classifications following a two-month house-to-house survey, which collected empirical data on the socio-economic and educational backwardness of about 93% of Karnataka's estimated 1.16 crore SC population.

The Cabinet's decision, announced by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, appears to have been weighed down by political compulsions. While the commission recommended

five categories based on backwardness, the government reduced these to three to accommodate the demands of the politically stronger Dalit right and “less backward” communities. In doing so, the State government let go of Category A, which was recommended for 1% reservation by the commission for the most backward 59 microscopic communities, many of which have double-digit populations and no representation in bureaucracy or politics. In another decision, the Cabinet also dropped the 1% reservation recommended for Adi Karnataka, Adi Dravida, and Adi Andhra communities under Category E. They have been split between right and left groups.

Under the new categorisation, microscopic communities – around 4.97% of the total SC population – will now have to fight with relatively better-off “less backward” SC communities that have made strides in securing education and finding public sector employment.

While many concede that bringing consensus among all groups vying to have a bigger pie in the matrix was not easy, it was believed that in the jockeying for a higher share, the microscopic communities – many of them nomadic – did not get the justice they had hoped for. Of the six Dalit Ministers in the Cabinet, none

represent these communities, and there was no voice in their favour. In the final decision, both Dalit right and “less backward” communities received 1% more than the commission's recommendations. In Karnataka, Dalit left is seen as veering towards the BJP, while Dalit right is believed to be with the Congress. The “less backward” communities are believed to be divided between the BJP and Congress.

The question of internal reservation has been an important component of Dalit politics in Karnataka over the past two decades. While the A.J. Sadashiva Commission, set up in 2005, submitted its report in 2012, the internal reservation remained mostly rhetoric as Dalit right groups successfully brought pressure on the government not to implement its recommendations. The judiciary then had also not cleared the internal reservation. The BJP government in 2022 tried to tinker with the recommendations and came out with its matrix that was unacceptable to Dalit right and “less backward” communities. It also increased the overall reservation for SCs from 15% to 17%. Ahead of the 2023 Assembly elections, the Congress promised in its manifesto to introduce internal reservation.

Following the commission's recommendations, though not officially released, Dalit right groups have been vigorously campaigning against the report, urging the government to drop it in what was seen as a posture for hard bargaining. While the clearing of the internal quota is historic, in the end, the relatively more powerful communities within the larger SC population seem to have gained an upper hand, while the most marginalised still have a long fight.

More questions than answers over higher deletions among women

Far more women than men migrants have been excluded from the rolls in the Bihar SIR process

DATA POINT

Srinivasan Ramani
Vignesh Radhakrishnan
Areena Arora

A granular look at deletions in the special intensive revision (SIR) carried out by the Election Commission (EC) in Bihar shows women electors significantly outnumbered men in the “permanently shifted” category. This trend was more pronounced among younger voters below the age of 40.

Following the Supreme Court's directive, the EC released the full list of close to 65 lakh deleted voters with reasons. In a previous Datapoint in *The Hindu*, we found the SIR resulted in deletions of around 7 lakh more female electors compared to the rolls prepared as on January 1, 2025.

We repeated this exercise to identify constituencies with the most deletions by comparing August SIR rolls with pending enrolments released by the Bihar Chief Electoral Officer in mid-July 2025. **Table 1** shows the top nine Assembly constituencies with the most deletions. It also mentions the number of electors deleted and exclusion reasons as a share, according to data shared on August 17.

We had conjectured that higher deletions among women were due to higher illiteracy rates in Bihar and the inability to fill enumeration forms. But we found no correlation between illiteracy and exclusion rates in Bihar's districts.

We went on to extract the Electors Photo Identity Card (EPIC) IDs and the reasons for the deletions of all electors for these top nine ACs. Only the top nine ACs were considered, as the EC has maintained the whole set of data in image PDFs, making it onerous to extract full information.

After parsing this data, we found starker patterns in deletions among men and women across

certain “reason” and “age cohort” categories. **Table 2** looks at gender-wise and reason-wise patterns among the exclusions in the top nine ACs. While there was barely any gender-difference among exclusions pertaining to “not found”, “enrolled elsewhere as well” and “deceased” voters, there was a stark difference in the “permanently shifted” category. About 62.6% of those who were excluded for this reason were women compared to 37.4% who were men.

When age cohorts were included in the analysis, we found an even more distinct pattern. Among the 18-29 and 30-49 age cohorts, women outnumbered men three to one and two to one, respectively, in the list of exclusions under the “permanently shifted” category, with no such noticeable differences among other categories (**Table 3**). Which leads us to the question, is the higher deletion among women due to the exclusion of younger, married women who have shifted to other States?

Data from the 2011 Census offers us pointers (**Table 4**). Nearly 17.7 lakh women had shifted out of Bihar due to marriage, in comparison to just around 43,000 men who had done so. In contrast, 21.2 lakh men had shifted out of Bihar due to work. In comparison, just around 1.5 lakh women had done so. This led to migrant men (38.5 lakh) outnumbering women (36.02 lakh) by around 2.5 lakh overall from the State. This gap would have clearly increased in the last 14 years, as we know that male migration for work has only increased further.

That leaves the question – why have more migrant women been excluded from the SIR electoral rolls? Is this because male electors who migrated over the years were already excluded in the summary revisions in the previous years? Also, what are the implications of excluding these migrants without making sure that they are enrolled as voters in other States? Will this lead to their disenfranchisement?

Married and migrated?

The data for the tables were sourced from the Election Commission, ceoelection.bihar.gov.in and the 2011 Census. Data for gender and reasons were scraped and converted from image PDF to spreadsheets using OCR software

Table 1: The top nine ACs with the most deletions. Number of electors deleted and exclusion reasons as a share, according to August 17 data

Top 9 ACs	Total deletions (absolute number)	Not found (%)	Enrolled elsewhere as well (%)	Deceased (%)	Permanently shifted (%)
AC101	66,040	30.7	6.6	15.2	47.6
AC102	59,781	25.1	10.1	23.5	41.3
AC19	54,418	21.1	5.0	23.9	50.1
AC181	53,470	46.5	2.6	14.0	36.9
AC62	49,859	41.8	4.9	22.2	31.0
AC54	49,217	23.1	6.0	25.2	45.7
AC100	47,537	24.7	10.7	23.2	41.4
AC56	46,947	29.4	5.7	30.7	34.2
AC104	45,947	19.1	9.8	25.2	45.8
Total	4,73,216	29.2	6.8	22.2	41.8

Table 2: Gender-wise and reason-wise patterns among the exclusions in the top nine ACs

Reason	F	M	F %	M %	F - M
Not found	73,615	64,546	53.3	46.7	+6.6
Enrolled elsewhere	16,609	15,495	51.7	48.3	+3.5
Deceased	54,780	50,295	52.1	47.9	+4.3
Permanently shifted	1,23,825	74,025	62.6	37.4	+25.2
Total	2,68,829	2,04,361	56.8	43.2	+13.6

Table 4: Gender-wise number of people who migrated out of Bihar according to 2011 census

Reason	F	M	F %	M %	F - M
Total	36,02,243	38,51,560	48.3	51.7	-3.3
Work	1,48,008	21,17,013	6.5	93.5	-86.9
Business	17,403	1,28,737	11.9	88.1	-76.2
Education	22,696	95,541	19.2	80.8	-61.6
Marriage	17,75,188	42,903	97.6	2.4	+95.3
Moved after birth	70,911	1,02,892	40.8	59.2	-18.4
Moved with household	11,99,779	7,82,405	60.5	39.5	+21.1
Others	3,68,258	5,82,069	38.8	61.2	-22.5

In the tables:
F = Female, M = Male, F% = Female %, M% = Male %.
F-M is in % points
Shifted = Permanently shifted

Table 3: Gender-wise, reason-wise, and age-wise patterns among the exclusions in the top nine ACs

Age	Reason	F	M	F %	M %	F - M
18-29	Deceased	7,903	6,008	56.8	43.2	+13.6
18-29	Enrolled elsewhere	6,147	5,608	52.3	47.7	+4.6
18-29	Not found	18,536	15,107	55.1	44.9	+10.2
18-29	Shifted	42,994	16,521	72.2	27.8	+44.5
30-39	Deceased	3,342	3,504	48.8	51.2	-2.4
30-39	Enrolled elsewhere	5,013	5,014	50.0	50.0	0.0
30-39	Not found	22,616	19,088	54.2	45.8	+8.5
30-39	Shifted	38,685	19,741	66.2	33.8	+32.4
40-59	Deceased	12,895	12,668	50.4	49.6	+0.9
40-59	Enrolled elsewhere	4,378	3,891	52.9	47.0	+5.9
40-59	Not found	23,383	21,967	51.6	48.4	+3.1
40-59	Shifted	32,406	28,074	53.6	46.4	+7.2
60-89	Deceased	29,776	27,369	52.1	47.9	+4.2
60-89	Enrolled elsewhere	1,046	966	52.0	48.0	+4.0
60-89	Not found	8,854	8,215	51.9	48.1	+3.7
60-89	Shifted	9,557	9,555	50.0	50.0	0.0
90+	Deceased	864	746	53.7	46.3	+7.3
90+	Enrolled elsewhere	25	16	61.0	39.0	+22.0
90+	Not found	226	169	57.2	42.8	+14.4
90+	Shifted	183	134	57.7	42.3	+15.5



FROM THE ARCHIVES

The *Hindu*.

FIFTY YEARS AGO AUGUST 21, 1975

Degree colleges asked to start book banks

New Delhi, August 20: The Union Education Ministry has directed colleges to establish book banks to provide text books free of charge to the weaker sections of society. Colleges with an enrolment of at least 100 students in degree classes should have book banks. Nearly 2,000 colleges are expected to be covered under this scheme.

Simultaneously a scheme has been drawn up to supply essential commodities to students' hostels at fair prices through consumer co-operatives. The items of essential goods to be supplied are foodgrains, pulses, spices, vanaspati and edible oils, tea, coffee, etc. Where there is no university or college store, the co-operative institution will open its branch and the institution is expected to provide the necessary accommodation for the purpose.

The scheme which was originally intended to cover selected cities will now cover all towns with a population of over one lakh. Already a beginning has been made in some parts of Tamil Nadu and Delhi. Other States are expected to follow suit and the State Governments have been asked to earmark a senior officer of the co-operative department for ensuring co-ordinated follow-up action.

To ensure a fair and equitable distribution of concessional paper for educational purposes, a two-tier system has been evolved.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO AUGUST 21, 1925

Col. Knapp's views

London, August 20: Colonel Knapp, Ex-Inspector-General of Prisons, Burma, interviewed with regard to the work of the International Prisons Congress, said his British tour had been very enlightening.

He said money was spent more lavishly here than in India, for example, Scotland spending more on 2,000 prisoners than Burma on her 16,000 prisoners.

India might consider the introduction of the probation system, together with the Borstal system and the Prisoners' Aid Societies in India needed not only money, but the right type of men for probation officers.

The Prison staffs in India might also consider the system of indeterminate sentence, which, in his opinion, was preferable to preventive detention.

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Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Public grievance complaints received on CPGRAMS portal

1.28 In crore grievances. Over 1.2 crore public grievances were received from 2020 to 2025 against different government departments through a dedicated Centralised Public Grievance Redress and Monitoring System (CPGRAMS) portal. PTI

Americans who think Palestine should be universally recognised

58 In per cent. A majority of Americans believe that every country in the United Nations should recognise Palestine as a nation, according to a new Reuters/Ipsos poll, as Israel and Hamas consider a possible truce in the nearly two-year-long war. Some 33% of respondents did not agree. REUTERS

Number of tourists in Japan in the first seven months of 2025

24.9 In million tourists. Arrivals of foreign visitors for business and leisure reached 3.43 million, a 4.4% increase from the same month last year and the highest number for any July month, the Japan National Tourism Organisation (JNTO) said. REUTERS

Booking capacity of the passenger reservation system

25,000 Tickets per minute. As per Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw, the Indian Railways has undertaken a complete upgradation of the passenger reservation system (PRS), which involves upgrade and replacement of hardware. PTI

Estimated amount lost from real money gaming in India

20,000 In crore. The government estimates that around 45 crore people lose close to ₹20,000 crore every year in online real money gaming, an official source said on Wednesday. PTI

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Why India needs a national space law

What does the Outer Space Treaty of 1967 stipulate? Is it self-executing? Why is it important that countries enact their own national space legislations? What has been India's approach to space legislation? Why is creating affordable insurance frameworks for space startups crucial?

EXPLAINER

Shrawani Shagun

The story so far:

India is set to celebrate its second National Space Day on August 23. Following Chandrayaan-3's soft-landing near the lunar south pole to the upcoming Gaganyaan and Chandrayaan missions, as well as the Bharat Antariksh Station, the Indian space programme is set to make history many times over. Yet an essential component remains grounded – the legal architecture. In the race to explore, innovate, and commercialise outer space, a strong space law is necessary.

What about global space legislation?

The Outer Space Treaty of 1967 establishes that space is the province of all mankind, and therefore prohibits national appropriation, and places responsibility on states for national activities in space, whether conducted by the government or private entities. Its companion agreements create binding frameworks of rights, responsibilities, and liability rules. However, these treaties are not self-executing. According to Aarti Holla-Maini, director of the United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs (UNOOSA), "The core United Nations treaties on outer space provide the foundational principles for all space activities: from the peaceful use of outer space to the responsibility and liability of states. National legislation is the means by which nations can give effect to these principles domestically, ensuring that their growing space sectors develop in a safe, sustainable, and internationally responsible way." India has ratified the key UN space treaties but it is still in the process of enacting comprehensive national space legislation.

While space policy may signal intent, law is what creates an enforceable structure. "National space legislation offers predictability, legal clarity, and a



The ISRO carrying out the Well Deck trials of the Gaganyaan missions's crew module in 2024. FILE PHOTO

stable regulatory environment for both government and private actors," Rossana Deim-Hoffmann, UNOOSA Global Space Law Project Lead said. Many countries now have national space legislation. Japan, Luxembourg, and the U.S. have enacted frameworks to facilitate licensing, liability coverage, and commercial rights over space activities.

Will India enact similar legislation?

India's approach to space legislation reflects a methodical, incremental strategy. As space law expert Ranjana Kaul notes, "It should be understood that national space legislation includes two cardinal interdependent aspects: (i) technical regulations governing space operations in orbit by commercial entities – this is the first aspect of 'authorisation' process under Article VI [of the Outer Space Treaty]. The Department of Space is proceeding meticulously in this matter."

This methodical approach has yielded concrete regulatory developments, which

includes the Catalogue of Indian Standards for Space Industry, critical for ensuring the safety of space operations; the Indian Space Policy, providing details of activities that non-governmental entities are encouraged to undertake; and the IN-SPACE Norms, Guidelines and Procedures (NPG) for implementation of Indian Space Policy, 2023, in respect of authorisation of space activities.

However, the second component is still pending. According to Dr. Kaul, "(ii) the overarching regulatory framework (textual part) – this is the ... 'space activities law' that will contain provisions of the OST that are meticulously, carefully, appropriately drafted."

What are industry perspectives?

From the industry's standpoint, the current regulatory transition creates significant operational challenges. Gp. Capt. T.H. Anand Rao (retd.), director of the Indian Space Association, identified priorities for national space legislation

beginning with the fundamental need for a statutory authority.

"IN-SPACE, which currently operates without formal legal backing, requires clear statutory authority to strengthen its role as the central regulatory body," Mr. Rao said. "The national space law should clearly set out licensing rules, qualifications, application processes, timelines, fees, and reasons for acceptance or denial, to avoid unnecessary delays and confusion from multiple ministry approvals." The dual-use nature of space technologies creates particular complications, with companies facing delays from multiple ministry clearances even after provisional approvals. Clear FDI rules, such as allowing 100% FDI in satellite component manufacturing under automatic routes, would attract critical capital for startups to scale operations. This operational clarity extends to liability frameworks, with Mr. Rao emphasising that "while India is ultimately responsible internationally, private companies must hold proper third-party insurance to cover any damages. This includes creating affordable insurance frameworks for startups managing high-value space assets. Innovation protection remains equally crucial, "legislation should secure intellectual property rights without excessive government control, encourage partnerships among industry, academia, and government, and foster investor trust." This balanced approach would prevent migration of talent and technologies to more IP-friendly jurisdictions. Mr. Rao also stressed the need for mandatory accident investigation procedures, enforceable space debris management laws, unified frameworks for space-related data and satellite communications, and an independent appellate body to prevent conflicts of interest. Without statutory backing, IN-SPACE's decisions remain vulnerable to procedural challenges.

Shrawani Shagun is a researcher focusing on environmental sustainability and space governance.

THE GIST

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▼ India's approach to space legislation reflects a methodical, incremental strategy.

▼ Gp. Capt. T.H. Anand Rao (retd.), director of the Indian Space Association, identified priorities for national space legislation beginning with the fundamental need for a statutory authority.

What are 'machine readable' electoral rolls?

Why are electoral rolls not being provided by the EC in a format that can be analysed easily?

Aroon Deep

The story so far:

Along with the allegations of 'vote theft' by the Congress, Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi has demanded that "machine readable" voter rolls be made available to all political parties by the Election Commission (EC).

How are voter rolls shared?

Electoral rolls are the authoritative list of who is and isn't allowed to vote in India, and they are continuously updated when newly eligible voters register to vote, change addresses, or become ineligible. Voter rolls are prepared under the EC's authority by district level officials, who have access to ERONET, a digital application used by the EC to process applications for new additions to the voter list, or deletions. The EC has access to the full repository of data on every

voter in India. They make this data accessible by making 'image PDF' files available, or by handing out printouts to political parties and the general public. Voter rolls include a photo of all voters, but this photo is not included in the image PDF files that the EC has on its website. While these image PDF rolls can be scrutinised in theory, this can turn out to be a resource-intensive exercise in practice. India has over 99 crore voter roll entries as of this January, and spotting duplicates can be challenging unless a team of human reviewers has a long period of time, and a limited geographic sample. That was the case in the Mahadevapura constituency of Bengaluru, where the Congress was able to spot 11,965 duplicate entries.

However, if 'text PDF' files are made available, the text can be indexed and searched by a computer making information formatting more straightforward. Without such

machine-readable rolls, the Opposition argues, malfeasance and duplicate entries will be harder to spot. P.G. Bhat, a Bengaluru activist, has, prior to 2018, analysed machine-readable rolls to highlight irregular additions.

Why won't the EC provide the same?

One year before the 2019 elections, the EC ordered State-level Chief Electoral Officers to stop uploading machine-readable rolls on their website. O.P. Rawat, the then Chief Election Commissioner, told *The Hindu* that this was done to prevent foreign countries from accessing voter roll data, which could expose Indians' full names and addresses. In *Kamal Nath versus Election Commission of India*, the Supreme Court in 2018 refused to compel the EC to provide machine-readable electoral roll data. This was in spite of the EC's own manual, which states that the "draft roll shall be put on [Chief Electoral Officers']

website in a text mode". However, the court observed, "it may be added that if the petitioner so wants, he can always convert [voter lists] into searchable mode which, of course, would require him to put his own efforts."

The main technology to convert scanned or un-searchable PDF documents into an analysable format is Optical Character Recognition (OCR), a decades-old technology. But there are points of friction that make such an analysis challenging: on the EC's website, voter rolls for each assembly constituency are split into hundreds of "parts," each a separate PDF document. Beyond the resource-intensiveness of obtaining the files, performing OCR on such a massive number of pages – over six crore for all the voter rolls in the country, based on a rough estimate – would cost around \$40,000 per summary revision list (as per Google's indicative AI Document pricing).

Can digital voter rolls spot fraud?

Mr. Gandhi has argued that having searchable copies would make spotting duplicate entries easier. Srinivas Kodali, an advocate and transparency activist, said that "there is a risk" in making rolls public, but that the EC's conduct necessitated further transparency. "If the capability to OCR anyway exists with political parties, the question is whether we might as well make it public," Mr. Kodali said.

THE GIST

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BUILDING BLOCKS



Light to image: Willard Boyle and George Smith with a charge-coupled device in 1974. AFP

How charge-coupled devices revolutionised digital imaging

At the time it was invented in 1969, the charge-coupled device (CCD) was a pioneering technology that converted light into electrical signals using an array of capacitors that transferred electric charges in a sequence

Vasudevan Mukunth

A charge-coupled device (CCD) is a remarkable electronic component used to capture images by converting light into electrical signals. Its invention marked a significant milestone in technology, influencing fields such as photography, astronomy, medicine, and many others.

What is a CCD?
At the time it was invented in 1969, the CCD was a pioneering technology that converted light into electrical signals using an array of capacitors that transferred electric charges in a sequence. Today, CCD technology has fundamentally transformed how we capture, analyse, and share visual information, representing one of the most important technological advances of the 20th century.

A CCD consists of an integrated circuit made up of an array of small picture elements called pixels. Each pixel acts like a small light sensor that collects photons (the particles of light) and converts them into electrical charges. These charges are then transferred across the device, one pixel at a time, to be read and processed into a digital image.

Imagine a grid where every little square captures some light and turns it into an electric signal that can be measured and displayed as part of a

complete picture. That’s what a CCD does.

How was the CCD invented?
Willard Boyle and George Smith at Bell Telephone Laboratories in New Jersey in the U.S. invented the first CCD in 1969 (Smith passed away on May 28, 2025.) They were initially working on using semiconductor technology to create new types of memory devices. During a brainstorming session, they realised that an electric charge could be stored and moved on small capacitors arranged close together.

Boyle and Smith came up with the idea to connect these capacitors in a way that allowed electrical charges to be shifted along the device, a process they called “charge coupling”. This way, the charges could be transferred in a controlled manner, paving the way for its use in capturing images by converting light into electrical signals.

Their groundbreaking work earned them the Nobel Prize for physics in 2009, highlighting the profound impact of CCDs on science and technology.

Soon after, companies like Fairchild Semiconductor and Sony further developed CCDs, making them practical for mass production and use in cameras and other imaging devices.

How does a CCD work?
A CCD operates using the photoelectric

effect, where light that falls on the device generates electron-hole pairs in the semiconductor material.

Specifically, when photons enter a CCD, they strike the semiconductor material beneath each pixel. This energy knocks electrons loose, creating a small group of electrons proportional to the intensity of light in that pixel. Each pixel is essentially a small capacitor that holds these electrons. The amount of charge in each pixel varies depending on how much light the pixel has received.

A voltage is applied to electrodes placed over the pixels in a sequence that moves the charges from one pixel to the next, like passing buckets of water along a line. This is why it’s called a “charge-coupled” device, and this process continues until all the charge has reached a readout register.

The accumulated charge from each pixel is then converted into a voltage signal, which can be amplified and digitised by connected electronics to form a digital image.

This sequential transfer and reading process allows the CCD to create a precise and high-quality representation of a scene being captured.

Where are CCDs used?
Since 1969, CCDs have revolutionised many fields by improving their ability to capture light as data. At the household level, CCDs made possible the rise of

digital cameras by replacing film with sensors that captured images electronically. This allowed people to view their images instantly, edit them, and store them in hard drives, greatly influencing everyday life and media. They’re also used in CCTV cameras to provide high-quality video feeds for security in places like banks, shopping malls, and hospitals.

CCDs play a vital role in medical diagnostics, including in X-ray imaging, computed tomography (CT) scans, and endoscopy. Their high resolution and sensitivity produce clearer images that help doctors determine more accurate diagnoses and treatments. In the same vein, because of their sensitivity and precision, CCDs are also used in microscopes, spectrometers, and particle detectors where they allow scientists to analyse images in detail, for example, when they study cells, the structure of materials, and other physical phenomena.

In astronomy, CCDs have become the gold standard for astronomical imaging. Telescopes fit with CCDs can capture faint and distant celestial objects with more sensitivity and accuracy than traditional photographic plates. This capability has vastly increased astronomers’ understanding of the universe, helping them discover distant galaxies, detect exoplanets, and study cosmic phenomena.

THE DAILY QUIZ

Some significant events occurred on August 21. Here is a quiz on observances, birthdays and everything else that happened on the day

Abhinaya. K

QUESTION 1
An iconic painting was stolen on this day in 1911 by three Italian handyman. It was not recovered until 1913. Identify the painting.

QUESTION 2
Considered the greatest sprinter of all time, this person who was born on this day in 1986, holds multiple world records and is an eight-time Olympic gold medalist. Identify the person.

QUESTION 3
This unique island State officially became the _____ State of the United States on

this day in 1959. It is one of the two non-contiguous States. Name the State and fill the gap.

QUESTION 4
The wedding of this British royal, who was born on this day in 1930, was the first royal wedding to be broadcast on national television. What was the title of this Royal person?

QUESTION 5
This American swimmer won his eighth medal at the Olympics on this day in 2004. Where was the Olympics held that year and how many Gold medals did the Swimmer win?



Visual question:
Bambi, the iconic Disney animated film was released on this day in 1942 in the U.S. The movie was based on a book. Name the book and its author.

Questions and Answers to the previous day’s daily quiz: 1. Number of Vice Presidents India has had since the post’s inception. **Ans: 14 with the latest occupant being Jagdeep Dhankhar**
2. The reason why a candidate should be qualified to be elected to the Rajya Sabha. **Ans: Because the VP is to act as the ex-officio chairman of the Upper House**
3. Apart Dr. S. Radhakrishnan, this VP has held the post for 10 years. **Ans: M. Hamid Ansari**
4. Six Vice Presidents have become President. Four are Dr. Radhakrishnan, Dr. Zakir Husain, V.V. Giri, and K.R. Narayanan, name the other two. **Ans: R. Venkataraman and Dr. Shankar Dayal Sharma**
5. The Vice President who passed away during his tenure. **Ans: Krishan Kant**
6. Name the three Vice Presidents to have been honoured with the Bharat Ratna. **Ans: S. Radhakrishnan, Zakir Husain and V.V. Giri**
Visual: Name this individual. **Ans: Mohammad Hidayatullah**
Early Birds: Erfanally Oosmany| Siddhartha Viswanathan| Ganesh. N| Haridas Pal| Shravya Attri



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

K. Subrahmanian
S. Upendran

Here’s a test on words. Next to each number below you will find a word in capitals followed by four words or phrases. In each case, select the word or phrase that has most nearly the same meaning as the word in capital.

1. AMBIGUOUS (a) clear (b) doubtful (c) large (d) complicated.
2. AMENABLE (a) religious (b) responsive (c) kind-hearted (d) cruel.
3. AMITY (a) linen (b) strife (c) friendship (d) enmity.
4. AUGURY (a) foretelling (b) increase (c) boring tool (d) sickness.
5. AUSTERITY (a) style (b) poverty (c) calmness (d) severity.
6. CASTIGATION (a) projectile (b) driving force (c) punishment (d) insulting.
7. CONDONE (a) surround (b) pardon (c) bring together (d) pale together.
8. CONTENTION (a) deep satisfaction (b) self-restraint (c) competitive struggle (d) convincing reason.
9. DECRY (a) denounce (b) catch sight of (c) weep (d) spy on.
10. DEFALCATION (a) desertion (b) embezzlement (c) emigration (d) branching off.
11. DEMUR (a) to be coy (b) grumble (c) object to (d) remove.
12. DENIZEN (a) agent (b) police (c) underworld (d) inhabitant.
13. DISSENTIENT (a) not agreeing (b) abstaining (c) odourless (d) unfeeling.
14. DISSERTATION (a) praise (b) food (c) sprinkling (d) essay.
15. DISSIPATE (a) concentrate (b) squander (c) speak foolishly (d) drink.
16. DISTAFF (a) musical scale (b) female (c) left (d) shepherd.
17. ESCHREW (a) eat slowly (b) to go wrong (c) avoid (d) lose.
18. ETHNIC (a) moral (b) foreign (c) legal (d) racial.
19. FRESCO (a) painting on fresh plaster (b) cooling drink (c) Italian vegetable (d) fresh fruit.
20. HARBINGER (a) safe port (b) forerunner (c) drunken revel (d) warrior.
21. HIRSUTE (a) cheap (b) juicy (c) hairy (d) smoky.
22. HOLOGRAPH (a) chart (b) table of contents (c) deep cavern (d) handwritten document.
23. ILLICIT (a) free (b) easy (c) spotless (d) not legal.
24. IMBROGLIO (a) decoration (b) quarrel (c) scandal (d) harem.
25. IMPROMPTU (a) offhand (b) tardy (c) precise (d) not proper.
26. IMPROVISE (a) impoverish (b) supervise (c) arrange suddenly (d) overlook.
27. IMPUGN (a) bother (b) hunt (c) attack (d) uphold.
28. INTERIM (a) meantime (b) entrance (c) burial (d) step.
29. INUNDATE (a) flood (b) insulate (c) make an entry (d) go under.
30. LETHARGY (a) energy (b) sluggishness (c) inability (d) permission.

Answers: 1. (b), 2. (b), 3. (c), 4. (a), 5. (d), 6. (c), 7. (b), 8. (c), 9. (a), 10. (b), 11. (c), 12. (d), 13. (a), 14. (d), 15. (b), 16. (b), 17. (c), 18. (d), 19. (a), 20. (b), 21. (c), 22. (d), 23. (d), 24. (b), 25. (a), 26. (c), 27. (c), 28. (a), 29. (a), 30. (b).

Published in The Hindu on September 30, 1997.

Word of the day

Avaricious:
immoderately desirous of acquiring wealth


Synonyms: covetous, greedy

Usage: They are avaricious and will do anything for money.

Pronunciation: newsth.live/avariciouspro

International Phonetic Alphabet: /əˈvɛərɪʃəs/

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



A thought for today
Compulsive gamblers do not fail to moderate their bets out of lack of will power...the whole point of this kind of gambling is to maximise risk...for its own sake
DOSTOEVSKY, THE GAMBLER

Office Politics

JPC that'll examine bill on removing govt leaders should agree conviction, not investigation, must be the trigger

The Constitution (130th Amendment) Bill and its adjuncts tabled in Parliament yesterday propose something serious – that a PM or a CM or a minister will be removed from office if he/she has been in custody for 30 days, for an offence punishable by 5+ years of jail term. Opposition's questions and criticisms were predictable. It also, in a most unlovely way, tore up copies of the bill and threw these at the treasury benches. Amidst chaotic scenes and repeated adjournments, GOI denied that the bills had been brought in haste, but agreed to send them to a joint parliamentary committee. The 21 Lok Sabha and 10 Rajya Sabha members of this JPC have to distill the matter to basic principles.

The stated purpose of yesterday's bills is that those arrested and detained against serious criminal offences should not “eventually diminish the constitutional trust” of the Indian people. But different provisions in the Representation of the People Act, 1951 that deal with disqualifications have taken shape very much with this goal – and that of countering the criminalisation of politics. Shifting the goalpost from conviction to custody, as the bills propose, is contraindicated by foundational legal principle: Innocent until proven guilty. As current provisions stand, they seem to skirt around the idea of due process. Yes, there's an argument that those accused of serious crimes should resign anyway. But a law that makes dismissal contingent upon a month's incarceration doesn't account for the utmost importance accorded to the will of the people – those elected can be found unfit to hold office only after conviction. JPC should work from this principle and recommend amendments.

There's, of course, no denying that crime and politics remain friendly. Per ADR, 46% of newly elected MPs in 2024 boast criminal charges compared to 30% in 2009. Earlier this year the Supreme Court learned from the amicus curiae that about 5,000 criminal cases against MPs and MLAs are still pending. Only parties can change these outcomes. As for laws, they should pay heed to well-understood principles.



Regulate, Don't Ban

Strict regulation can protect players of online games from financial ruin. Ceilings on bets is one idea

GOI's move to ban “online money games” has a close analogue in prohibition. People drink, and some drink to the point of ruin. But history is witness that prohibition never solved this problem. Likewise, people have always gambled, some to the point of ruin, but is a ban the best way to make this problem go away?

There's no denying that gambling addiction – online or off it – takes a heavy toll on society. Data from Karnataka alone shows at least 32 suicides related to online betting since 2023. There are countless other reports from across the country. When lab technicians and auto drivers run up loans of ₹10L or more to play rummy online, a ban seems only right. But consider its consequences. Some 400 companies, 2L jobs and ₹20,000cr in GST revenue may be wiped out in an instant, *without stopping online betting*. Just as prohibition spurs bootlegging, a ban on online money games will result in players exploring other options. The internet has no barriers, remember. Chances are the alternatives will be riskier. While Indian tech workers will lose jobs, money might flow into those same offshore jurisdictions that pose “significant enforcement challenges”.

GOI should consider tightening regulations instead. In 2023, it gave the industry an opportunity to self-regulate. While that didn't work, a firm hand now might produce desired results. Since the ban is meant to protect players from financial ruin, strict KYC checks and deposit/loss limits based on credit scores may be a good start. Data should be localised while blocking offshore betting sites aggressively. Govt has also expressed concern about “manipulative design features, addictive algorithms, bots and undisclosed agents” in gaming apps. It has already cracked down on such “dark patterns” in ecommerce and can do so in online gaming also.

Other countries are still learning – UK banned celebrity endorsements for gambling apps, and Italy banned such ads altogether. US and Australia also regulate the sector with strict rules regarding KYC and advertising. That's why India shouldn't go the way of a blanket ban either.



So Many Choris

We the people lose so many things...air, water, roads...

Bachi Karkaria

'O EC, EC, / O EC, EC, Mere polls churaya na karo!'
'O Rahul, Rahul! / O Rahul Rahul Roz, roz lies na bo-la-ya karo!'
'Vote Chor' is the latest *RaGa Atana*. Played fast and furious, this angry arrangement has been known to cause palpitations in listeners, but EC-ji isn't showing any cause for concern. It's not clear who's doctored what. At a Bangalore pressconf, Rahul unfurled reams to allege that EC was up to something dodgy. In turn, EC's presser demanded either proof or apology. But, if you'll excuse more mixed metaphors, I shan't go into whether there was indeed a *corps de ballot*-stuffing or Mr G's accusations are just a load of Bolshoi. Instead, here's my list of what We the People are routinely robbed of. Nos 1,2,3 are even *ultra vires* our constitution.

Air chori. Operating with impunity, these *bindaas*, badass gangs comprise dirty industries, toxic vehicles, even flatulent cows. In Delhi, it's stubble-burning neighbours; in Mumbai, the phalanx of concrete blocking sky and cleanser sea-breeze.

Paani chori. Blame not the hapless, tap-less slumdweller siphoning off a bucket or two. Industrial-grade pollution and encroachment rob our water bodies. Like lowly beat-cop, the state can be 'persuaded' to turn a blind eye. Or is it itself the violator?

Sleep chori. Imminent, blared serial festival music will compound chronic construction cacophony.

Land chori. It's countrywide, but particularly rampant in Mumbai where real estate is scarce and correspondingly valuable. Most recently, port authority leased away 30 chunks which should have rightly been returned for public good once shipping moved to JNPT. Or cop is culprit. In 2001, state govt cynically tweaked the mill-lands' development rule, leaving the city with only one-eighth of the bonanza it expected for more open spaces, schools, hospitals and affordable housing.

Roads chori. Accused No 1: municipal corporations. Evidence: pothole-glut, pavement-paucity, choked gutters, overflowing garbage. Encroachment too is public-way robbery.

Civility chori. Guilty as charged are netas, newshour anchors, neighbours road-ragers. They've not only stolen but smashed beyond salvage all civilised discourse, discussion, debate, disagreement.

So-ji, never mind politics, think of these 24x7x30x12 robberies?

Alec Smart said: “Did Putin heed Trump? Alas-ka, no.”



erratica

When He Walks, Who Gains?

Rahul Gandhi's Bihar yatra shows he's often better at making a case for opposition than at making Congress a major player in politically tough states

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Rahul Gandhi has centred his political identity and brand on walkathons from the very first day he threw himself into the task of mobilising crowds. Bihar's 'Vote Adhikar Yatra' that started Sunday last is his fifth big-ticket walkathon. Success of Bharat Jodo Yatra (BJY) from Kanyakumari to Kashmir and from Manipur to Mumbai – completed 508 days ago – forms the backdrop to Bihar's hybrid mode of walks & drives through 20 districts covering 1,300 km.

Even when he was a raw political project with a famous surname, simply finding his feet, Rahul marched against land acquisition in west UP's Bhatta-Parsaul. The 'kisan yatra' from Deoria-to-Delhi was to push farmers' agenda. He also hiked to Kedarnath in 2015 to signal normalcy to the world two years after flash floods devastated the region. A whiff of a provocation or political possibility sets Gandhi on the move – an itch to hit the road.

And so it was last week, on a muggy Sunday in Sasaram, that the Leader of Opposition in Parliament was off once again along with RJD's Tejashwi Yadav and allies to talk to the Bihari on the 'threat' to their right to vote.

Protests & polls | Yet the Bihar yatra is like no previous campaign. It follows Supreme Court's accepting the opposition's demands and directing Election Commission (EC) to publish the names of those deleted from Bihar's new draft rolls. In July, the abruptly announced Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in Bihar – requiring voters to furnish fresh documents for enrolment – months before state polls had triggered suspicion.

A meeting with EC deepened opposition's fears that outward-bound migrants and poor, marginalised groups – seen as anti-BJP voters – would be struck off the rolls. The move sparked mass protests and a Supreme Court petition. That it all coincided with Parliament's monsoon session provided the issue a giant platform.

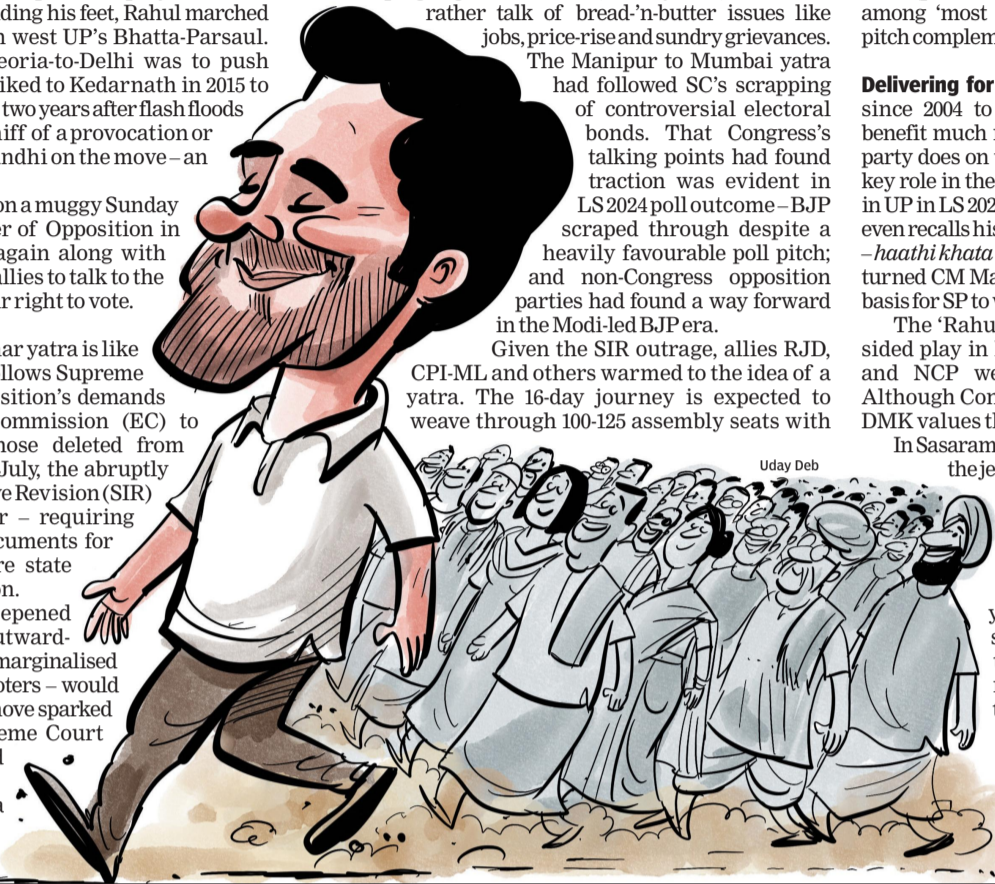
On Aug 7, Rahul

stunned the country with a TedTalk-style presentation of a study he had commissioned. He showed 'largescale irregularities' in voters' list for Mahadevapura assembly segment of Bangalore Central parliamentary seat during Lok Sabha elections 2024. The findings amplified suspicions Congress had aired over Maharashtra assembly polls and some LS 2024 seats.

With SC's directive to EC, Rahul's efforts were seen to have paid off. Could a yatra be far behind? One that brought together a protest and elections – a potent mix for a poll campaign.

Crowds pay attention | BJY revealed a large base existed for a campaign against “hatred”, “cronyism”, who would rather talk of bread-n-butter issues like jobs, price-rise and sundry grievances. The Manipur to Mumbai yatra had followed SC's scrapping of controversial electoral bonds. That Congress's talking points had found traction was evident in LS 2024 poll outcome – BJP scraped through despite a heavily favourable poll pitch; and non-Congress opposition parties had found a way forward in the Modi-led BJP era.

Given the SIR outrage, allies RJD, CPI-ML and others warmed to the idea of a yatra. The 16-day journey is expected to weave through 100-125 assembly seats with



Assert Or Accommodate: Playbook For India

We must know when to stand firm and when to agree to some demands. Restoring mutually beneficial trade ties with US depends on this

Chetan Bhagat



Depending on whether you are a glass half full or glass half empty kind of person, you can judge the recently concluded Trump-Putin summit either way. Pessimists will say nothing happened towards ending the Russia-Ukraine war. Optimists will say at least a start has been made – let's hope the war comes to an end soon.

What the Alaska summit didn't provide, however, was clarity on what's happening with the 50% tariffs, which were suddenly imposed on Indian exports to US. The 25% overall tariff and an additional 25% penalty tariff for doing business with Russia are unique to India, at least at this point. The impact of such tariffs can be devastating.

Even as we prepare to live in this new reality, we must not give up diplomacy to reverse or at least put these onerous tariffs on hold. For this, we perhaps need to revisit our foreign policy, which has tilted towards assertiveness in the past few years. Today, that assertiveness needs to be balanced with accommodation.

Human beings are social animals. We cannot survive without interacting, cooperating and living alongside other humans. And yet, every now and then, we as individuals have to assert ourselves against others. The unfair boss who gives you too much work and pays you too little – until the day you decide to assert yourself and call him out. The person who tries to jump the queue you've patiently stood in – until you tell him off. The friend who takes advantage of you – until you finally tell him it has to stop.

Nations need to be assertive too, particularly those aspiring for greater stature and power. In the case of nations, assertiveness usually means standing firm with respect to other countries. For example, ignoring sanctions imposed by one country on another can be a sign of assertiveness. Disregarding climate change targets set by others may be another. Refusing to dismantle a nuclear weapons programme also fits the bill.

A certain level of assertiveness is essential. All rising powers become more assertive as their per capita income, military strength, market size and competitiveness increase.

China, for example, is significantly more assertive today than it was three decades ago. This correlates with its remarkable growth in economic output, military capability and manufacturing strength. India has also grown more assertive, especially over the past two to three decades. From the Indo-US nuclear deal to strategic non-alignment to membership in Quad and Brics, India is standing up for itself more than before.



Today, assertiveness often includes loud proclamations on social media about bold decisions made by India. The local media amplifies these messages, often presenting them as small diplomatic victories. This underlines and reinforces the sense of national assertiveness. These public declarations also serve domestic political interests. Ministers whose official roles involve diplomacy are often celebrated by nationalist supporters as heroes for “putting other nations in their place”.

And this is where assertiveness can go too far. When

roadshows, speeches, handshakes and waves. MBCs, SCs, STs, Muslims and the poor are being courted under RJD's well-worn banner of social justice, now amplified by Rahul. He in turn has fashioned a mix of caste census, removal of quota cap, highlighting atrocities, and secularism into his political calling card. All of this is in step with Mukesh Sahani's VIP base and Dipankar Bhattacharya's CPI-ML.

The idea is to pierce the sprawling Bahujan bloc and overcome entrenched political divisions where Nitish Kumar's JDU and Paswan's LJP are lodged. A similar project was executed successfully in UP last year by Akhilesh Yadav. Samajwadi Party branded itself as the party of PDA (pichhda, dalit, adivasi) to counter BJP's success among 'most backward' groups. Rahul's social justice pitch complemented SP's move. SP swept LS 2024 in UP.

Delivering for state parties | There is ample evidence since 2004 to show that allies, or like-minded rivals, benefit much more from Rahul's presence than his own party does on turf where Congress is a fringe player. His key role in the Grand Alliance's superlative performance in UP in LS 2024 is privately acknowledged. In fact, chatter even recalls his campaign against corruption in UP in 2007 – *haathi khata hai* (the elephant is corrupt). The campaign turned CM Mayawati's BSP into a villain and formed the basis for SP to win in 2012.

The 'Rahul factor' turned Maharashtra into a one-sided play in last year's LS elections, when Shiv Sena and NCP were marred by splits and defections. Although Congress is a marginal force in Tamil Nadu, DMK values the credibility Rahul brings.

In Sasaram, like during BJY's Bihar leg, Tejashwi drove the jeep with Rahul seated next to him. It signalled Lalu's son playing the lead on home turf. RJD has the ground troops and organisational network, Congress brings a national leadership and ideology, Rahul its face.

Mahagathbandhan insists the Bihar yatra's focus – Constitution in hand – is a serious effort to make people aware about threats to their voting rights. But the mobilisation visible is as good as launching the opposition's poll campaign.

Political outreach cannot end by Sept 1 given Bihar polls are still months away. Expect a sequel closer to the elections on manifesto, on failure of incumbent govt, and 'social justice'. Rahul has made power walks his power play.

it no longer just serves our self-interest, but also shames or humiliates others. It may alienate entire nations, making it awkward or difficult to restore relations or conduct business with them in the future.

India is undeniably rising. We are not the same nation we were 30 years ago. However, we still have a relatively low per capita income and limited global influence compared to others. If we continue progressing over the next two decades, we will naturally have more room to be assertive. For now, our assertiveness should be dialled down and calibrated in line with our true global standing. Additionally, assertiveness should always serve a clear, constructive purpose – not insult or demean others.

In Chinese culture, there's the concept of *guanxi* (mutually beneficial relations), and *gei mianzi* (giving face). Together, they mean that even in negotiations or disagreements, one should always respect the other party and avoid causing them humiliation. At the international level, even though China pursues its own interests unapologetically, it rarely mocks or ridicules other countries.

Diplomacy and foreign policy require fine-tuning two dials: being assertive and being accommodative. A person with strong friendships and professional relationships often achieves more than someone who insists on going it alone. This is where accommodation comes in. Sometimes we can afford to concede on issues of little consequence. In doing so, we build goodwill – favours that can be called in later.

The country with the best relationships isn't the one who is the most assertive. It's the one that knows how to strike a balance: when to stand up for itself, and when to stand beside others. India's foreign policy should embody this balance, and revisit and recalibrate it regularly in response to global events.

The Russia-Ukraine war may resolve itself in two weeks, or it may go on for two more years. India, meanwhile, will have to be prepared to deal with this tariff problem, and retune its foreign policy to accommodate US a bit more in order to get a resolution to the penal tariffs.

Calvin & Hobbes



Paryushan Mahaparv: Festival Of Awakening

Lalit Garg

In Jainism, Paryushan Mahaparv holds a unique significance. It is not merely a religious ritual but a celebration of deep introspection, self-purification, and turning inwards. Jain culture, for centuries, has regarded this sacred observance as a profound medium for self-uplift, meditation, and penance. The literal meaning of 'Paryushan' is to dwell within, to immerse in the soul, to be close to the self. This year, the grand festival of inner purification is being observed from August 20 to August 27, 2025. During these eight days, every follower of Jainism devotes body and mind to spiritual practices, polishing the mind so deeply that past mistakes may be erased and future missteps avoided.

The atmosphere created during the celebration purifies not only individuals but also society. In this sense, Paryushan is not only a festival of spirituality but also one of personal growth and

transformation. It is not confined to Jains alone – it is a festival for all humanity. Immersed in inner worship, seekers ascend to higher states of spiritual joy and make an earnest effort to move closer to liberation. Rooted in the renunciatory culture of Jainism, Paryushan represents a unique spiritual path where chanting, penance, meditation, contemplation, devotion, and mindfulness elevate life to purity. It is the festival of awakening from slumber, of moving from darkness of ignorance to light of wisdom.

Paryushan also symbolises destruction of karm. Only when enemies of the soul – karm – are destroyed can the soul dwell in its true essence. Paryushan plays a vital role in unveiling the luminous and pure nature of the soul. True spirituality means nearness to Self, and Paryushan opens the doors, and skylights of the heart to this reality.

It is also a festival of Jain unity – known in the Digambar tradition as Dashedalakshan Parv. For them, it begins on the fifth day of the bright fortnight of Bhadrapada and concludes on the fourteenth. In the Shwetambar tradition, the same day marks Samvatsari, celebrated through fasting, meditation, study, and renunciation. According to scriptures, Samvatsari should be observed after 49 or 50 days of chaturmas, monsoon retreat, have passed, with 69 or 70 days remaining. The Digambar tradition emphasises Dashedalakshan Dharm, ten virtues; while the Shwetambar tradition focuses on purification through rituals, fasting, and repentance. In both traditions, however, it is an opportunity for deep reflection, self-restraint, and inner progress.

The central aim of this festival is to free the soul from layers of karm. The final day of Paryushan is celebrated as



THE SPEAKING TREE

Sacredspace

One who neglects or disregards the existence of earth, air, fire, water and vegetation disregards his own existence which is entwined with them.

Mahavir





The IndianEXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

DANGEROUS & WRONG

Yes, ministers arrested after due process may lose the moral right to govern. But the new Bills are bad faith, bad law

ON THE FACE of it, the Constitution (130th Amendment Bill) and two related Bills, tabled in the Lok Sabha and sent to a joint committee on Wednesday, frame a concern about political corruption and seek to enforce constitutional morality. In fact, however, the Bills are deeply troubling pieces of legislation that arrogate to the Executive expanded and concentrated state power and severely shrink safeguards, checks and balances. They undermine the principle of separation of powers and violate federal autonomy. According to the Bills, if any minister, including a chief minister and the prime minister, is arrested and remains in custody for 30 straight days, for an offence punishable by five years or more in jail, he or she must resign or lose their office. This proposed automatic removal on unproven charges marks an inexplicable and disturbing departure from the established principle of disqualification only after conviction — in its ruling in the Lily Thomas case in 2013, the Supreme Court held that a conviction which carries a sentence of two years or more would result in disqualification of a legislator from holding public office and contesting elections from the date of conviction. In a climate in which the executive has shown little compunction in weaponising central agencies to target political opponents, and when the guard rails of the federal framework are under strain, the Bills, by vesting the power of removal in the Prime Minister and Governor — their “advice” will be necessary at the Union and state level, respectively — only add to the dubious arsenal of the Centre’s ruling party.

In the past, chief ministers have resigned before being sent to jail in cases of corruption, from Lalu Prasad in Bihar in the 1990s to Hemant Soren in Jharkhand more recently — Arvind Kejriwal, who continued as Delhi Chief Minister even after being taken into custody in the Delhi excise policy case, was an exception. But that is a call that must remain a political one. It is a matter between the political party and the politician, and then between the politician and the people. Of course, the judicial process is infamously prone to delays, but short-circuiting the due process of law, overturning the principle of innocent till proved guilty, and handing untrammelled power to the ruling establishment at the Centre is certainly not the answer. All Union governments have misused central agencies against political opponents — the CBI was dubbed the “Congress Bureau of Investigation” and a “caged parrot” in the tenure of the UPA. But the last 10 years or so have seen this distortion acquire a new scale. Since 2014, there has been a starkly disproportionate targeting of Opposition leaders by the CBI and ED, who win an instant reprieve when they cross over to the BJP. The ED, which has acquired a reputation for being the prime instrument of this vindictive politics, armed with stringent laws that make bail more difficult, has a pathetic conviction rate. It has, time and again, been rebuked by the SC, as for its money laundering investigation in the Tamil Nadu State Marketing Corporation case.

To argue, as the Home Minister does, that “the people” will decide if their ministers should run the government from jail, is a cynical framing that subverts people’s rights in their own name. The Bills, which have gone to a joint parliamentary panel, deserve to travel no further. They should be rejected.

HEAVY-HANDED STATE

Invocation of sedition law against journalists by Himanta Biswa Sarma government stifles free expression, violates SC guidelines

THE ASSAM POLICE has summoned journalist and *The Wire* editor Siddharth Varadarajan in a case of sedition, over an article on Operation Sindoor carried by the online portal. The article carried comments by India’s military attache to Indonesia on IAF jets and military tactics employed during Operation Sindoor and was widely reported. It is now part of police case diaries for being an act “endangering the sovereignty, unity and integrity of India.” On August 12, the Supreme Court directed the Assam police to not take any “coercive steps” against Varadarajan. However, in defiance of the Court order, the police registered a second FIR on the same issue in a different district. Invoking the provisions of sedition for a news report, selectively and unfairly deploying state machinery against journalists, raises serious questions about violation of due process and infringement of fundamental rights.

The Supreme Court, in its landmark Kedar Nath Singh judgment (1962), made it clear that criticism of the government, however harsh, is not sedition unless it directly incites violence or fosters public disorder. In May 2022, the SC stayed the operation of the law after forming a “prima facie view that the rigour of Section 124A of IPC is not in tune with the current social milieu.” Sensing the mood of the Court, the government asked for an opportunity to repeal the law before it was struck down. The SC said that it would “hope and expect” that the government would refrain from registering any FIR, continuing any investigation or taking any coercive measures by invoking Section 124A of IPC while the provision is under consideration. But in 2023, when the new Nyaya Sanhitas were brought in, the law on sedition was retained with a mere change in nomenclature. The name has changed from “rajdroh” to “deshdroh,” but the dispiriting misuse of the law continues.

“To allow a journalist to be subjected to multiple complaints and to the pursuit of remedies traversing multiple states and jurisdictions when faced with successive FIRs and complaints bearing the same foundation has a stifling effect on the exercise of that freedom. This will effectively destroy the freedom of the citizen to know of the affairs of governance in the nation and the right of the journalist to ensure an informed society,” said former CJI D Y Chandrachud in May 2020, while granting bail to Arnab Goswami. As the SC hears challenges to the new sedition law, the Assam government must urgently heed the court’s caution.

A MID-CAREER TRAGEDY

Survey shows that professionals aged 35–54 are driving AI adoption in workplaces. It’s because they must

THE WHITE-COLLAR, mid-career professional today will be hard-pressed to find himself represented in any of the Seven Ages of a person’s life, as Shakespeare described them in *As You Like It*. The coder, the corporate worker, the doctor, the journalist, the lawyer — hardly anyone in their 40s and 50s can “In fair round belly with good capon lin’d/With eyes severe and beard of formal cut/Full of wise saws and modern instances... plays his part.” In the age of AI, the middle-aged worker cannot rely on her experience, her wisdom to “play her part” — she must become a student, once again.

A survey and report by Indeed — titled “Work Ahead” — found that 43 per cent of workers across the country feel confident about using AI over the next two-three years, and, significantly, mid-career professionals (aged 35–54) are leading the way in adopting the technology. Over half the people surveyed (56 per cent) in this category are actively seeking AI training, outpacing younger professionals (39 per cent) by quite a margin. There is something admirable about this eagerness, this drive to stay relevant and the manager’s dream — “productive” — at a time people are usually at the top of a career hill, staring down the slope on the other side. But it is also a little sad.

The young know they have enough time to learn, to “upskill”, to make a mark. The old can rest on their laurels, and look back at a life well-lived (or lived, at any rate). It is the middle-aged, middle-career, middle-class worker — paying for kids’ rising costs and hospital bills that only seem to mount, with salaries staying stagnant — who has to learn how to give prompts to a machine that has cannibalised the data created by the same human intelligence it seeks to replace. All the world is indeed a stage — and the play right now is an absurd tragedy.



FAIZAN MUSTAFA

CRIMINAL LAW IS the most direct expression of the relationship between a state and its citizens. Nowhere in the legal field is more at stake for the community or the individual. Unfortunately, “crimes” originate in government policy and, therefore, criminal law reflects the idea of power rather than justice. The state, in its discretion, designates certain acts as crimes as per its electoral or other needs. It may decide to criminalise and decriminalise almost anything. Thus, Emperor Claudius of Rome, who wanted to marry his brother’s daughter, procured an amendment to the crime of incest that permitted a marriage between a niece and her paternal uncle, leaving the law unaltered as to other marriages between uncles and nieces or aunts and nephews.

The criminal justice system is permeated by discretion, where the police have the power to arrest people even on mere suspicion. In 2022, 76 per cent of prisoners were under-trials. Can politicians who spend just 30 days in custody constitute a valid class protected by Article 14 to be treated differently? Can police powers not be used by central or state governments to get political leaders removed from their high constitutional offices? Can an arrest itself be converted into a punishment prior to conviction? These are legitimate questions that require public debate.

The Narendra Modi government’s proposal in the recently tabled bills was seemingly necessitated by the former Delhi Chief Minister’s refusal to resign after spending weeks in jail and the Delhi HC’s observation that there is nothing in law envisaging a CM’s resignation in such circumstances. Indeed, the new provision of removal of ministers including the Prime Minister — insertion in Article 75(5A) — and ministers and Chief Ministers in states — insertion in Article 164(4A) — to protect our democratic set up would, in normal circumstances, have been widely acclaimed as a historic and bold move towards the decriminalisation of politics. However, the functioning of our investigating agencies in the recent past has created doubts not only in the minds of people but also among the judges of the apex court. On the raid at the Tamil Nadu State Marketing Corporation, CJI B R Gavai on May 22 said that the

Bills seeking to remove ministers facing criminal charges are vulnerable to misuse

The mischief that the three bills propose to deal with is political corruption. In March 2025, Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary informed the Rajya Sabha that ‘in the last ten years, as many as 193 cases against politicians have been registered by the ED in which only two convictions (both former ministers from the Jharkhand government) have been made.’ Since of the total cases, 138 or a whopping 71 per cent, have been registered in the last five years, there are reasons to be apprehensive about the credibility of ED. Even the Supreme Court had expressed its anguish over the low conviction rates.

Enforcement Directorate (ED) has “crossed all limits”. In 2013, during the UPA government, Justice R M Lodha famously called the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) a “caged parrot speaking in the master’s voice”. While granting bail to Delhi’s then Chief Minister in 2024, the SC had reiterated the importance of the CBI shedding its image as a caged parrot.

Jharkhand CM Hemant Soren, who, unlike Arvind Kejriwal, resigned on his arrest, had to spend some six months in custody on the allegations of a so-called land scam before the Jharkhand High Court concluded that in the “overall conspectus of the case, there is no likelihood of the petitioner committing a similar nature of offence”. Subsequently, the SC refused to interfere with Soren’s bail order. As a result of his arrest, Soren could not campaign in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. Kejriwal, too, lost some seven weeks during the Lok Sabha elections, and when the SC granted him bail on May 10, 2024, just 18 days were available for him to campaign. With bail made extremely difficult under laws like the UAPA and PMLA, the provision is likely to be misused.

The first step in the decriminalisation of politics should be to grant substantial autonomy to the CBI and ED with directors selected through consensus. Let people trust their investigation and the arrests they make. Without doing so, the removal or deemed resignation of a minister, PM or CM may lead to the misuse of the criminal justice system.

Corruption in politics is a serious problem. The Vohra Committee (1993) was appointed by the Government of India to look into this issue, but we have not been able to make much progress. Lately, our politics has become devoid of ethics, and as a result, we see the willing embrace of and alliances with corrupt political leaders after leaders of a particular party have been publicly ridiculed. In ticket distribution, the autocratic high commands of all political parties reward such corrupt leaders, and very often, the “winability” of candidates is the only consideration.

The Supreme Court has done a remarkable job in reducing political corruption through several landmark judgments. In *Lily Thomas* (2013), it barred convicted political leaders from

contesting elections. In *Jan Chaukidar* (2004), it had even prohibited those in jail from contesting, but Parliament overturned this order. The UPA government did come up with an ordinance to overturn the disqualification of convicted political leaders, but Rahul Gandhi famously and publicly opposed the move. Years later, he was disqualified under that very law.

The mischief that the three bills propose to deal with is political corruption. In March 2025, Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary informed the Rajya Sabha that “in the last 10 years, as many as 193 cases against politicians have been registered by the ED in which only two convictions (both former ministers from the Jharkhand government) have been made”. Of the total cases, 138 or a whopping 71 per cent have been registered in the last five years. There are reasons, therefore, to be apprehensive about the ED’s credibility. Even the Supreme Court had expressed its anguish over the low conviction rates.

If the NDA government intends to divert attention from the ongoing debate about the integrity of electoral rolls, the bills are a smart move, as the 130th Constitutional Amendment Bill is unlikely to be passed because the ruling alliance does not have a two-thirds majority. Such reforms must ideally be preceded by consensus-building. Since the Opposition is against these bills, the BJP may create a narrative that it is trying to protect corrupt leaders. The inclusion of the PM, too, may be intended to score a political point, as years were lost in the debate on the Lokpal over the same issue. But finally, the UPA government’s Lokpal Act, 2013, did include the PM (Section 14(1)(a)).

Under the Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) 2023 alone, about 181 sections (out of 358) provide for five years or more imprisonment. If special laws and local laws are added, this will go up drastically. Since criminal law’s promise as an instrument of safety is matched only by its power to destroy, let us not use it for petty political interests. Let us make bail a rule except in heinous violent crimes so that the new provisions have wider acceptability.

The writer is vice chancellor of Chanakya National Law University. Views are personal



RAJNI BAKSHI

IN THE LAST 30 years, Himachal Pradesh has lost 50 per cent of its glacier area. When the state’s chief secretary said this at Himachal’s administrative academy, earlier this year, there were no gasps of shock among the audience. The outsiders in the conference hall were mostly experts who knew these trends in detail. The local people seem inured to this reality. They suffer every year as raging torrents of melted glacial waters devastate lands, roads, and homes.

And yet, the gathering was dedicated to “Samridh Himachal 2045”. How can the hill people even dream of a prosperous future when all the data indicate that they are now facing an indefinite period of cascading disasters? Or could it be that climate chaos might actually lead to a redefinition of “development” and “value”?

A meaningful answer to the first question is not that “hope springs eternal”. Hope alone can become delusional. A futuristic “samridh” narrative is worthwhile only if it combines defiant determination with wisdom.

It is easy to identify the greed of both private companies and political masters as enemy number one of the Himalayan ecosystems. This is largely why new dams and other disruptive projects continue to be planned and built even after several predecessors have been swept away by ferocious torrents. However, there are more insidious dangers. One is the assumption that if we make people more aware of the environmental data, this will somehow lead to solutions. On the contrary, there is evidence that when faced

NOT BY GLOOM AND DOOM

Alarmism doesn’t help people confront the climate crisis. It numbs them

IN GOOD FAITH

It is clear that ‘samridh’ cannot be equated with either status quo or harking back to a past in which humans and nature lived in a better balance. Perhaps the foremost challenge is for those of us who have advocated a more eco-sensitive notion of development and value for over half a century. Can we craft narratives that address a paradox — encourage people to face the grim prognosis and yet do this in ways that expand rather than shut down their sense of agency?

with overwhelming projections about the future, people feel so numbed that it slows or shuts down their creative energies. During the Samridh Himachal colloquium, in private conversations, several bureaucrats said that many who are already suffering — due to the combined consequences of climate chaos and poor planning — are adopting a fatalistic view.

The other, even more insidious, danger is habit. In a breakaway session of the colloquium, a young official spoke proudly about how Himachal is marching ahead in building dams to maximise its hydropower potential. His education and orientation have deeply embedded the notion that dams equal prosperity. When I asked, “Where will the water come from? Fifty per cent of glaciers are already gone,” he seemed both perturbed and puzzled. It may not help to tell that young man that dams are not temples of modern India, as he has been taught, but have now become tombs. Breaking most or all existing habits of thought may be the biggest challenge going forward. But only then is fresh thinking and truly open reasoning possible. However, the challenges ahead are even more deeply connected to aspirations. Today, prosperity and development are also equated with millions of people being able to drive easily to what were earlier remote pilgrimage sites. So we have multi-lane roads and other facilities, which are at odds with the fragility of the Himalaya.

So what, in this context, could defiant enthusiasm mean? It is clear that “samridh” cannot be equated with either status quo or harking back to a past in which humans and nature

lived in a better balance. Perhaps the foremost challenge is for those of us who have advocated a more eco-sensitive notion of development and value for over half a century. Can we rapidly craft narratives that address a peculiar paradox — encourage people to face the grim prognosis and yet do this in ways that expand rather than shut down their sense of agency?

A wide variety of civic organisations are already engaged in localised solutions — both for eco-restoration and survival in times of natural disasters. So far, these are largely efforts on the margins. It is not necessary that these groups themselves scale to a regional level. Their function might often be more demonstrative than comprehensive problem-solving.

While the onus of more comprehensive solutions is eventually on governments and political parties, appropriate action from them requires demands and pressure from the *samaj* at large. Here is the most tricky challenge: Will people demand larger highways in the mountains or will they instead demand more sustainable policies and projects?

There are those who will argue that raising general public awareness about and demand for ecologically sound policies is a difficult or impossible task. But what does such determinism gain us? The opposite of this is not optimism. Instead, it is the ability to keep stretching our imagination and creativity, both to be better prepared to survive climate disasters and yet not succumb to anxiety and fear.

The writer is the founder of the Youtube channel Ahimsa Conversations

AUGUST 21, 1985, FORTY YEARS AGO

LONGOWAL MURDERED

SANT HARCHAND SINGH Longowal, president of the Akali Dal (L) who was shot at Sherpur village, 30 km from Sangrur, on the evening of August 20, succumbed to injuries in hospital. The 53-year-old Sant was killed within 27 days of his having signed the Punjab accord with Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, on July 24, thus bringing about uncertainty in the political situation in the state, which had shown signs of clearing up.

APPEALS FOR CALM

THE PRESIDENT AND the Prime Minister led

the nation in condemning the assassination of Akali Dal chief Sant Harchand Singh Longowal and appealed to the people to preserve unity and communal harmony. “There are no words to condemn this dastardly act,” President Zail Singh said in his message, adding that the best way to pay homage to the slain Akali chief would be to faithfully implement the Punjab accord.

CONGRESS LEADER SHOT

DEV DUTT KHULLAR, 62, general secretary of the Jalandhar District Congress Committee-I, was shot dead while Gurdial Saini, former MLA and president of the District Congress

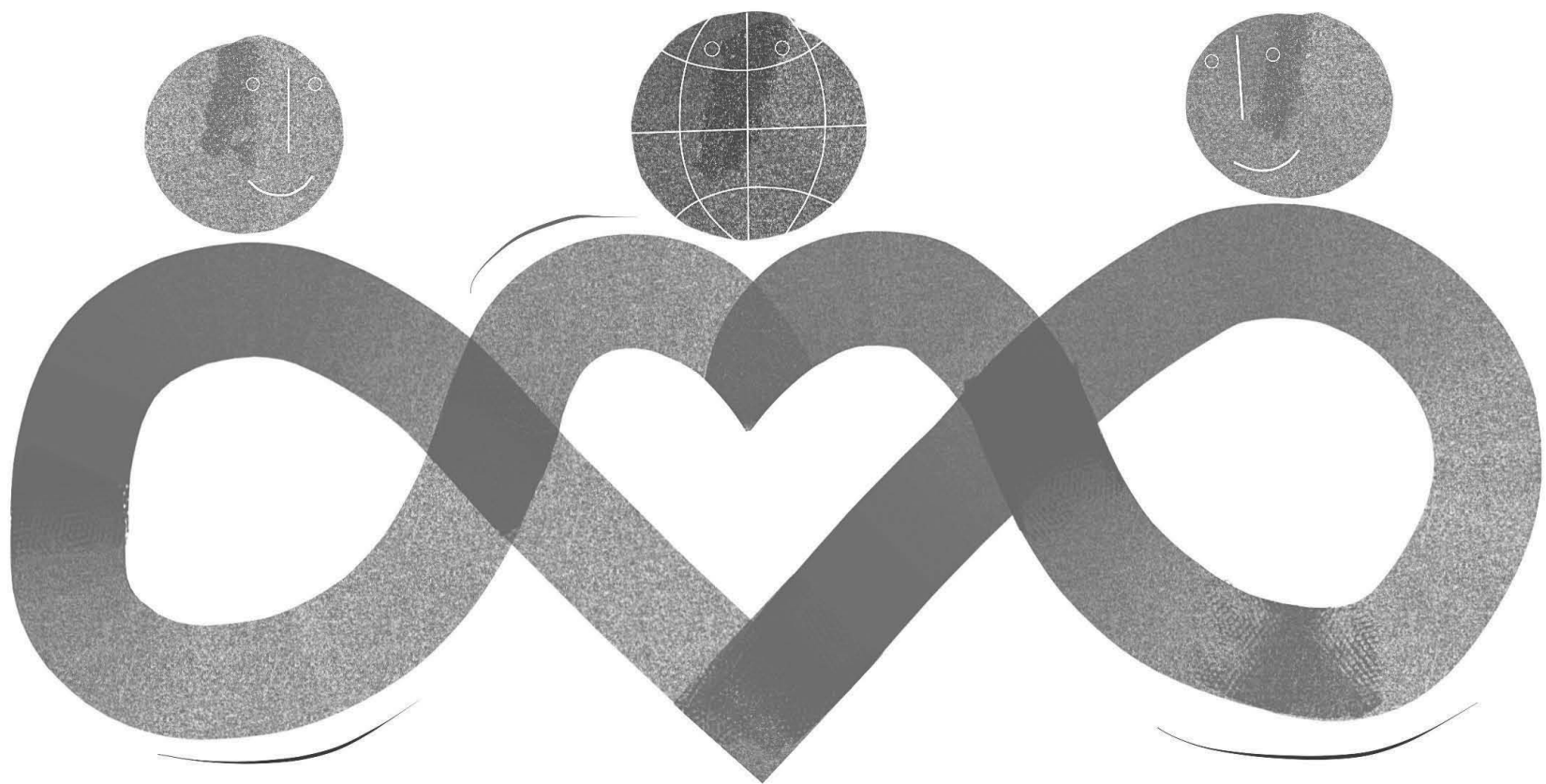
Committee-I, and a party worker, Gurbachan Singh, were seriously injured when a terrorist sprayed bullets inside Saini’s residence. Khullar, who is the father-in-law of Saini’s daughter, was pronounced dead at the Civil Hospital.

OIL IN ASSAM

OIL HAS BEEN discovered in the first well drilled in the Rajgarh structure in Upper Assam. The Minister of State for Petroleum, Nawal Kishore Sharma, in a statement in Parliament described it as a significant discovery, though the full potential of the structure was yet to be assessed. The minister said the well was drilled in the Rajgarh structure by Oil India.



9 THE IDEAS PAGE



CR Sasikumar

The affection economy

The future belongs to those who best understand that the currency for prosperity, influence and well-being at this time is care and belonging



SAMIR SARAN

ANY EPOCH HAS an underlying currency that determines how power is distributed, partnerships are formed, and international relations are managed. In the distant past, it was fertile land. Then it was mineral resources. More recently, it has been demography, innovation or creativity that determined value, national purpose, and global power. As old orders replace themselves, new economic forms emerge. The emergence of the information age gave us the data economy and the attention economy. In today's world — decoupled, divided, atomistic — another term must receive our consideration: The affection economy.

Success today — in trade, in innovation, in the creation of value — depends upon how skillfully you curate a community, how effectively you kindle kinship, how carefully you nurture cohorts. Cohorts, kinships, communities: They are the building blocks of co-operation and economic success.

We have already seen glimmerings of this understanding permeate even the most rational, realist spheres of international relations. What, after all, do we mean when we speak of “like-minded” nations? Like-mindedness creates commonality. It creates a shared purpose and ensures a common direction. It means trust endures even through the temporary turbulence of the sort that the American president is currently inflicting.

The affection economy has visible effects on the corporate world as well. Both companies and countries compete for affection; they expand their footprint through a dedication to empathetic engagement and care. The smartest places, like Dubai, have de-

signed entire demographic and growth policies around curated communities. Visas are offered apparently for commercial reasons, but actually to create a golden cohort of affection. The purpose of their national policy is to make people embrace Dubai. Like Dubai, fly Dubai, buy Dubai, live Dubai.

The UAE may be the perfect exemplar, but it is not the only one. Other countries are constructing or have constructed soft power strategies around communities of interest. Germany is one; Australia and New Zealand, too — and of course Singapore.

Corporations have done it. In India, the stakeholder capitalism that Dhirubhai Ambani fostered — filling stadiums with tens of thousands of co-owners of the Reliance enterprise — offers an analogy. It percolates to the company's thinking even today, with the equity community being succeeded by the data equity community, taking broad-band to the bottom of the pyramid.

The US is a special case. Companies like Apple have built on that foundation to create global production and consumption networks that look to California for inspiration. The federal government has largely let the American private sector run the affection economy.

It is this stored-up affection capital that President Donald Trump is running down so speedily. What differentiates countries and companies today is the networks they lead. It has long been taken for granted that China lacked soft power, that it was respected but not loved. In the 21st century, this placed a hard ceiling on its rise. The US had no such hard ceiling till it constructed one for itself.

How has the affection economy come to dominate? The flattening of the world by digital technology has had something to do with it. It replaced organic connections created by neighbourhoods and workplaces with the more diffuse, detached and delicate bonds that are created online.

But this and individualisation have been in progress for decades. Political scientist Robert Putnam developed a theory in the 1990s of “social capital”, explaining how person-to-person connections were founda-

What differentiates countries and companies today is the networks they lead. It has long been taken for granted that China lacked soft power, that it was respected but not loved. In the 21st century, this placed a hard ceiling on its rise. The US had no such hard ceiling till it constructed one for itself.

tional for modern America. In his book *Bowling Alone*, he argued that this social capital was on the decline, taking civic consciousness with it. This would cause problems, as the community was the true determinant and differentiator of success. Francis Fukuyama demonstrated in his book *Trust* (1995) how social capital created trust within nations, and how trust led to stability and economic growth.

Putnam is not surprised that the desolation of communities has caused the rise of extreme movements. Political activist Steve Bannon has publicly said that *Bowling Alone* inspired him and others to identify their political movement as a cure for the social isolation felt by many Americans. This phenomenon is being replicated around the world: Individualistic societies are abandoning their lonely members to such extreme communities. These groups and movements may be only a dark imitation of the true solidarity and fellowship that creates trust, but they are still communities for those who have no other.

The final push that transformed global society would have to be a global event. Covid provided that impetus. It was a period when isolation deepened, the workplace became irrelevant, and the appeal of the solo actor was enhanced. Today, the digital nomad and the lone-wolf terrorist are two sides of the same coin.

The future will belong to those who best understand that advancements in the technology and economic realms have brought human collectives back a full circle socially. We have indeed returned to a primal state, where communities matter more than anything else. The currency for prosperity, influence and well-being at this time is care and belonging. Prime Minister Narendra Modi read this right when he spoke of *vasudhaiva kutumbakam*: One Earth, One Family, One Future. It is indeed the time for a return on and to affection.

The writer is president, Observer Research Foundation

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

“Any peace deal must ensure Ukraine's territorial sovereignty, while ending Russia's West-led isolation, particularly dropping economic sanctions. Anything less will fail to bring long-lasting peace.” — DAWN, PAKISTAN

For agriculture, a budget of its own

To deal with Trump's tariffs, India needs to protect farmers in short term. It must create more jobs to absorb workforce from agriculture



BHUPINDER SINGH HOODA

US PRESIDENT DONALD Trump's decision to impose a steep 50 per cent penal tariff on Indian agricultural products is more than a diplomatic jolt — it's a reminder of how unequal the global farm trade is. Washington has justified the move as “reciprocity” for India's refusal to open its markets to US grains, dairy, fruit, and fish. In truth, it is the familiar playbook of rich nations — demand access for their subsidised surpluses while shielding their farmers through lavish state support.

India's stand was the right one, both economically and socially. Agriculture sustains 42 per cent of our population and employs 46 per cent of our workforce, yet it contributes less than 20 per cent of the GDP. This imbalance means that most Indian farmers remain trapped in debt and poverty. The recent NABARD (National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development) Rural Financial Inclusion Survey reveals that an average farming household earns Rs 13,661 per month, with a mere Rs 4,476 from actual farming. The rest comes from supplementary work, such as working as labourers or engaging in petty trade. Opening the floodgates to the highly mechanised, subsidy-backed output of US farms would devastate these fragile livelihoods.

The US spends over \$48 billion annually on domestic farm support, according to WTO data. This includes crop insurance subsidies covering up to 60 per cent of premiums, whereas a large number of our farmers are waiting for compensation for their produce losses under PMFBY (Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojna). In the US, price guarantees and marketing loans ensure farmers earn above-market rates. Our farmers are waiting for a legal guarantee of MSP. Export-linked supports disguised as food aid and development programmes allow US wheat, corn or dairy farmers to sell abroad at or below cost without losing income. India's WTO-notified support — the aggregate Measurement of Support (AMS) — is less than 5 per cent of production value, far below the 10 per cent limit allowed for developing countries. This is not competition — it's an uneven playing field.

Only 2 per cent of the US population works in agriculture; in Germany and the UK it's just 1 per cent, in Japan 3 per cent. With 46 per cent of its population working on farms, India is in the company of Afghanistan (45 per cent) and North Korea (47 per cent). Even China, which in 1991 had 63 per cent of its workforce in agriculture, has cut the number to 22 per cent — below the global average of 26 per cent.

Structural weaknesses make matters worse. Average farm size has shrunk from 2.28 hectares in 1971 to 0.74 hectares in 2021 — too small for efficient mechanisation. Input costs — diesel, fertilisers, seeds — have risen faster than crop prices, squeezing margins. That a large percent-

age of India's population is engaged in agriculture is a symptom not of farming's attractiveness, but of manufacturing and services failing to create the 7.9 million jobs a year.

Imports were a necessary measure to protect our farmers in the short term. However, in the long run, genuine farmer welfare demands more than simply keeping competition at bay. It requires equipping farmers with the essential tools, providing market access, and creating alternative employment opportunities. To achieve this, we must implement three urgent and decisive shifts.

First, India must accelerate labour transition by transitioning millions from low-yield farming into manufacturing and services, following the model established by China. This calls for a focused industrial policy that targets labour-intensive sectors like textiles, food processing, and light engineering, coupled with robust rural skill training and urban job creation.

Second, we must prioritise farm consolidation and mechanisation. By promoting cooperative farming, reforming land leasing, and supporting Farmer-Producer Organisations (FPOs), we can effectively reverse land fragmentation. Pooling holdings allows for the viability of modern irrigation, storage, and precision agriculture, which will significantly increase yields and lower per-unit costs.

Third, we need to boost value addition and enhance export competitiveness. India's farm exports, which stand at \$48.15 billion for 2023–24, could experience substantial growth through improved logistics, branding, and quality certification. Reducing post-harvest losses from the current 15–25 per cent to the global standard of 5 per cent can release vast quantities for export.

India must take a strong stand against the hypocrisy of wealthy nations in multilateral forums. The US and EU's so-called “Green Box” subsidies, which they claim are non-trade-distorting, effectively grant their farmers an unfair advantage in global markets. New Delhi should demand a recalibration of subsidies under the WTO's Agreement on Agriculture, ensuring that the food security and procurement programmes of developing countries are protected while the support for affluent nations is scrutinised.

While Trump's tariffs may be temporary, the structural weaknesses in Indian agriculture are permanent unless we act decisively. Protection must be seen as a strategic bridge to competitiveness, not a blanket substitute for it. India has the opportunity to seize this moment and drive structural change — shifting excess labour into higher-value sectors, consolidating and modernising farms, and enhancing our competitive agri-exports. The next time a foreign leader imposes a tariff, we will not react with fear but with confidence. Until then, we must maintain a protective shield, but let its purpose be to buy time for transformation.

Protection serves a purpose, but it is reform that will ultimately secure our agricultural future, and for this, the Rashtriya Kisan Kalyan Kosh, a separate budget like defence, is the need of the hour.

The writer is former CM, Haryana. He headed the Congress Committee on Agriculture and Farm Welfare



ARVIND P DATAR

IN THIS YEAR'S Independence Day address, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has rightly called for sweeping reforms of the Indian tax and regulatory landscape. Notwithstanding the periodic flattering reports of how India will be the third-largest economy, and of how the world looks up to India, the brutal truth is that it is not an attractive investment destination for multinationals. For Indian companies, it is easier to import almost all products than make them in India. And we have no one to blame but ourselves. At the start of this century, the recurrent theme was that the 21st century belonged to India and China. Sadly, we missed the bus.

In 2001, the GDP figures for China and India were \$1.3 trillion and \$476 billion. China's economy was double the size of the Indian economy. A quarter century later, at the end of 2024, China's GDP stood at \$18.74 trillion as against India's \$3.91 trillion; China's economy is now 4.8 times the size of India. In 2001, China had 11 companies in Fortune Global 500, and India had one-IOC Ltd. In 2024, China had 135 and India had nine. These are statistics that indicate the urgent need to make “Make in India” the nation's top priority.

The three critical components of ease of

India mustn't miss the bus

Uncertainties on starting, running and closing businesses need to be removed

doing business (EB) are: (i) Ease of starting a business (ES); (ii) Ease of running a business (EB), and (iii) Ease of closing a business (EC) and can be represented by an equation: $E_B = E_S + E_R + E_C$.

The first component is the time and trouble involved in starting an industry, particularly in the small and medium sectors. At this stage, the bulk of the responsibility is on the states and their regulatory laws. The off-quoted single-window clearance is often a mirage. Even getting a GST registration is problematic, with rent-seeking at every stage. No one has done an actual study of the number of steps involved in setting up different categories of industries, what are the hurdles and actual costs involved, and the time taken. Equally important is to compare the steps, time and costs involved in setting up an industrial unit in China, Vietnam, Malaysia and Thailand with India.

Further, very little is done to attract small and medium investments of values as low as \$10 or 20 million. Most state governments focus only on large investors, ignoring the fact that the real growth is at the lower parts of the pyramid.

The second stage requires a careful study

of the state and central regulations applicable to running firms and companies on the regulatory front. There are multiple and often meaningless compliances that serve no purpose and only add to paperwork. For a single MSME, there are a mind boggling 57 recurring compliances and 17 approvals/licenses from 18 different authorities only in the area of environment, health and safety. The July 5th–11th issue of *The Economist* contains a damning indictment of India's regulations, 75 per cent of which are punishable with imprisonment.

But, the biggest fear of any Indian or foreign business entity is the highly complex and unpredictable direct and indirect tax system. GST continues to be as complex as ever, with vast powers of abruptly freezing accounts, cancelling registration, reopening assessments, and myriad provisions that can bring businesses to a grinding halt. Merely reducing the number of rates or re-enacting the same law in simple language is not the answer. The obsessive focus on checking tax evasion is choking our economic growth. High-pitched tax demands for the last five years, often with little foundation, have created a fear of doing business. Almost every notice is subject to litigation right up to the Supreme Court, often involving huge legal costs. In no other country are businesses exposed to so much uncertainty.

More than half of the businesses may fail and have to close down their operations. In the manufacturing sector, this will involve the disposal of the assets of the land and buildings and plant and machinery. At present, the closure of a business is fraught with severe procedural and legal hurdles. Every business must have a clear exit path.

We are at a fork in the road: Either we choose a completely new path that encourages enterprise or continue with our old methods that have hobbled India's growth. Peter Drucker famously remarked that there are no underdeveloped countries, there are only badly managed ones. The three components of ease of doing business must be re-examined not by the bureaucracy alone, but through intensive consultations and participation with representatives from industry. A clear plan followed by time-bound execution is the key. India cannot afford to miss the bus again and again.

The writer is Senior Advocate, Supreme Court of India

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

BALL IN EC'S COURT

THIS REFERS TO the article, ‘A spectre of exclusion’ (IE, August 20). The disenfranchisement of millions of voters in Bihar through the Election Commission's recent revision exercise demands urgent scrutiny. Any large-scale deletion from the electoral rolls not grounded in transparent criteria risks undermining the principle of universal suffrage. Research by organisations like ADR has repeatedly flagged flaws in the EC's data management — from duplication to wrongful deletions that disproportionately affect migrants, daily-wage workers, and linguistic minorities.

Zainab Irshad, Patna

DON'T DENY VOTERS

THIS REFERS TO the article, ‘Atest of trust’ (IE, August 20). The writer raises several pertinent questions about preservation of democratic trust and calls for transparency during the compilation of voters lists at all times. He, quite appropriately, quotes the example of the 2007 UP assembly elections, when the EC found a way to deal with the problem of “SAD” (shifted, absent or dead) voters. Those methods merit due attention. No “eligible” voter should ever be denied his or her legitimate right to vote. The EC also

remains duty-bound to deal with the problem of duplicate and fake voters. Anjana Gupta, via email

PROTECT THE HILLS

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, ‘Shelter in a storm’ (IE, August 20). Heat waves, droughts, severe thunderstorms and floods, all seem to hit us with greater vengeance, leaving millions vulnerable. The recent loss of dozens of lives in the hill states due to cloudbursts, flash floods and landslides is tragic. We must end deforestation in the hills.

AD Talukdar, Kolkata

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, ‘Shelter in a storm’ (IE, August 20). Wayanad was not the first and Kishtwar and Dharali are not the last places to witness a natural disaster. The topography of these areas is vulnerable to landslides and flash floods. Rampant deforestation, road construction and unregulated development have created havoc in hilly terrains. The need of the hour is to have real-time weather monitoring infrastructure in the Himalaya and other high altitude areas. Community involvement in disaster management is beneficial because local knowledge about terrain and weather patterns is second to none.

Bal Govind, Noida

OUR VIEW



Gaming ban: Why take a big legislative gamble?

India needs a uniform law on online money gaming, yes. But a pragmatic response to this anarchic and risk-laden space would be to regulate rather than ban the activity outright

The government’s decision to outlaw online games that require players to fork out money seems to go against a basic tenet of good governance: strict regulation is typically better than an outright ban. This is especially so in markets that not only exist, but also display demand that state action may be unable to stamp out. A policy that prohibits such an activity runs the risk of sending it underground or overseas, making it much harder to monitor. Which, in turn, could spell even more grievous consequences. Yet, this does not mean that the Wild West air around India’s online gaming industry should continue. Lawmakers could have intervened with a framework that includes strict age-gating rules, heavy ‘sin’ taxation and exemplary punishment for any violation. The Centre argues that platforms that run money games pose a potential threat to national and economic security, with digital wallets and crypto acting as avenues for money laundering and illicit transfers, even as they let data leak with little regard for personal data protection. Apart, of course, from the danger of offshore entities dodging taxes. There is also the harsh reality of addiction among the underage, associated mental health risks and gamer suicides. “The immersive and addictive nature of online games, particularly with monetary incentives, has led to significant mental health issues among users—especially children, adolescents and young adults,” as the government puts it. The Promotion and Regulation of Online Gaming Bill, passed by the Lok Sabha on Wednesday, treats online games where actual money changes hands apart from e-sports and social games where it does not (even if users pay an access fee). This seems to solve the blurry-

line problem of telling games of skill apart from those of chance, which various courts have had to ponder as a test for online gambling. Laws on wagers of fortune and what count as such differ across states. So do the types of app-based games that pool in money. In framing online money games as a distinct category, this legislative move targets a boom space by skirting that trap. The Centre, on its part, must ask itself whether an addictive activity can be banned without its impact going askew from its intent. The bill proposes to plug any potential loopholes. Thus, it will criminalize the advertising of such platforms, while any bank enabling transactions through such apps will face penalties; their senior executives would be hauled up for their role to be put under a scanner. Even so, money gaming will probably prove hard to end. But that is no reason for the Centre not to try sorting out the present patchwork of varying state laws. States like Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh have banned online money gaming outright, others like Sikkim and Nagaland require registration, and still others like Telangana restrict certain forms of online gambling. This maze makes space for operators to game the system and evade state laws. Needless to say, if the proposed law is enacted, it will deliver a body blow to India’s gaming sector, throwing investments and jobs into jeopardy. That, however, is not the point; legislation must focus on the larger common good, not the profits of a few. But then, if the country’s common interest is at stake here, why let the good be the enemy of the best? Regulation would not just work better than a ban, while filling state coffers if taxed punitively, but also conform with ideals of individual and market liberty.

MY VIEW | EYE ON AI

India’s chip challenge: To build at home, we must invest abroad

We must mobilize private capital to invest in technology leaders and gain board influence globally



NILESH JASANI
is a Singapore-based innovation investor for GenInnov Pte Ltd

When Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his Independence Day address spoke of a Made-in-India semiconductor chip becoming a reality, he was articulating more than an industrial goal. He was defining a new pillar of national security. In a world fractured by geopolitics, the ability to not just use but to influence and control the technology that powers our future is a matter of sovereignty. He recalled how past efforts to build chip manufacturing were blocked. India has identified this as a challenge and committed itself to the arduous journey of semiconductor self-sufficiency. Initial steps are underway. Across India, a concerted policy push is taking shape. The government launched the India Semiconductor Mission in 2021 to create a full ecosystem. Policies offer production-linked incentives and 50% capital aid for components and chips. To begin with, the plan is to make less advanced nodes, focusing on packaging and testing operations, where barriers are lower. While incentives were used to draw private firms, events were hosted to attract foreign companies with technology and funds, even as talent is being developed through educational and skilling plans. Now we must align the efforts of the Centre and states for fast action. We have seen the foundation of a landmark fabrication plant by the Tata

Group in Gujarat and a major packaging facility by Micron taking shape in San-and. Each of these conventional steps is essential. They must all be pursued with relentless focus and flawless execution. But as we celebrate this resolve, we must be brutally honest about the mountain we have chosen to climb. This is a journey of immense length and cost, with few short-cuts. We need only look at China, which began its determined push for self-sufficiency over a decade ago. After investing well over \$100 billion and mobilizing the full power of the state, it has made enormous progress. Yet, it remains years and multiple technological generations behind the cutting edge. Resolve and policy alone are not enough. The greater challenge is that the target is not stationary. It is galloping away from us. The world’s leading chip-makers in Taiwan, South Korea and the US are investing hundreds of billions of dollars to push the frontiers of physics and engineering ever further. This creates a dangerous paradox. If today we are theoretically \$100 billion and 10 years behind the cutting edge, it is entirely possible that after five years and \$50 billion of our own investment, we may find ourselves \$200 billion and 15 years behind. Our progress may not be enough to even slow the widening of that gap. This reality does not call for despair. It calls for a bolder and more creative strategy to complement our domestic efforts. It requires us to deploy our most unique and potent national asset: our deep well of private risk capital. While our government faces many demands on its fiscal resources, India’s private economy and capital markets are brimming with investors who show a remarkable appetite for risk in their quest to participate in world-changing technologies. This is a strategic advantage few other nations possess. Private capital by itself cannot lure the world’s best technology to our shores overnight. But what if we created

a new paradigm? Imagine a new kind of strategic investment vehicle, a fund structured like a sovereign entity but capitalized by private Indian wealth. Its mandate would not be to build factories at home, but to strategically deploy capital abroad. It would invest in a select portfolio of the world’s most innovative and cutting-edge semiconductor companies—those that are defining the next generation of technology. This approach would transform our strategic calculus. Instead of parking our nation’s vast foreign exchange reserves in low-yield foreign government debt, we could create pathways for a portion of our private capital to go into acquiring meaningful stakes in global technology leaders. The objective would be more than just financial returns; it would be strategic influence. With significant ownership comes a seat on the board, a voice in the boardroom and a powerful say in a company’s direction. It is a pathway to securing access to critical technology, understanding innovation roadmaps from within firms and lowering long-term vulnerability. History teaches us that rising powers have always acted beyond their borders to secure access to the resources critical for their future. For centuries, this meant securing raw materials or trade routes. Many of the successful East Asian economies built their industrial might by strategically acquiring assets and know-how from abroad. In the 21st century, the most vital strategic resource is technology. Semiconductors are the first and most crucial arena where India must apply this forward-thinking global strategy. Our path to true self-sufficiency cannot be paved by concrete and steel within our borders alone. It must also run through the world’s most advanced laboratories and corporate boardrooms, secured by the strategic deployment of our own capital. To build a secure future at home, we must begin to invest boldly abroad.



GUEST VIEW

Watch the downstream flows of Gangetic investments

SWANAND KELKAR



is managing partner at Breakout Capital.

Anyone who has seen the Ganga in the upper reaches of the Himalayas—especially its Bhagirathi portion on its way from Gangotri to Devprayag—and then its more expansive but slower flow in the lower Gangetic plains might struggle to believe that it is the same river. What starts as a sparkling gush of pristine water turns brown as it meanders its way to the sea. Something similar is happening with domestic flows. The ‘Gangotri’ (or origin) of capital flows in India in recent years has been the humble but pure Systematic Investment Plan (SIP)—a simple yet powerful means of investment by which savers buy mutual fund units at predetermined intervals, such as every month or even week, so as to maintain the discipline of investing and benefit from the opportunity of less expensive purchases when the market falls. Investments through this route have grown vastly across the country. From a modest ₹3,000 crore per month in 2016, when the Association of Mutual Funds

in India (AMFI) started reporting this data, the figure has surged to over ₹28,000 crore: an annual figure of almost \$40 billion. Jefferies research estimates that Indian public equity markets received inflows of \$100 billion in 2024 and are on track to receive a similar amount this year as well. In addition to SIP flows, investments made by the Employees’ Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) and the National Pension System (NPS) have added to this total. These steady inflows have underpinned the resilience of the Indian equity market in recent years, despite heavy intermittent selling by foreign funds. At first glance, this consistent source of domestic capital appears to grant a major advantage to an economy in need of capital, especially when foreign investments, both direct and portfolio, have been feeble or in retreat. But the downstream usage of this torrent paints a different story. India has become a hotbed of initial public offerings (IPOs), with 91 mainboard offers that raised a record \$19 billion in 2024. Despite sideways market movement this year, this trend has continued in 2025. A large portion of these IPOs have domestic institutions as subscribers, entities that are the main beneficiaries of these heavy retail flows.

This would have been good for the Indian economy if the money thus raised was put to use in building new factories or on research and development (R&D). After all, the original purpose of capital markets is to make savers and borrowers meet. However, as I noted in an earlier piece in *Mint* (‘The IPO gamble: Why the odds seem stacked against investors’, 13 July 2025), of the 275 IPOs since the pandemic, 101 had private equity owners selling stakes and repatriating proceeds back to their home countries. Moreover, of the \$19 billion raised through IPOs in 2024, less than \$8 billion was raised through primary offerings (i.e. with money put to use for business purposes), while the remaining provided an exit to existing investors. The newest craze among well-heeled investors is to buy shares in unlisted companies that are headed for an IPO. Shares of National Stock Exchange (NSE) are the poster child of this trend. As per recent reports, the unlisted NSE already has over

150,000 shareholders, up from just over 1000 in 2021. The hope of most of these investors would be to sell their shares for a profit when the IPO takes place. Again, the bet is that the strong domestic flows will facilitate an IPO at a high valuation. This is notwithstanding the fact that recent IPOs such as of HDB Financial Services’ and NSDL’s listed at significant discounts to the prices at which their shares traded in the private market. If we row further downstream, we enter the realm of private credit. Here, investors subscribe to a fund that lends money via debt or debt-like instruments for purposes that a bank generally would not. This includes lending to promoters of private entities, with their unlisted shares being put up as collateral. Private credit funds also lend for the purchase of land or for undertaking mergers and acquisitions. Private credit is lightly regulated and data is hard to come by, but it is estimated to be worth \$25 billion in India and growing rap-

idly. If you trace the expected path for a private loan to be repaid or for the collateral to be enforced, more often than not, it will lead to a hoped-for IPO in the future. Again, the premise on which such a successful float relies is the domestic flow of funds. Just like private equity, whatever new asset class institutions have spawned, high net worth individuals have followed with gusto. It is common practice for family offices to co-lend along with private credit funds, with promises of juicy coupons or high yields-to-maturity till the eventual blockbuster IPO. The Indian economy awaits a rise in private capital expenditure for a broad-based revival, which would hopefully lead to domestic savings getting channelled towards productive purposes. Meanwhile, those savings are finding their way into the hands of savvy investors who in a way are front-running the public floats. The steady rise in household allocation to equities is a healthy trend, but too much of it is just going from one provider of capital to another. It is India’s good fortune that the mighty Ganga is a perennial river, but not all rivers are. If domestic inflows were to slow significantly, the fragility of asset classes downstream would become apparent. These are the author’s personal views.

A blunt ban

Govt should have considered other options for money games

The Lok Sabha on Wednesday passed The Promotion and Regulation of Online Gaming Bill, 2025. The Bill, among other things, seeks to prohibit online money gaming in the country. Predictably, the move has sent the online gaming industry into a tizzy. As reports suggest, there are thousands of high-skill jobs at stake. The Bill’s statement of objects and reasons notes that the widespread proliferation of online money games, easily accessible on mobile devices and computers, has led to grave social, economic, and psychological consequences across the country. These platforms tend to promote addictive behaviour, which results in mental-health issues and financial ruin. Such platforms have also led to an increase in instances of exploitation and fraud. Thus, instead of regulating this market segment, it is in the public interest to prohibit it.

Any person offering online money-gaming service in contravention of the provisions of the Bill shall be punished with imprisonment extending up to three years, or a fine of up to ₹1 crore, or both. Taking out advertisements in the media and engagement in transactions related to money games shall also be punished. Evidently, if the provisions are implemented in their current form, it will be curtains for the formal online money-gaming business in India. To be fair, it is hard to disagree that online gaming can be addictive with mental and financial consequences. However, it is worth debating whether prohibition is the most suitable answer to the stated problems. India has a large talent pool of developers creating various kinds of games, and the industry is growing at a fast pace. India can become a global hub for developing online games.

According to the industry associations concerned, skill-gaming companies have an enterprise value of over ₹2 trillion and have attracted foreign direct investment worth over ₹25,000 crore. An advisable path for the government would have been to hold wide consultations with stakeholders and experts in the area before introducing the Bill. Instead of prohibiting online money games, a regime of adequate regulation would have served India’s interests better. With outright bans, it is possible that a large part of activity would move underground, which can put those engaged in online gaming at greater risk of fraud and exploitation. Given the penetration of the internet, it will be extremely difficult for the government to monitor and check underground operators. Besides, the government would lose tax revenue.

While the prohibition of money games will attract disproportionate public interest for obvious reasons, the Bill also provides a broad formal framework for regulating and promoting online gaming. For instance, the Bill envisages the establishment of an authority for online gaming. The central government is expected to take steps to recognise and register esports with the authority. Guidelines will be formed for conducting esports events. There is also a provision for the establishment of training academies and research centres for the advancement of esports. There are several such provisions to promote and develop online gaming in the country. There are also provisions to facilitate the development of social games. Overall, the bent of the Bill is forward-looking in terms of providing a legal framework for online gaming, which will help facilitate growth and development, but the prohibition of online money games is not in the same spirit.

Black box to sandbox

Framework needed for responsible AI adoption in finance

The Reserve Bank of India’s (RBI’s) Framework for Responsible and Ethical Enablement of Artificial Intelligence (FREE-AI) committee released its final report last week, proposing guidelines for the responsible use of artificial intelligence (AI) in the financial sector. The framework is anchored around seven guiding “sutras” or principles — trust, people first, innovation, fairness, accountability, explainability, and resilience — and is backed by 26 actionable recommendations across six pillars — infrastructure, policy, capacity, governance, protection, and assurance.

The report arrives at a critical juncture. A World Economic Forum study (2025) estimates that global AI investment in finance could reach \$97 billion by 2027, compared to \$35 billion in 2023, showing the pace at which the technology is growing. In India, AI can transform everything from fraud detection to financial inclusion. Yet, the report cautions that unchecked adoption risks replicating biases, undermining trust, and exposing financial institutions to systemic vulnerabilities. The committee recommends using the “sutras” to foster innovation while mitigating risks, treating these objectives as complementary. To lower entry barriers, it proposes a common AI infrastructure offering pooled datasets, computing resources, and a regulatory “sandbox” for safe experimentation before deployment. This is especially critical for smaller banks and non-banking financial companies, most of which report little AI adoption due to high costs, skill gaps, and poor data quality. Without support, only the largest banks may benefit, leaving smaller ones behind.

Global precedents strengthen the case. The Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) introduced “FEAT” (fairness, ethics, accountability, and transparency) principles in 2018. It later launched the Veritas toolkit to enable financial institutions to evaluate their AI solutions against the FEAT principles. Hong Kong’s Monetary Authority recently unveiled a generative AI (GenAI) sandbox, while the United Kingdom’s (UK’s) Financial Conduct Authority offers a “supercharged sandbox” for AI experimentation. These examples show that trust and innovation can reinforce one another when regulators act early. The FREE-AI committee also emphasises indigenous AI models trained on Indian data and languages. Off-the-shelf large language models, largely built on Western datasets, might overlook the country’s diversity, risking exclusion and unfair outcomes.

For India, the stakes are high. Poorly governed AI-based credit models could entrench social biases and erode public trust. The FREE-AI framework seeks to pre-empt such risks by aligning technological progress with ethical safeguards. Strong data governance will also be needed. Financial institutions must establish frameworks for sourcing, cleaning, anonymising, encrypting, sharing, and purging data, while addressing bias detection, synthetic data validation, and open standards. Without secure and transparent data pipelines, AI adoption risks magnifying systemic vulnerabilities rather than reducing them. That said, principles and reports are only the beginning. The real test lies in execution. The RBI and financial institutions must now invest in capacity building, interoperability, and accountability structures. India’s own digital public infrastructure — from Aadhaar to Unified Payments Interface — shows how inclusive design can create global benchmarks. If the country can replicate that success by moving from the opacity of today’s AI “blackbox” to tomorrow’s “sandbox” experimentation, it could enable the adoption of responsible AI in the banking and financial sector.



Humility, ambition and the will to develop

Learning from Japan to win the economic war with Mr Trump

The world could have chosen to deal with Donald Trump’s tariff threats through international coordination (see my “Trade and Trump”, April 17, 2025). It chose not to, with the European Union, Japan, and others signing lopsided deals that give the United States more than they get.

Our own negotiations have so far come to nought. We face amongst the highest tariffs of any country. Mr Trump has supplemented his tariffs with claims (of making peace between India and Pakistan), insults (“dead economy”), and threats (cosying up to Pakistan’s military leader). So where are we, and what are our options? T N Ninan’s outstanding piece (“Our Perry Moment”, *Business Standard*, August 11) reminds me of two things. First, how much I miss his always-insightful weekend column. And second, how much there is for us to learn from how Japan responded to US bullying in the mid-19th century to drive a series of transformations that made it a leading industrial economy. My major source is the sociologist Ronald Dore, who wrote widely on Japanese culture and its interplay with economic success.

Humility and ambition: Ninan reminds us that we seek to win the economic war, not the argument with Mr Trump. This means humbly shrugging off insults while keeping our eye on the final prize. Japan’s “Perry moment” forced it to open to trade and extracted several concessions. These “Unequal Treaties” included losing the rights to set their own tariffs and allowing Western law to apply in enclaves where foreigners lived. The Japanese had humility forced on them. They responded after the Meiji Restoration with a series of increasingly ambitious goals:

- 1870s: Keep Japan free of colonialism.
- 1890–1911: Revise the unequal treaties that the Western powers had extracted.
- 1890s: Keep China from seizing control of Korea.
- 1900s: Prevent Russia from seizing control of Korea.

- 1930s: Achieve total equality with the Great Powers.

Dore tells us that these ambitious goals were presented as the shared objective of all the Japanese people — and were highly effective in galvanising action through a nationalist spirit. Nationalism often ends badly — for both the nation and its neighbours. As here. “Badly” meant defeat in war and occupation — for the Chinese in 1895, the Koreans in 1905, and for the Japanese themselves in 1945 following two nuclear bombs. After World War II, things were more positive. Economic growth became the national ambition. Japan’s daily papers published a league table of gross domestic product (GDP) growth rates. Each time Japan overtook another country in per capita GDP (which is what matters, not overall GDP), it hit the headlines. The target was national prestige, not economic growth itself.

As Japan grew at world-record rates in the 1950s and 1960s (9–10 per cent for two decades), the acquisition of technical capability played a critical role. Between 1950 and 1978, Japan was the world’s largest importer of technology, sourcing it across industries and countries. It spent, Dore tells us, \$9 billion on importing technology, a big sum, but nothing compared to the \$60 billion that one country, the US, spent on research and development (R&D) in 1978 alone. Together with importing technology, from the 1960s onwards, Japanese firms greatly expanded their investment in in-house R&D. Meanwhile, constraints of space and capital were turned into an opportunity — a whole new system of lean manufacturing that led the world. Japanese firms expanded overseas, as Honda, Sony, Panasonic, and Toyota became household names worldwide. Learning from the best requires humility. New technology and developing world-leading firms and industries require ambition. It was the combination of humility and ambition that was so powerful.

The will to develop: Dore describes Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore’s “will to de-



INDIA’S WORLD?
NAUSHAD FORBES

Fear vs flow: Migration and the city

For decades, Indian cities have been magnets of opportunity, offering hope for social mobility. Millions of migrants have moved from the rural hinterlands to urban areas. From the textile mills of Mumbai to the tech parks of Bengaluru, they are the hidden force that continues to power India’s urban transformation. This movement has not been incidental to India’s growth story, but central to it. Yet, an emerging pattern of fear-based governance now threatens this circulatory system, raising the question of whether India’s cities can continue to serve as engines of migration and, by extension, engines of economic growth and development.

Internal migration in India is massive in scale. According to the 2011 Census, there were over 450 million internal migrants, which is about 37 per cent of the population. This reflected a sharp rise from the 30 per cent recorded a decade earlier, according to the World Bank analysis. Rural-to-urban flows have been a major component, with some states seeing nearly a 30 per cent surge in their urban populations during 2001–2011, driven largely by migration. These demographic shifts have reshaped the economic geography of the country. Migrants are integral not only to the informal economy, which contributes roughly 45 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP), but also to the formal sectors that depend on their labour as a low-cost resource.

Urbanisation when managed sensibly, has consistently been associated with poverty reduction and improved standards of living. In developing economies, migration to cities raises incomes for poorer households and expands access to services. This is particularly pronounced in countries like India, where productivity and wages in urban areas are significantly higher than in rural areas. For in-

stance, the Periodic Labour Force Survey 2023–24 shows that the average annual wage in urban India (₹88,604) is nearly double that in rural areas (₹45,785), highlighting a gap of about 1.94 times.

Fear can be as effective a brake on migration as any legal restriction. India does not impose internal passports, yet the barriers are often invisible. While basic distinctions, including language, play a critical role, there is also a tacit perception that entering a new state or city means navigating a new social and administrative environment. For migrants, especially those in the informal sector, access to healthcare, housing, and basic ration often depends on this tenuous sense of belonging. In recent years, that sense has been eroded.

Political rhetoric and administrative measures targeting specific linguistic, ethnic, or religious groups have created unease among migrant populations. Notably, during the 2020 Covid-19 lockdown, millions of migrants facing sudden job loss, housing insecurity, and a collapse of transport walked or hitched rides back to their villages, and many never returned. This was perhaps the largest mass migration in India since Partition, revealing how fragile urban life can be for those without a safety net.

This fragility is exacerbated when governance itself becomes a source of fear. Policies that appear to single out outsiders, whether through enhanced police checks, documentation drives, or arbitrary enforcement, create an environment in which migrants calculate that their best chance of security lies in retreating to their place of origin. The loss to cities is twofold. First, there is the immediate disruption to sectors reliant on migrant labour: Construction projects stall, service industries struggle to hire, and costs rise. Second, the longer-term erosion of trust in urban



CONURBATION
AMIT KAPOOR

Strategy versus the Plan



AMBI PARAMESWARAN

We use the term “strategy” very loosely. There is corporate strategy, marketing strategy, sales strategy, promotion strategy, finance strategy — and more. Often managers tend to use the “S” word when in reality they should have used the “P” word: Replace Strategy with Plan. So what is strategy?

In his highly quoted article “What is Strategy” published almost two decades ago (*Harvard Business Review*, November–December, 1996), Professor

Michael Porter had laid out the contours of what should be called “strategy”. He clarified that strategy is not a placeholder for what could be called operational excellence. Strategy called for clear choices to be made. It starts with choosing a unique position that is grounded in clear activities that are difficult for competition to imitate. Strategy also calls for trade-offs, dropping some things and focusing on a few things. And good strategy always calls for friction and is never a simple, clean line.

Given this grounding, it was with great expectation that I picked up *Why Your Strategy Sucks* by Sandeep Das. The author is an MBA with over 15 years of experience in both the corporate world and consultancies. His previous book was a look at business storytelling.

Why Your Strategy Sucks is presented in five parts. Part 1 is the introduction to

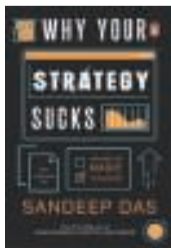
strategy. Part 2 is about strategy for corporations. Part 3 is about strategy for you. Part 4 is on necessary skill building. Part 5 is on careers in strategy. Written in a light-hearted tone and peppered with humour, the author has tried his best to make this rather heavy topic easy to approach and appreciate.

The most important chapter in the book is probably the one titled “Thinking Strategically About Strategy”, where the author presents his Strategic Thinking Framework. This framework also appears in many other chapters. It consists of six steps: Define Problem (1. Understand scope, 2. Identify objective); Create Strategy (3. Identify framework, 4. Generate options, 5. Prioritise options); Deploy Strategy (6. Develop implementation charter).

A good strategy is as good as the implementation or execution. The

most often quoted book on the topic of execution is the book, duh, *Execution* by Lawrence Bossidy and Ram Charan. Their book emphasises that successful businesses are built on effective execution of strategy, not just on brilliant ideas. The book argues that leaders must actively engage in the implementation process, fostering a culture of accountability and linking strategy to operations and people.

In *Why Your Strategy Sucks*, the author has spent time stressing the importance of implementation. The book presents what is called the “implementation charter framework” that has three parts: Implementation charter objective; Stakeholders — who should do it; Incentive — why should they do it; Capability — what will they do; and continuous tracking



Why Your Strategy Sucks
by Sandeep Das
Published by Penguin
256 pages ₹399

through a dashboard.

Through the book the author has demonstrated the Strategic Thinking and Implementation Charter framework to illustrate several examples from the world of strategy and the world of recruitment and HR.

The book gives the reader a quick tour of the strategic thinking process adopted in companies. Most books on strategy stop with that. This book is different to the extent that it takes the strategic thinking process and applies it to an individual’s career planning. There is a chapter on what skills you need to develop if you want to get into a strategy role.

Each chapter is full of examples and anecdotes. For the sake of confidentiality, many of the names have been masked. It would have been good if some of the real-life strategy

cases had been presented.

For the sake of quick revision, each chapter ends with a summary that we can go to, if in doubt. Full of quotes, some real, some fictitious, the book is a well-packaged presentation. Here is a sampler: “The future is shaped by your dreams, so stop wasting time and go to sleep” — the author’s favourite quote, by the way.

In the field of management and strategy consultants who have either lost all their hair or at least lost all their black hair, each claiming to have served clients across continents for several decades, Sandeep Das comes across as a breath of fresh air. He is definitely a lot younger, writes with a light touch and doesn’t take himself too seriously. That has not held him back from writing an engaging book that is useful for a seasoned professional and to a newcomer.

The reviewer is a bestselling author of 12 books. His latest is *Marketing Mixology – Four Essential Ingredients for Marketing Success*

The author is chair, Institute for Competitiveness. With inputs from Meenakshi Ajith. X: @kautiliya

Think global, act local

OpenAI’s bold bet on India is welcome but the future of AI in India will not be won on pricing alone

OPENAI’S LAUNCH OF the India-specific GPT-Go is a bold move to unlock the Indian market and a calculated bet on the country becoming the proving ground for scalable artificial intelligence (AI) deployment in other countries in the Global South. OpenAI’s playbook for its second-largest market, however, is not an original composition—rolling out a budget plan with clear advantages over the free tier and pricing has been a familiar model for many successful global companies operating in India. OpenAI’s reported talks with Jio to bundle ChatGPT access (much like Perplexity with Airtel) underline how global firms often rely on local partners to gain momentum. McDonald’s, for instance, entered India in 1996 and now runs over 500 outlets, posting 7% year-on-year revenue growth (₹660 crore) in the first quarter of FY26. After reducing its prices substantially, Netflix, which entered in 2016, saw India lead paid subscriber additions in Q2 FY24 and rank third globally for revenue growth.

Not all bets, however, have paid off. Amazon Marketplace, in India since 2013, has recorded a decent rise in operating revenue, but reported losses of ₹3,500 crore. Tata-Starbucks, launched in 2012, is now the country’s largest café chain, with steady revenues, even as losses widened 65% owing to aggressive expansion. Both companies though remain optimistic, viewing current losses as investments in long-term growth, to be realised as markets mature. Whichever route OpenAI takes, its expansion must rest on a principle common to all successful growth stories in India—catering to the consumer. McDonald’s did this with menus tailored to local tastes, Netflix through partnerships with Indian studios, and Amazon with offerings like Karigar and multilingual support to reach tier-II and -III cities. For OpenAI, beyond an affordable plan, this means building India-specific use cases, such as support for regional languages and tools for Indian businesses. The company seems to be on that route—it has already enabled payments through the Unified Payments Interface, and GPT-Go has been enhanced with Indic support.

This also serves a wake-up call for India’s AI industry, still in its early stage, as it now faces direct competition from global players. However, promising signs include Sarvam AI, the first private start-up chosen under the IndiaAI Mission to build a sovereign foundational model, launching Sarvam-M, a 24-billion parameter multilingual large language model that reportedly rivals Meta’s Llama on reasoning and language tasks. Ola’s Krutrim has also been integrated into its ecosystem. Yet, despite their edge in multilingual support, both models have seen tepid developer response, underscoring the need to refine offerings to secure a durable advantage. India’s AI market is ripe for the taking. Around 93% of Indian consumers already use generative AI tools directly (such as ChatGPT or Claude) or indirectly through platforms with embedded features. The player that adapts fastest to these dynamics will not only capture India’s lucrative market but also gain a template to scale adoption in other fast-growing economies.

India provides the ideal test bed for product development with its user diversity, mobile-first orientation, and rapid feedback cycles that make it possible to fine-tune features before rolling them out globally. But the point to note is that the future of AI in India will not be won on pricing alone. It will be shaped by how well each platform adapts to Indian realities, from language to platform access to cultural context. In short, think global, act local.

Nvidia's China reception is buying time for Huawei

DON'T BE FOOLED by China’s icy response to America’s policy reversal that will allow a key Nvidia Corp. artificial intelligence chip back on the mainland. The country’s AI ambitions currently rely on Nvidia’s hardware, and authorities know that—even if they won’t admit it. But by fanning fears of alleged security or environmental concerns, they’re buying time for Huawei Technologies Co. to catch up while keeping trade talks pressure on the US.

CEO Jensen Huang was greeted with fanfare by industry leaders in Beijing last month after news broke that the Trump administration will allow the sale of H20 chips to resume. It seemed like China got what it wanted: loosening export controls designed to hold back its AI sector has been a key sticking point during tariff negotiations.

Yet in the weeks since the announcement, cyber authorities have summoned Nvidia to discuss alleged security risks related to the H20s, state media warned of potential backdoors that could cause a “nightmare,” and the government urged local companies to avoid using the much sought-after processors for AI development.

When asked about Beijing’s unexpected reaction, US treasury secretary Scott Bessent told *Bloomberg TV* that it “tells me that they are worried about the Nvidia chips becoming the standard in China.” This is an optimistic and simplistic take. It’s too soon for Washington to be celebrating over this feigned angst.

Nvidia’s tech stack is already, overwhelmingly, the standard in the nation’s AI sector. There’s a reason that giants from ByteDance to Alibaba Group Holding stockpiled billions of dollars’ worth of orders ahead of the now-reversed ban. (Similarly, it seems a deliberate move that, despite all the talk of lurking threats, China hasn’t issued an outright ban itself.) While these warnings have drawn a lot of attention, they likely won’t be enough to deter companies eager to power their AI ambitions to stop buying H20s.

While a Communist Party mouthpiece did appear to blast alleged “backdoors” in these chips, and many Western news outlets ran with that headline, the reality is more nuanced. The made-to-go viral editorial in a *People’s Daily* WeChat account was far from an official rebuke, according to a China Media Project analysis. Instead, it was meant to make Nvidia “squirm.” It worked. The chipmaker responded with a public denial of breaches and argued that adding any would be “an open invitation for disaster.”

It’s true, as I’ve written before, that Beijing would very much prefer its AI industry to use offerings from Huawei instead of Nvidia. But the domestic alternatives aren’t ready for primetime—both in terms of performance and the quantity that can be produced. Domestic AI champion DeepSeek was forced to delay the release of its new model because it was trying to train it on Huawei’s hardware instead of Nvidia’s, the *Financial Times* reported last week. But even with a team of Huawei engineers on-site, they couldn’t get it to work. In an apparent compromise, DeepSeek is using Nvidia for training the model and Huawei for inference (the phase that involves running and deploying AI). It would be foolish for regulators to arrest DeepSeek’s momentum by not allowing it to use any US computing power at all.

The most unusual aspect of this is still Donald Trump’s announcement that Nvidia will pay the US 15% of its revenue for AI chip sales on the mainland. It’s not hard to imagine the global backlash if such a pay-for-play deal had been set up by the other side. But it also reiterates the president’s transactional approach to such national security concerns. This isn’t lost in Beijing, especially at a time when the tariff truce has been further extended. Beijing may be putting on a show that it doesn’t want America’s chips, but it’s really just building a bridge now until the domestic alternatives are ready. There are signs that this moment is approaching: Companies like buzzy start-up iFlytek claim to have trained their models entirely with Huawei processors. Still, most Chinese businesses much prefer Nvidia’s, in large part because of its supporting software system. Encouraging developers to build on top of Huawei’s rival platform over time is what will help improve it enough to eventually force a broader ecosystem shift.

When this turning point is reached, US-led export controls will lose much of their power. For Washington, a 15% cut seems like an extremely low price to help smooth over this transition for China.



CATHERINE THORBECKE
Bloomberg

ON TUESDAY, THE Centre introduced Bill No. 110 of 2025, titled The Promotion and Regulation of Online Gaming Bill, in the Lok Sabha, which was passed without much discussion. This Bill is the complete opposite of the government’s approach to online gaming, moving away from the earlier amended Information Technology Intermediary Rules in April 2023. The Bill, while attempting to address the concerns of Indian online gaming start-ups about illegal offshore gambling and betting platforms, has ended up shutting down all real money gaming formats in the country. This signals the end of online gaming start-ups and the sector’s foreign direct investment (FDI) story in India.

Multiple states have attempted to ban online gaming formats by regularly confusing companies with inconsistent definitions of gambling and betting. Various high court verdicts have overturned the bans till date. Even formats have been challenged all the way till the Supreme Court, and these have been turned down for many real money gaming formats. This Bill could potentially be challenged in court if it is passed similarly in Rajya Sabha, considering that many courts in India have overturned such bans.

While the Bill proposes to encourage e-sports and online social games, it proposes a blanket ban on online games that involves any kind of payment—be it users paying a fee, depositing money, or staking other assets with the expectation of a monetary win.

On one hand, the Bill aims to promote and regulate the online gaming sector, including e-sports, educational games, and social gaming. Additionally, it proposes the creation of an authority for coordinated policy support, strategic development, and regulatory oversight of the sector. On the

● ONLINE GAMING

WHILE ADDRESSING OFFSHORE GAMBLING CONCERNS, PROPOSED LAW CAN BE A BAD BET FOR DIGITAL ECONOMY

Blanket ban ineffective

RAMEESH KAILASAM

CEO, Indiatech.org



other hand, it clearly prohibits the offering, operation, facilitation, advertisement, promotion, and participation in online money games through any computer resource, mobile device, or the internet, particularly where such activities operate across state borders or from foreign jurisdictions, thereby hurting sporting events, television advertising, and other media that have benefitted from such sponsorships and advertisement engagements.

The Bill also states that no bank, financial institution, or any other person facilitating financial transactions or authorisation of funds shall engage in, permit, aid, abet, induce, or otherwise facilitate any transaction or authorisation of funds towards payments for online money gaming services. This also puts at risk all banking transactions as well as accounts with their balance amounts. The authority on online gaming has been empowered to determine, on receipt of an application from any person offering an online game or on a suo motu basis, whether a particular online game is an online money game.

Punitive penalties been prescribed on anyone offering such a service. It would be seen as a contravention of Section 5, making the party liable for punishment with imprisonment of up

to three years, a fine of up to ₹1 crore, or both. Advertising such services would be considered a violation of Section 6, punishable with imprisonment of up to two years, a fine of up to ₹50 lakh, or both. Engaging in transactions or authorising funds would be a contravention of Section 7, with penalties including imprisonment of up to three years, a fine of up to ₹1 crore, or both.

Clause 11 further specifies that if an offence is committed by a company, every person responsible for the conduct of the business at the time as well as the company itself shall be liable for prosecution and punishment.

Interestingly, the government has cited rising concerns over gaming addiction, debt traps, financial fraud, and national security threats as the primary motivations for this strict approach. Ironically, these were the very concerns given to the government by the online gaming start-ups based in India regarding illegal offshore platforms that were operating with ease.

The Bill, in the process of targeting them, seems to cause more damage to the law-abiding and tax-paying Indian start-ups that are emerging in the online gaming space. In today’s digital world, such restrictions will push millions of Indian users towards illegal

There are different ways of addressing the concerns around addiction, age gating, financial discipline, etc., which the industry had already proposed to the government



JAMAL MECKLAI

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IT PAINS ME to admit it but Donald Trump is certainly the most consequential president the US has ever had. Of course, the consequences range from utterly appalling for children in Africa who have suffered (and died) as a result of the closure of USAID and, of course, people in Gaza who continue to be pounded by the Israeli army under (effectively) licence from Trump to, on the other hand, absolutely wonderful for Trump’s family that has been collecting, for want of a better word, *hafta* (protection money) from a wide array of companies and institutions in the US, and even countries from all over the world. Where the American people land within this spectrum is yet to unfold.

Shockingly, equity markets, which many (myself included) had felt would tumble to put a brake on Trump’s most egregious overreaches, actually appear to be doing extremely well, thank you. This could only mean that the big dump is yet to come, and/or the markets which themselves thrive on the corruption of capitalism are simply enjoying this as business (largely) as usual. Which again suggests an even huger dump is on the cards. It is well known that markets sometimes take a very long time to react to circumstances, but when they do they move with lightning speed.

While there could be occasional short-term upward bursts, particularly

as the *hafta* king celebrates some of his “victories”, staying long US global equities is dangerous. (I note that Warren Buffett continues to hold a huge percentage of his portfolio in cash.)

Interestingly, the bond markets, which everyone expected to be the first to scream bloody murder, are also relatively calm, particularly given the circumstances of Trump abusing the Fed governor and moving alternatives in place. To be sure, the push-me-pull-you tariffs have already added (I think) over \$500 billion to the treasury and Trump’s advisers that understand only linear extrapolation are assuming much more to come—\$3 trillion is the number being kicked about—particularly with steeper tariffs about to kick in. While this could certainly result in a huge reduction in fiscal deficit—one of the number of economic problems facing the US—the concern is that the tariffs will be paid by American companies that are importing, which will, over time, be passed on to American consumers. Thus, this potentially huge flow of funds to the government coffers will act like a very regressive tax since it would affect the normal American con-

sumer much more, relatively speaking, than the well-heeled ones, reflecting, once again, Trump’s instinctive approach to protect the rich at the expense of others.

US producer prices have already started screeching higher, and, as the fundamental rules of economics will always apply, are likely to continue to rise. It is possible that the heavily-pressured Fed may cut rates by a nervous 25 basis points (bps) in September—Trump and treasury secretary Steve Bessent are demanding 150 bps over the next year—and this may unleash more threats and public posturing, which will certainly not speak to a benign long-term rate environment. Interest rate volatility is sure to rise and the continuing uncertainty will make defining borrowing requirements extremely tricky.

Trump’s transparent Ukraine gambit for the Nobel Peace Prize is another shocker. Of course, the Norwegians are not only sane but extremely rich, so simply buying them out will be a tall order. From India’s perspective, Trump making nice with Putin could—fingers crossed—result in the extra 25% tariff being eliminated, which would be great.

If the Ukraine gambit fails, it is possible that Trump may turn back to 'peacemaking' between India and Pakistan—it would ensure high tariffs remain in place

On the other hand, and particularly if the gambit fails, it is possible that Trump in his search for validation may turn back to “peacemaking” between India and Pakistan—this would ensure high tariffs remain in place.

The good news, if it can be called that, is that Trump has compelled everybody to acknowledge that India needs to step out of its business-as-usual policymaking and take some serious steps to strengthening its economy. Cutting the goods and services tax is easy—the real trick will come in addressing agriculture (and labour, education, healthcare, and employment opportunities), particularly given the government’s single-minded focus on politics so far.

Indian agriculture, while it continues to show growth, is extremely inefficient with yields lower than most other major players. The longstanding problems are small farm holdings, limited irrigation, and technology adoption. The farm laws could have been the beginning of real change; a revamped push is needed, which will require the government to build meaningful bridges with the sector and the Opposition (which may be quite a trick), and to broaden the plans to include non-agricultural employment opportunities for small farmers.

And all this while dealing with the *hafta* king.

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The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Flawed Bills

Fair legislation a must to oust tainted ministers

IT's no surprise that the three Bills introduced by Home Minister Amit Shah in the Lok Sabha on Wednesday ran into rough weather right away. The Opposition tore the Bills apart, literally as well as metaphorically, describing them as 'draconian', 'unconstitutional' and 'diversionary'. There is no doubt that the conduct of Central and state ministers — including the Prime Minister and chief ministers — should be beyond suspicion. However, the contentious proposal to remove a tainted minister — who has been arrested and detained in custody for 30 consecutive days for offences that attract a jail term of at least five years — is fraught with dangerous consequences. It strikes at the heart of parliamentary democracy and constitutional federalism.

The Bills, now referred to a Joint Committee of the two Houses, presuppose guilt at the arrest and detention stage — even before the trial has begun. This is quite problematic with regard to Central probe agencies such as the CBI and the ED, which continue to be under judicial scrutiny for alleged overreach. Last year, in his judgment granting interim bail to then Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal in a case related to the liquor policy 'scam', Justice Ujjal Bhuyan of the Supreme Court had said: "It is imperative that the CBI dispel the notion of being a caged parrot." Recently, the apex court told the ED that it should not act like a 'crook'. Such scathing observations have dented the credibility of these premier agencies, even as Opposition parties have repeatedly accused the Centre of misusing them.

The Joint Committee will find it tough to build consensus on the Bills, which must have adequate checks and balances. There is a dire need to look at ways to ensure that erring ministers don't cling on to their chairs. A fair, time-bound probe and an expedited trial are a must to prove their guilt or innocence. A legal framework for morality in politics should have firm legs to stand on: it must not be based on mere suspicion or political vendetta.

Taking a toll

Courts assert road infra as social contract

IN a vital rebuke to misplaced toll policy, the Supreme Court has upheld the Kerala High Court's order suspending toll collection on a deplorably maintained stretch of highway. It has ruled that citizens cannot be forced to pay to traverse potholes and congestion. The Bench, under Chief Justice BR Gavai, reminded the authorities that public service, not revenue extraction, is the foundational justification for tolls. He posed a piercing query: "Why should a person pay Rs 150 if it takes 12 hours for him to get from one end of the road to the other?"

In Punjab, the National Highway Authority of India (NHAI) is facing scrutiny from legislators and oversight bodies for its infrastructural missteps. Highway officials have been summoned by the Parliamentary Standing Committee over elevated highways, sometimes up to 10 feet, that obstruct natural drainage. These constructions have diverted rainwater from farmland, eroded fertile topsoil and threatened crop productivity. Simultaneously, multiple district administrations are being hauled before the Punjab and Haryana High Court due to land possession setbacks. Several kilometres of highway land were illegally repossessed by farmers dissatisfied with compensation, delaying key corridors like the Delhi-Amritsar-Katra expressway.

These developments expose a troubling pattern: infrastructure delays and public harm resulting not from engineering deficits alone, but from erosion of governance and oversight. Whether through substandard roads, toll collection on potholed, congested expressways, mismanaged drainage or contested land acquisition, the NHAI is being forced to justify the social value of its projects. The Kerala verdict underlines that tolls must reflect delivered service. The Punjab cases affirm that infrastructure planning must account for the social costs of agriculture, livelihoods and environmental balance. Highways are public assets, not profit conduits. The authorities must uphold the social contract: ensure safe passage, protect livelihoods and respect the land.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

LAHORE, FRIDAY, AUGUST 21, 1925

Children's Protection Bill

THE rejection in last March of the Age of Consent Bill by the Legislative Assembly, as the result of the combined opposition of the official and orthodox Hindu members, did no credit to the reputation of the legislature as an enlightened body; nor did the view of the Assembly represent the better mind of the Indian educated community. Social legislation, the scope and nature of which must, in the very nature of things, be circumscribed by various cramping influences, is bound to be cautious and slow; but caution does not mean timidity, nor can the desire to move slowly be properly allowed to develop into a state of inertia. While it is the duty of the social reformer to move slowly and cautiously and carry the enlightened section of public opinion with him, he must also guard against trying to secure universal approval for a proposed piece of legislation before proceeding with it, because reform *ipso facto* ceases to be reform when everyone is prepared to readily carry it out. And if the social reformer were to wait until the reform that he desires becomes acceptable to all, he will have to wait until doomsday or until the reform is no longer required. Sir Hari Singh Gour has done well in not allowing himself to be dismayed at the defeat encountered by him during the winter session of the Assembly; and we are pleased to learn that he is again going to bring forward the Bill before the Simla session of the Assembly under the much better title of the Children's Protection Bill. It is designed to make better provision for the protection of children from unlawful intercourse.

Governance model of UTs needs a reset

The Union must act not as a jealous sovereign but as a generous trustee, confident enough to share power



MANISH TEWARI
LOK SABHA MP AND
FORMER I&B MINISTER

INDIA's constitutional tapestry is woven out of innumerable threads — threads of history and memory, of law and politics, of compromise and conviction — and one of its most peculiar yet enduring strands is the story of Union Territories (UTs), known at the time of constitutional inception as Chief Commissioner's provinces.

The genesis of this constitutional conundrum traces back to the deliberations of the Constituent Assembly, where four members representing Chief Commissioner's provinces argued for their rightful place in India's democratic architecture.

KM Munshi, an active member of the Constituent Assembly, moved a resolution on April 30, 1947, for the formation of the Union Constitution Committee (UCC) and the Provincial Model Constitution Committee.

CM Poonacha (representing Coorg) proposed that a joint subcommittee of three members should specifically address the issues of the Chief Commissioner's provinces. His proposal was rejected; instead, the UCC assumed charge of the matter.

The July 21, 1947, report of the UCC, recommended maintaining the status quo — that Chief Commissioner's provinces continue under Central governance in accordance with the Government of India Act of 1935. Yet, the debate was far from settled.

On July 30, 1947, Deshbandhu Gupta (representing Delhi) pressed for a special subcommittee to suggest "suitable constitutional changes to be brought in the administrative system of the Chief Commissioner's provinces". His amendment carried the day, and soon after the President of the Constituent Assembly, Rajendra Prasad, appointed a committee chaired by Pattabhi Sitaramayya.

The Sitaramayya Committee's report, tabled in November 1948, offered a cautious blueprint. It proposed that Delhi, Ajmer-Merwara, Coorg and Panth-Piploda should be designated Lieutenant Gover-



WAY OUT: The solution to Chandigarh's problems lies in a representative & accountable governance model. ISTOCK

nor's provinces with legislative assemblies and councils of ministers, though subject to overriding Union control. Andaman & Nicobar Islands, strategically sensitive, were to remain under direct Central authority. The report was path-breaking for its time, but tragically, it was never debated. The Drafting Committee quietly sidestepped it.

Thereafter, the Assembly's discussions took a different turn. On November 9, 1948, MBL Bhargava, himself a member of the Sitaramayya panel, remarked that the curbs on autonomy it envisaged were accepted by representatives of these provinces only as an unwilling concession.

The Drafting Committee, however, found itself perplexed, as Syed Muhammad Saadulla admitted. His defence of the committee's position articulated the prevailing hesitancy: how could small enclaves with a few lakh people sustain the apparatus of self-government? If Delhi with a population of 20 lakh was made a separate unit, how could Ajmer-Merwara (10 lakh) or Coorg (less than two lakh) be denied the same? Mahavir Tyagi and Mohan Lal Gautam put it more bluntly in August 1949: these territories should remain under Central control temporarily and ultimately be merged with larger states.

Thus, UTs came into being not by bold design but by default, an interim expedient, a "hanging fire" in the words of Poonacha. They were never meant to be permanent fixtures of the Republic. Yet history has its ironies. What the Constitution's framers considered too small, too fragile or too transitional have evolved today into robust communities with their own iden-

The question is no longer whether UTs can govern themselves; it's why they should be denied the opportunity.

ties, issues and aspirations.

The transformation is evident in hard numbers. Chandigarh's population now exceeds 15 lakh, surpassing Sikkim's six lakh and equalling Mizoram's figure. The case of Chandigarh is, however, unique. It was never an original UT or a Chief Commissioner's province. It was the capital of joint Punjab, built as a replacement for the loss of Lahore. When Punjab got trifurcated and the status of Chandigarh was contested, it became a UT as a consequence of Section 4 of the Punjab Reorganisation Act, 1966, albeit for an interim period pending the settlement of its political question.

The combined population of Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu, according to the 2011 Census, stands at 5.85 lakh — merely 25,000 less than that of Sikkim. The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare's 2023 estimates indicate that Chandigarh, Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu, and Mizoram each have around 12 lakh residents. Puducherry's population of 16.46 lakh exceeds both Goa's and Arunachal Pradesh's 15 lakh. Delhi and J&K boast populations larger than those of several states.

In terms of population density, the disparities are even more pronounced. Lakshadweep's density of 2,013 people per square km is

twice that of Bihar, India's most densely populated state at 1,102. Puducherry's density of 2,598 is about 2.5 times Bihar's, while Chandigarh's 9,252 is more than eight times Bihar's figure. Delhi's staggering density exceeds 11,000 people per square km.

These statistics demolish the argument that such territories are too small, too thinly populated or too peripheral to deserve democratic self-rule. If states with lesser populations and densities can sustain fully autonomous governments with legislative assemblies and councils of ministers, the continued denial of similar rights to UTs appears increasingly indefensible.

The political case is stronger still. Each UT has incubated its own political culture and policy problems — for instance, Chandigarh's land regimes, 'laal dora' questions, housing board legacies and lease-to-freehold transitions have been hanging fire for two-and-a-half decades.

The solution to Chandigarh's problems lies in a representative and accountable governance model without prejudice to its status as a UT — since it is the capital of Punjab and Haryana — and the conflicting political claims of both states.

This can be achieved by the people of the city electing a Mayor for a five-year term, who then would function through a Mayor-in-Council with powers over all subjects except land, police and public order that would be vested in the Administrator. The latter would exercise these powers in statutory consultation with the Mayor in Council. It would be a directly elected, powerful Mayor — as most dynamic megapolises have around the world.

For other UTs, the constitutional operating system remains stubbornly diarchic. In the three UTs with a legislature (Delhi, Puducherry and J&K), the Lieutenant Governor retains a wide berth, and the Union reserves public order, police, land and services. Delhi, as the capital, remains the theatre for tensions between local autonomy and national symbolism. Omar Abdullah's demand for restoring J&K's statehood in line with the assurances given by the Union Government in the Supreme Court and Parliament highlight the political unsustainability of the current arrangement.

The five UTs without a legislature (Chandigarh, Andaman & Nicobar Islands, Lakshadweep, Ladakh, and Dadra & Nagar Haveli and Daman & Diu) face even greater democratic deficits, with representation limited to local bodies and administration controlled by external bureaucrats.

Bureaucrats, however competent, cannot substitute for the legitimacy of elected leadership. It is neither humanly possible nor institutionally feasible for Union ministers to micro-manage far-flung territories while stewarding national portfolios. The persistence of local problems reveals the limits of an administrative model that is formally responsive to the Centre but substantively unaccountable to residents.

The question is no longer whether UTs can govern themselves, but why they should be denied the opportunity. Article 239 empowers Parliament to legislate for UT administration, currently exercised through Presidential appointment of Administrators. This constitutional provision offers the framework for democratic transformation. To persist with the present model is to deny them constitutional justice. To empower them is to complete the unfinished work of the Constituent Assembly. The Union must act not as a jealous sovereign but as a generous trustee, confident enough to share power.

The path forward requires constitutional courage and democratic vision. The "hanging fire" of 1949 has burnt long enough. If India's constitutional tapestry is to remain whole, the UTs must no longer be treated as loose threads. They deserve to be woven securely into the democratic fabric, not merely as administered enclaves, but as autonomous participants in the federal life of the Republic.

The will of the people is the only legitimate foundation of any government. — Rajendra Prasad

Military horses, mules that stole the show

COL VIKAS THAKUR

IN the Army, horses and mules were generally retained in service for 18-20 years, after which they were disposed of. Those who had exceptionally good health survived longer. But the longest survivors had unique qualities which made them indispensable.

There was this pure black horse, Zorawar, whom we retained way past his productive life so that we had a steady supply of black horseshoes, which were in great demand for their 'occult powers'. And our clientele included senior officers!

A mare, who was a work animal (she pulled a cart), was a surrogate mother for a whole lot of orphan foals. Her milk never dried and you could often see her breast-feeding two or three of these poor little things. She used to get agitated if any of her adopted children had a problem. The syces named her Jagatmata.

Young horses and foals don't allow a halter to be put on their head. So, when they are to be moved from one place to other, a mare is led in the front and they will follow her. Such a mare is called an 'engine' and you can see 3-4 'bogies' following her to the treatment area for their shots.

Then there was the famous Pedongi, a Spanish mule who had phenomenal health and vigour. His longevity ensured him an extended term and he made it to the Guinness Book of World Records as "the longest serving military mule". He passed away at the ripe age of 37.

Bholu, a mule in the Animal Transport Company, was the ultimate thespian. He was our star attraction during trick riding shows in 'Pagal Gymkhana' type events. A couple of jokers would enter the arena riding Bholu and do all kind of acrobatics while simultaneously cracking wild jokes on and off the poker-faced mule. In the end, Bholu was told that his girlfriend had eloped with a donkey! At this, Bholu would start shaking violently and suddenly drop on the ground. After that, no amount of pushing and pulling or noise would rouse Bholu. He would then be pronounced 'dead' due to shock. There would appear four jawans with a stringed *khat* (cot) and Bholu was put on it and taken away.

Once out of sight, he used to leave the *khat* and reappear with the jokers to a spontaneous applause by spectators. He lived till 25 and died in his sleep!

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dog lovers must adopt strays

Refer to 'Let evidence offer ways to handle strays'; it is not only rabies, but violent encounters with strays that is a matter of concern. All stakeholders, especially the government, have failed miserably in controlling the stray dog population. Civic bodies need to generate and spend funds and effectively enforce vaccination and sterilisation measures to cover more than 80 per cent of the canine population. Stray dogs need to be relocated appropriately and as humanely as possible. Animal rights activists and dog lovers should come forward to adopt at least two strays each.

VITULL K GUPTA, BATHINDA

Adopt latest agri techniques

Apurpos of 'A roadmap for Punjab's economic revival': being a flag-bearer of the Green Revolution, Punjab became the nation's food bowl. This glory can be restored with renewed efforts to address farmers' needs sympathetically. Agriculture sector has been relegated to the background by successive governments while it should have been a top priority. The government should bring in the latest scientific farm techniques used in developed countries. Bank loan disbursement and recoveries should be streamlined. MSP should be announced and disbursed for commercial crops.

BM SINGH, AMRITSAR

Counselling needed too

Haryana's Community Service Guidelines, 2025, mark a welcome shift from punitive to restorative justice. Mandatory psychological counselling and value-based education should complement community service to address root behavioural issues. NGOs, RWAs and educational institutions must be made stakeholders. Skill development programmes should be started so that the jail inmates become employable later.

AMARJIT SINGH, MOHALI

Converting punishment to duty

With reference to 'Justice beyond bars'; Haryana's community service guidelines are a bold step. Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment* reminds us that true redemption lies not in confinement but in conscience. Actor-singer Lindsay Lohan's much-discussed community service showed how correction can be reoriented to contribution. Jacques Derrida spoke of justice as an infinite responsibility and Mahatma Gandhi envisioned it as transformation rather than retribution. Michel Foucault, meanwhile, warned of prisons becoming instruments of control rather than reform — a cautionary note that makes Haryana's decision all the more significant.

HARSH PAWARIA, ROHTAK

Bills becoming political tools

Apurpos of 'PM, CM, ministers go if held for 30 days for grave offences': 3 Bills to be tabled in LS today; though projected as a step towards accountability, in practice it risks becoming a political weapon to tame Opposition-ruled states. The example of then Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, who continued functioning from jail despite arrest, had unsettled the ruling establishment. If such Bills are passed, Central agencies like the ED or CBI could implicate leaders under provisions carrying five years or more of punishment, leading to removal from office and destitution of elected governments.

RAMPHAL KATARIA, KURUKSHETRA

Change SOP for floodgates

Opening of the floodgates of the Sukhna Lake at 3.45 pm and 5.15 pm on Tuesday caused a lot of inconvenience to residents. The floodgates should be opened around 1 am so that the water recedes by 5 am and there are no traffic problems. The administration needs to change the standard operating procedure.

SS BANSAL, BY MAIL

A Bill that creates a kill switch for regime change



SANJAY HEGDE
SENIOR ADVOCATE,
SUPREME COURT

THE Constitution (One Hundred and Thirtieth Amendment) Bill, 2025, introduced in the Lok Sabha, seeks to amend Articles 75, 164, and 239AA of the Constitution. Two allied bills extend the same to the Union Territories and Jammu and Kashmir. Given that the government lacks a two-thirds majority, these proposals may never be enacted. Yet, the thinking behind them deserves scrutiny.

At its core, the amendment mandates that any Union or State Minister, including the Prime Minister or a Chief Minister, who is arrested and remains in custody for thirty consecutive days on charges carrying a potential sentence of five years or more, must resign or automatically vacate office. The justification offered is lofty: to uphold constitutional morality, preserve public trust, and ensure that those in high office remain beyond reproach.

But noble intentions do not always yield noble results. In politics, where strategy often trumps morality, a constitu-

tional amendment can become a weapon. The cure may prove worse than the disease.

The Promise of Clean Politics
The Statement of Objects and Reasons insists that ministers must be models of probity and incapable of thwarting governance while in custody. To a weary citizenry, tired of tainted leaders clinging to office, this sounds attractive.

Yet the moral appeal falters against political reality. Arrest and custody are not guilt. They are often tactical instruments. In a democracy with politicised police forces, the line between prosecution and persecution is thin. This amendment risks creating more incentives to arrest rather than fewer.

A 30-Day Window for Regime Change
The most striking feature is the 30-day clock. If a minister is held beyond thirty days, they must resign. On paper, this filters out frivolous arrests. In practice, it creates a constitutionally sanctioned "kill switch" for regime change.

Picture an opposition Chief Minister heading into an election. A timely arrest engineered a month before polling could decapitate the party, leaving it rudderless. In volatile electoral politics, the removal of an incumbent leader could swing the result.

The precision of the timeline makes this amendment less a safeguard and more a political masterstroke: a lock-up, not the ballot, becomes the means of dislodging governments.



PURPOSE The Constitution is meant to shield democracy, not provide swords for cutting down rivals. **PN**

Police, Judges & Lawyers as Political Players
The provision would inevitably politicise institutions that should remain neutral. Police officers, already vulnerable to political pressure, would know that arresting a chief minister could topple a government. Judges, ruling on bail applications, would effectively decide who governs. Even lawyers, skilled in strategic bail manoeuvres, would find themselves central actors in high-stakes political combat.

Thus, policemen and judges who should guard impartiality could become unwilling or willing players in partisan battles. The line between law enforcement and political engineering would blur beyond recognition.

The Most Vulnerable: Oppn Chief Ministers
History suggests such provisions are rarely used against the ruling party's own. The targets will be opposition Chief Ministers heading into elections. Their removal would not only bar them from campaigning but would also fracture their parties.

Legislators, deprived of their leader, would be ripe for inducement or intimidation.

Consider a popular opposition CM, poised for victory, arrested weeks before polls. Even if later released, the election would already be fought and lost. Timing is everything in politics. This amendment allows rivals to time a leader's fall with surgical precision.

Lessons from Pakistan
Pakistan offers a sobering example of how legal instruments can hollow out democracy. Nawaz Sharif was disqualified by the Supreme Court in 2017 on charges many saw as politically orchestrated. His removal destabilised democratic processes and strengthened unelected actors.

Imran Khan, once establishment-favoured, now finds himself disqualified, imprisoned, and excluded from politics. His popularity among voters did not protect him from judicial manoeuvres.

Both cases show how laws, cloaked in the language of morality, can be tools for disqualification and delegitimisation. Pakistan's democracy is weaker because courts allowed themselves to become instruments of regime change. India risks writing into its Constitution a similar pathway.

Constitutional Morality vs Political Expediency
Supporters of the Bill argue that a minister in prolonged custody cannot discharge duties. True, but remedies already exist. Portfolios can be reallocated, acting heads appointed, and legislatures can decide whether to continue supporting a detained leader. Democracies have self-correcting mechanisms.

By short-circuiting these processes with a rigid constitutional timeline, the amendment elevates expediency over principle. It undermines the presumption of innocence, converting temporary

detention — often driven by vendetta — into an automatic disqualification.

Every amendment sets precedent. If today ministers are forced out after 30 days, tomorrow legislators may be disqualified after 15. The bar may keep shifting, normalising the use of arrest as a political tool. The attempt to cleanse politics could end up making arrest the very currency of politics.

The danger lies not only in misuse but in perception. Citizens would see that leadership is decided not by the ballot, but by police stations and courtrooms. That belief, once entrenched, corrodes democracy far more than the sight of a minister in custody ever could.

Remedy Worse than Disease
The Constitution is meant to shield democracy, not provide swords for cutting down rivals. The 130th Amendment Bill, though noble in intent, risks incentivising arrests, emboldening partisan policing, and politicising the judiciary. The losers would be the voters, whose mandate could be truncated mid-term.

If Pakistan teaches anything, it is that democracy collapses not when unpopular leaders cling to office, but when popular leaders are denied their chance to face the people. India should not repeat that mistake.

In the end, the true ruler is not a police officer or magistrate. It is the voter. And only the voter should decide who stays and who goes.

Hiware Bazaar to Punjab: AAP's story left untold



DEVINDER SHARMA
FOOD & AGRICULTURE
SPECIALIST

FEW years ago, during the formative years of India Against Corruption, Arvind Kejriwal wanted me to watch a documentary made by his confidant Manish Sisodia on Hiware Bazaar, a nondescript village in Ahmednagar district of Maharashtra, which had suddenly sprung into the news because of the miraculous transformation it had undergone.

Sisodia's film showed how a perennially drought-affected destitute village had metamorphosed into a vibrant model village of self-governance, relying on the collective decision-making in the gram sabha. From a mere Rs 8,000 per year as the average adult income in 1989, it had risen to Rs 28,000 by early 2012-13. The remarkable model of all-round growth, based primarily on people's participation, eventually produced 54 millionaires.

Nowonder that at one time, it became a village having the

highest GDP. But what is more important to know is that it very successfully pushed far behind all the symbols associated with poverty and destitution — like growing alcoholism, disease proliferation, poor education. Rather, the village started witnessing reverse migration. When a village witnesses an economic turnaround, those who were forced out want to return.

Around nine years ago, I was pleasantly surprised when Kejriwal eloquently narrated the story of Hiware Bazaar in another YouTube show, titled 'Story of Hiware Bazaar by Arvind Kejriwal'. He wanted the socio-economic thinking that backed the pathway led by the amazing sarpanch of the village, Popat Lal, to be followed in all the seven lakh villages across the country. Kejriwal had found a touchstone for ushering in rural prosperity.

He even talked of creating a new Punjab, saying that the Hiware Bazaar story would be implemented in the agrarian state whenever the AAP got the opportunity. Alas, it turned out to be a forgotten story after the AAP government was formed in Punjab.

With 92 of the 117 seats bagged by the AAP, the electoral mandate gave the party the opportunity and favourable circumstances to adopt Hiware Bazaar's unique blueprint of develop-



AT COST OF FARMS: The land pooling policy reflected intellectual drought of policymakers. **SANDEEP JOSHI**

ment and showcase the emergence of a new Punjab.

Being an agricultural state, Punjab has the ingredients needed to sustainably transform a broken food economy into not only a climate-resilient but also an economically and environmentally viable and prosperous rural wonderland.

If a drought-stricken village could boast of 54 millionaires, imagine the enormous number of millionaires that Punjab's 12,000-plus villages, with 98 per cent assured irrigation, could have thrown up.

If water could be used as a core of village development, Punjab certainly is much ahead. It required a fresh and imaginative thinking, the master plan for which was

available. But by conveniently putting it on the backburner, the AAP has squandered the opportunity. And listening to Sisodia's latest words of advice to his party workers: "2027 ka chunav jitvaane ke liye, saam, daam, dand, bhed, sach, jhooth, question, answer, ladaai, jhagda jo karna padega karenge... Taiyyar hain josh ke saath?" says it all.

It is now apparent that land pooling happened for no other reason.

My disgust also stems from the failure of the political leadership to believe in what it has been repeatedly telling us. Punjab certainly needed crop diversification to replace the dominant wheat-paddy cropping pattern. But

land pooling was not the kind of diversification that it was looking for.

I understand that the land pooling policy in reality reflected the acute intellectual drought that prevails among policy planners, including both serving and influential retired bureaucrats. At a policy dialogue in Panjab University few months back, it wasn't surprising to hear retired bureaucrats batting for rapid industrialisation at the cost of agriculture.

It is not just the AAP political parties of all hues are engaged in land grab across the country. Haryana plans to acquire 35,000 acres for the upcoming six integrated multimodal townships. In Karnataka, after a prolonged three-and-a-half-year farmers' protest, the Chief Minister has dropped land acquisition of 1,777 acres of farmland in Devanahalli taluka, extending to 13 villages, around Bengaluru.

Call it by any name, acquiring roughly 65,553 acres in 164 villages was nothing but land grab. Soon after the Punjab and Haryana High Court stayed the land pooling policy for four weeks, severe backlash coming from farmer groups, including tractor rallies and 'out of bound' notice boards and banners for AAP politicians in several villages, the Punjab government's withdraw-

al of the disastrous policy came as a relief.

Remember, the court had also mentioned that the land being acquired is the most fertile and double-cropped, which means it can only be taken over in exceptional cases and, therefore, goes against the provisions of the Land Acquisition Act, 2013.

Add to it the land being usurped for the Bharatmala highway project, with food courts coming up every 10 km, fertile land is being gobbled up at a fast pace.

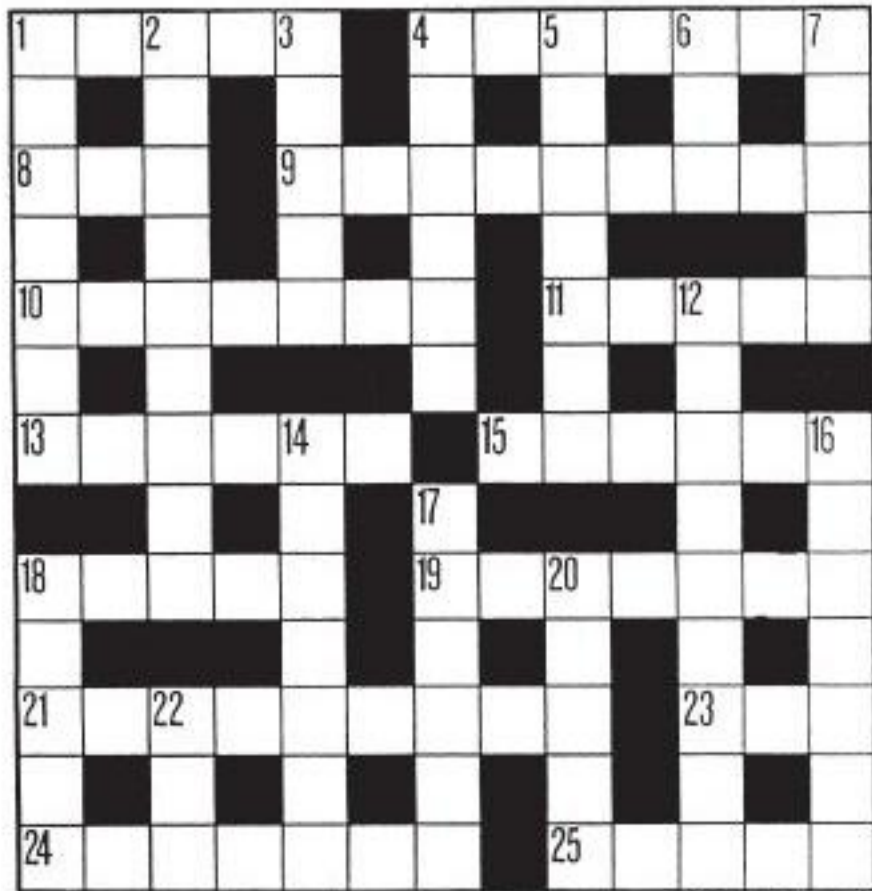
It makes me wonder — Why can't our political leaders and policymakers learn from China, which has drawn a 'red line' over 120 million hectares of fertile land that it needs to protect for ensuring food security in future. When will India have a crop of visionary leaders who can save Punjab for the role it can be asked to replay in future — provide food again for a hungry nation in times of climate uncertainties?

Instead of promulgating *saam, daam, dand, bhed* as the way forward to somehow stay in power, Punjab expects the Bhagwant Mann government to sow the seeds of transforming its villages, allowing thousands of flowers to bloom. Punjab certainly needs a policy framework to save a dwindling civilisation from a virtual collapse; not selling off its precious land resource.

It makes me wonder — Why can't our political leaders and policymakers learn from China, which has drawn a 'red line' over 120 million hectares of fertile land that it needs to protect for ensuring food security in future. When will India have a crop of visionary leaders who can save Punjab for the role it can be asked to replay in future — provide food again for a hungry nation in times of climate uncertainties?

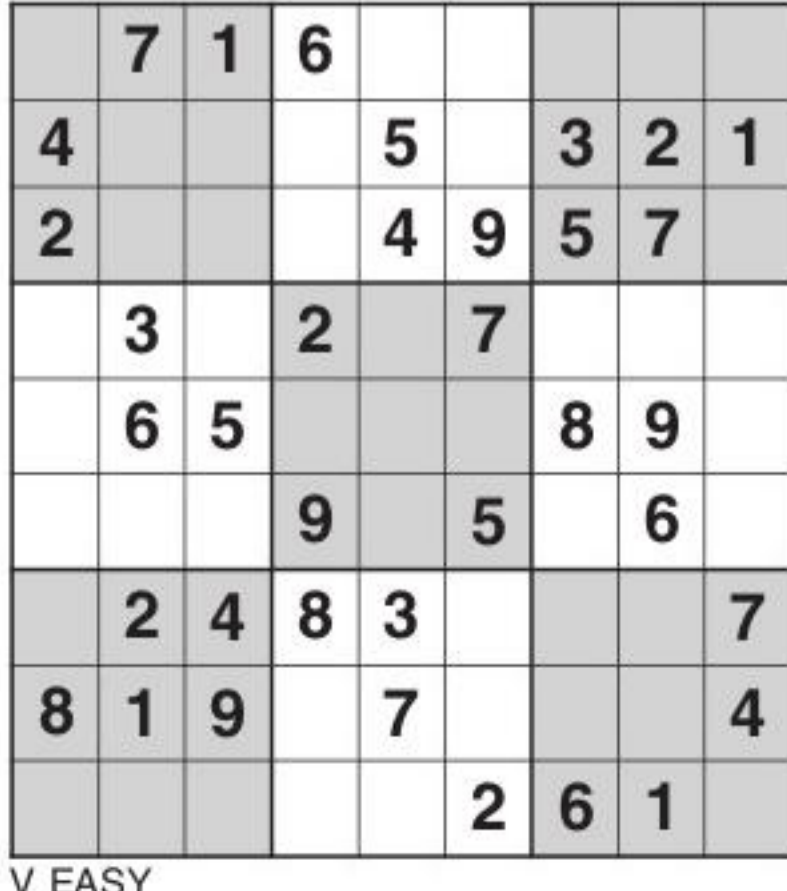
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QUICK CROSSWORD



- ACROSS**
- False name (5)
 - Rigidly conventional (7)
 - Greasy (3)
 - Probably (4,2,3)
 - Running late (7)
 - Seize wrongfully (5)
 - A defensive ditch (6)
 - Concealed marksman (6)
 - Subordinate to (5)
 - Commonplace (7)
 - To create an impression (3,6)
 - Express publicly (3)
 - Without any reservation (7)
 - Avoid definite commitment (5)
- DOWN**
- An indignity (7)
 - Ahead of the field (2,3,4)
 - Dish of uncooked vegetables (5)
 - Maintenance in good order (6)
 - (Cooked) perfectly (2,1,4)
 - Spirit flavoured with juniper berries (3)
 - Add together (3,2)
 - Dominance (5,4)
 - Thorough (7)
 - Self-reproach (7)
 - In good spirits (6)
 - Out of condition (5)
 - A marriage (5)
 - Nonsense (3)
- Yesterday's solution**
- Across:** 1 Of few words, 8 Noble, 9 Concord, 10 Whittle, 11 Wince, 12 Wrench, 14 Dynamo, 17 Rodeo, 19 Raucous, 21 Hothead, 22 Aesop, 23 Reportedly.
- Down:** 2 Febrile, 3 Eject, 4 Wicked, 5 Runaway, 6 Swoon, 7 Idle gossip, 8 Newsworthy, 13 Close-up, 15 Arousal, 16 Trader, 18 Deter, 20 Usage.

SU DO KU



YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

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

CALENDAR

AUGUST 21, 2025, THURSDAY

- Shaka Samvat 1947
- Shravan Shaka 30
- Bhadrapad Purnimika 6
- Hijri 1447
- Krishna Paksha Tithi 13, up to 12:45 pm
- Vyatapata Yoga up to 4:14 pm
- Pushya Nakshatra up to 12:09 am
- Moon in Cancer sign
- Gandmoola start 12:09 am

FORECAST			
SUNSET:	THURSDAY	18-57 HRS	
SUNRISE:	FRIDAY	05-54 HRS	
CITY	MAX	MIN	
Chandigarh	34	25	
New Delhi	34	24	
Amritsar	33	26	
Bathinda	35	25	
Jalandhar	33	26	
Ludhiana	35	26	
Bhiwani	34	25	
Hisar	34	24	
Sirsa	35	25	
Dharamsala	28	19	
Manali	25	16	
Shimla	23	17	
Srinagar	31	16	
Jammu	33	24	
Kargil	30	16	
Leh	27	15	
Dehradun	23	24	
Mussoorie	22	17	

The Statesman

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

Borrowed Time

The days following the Alaska summit between US President Donald Trump and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin have revealed much about the shifting geometry of wartime diplomacy. Within 72 hours, the White House hosted an extraordinary gathering of Western leaders alongside Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who had already met President Trump in the Oval Office prior to this. The choreography was deliberate: to assure Kyiv that, despite the lack of progress with Moscow, its allies remain engaged. Yet, the symbolism should not mask the persistent gaps in substance.

Mr Zelenskyy's visit was less about breakthroughs and more about damage control. After Alaska produced no ceasefire and allowed Mr Putin to project confidence, the Ukrainian leader needed to reaffirm that his nation was not being side-lined. His strategy - tempered rhetoric, quiet persistence, and the pointed use of maps and figures to dramatise Ukraine's resilience - showed a leader intent on survival through persuasion rather than confrontation. Mr Trump, meanwhile, appeared eager to reset the narrative.

The Oval Office meeting gave him a chance to display warmth toward Mr Zelenskyy, an important counterweight to criticism that he had given Mr Putin too much stage time in Alaska. But the absence of concrete pledges was glaring. Security guarantees, arms packages, and even timelines for sanctions were floated in the broader White House session with NATO and EU leaders, yet each remained suspended in conditional language.

For European participants, the gathering was less about trusting Mr Trump than about making themselves indispensable. Leaders from France, Germany, Italy, and Finland pushed visibly for some form of ceasefire framework, knowing that their publics are weary of prolonged war and economic uncertainty.

But their efforts collided with the reality that Russia shows no sign of softening its maximalist demands, and Ukraine cannot accept terms that compromise its sovereignty. The allies, therefore, spoke more of "options" than of "agreements." What emerges is a picture of diplomacy conducted on borrowed time. Each meeting postpones hard choices rather than resolves them.

Ukraine buys breathing space, Mr Trump maintains the appearance of leadership, and Europe signals unity while harbouring private doubts about endurance. NATO's presence at the table was crucial, yet even the alliance's words carried more symbolism than substance.

Still, these meetings were not meaningless. For Kyiv, the absence of pressure to concede was itself a victory. For Washington, the optics of a crowded White House lent weight to claims of coordination.

And for Europe, the chance to publicly shape the agenda was valuable in itself. But none of this alters the fundamental stalemate: Russia remains entrenched, the West is cautious, and Ukraine continues to fight for survival with promises rather than guarantees. The Alaska summit may have been theatre, but the Washington meetings show that the play is still running - without a clear script for the final act.

Turning Point

Bolivia's presidential election has set the stage for a political transformation, unprecedented in nearly two decades. The preliminary results, which place Senator Rodrigo Paz Pereira in the lead and former president Jorge Quiroga in second position, mark a decisive moment in the country's democratic journey. A run-off in October will determine the winner, but the real story is already clear: Bolivia's long-standing experiment with leftist dominance may have run its course. For almost twenty years, the Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS) defined the country's political landscape. From Evo Morales's sweeping rise in 2006 to Luis Arce's tenure in more recent years, the left's grip seemed unshakeable. Mr Morales, with his deep grassroots base, positioned himself as the voice of indigenous identity and economic nationalism. Yet over time, the economic dividends of that model withered. Inflation, food and fuel shortages, declining reserves, and mounting debt eroded public patience. What was once seen as empowerment became associated with stagnation and mismanagement.

The election's outcome reflects both fatigue and anger. The humiliation faced by MAS candidates at polling stations - being booed, jeered, or even attacked - symbolises the scale of disillusionment. This is not merely a rejection at the ballot box but a broader collapse of credibility for a movement that once claimed to embody Bolivia's future. Mr Morales's continuing shadow only deepens the divisions. Barred from running, facing legal troubles, yet unwilling to retreat, he has become a destabilising factor even for those within his former ranks.

By contrast, Mr Paz Pereira's appeal lies not in lofty ideology but in pragmatic promises: decentralising funds, widening access to credit, encouraging formal business, and reducing barriers to trade. His slogan of "capitalism for all" encapsulates the yearning of many Bolivians for opportunity beyond the state-centric approach that has dominated their economy. Mr Quiroga, though more rooted in the country's political past, represents a similar tilt toward markets and foreign engagement.

The implications go far beyond domestic politics. Bolivia holds some of the world's richest lithium reserves, an increasingly strategic resource in the global shift toward renewable energy. For years, resource nationalism limited foreign investment in this sector. A government more open to partnerships could attract the kind of capital and technology needed to transform Bolivia into a central player in the energy transition. At the same time, a pivot away from reliance on China, Russia, and Iran and toward a rapprochement with the United States could reshape Bolivia's foreign relations after decades of tension. What the election shows most vividly is that Bolivians are ready to gamble on change. The socialist era promised dignity and delivered some gains, but its end is now written in the anger on the streets and the ballots cast at the polls. Whoever wins the run-off will inherit a crisis, but also an unmistakable mandate: to break with the past and deliver a different future.

Khalai Makhlooq

It will be critical and imperative for 'Field Marshal' Asim Munir to continuously flex the medallions on his chest, keep making controversial and provocative statements, as also keep the civilian politicians in check, to continue ruling the roost. The United States under the equally amoral Donald Trump will allow Munir the long rope for its own tactical, transactional, and topical reasons ~ after all, his railing and unacceptable statements on American soil against India (supposedly an ally of the US) went unchecked

In the see-saw equation of changing fortunes between civilian politicians and military Generals in Pakistan, selective amnesia is common. In 2018, PML-N supremo Nawaz Sharif had rightly accused Pakistani Generals of facilitating the "selection" (as opposed to "election") of Imran Khan by bumping-off the PML-N dispensation. Nawaz had cuttngly coined the term "Khalai Makhlooq" (extraterrestrial beings or aliens) for the dour Generals to allude to the invisible but sure hand of the cantonment.

It is another matter that the vainglorious Imran Khan misread his "selection" by the Generals to imply their deference, only to be booted-out ingloriously and to be incredulously followed by a government led by the same PML-N, helmed by Nawaz's brother, Shehbaz Sharif.

But wiser with times and experience, the "establishment" (read Pakistani military) has solidified its stranglehold with the self-anointment of Field Marshalship onto its Chief, Asim Munir, should Shehbaz or anyone else in the unnatural alliance government dare think of crossing the line with the Generals again.

Not done with grand posturing, Munir further awarded himself the Hilal-i-Jurat (Pakistan's second highest gallantry award - equivalent to India's Maha Vir Chakra) to further embellish the over-decorated uniform of an Army that has never won a war, ever!

While the larger-than-life symbolism of a ramrod posture or blunt (albeit,



apolitical) language is naturally given to those in "uniform" across the globe, in Pakistan, it is additionally embellished with political theatrics and extra constitutional verbiage. Because these Generals want to usurp power, they make sure that they speak the populist language of unhinged and uncouth politicians to suggest their own nationalist "muscularity".

The tradition started early with the first native Pakistani Chief (later self-appointed Field Marshal and President) Ayub Khan, who infamously said about the Indian Soldier before the 1965 Indo-Pak war, "The Hindu has no stomach for a fight and can be silenced with a few blows".

Ayub could be (dis)credited for setting the template of a politicised Pakistani General who would combine blustering charisma, intemperate language, and domineering actions, to ensure that the Pakistani military remains the singular power, either formally, or informally (like now). Ayub's successor, the debauch General (and President) Yahya Khan, carried on the unprofessional rhetoric of the "historic superiority of the Moslem fighters" and added cavalierly just before the 1971 Indo-Pak War, "I'll be damned if I'll see Pakistan divided".

Yahya's chosen General to handle his Eastern theatre was one who preferred the moniker "Tiger" to be embedded in his name to project bravado and valour i.e., Lt Gen AK "Tiger" Niazi, also known as the "Butcher of Bangladesh" (a dishonour shared with yet another Pakistani General, Tikka Khan) for overseeing the genocide.

Niazi had boorishly said, "Mein is haramzaadi quam ki nasal badal doon ga" (I will change the race of this bastard

community) and also thundered, "Dacca will fall only over my dead body". Later, the so-called "Tiger" Niazi meekly signed the surrender papers along with 93,000 Pakistani soldiers.

Later, a line of over-ambitious Pakistani Generals would continue conflating toxic religiosity, jingoistic politics, to cross-border activities like Generals Zia-ul-Haq, Hamid Gul, Mirza Aslam Baig etc., who would keep overstepping their functional mandate to the detriment of democracy in Pakistan, and regional peace.

Like Zia, yet another "Mohajir" General, Pervez Musharraf, would attempt dangling his own aura with a picture of him testing a pistol in a forward area, with a cigarette

dangling from the side of his mouth, and his beret at a rakish angle!

It wasn't just carefully manufactured imagery for a General trying to out-swagger his Punjabi-Pathan colleagues ~ he was working simultaneously on his ill-fated Kargil Project. But as it perhaps happens only in Pakistan, after each military blunder the 'establishment' scripts its own narrative to suggest a different outcome, as many in the Pakistani narrative still have a very different view from reality about the results of 1965, 1971, Kargil, to now, even Operation Sindoor.

Today, "Field Marshal" Asim Munir's nuclear sabre-rattling is from the age-old playbook of Pakistani Generals and their penchant for thundering statements, however reckless and unbecoming of professional soldiers.

Munir's language reflects the sensibilities of fringe cadres when he supposedly claimed, "we are a nuclear nation, if we think we are going down, we'll take half



BHOPINDER SINGH

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

China Daily

When parental anxiety is sparked by summer break

The high temperatures this summer were unbearable ~ and so was the pressure on many parents. While students enjoy almost complete freedom during summer vacation, their parents and/or guardians are often worried to the core: Who's watching the kids? Are they becoming lazy? Will they fall behind academically? Are they glued to their smartphone/tablet screens? In their anxiety, some parents eagerly await the reopening of schools or cram courses.

But after China implemented the "double reduction" policy in 2021, in order to ease students' burden by banning excessive homework and off-campus tutoring, the chances of cram courses' revival have largely disappeared. Schools are barred from holding formal classes or special tutorials during holidays, tutoring centers have been shut down, and paid private tutoring by school teachers is strictly forbidden. While the policy has been enforced, anxiety continues to plague parents. The policy was designed with good intentions: to reduce the pressure of academic overload on students, and make families happier.

Some researchers, however, said the policy's impact has been far from uniform: while some families welcomed the move, allowing their children to relax or play some sports, some have doubled down on their children, fearing they would lose precious ground. After all, no parents want to see their children falling behind at the starting line.

In such a situation, what should parents do? Giving children total freedom is not the answer nor is constantly pressuring children to keep on making achievements. To deal with the situation, we need balance, wisdom, and a long-term vision.

To begin with, parents must understand the deeper reasons behind the "double reduction" policy, because it is not only about reducing homework, but also about reforming the education system, promoting holistic development, and improving the quality of teaching and after-school support. If parents understand the policy's goals, they can reduce their anxiety.

They also need to recognize the changing nature of the world their

children are growing up in. Today's era is marked by rapid technological advancement ~ artificial intelligence, quantum computing, and tools like GPT are reshaping industries. In such a world, rote learning and doing repetitive drills are not only ineffective but also harmful.

They stifle curiosity and could lead to learning fatigue and emotional distress.

Parents must shift their focus from their children getting high grades to helping sharpen their problem-solving skills, and increase their scientific knowledge.

And the summer break is the perfect time for children to explore society and broaden horizons.

At the same time, physical and emotional wellbeing should not be neglected. Studies have shown a worrying rise in issues such as myopia, obesity, poor posture, and anxiety among children. Reducing academic pressure must be accompanied by efforts to increase children's exposure to music, sports, art, and hands-on activities. Well-rounded development ~ moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic and practical - is not

a luxury, but a necessity for healthy growth.

Yet parenting is not easy. Without proper guidance, some parents may feel frustrated and some may retreat entirely, while others could try to offload their responsibilities on others.

Since parenting is a special skill, would-be and new parents should seek elders' advice and guidance on how to bring up children. Parents who reflect on their behavior and seek guidance tend to feel more confident. And confidence is an antidote to anxiety.

Another crucial factor in parenting is the role of fathers. In many households, parenting duties are disproportionately shared by mothers. This "widowed parenting" practice leaves children without a strong male role model and mothers feeling overwhelmed.

A father's steady presence, quiet authority and long-term influence help shape children's character, and build resilience in them. When both parents share the parenting duties, the family functions better and children benefit from a more balanced, secure upbringing.

blacklist them, impose sanctions on them. Freeze all relations with them.

This will teach Trump a lesson and get him to open his eyes and see reason. If he does not change his position then all the better. We can go our way and he can go his.

There are enough other markets in this world where we can make up for the trade we lose by not dealing with the USA. It may take us some time but long term it is a better option.

We also have a huge domestic market and we can divert these goods into the local market. The other day there was news that Andhra Pradesh is planning to sell shrimps which are being priced out because of the US tariff imposition to the local market. Time for us to show some self-respect rather than wait to see what Trump will do.

Yours, etc., S Kamat, Mysuru, 17 August.

Letters To The Editor

✉ editor@thestatesman.com

Alternate voice

Sir, This has reference to the article "Trump vs BRICS" by Ash Narain Roy, published today. BRICS today is more than just a club of emerging economies; it is a statement of intent. Its very rise unsettles Western analysts because it dares to imagine a world where the West is not at the steering wheel. By pushing for de-dollarization, setting up its own financial institutions, and rallying the Global South around the idea of multipolarity, BRICS is quietly rewriting the rules of the game.

The message is subtle yet unmistakable: the age of Western monopoly over global governance is waning. This is not a rejection of the West, but a refusal to accept its exclusivity. In short, BRICS is not seeking to burn the old house down - it is simply building another one where more nations have a say at the table.



This explains why Donald Trump and others see red when they hear the name BRICS. For decades, America has thrived on a world order where Western dominance was never questioned, and rivals were easily boxed in. BRICS threatens that comfort zone by proving that alternatives are possible, and that the Global South need not remain silent spectators. Trump's instinctive hostility is less about ideology and more about power - he recognizes that if BRICS succeeds, America's role as

global umpire will no longer be guaranteed. The truth is, BRICS does not dream of a world without the West, but of a world where the West is just one voice among many. And that, for Washington, is perhaps the most radical vision of all.

Yours, etc.,
Narayanan Kizhumundayur, Thrissur, 19 August.

Dump him

Sir, Why should we as a sovereign, independent country be a hanger-on at the table of Donald Trump, President of America? Why are we waiting for what he next throws at us in terms of tariffs or other restrictive trade measures? It's time to stop this.

If Trump can do what he wants, then we should also do clearly and without ambiguity what we want. Stop all trade with the USA, put an embargo on them,



Expanding the education eco-system

V K PAUL, SHASHANK SHAH AND ARUNAVA DEY

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has introduced a transformative approach to India's higher education system with theaim to achieve the three primacies of access, quality and future readiness.Itemphasizes setting up more Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in underserved areas to 'ensure full access, equity, and inclusion'while recommending at least one large multidisciplinary HEI in or near every district.It has proposed a 50 per cent Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education by 2035, which would nearly double the student population from 4.33 crore (2021-22) in a decade. This would make India the world's largest higher education system. To accommodate this massive growth, India will need to nearly double its current number of universities.

An analysis of the current geographical distribution of universities in India reveals that over the last seven decades, their locations have been primarily determined by supply-side considerations rather than demand-driven factors. As a result, universities are concentrated in and around urban centres, rather than being spread across districts. For a more balanced distribution over the next decade, evidence-based spatial analyses can help provide insights for the strategic location ofnew universities across India.

The Ministry of Education publishes the All-India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE), an annual report that offers

Key Highlights	
Types of Universities	152 Institutes of National Importance (INIs); 70% of 1,665 Universities are State Public or Private Universities.
Rural-Urban Distribution	60% of universities are in urban areas that account for 34% of population.
Temporal Change	Number of universities increased by over 50% in last 10 years; doubled in 9 states including Assam, Gujarat, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal.
State-level distribution	Gujarat, Rajasthan, and UP have 90+ universities each; UP has the highest number of colleges (8,325) followed by Maharashtra (7,692); Karnataka leads in number of colleges per lakh population (66).
District-level distribution	4 districts have 80+ universities (Karnataka with 18); ~300 districts have more than 50 universities; 4 districts account for 6% of all colleges (Gangadurg Urban Dist, LITSE, IES, districts have 100 or more colleges).
Remote Regions & Aspirational Districts	Only 30% of 169 remote districts have at least 1 university; 4 of 12 Aspirational Districts have 1 or more universities.

comprehensive insights into the state of higher education across the country. When combined with available demographic data, this information holds significant potential for analysing the geographical distribution and concentration of colleges and universities. It also provides policymakers with valuable evidence to recommend optimal locations for establishing new universities. The key highlights are published alongside

A recent Working Paper by NITI Aayog on 'Establishing New Universities in India' used in-depth spatial and statistical analysis to provide insights at three levels.

District-level: There are 81 districts with 50 or more colleges, but no universities. Given their large population base and demand for higher education, these districts may consider establishment of new cluster universities.UP accounts for 32 of these districts, followed

by Maharashtra with 13 districts.In UP, 32 State Public Universities (SPUs) have an exceptionally high number of 8,375affiliated colleges. This translates to 262 colleges per SPU. While UP comprises about 7.8 per cent of India's universities, it accounts for approximately 18.4 per cent of colleges. This situation provides an opportunity for focused efforts to integrate high potential colleges into cluster universities for decentralized capacity expansion.

Region-level: After mapping the location of existing universities, spatial autocorrelation identifies contiguous regions spanning multiple districts with low university presence. These regions account for more than 75 per cent of Aspirational Districts, spread acrossfour major areas: North-eastern States (especially Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, and Manipur), eastern Maharashtra with south-western Odisha, eastern

Madhya Pradesh with south-eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, and eastern Gujarat with neighbouring western Madhya Pradesh.To enhance higher education access in these underserved regions, establishing new and specialized universities tailored to local needs is recommended.

State-level: A composite index created using five key indicators helped evaluate demand for universities at the state-level. The index includedtwo positive factors where higher values indicate greater demand: percentage of state's population relative to national population, and percentage of 18-23-year-olds within the state. It also used threeneegative factors where lower values indicate higher demand: GER in the state, and ratio of universities and colleges per lakh population.

States with higher composite scores in the indexindicate a requirement for more universities to meet existing demand. The analysis indicates thatUP, India's most populous state, has the greatest need for new universities. Other large states with significant populations such as Maharashtra, West Bengal, Bihar, Rajasthan, and Madhya Pradesh, also emerge as high-priority areas.This is despite significant growth in number of universities in these states between 2012 and 2022— Maharashtra increased from 45 to 74, West Bengal from 26 to 58, Bihar from 20 to 37, Rajasthan from 47 to 90, and Madhya Pradesh from 36 to 77.

While planning for creation and/or expansion of universities, greenfield and brownfield, it is essential to account for multiple

factors in addition to spatial and statistical analysis and conduct detailed micro-scale studies. These would involve careful evaluation of regional demand,socio-economic characteristics, accessibility, proximity to existing universities, and opportunities for collaboration with academic institutions, research organisations, and industries.

In addition to expansion, clear prioritisation in four areas is crucial for success of new universities. Firstly, developing specialized curricula that enhances skilling and employability in emerging fields.Secondly, designing courses that ensure quality education, nurture human values, promote socio-cultural identities, and strengthen teacher training. Thirdly, transforming universities into multidisciplinary hubs equipped with state-of-the-art infrastructure including smart classrooms, digital libraries, cutting-edge research centres, incubation hubs, and robust sports and wellness facilities. Lastly, fostering gender-inclusive campuses with hostels and barrier-free access for Divyangjan. These would ensure holistic and comprehensive higher education for all.

To achieve the vision of Viksit Bharat@2047, a strategic shift in approach for creation of new universities is needed. This involves moving away from traditional supply-based resource planning to demand-driven, proactive planning. Incorporating evidence-based statistical analyses alongside spatial evaluations can ensure an effective, efficient, inclusive, and sustainable expansion of higher education infrastructure.

(The writers are, respectively, Member, Senior Specialist and Research Officer at NITI Aayog. The views expressed are personal.)

100 Years Ago



Front page of The Statesman dated 21 August 1925

OCCASIONAL NOTE

THE University of Calcutta has been divided in counsel about what amount of money is needed to put its postgraduate departments in proper order. It set the Government of Bengal an awkward problem to solve, but the Legislative Council has to some extent prejudged the case by calling on Government to make a grant of three lakhs. This was inevitable after the statutory grant to the Dacca University, Government could not put up much of a defence against a proposal to treat the University of Calcutta also with some generosity. Sir P. C. Mitter argued that the grant to both universities should be put on a statutory basis, and whatever may be the present views of Government, it will find it hard to shut to one and the greater institution a door which has been opened to the other. Universities must cut their coats according to their cloth, but they are quite justified in getting all the cloth they can provided that they use it well. There is no limit to what they can do if they have the resources.

News Items

NEW ERA IN FLYING

“BUILDING NATION OF AIRMEN”

LONDON, AUG. 19.

A NEW era in flying was inaugurated with the opening in London to-day of the Light Aeroplane Club by Sir Philip Sassoon, Under-Secretary for Air, who made the first flight, in a de Haviland "Moth."

The club is the first of six to be established in England under the Air Ministry scheme. Full membership for London, which is limited to a hundred, has already been reached and is drawn from all classes. In the words of the Under-Secretary "from dukes to butchers."

Sir Philip Sassoon predicted that flying would soon be a popular sport and should help the Ministry to attain its ideal of building, up a nation of airmen. Twenty members to-day made half-hour flights, including a lady.

Already the membership list is full, including barristers, artisans, six women and two Members of the House of Commons. Ten hours of instructional flying will cost thirty shillings, after which those qualified will pay £1 per hour for the use of an aeroplane.— Reuter.

CHINESE BAN ON BRITISH SHIPS

VIOLATION OF TREATY RIGHTS

LONDON, AUG. 19.

AUTHORITATIVE circles in London are now concerned with the action of the Canton Government in banning the free movement of British ships to and from the Chinese ports, which obviously calls for some definite step on the part of Britain, as it constitutes a flagrant violation of the Treaty rights of foreign Governments. The British Government will very fully and carefully consider the whole position before coming to a definite decision.—Reuter.

SURPRISE FOR SWARAJISTS

WHY MOTIONS WERE WITHDRAWN

The tactics adopted by the Swarajists in the Bengal Legislative Council yesterday tended to emphasize the weakness in the party which had been apparent throughout the entire session.

Apparently, owing to their weakness, and, with a view to obstructing the discussion of non-official resolutions, which included one dealing with the payment of salaries to the Ministers for the period they had worked, the Swarajists and their allies adopted methods which resulted in a completion of the Government business in the short space of two hours. But there was a surprise in store for them.

At Wednesday's meeting, the President informed the Council that His Excellency the Governor was not prepared to grant a day exclusively for the transaction of non-official business, but that if the Government business was not concluded the following day, another day might be devoted for the purpose, a part of which could be spent in dealing with the non-official business. The Swarajists apparently thought that, if the Government business was completed yesterday, no further time would be granted for the dispatch of non-official resolutions, and they accordingly withdrew almost all the motions standing in their names for either refusal or reduction of various supplementary demands, which were thereupon granted.

A fix for Nepal's transportation woes?

LEELADHAR JOSHI

Social media and new portals in Nepal are abuzz with excitement as the NADA Auto Show 2025 in Kathmandu is expected to showcase a flying car, technically known as eVTOL (electric Vertical Take-Off and Landing) aircraft. Public display of this novel technology, known as Advanced Air Mobility (AAM) in a wider sense, marks a significant step towards innovative future transportation, one that seems essential for Nepal given its geographical constraints.

Exhibition and execution are quite different things. The opportunities it unlocks are exciting, while the path to operation is challenging. Meanwhile, a nuanced understanding of this novel technology, its developmental impacts and potential implementation challenges may turn expectations into reality.

AAM signifies a remarkable shift in aviation technology, with the potential to revolutionise the aviation sector. It can operate at lower altitude and shorter range, requires minimal infrastructure and maintenance, making it well-positioned to deliver cleaner, safer, quieter, flexible and cost-effective transport solutions compared to conventional means.

Over 267 cities and regions across 63 countries are planning or piloting AAM initiatives. Commercial launches are expected in countries such as the US, China, South Korea, France, Japan and Saudi Arabia by 2026.

A wide variety of eVTOL aircraft types have already been developed. Alongside the setting up of vital infrastructures, such as vertiports, is also gaining pace. As of February 2025, 1,504 vertiports are planned

globally, a sharp rise from 1,004 in September 2024, with China accounting for over 50 per cent of all projects.

Leading aviation authorities of the world released a joint AAM roadmap in June 2025 to guide certification, coordination, regulation and social acceptance of air taxis and drone operations. South Korean company OPNAV's manned-unmanned eVTOL, ran a successful flight test in 2023 and Chinese Ehang's EH216-S received certification for passenger use. This underscores the global momentum towards pilotless air mobility. Market forecasts also highlight substantial growth potential for AAM. The global AAM market was valued at USD 11.5 billion in 2024 and is expected to reach USD 73.5 billion by 2034.

With regulatory sandbox environments for flight testing and public-private partnerships with major eVTOL manufacturers, global leaders are supporting AAM developments. Saudi Arabia's ambitious NEOM city project and Dubai's readiness with certified vertiports further demonstrate the potential of this novel technology.

Connectivity in Nepal is severely hampered by its rugged and disaster-prone terrain. Dispersed rural settlements and unreliable transport infrastructures exacerbate the situation. Roads are often hard to build and maintain due to harsh topography and frequent disasters. Air travel remains crucial while affected by limited infrastructures, topography and weather constraints.

AAM offers a game-changing solution to the country's transportation problems. It is an agile and environmentally friendly option that can bypass damaged or

non-existent roads and operate in previously unreachable areas. It can improve healthcare, reducing fatalities via rapid deployment of medical supplies and personnel, including emergency medical evacuations. The novel technology accelerates economic activities and growth, offering market access to local producers and farmers producing goods that often struggle to reach the market. It also supports tourism by establishing connectivity with previously isolated tourist attractions.

AAM could support disaster preparedness and prompt response via the timely deployment of essentials during disaster incidents. Aerial surveillance and real-time mapping and fire-fighting capabilities further enhance effective disaster response, minimising potential losses.

Being emission-free and quieter, AAM vehicles offer environmental advantages. Unlike other countries still relying on polluting sources for electricity generation, Nepal could leverage its abundant hydropower potential for charging eVTOLs. Apart from the transport revolution, AAM offers a platform for innovation and skills development. The youth population of Nepal makes it well-positioned to develop human capital in terms of AAM pilots, technicians and drone engineers. Thus, AAM holds revolutionary potential for Nepal to help overcome geographical barriers, boost economic resilience and advance multiple SDGs.

Despite the promising prospects, the successful adoption of AAM in Nepal seems challenging. The absence of a legal and institutional framework, robust airspace management provisions and safety protocols, including pilot licensing for operating eVTOLs and

autonomous aircraft, could hinder timely adoption. Nepal could face challenges in operating eVTOLs at higher altitudes to meet its rural connectivity needs, as most commercial eVTOLs are designed to operate in urban settings within lower altitudes. Similarly, battery efficiency and lift capacity could be affected by climatic conditions and weather patterns. Additionally, the limited range and payload of current models may restrict their usefulness for longer or heavier routes in Nepal's challenging landscapes. The absence of essentials such as vertiports, reliable 5G connectivity, dedicated charging stations and robust electric grids, especially in rural and remote areas, could further delay the implementation and operation.

A dearth of technical expertise and workforce in AAM technologies creates a barrier to successful adoption. Building domestic expertise in advanced aviation technology, maintenance and regulatory affairs will require substantial investment in education and training. Furthermore, being a novel technology, the start-up costs for aircraft procurement, including infrastructure development and workforce training, are expected to be high. This could affect investment decisions and the willingness of a financially weak country like Nepal.

Low public awareness about this emerging technology may result in public mistrust and reluctance in the adoption of aerial mobility services, while raising awareness will require additional investments.

Given Nepal's technical, financial and human resource constraints in the field of modern aviation, an incremental approach with extensive international collaboration is required

to harness the full potential of AAM. For the safe and impactful adoption, it is necessary to provision a dedicated task force under the Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation (MoCTCA) in collaboration with key line ministries for cross-sector alignment. A National AAM Roadmap could set a clear timeline and organise necessary resources. Adopting available guiding materials like the Asia-Pacific AAM Reference could facilitate regulatory planning and governance.

International collaboration and private sector engagement are key to harnessing AAM's potential. Regional and global engagement with AAM adopters and pioneers could help gain momentum. Partnering and promoting the private sector via tax incentives and regulatory arrangements could assist research and development of technology compatible with Nepal.

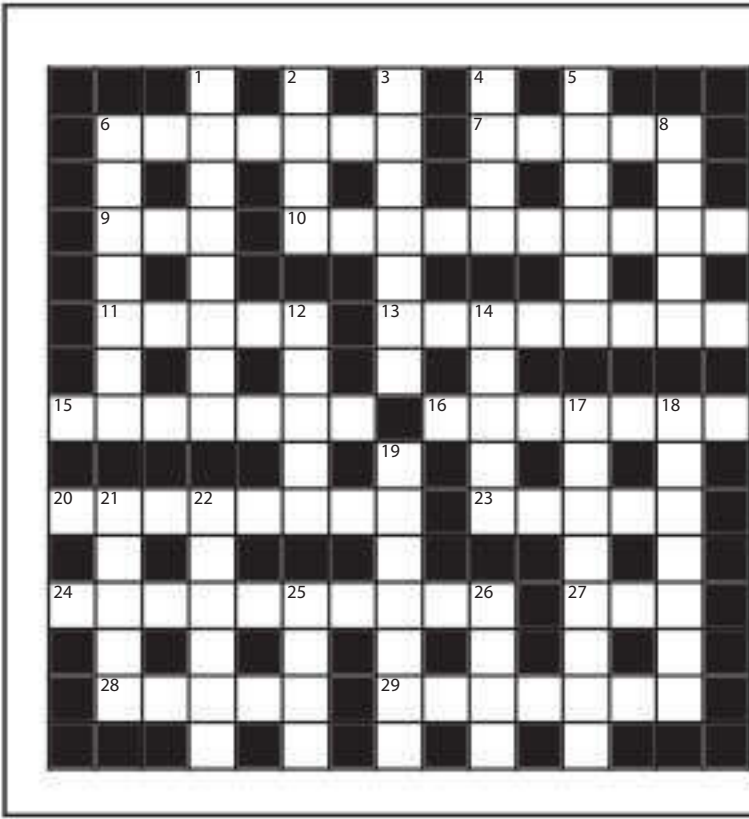
The government should focus on the implementation of pilot projects in collaboration between CAAN, Nepal Army, academic institutions and the private sector with regulatory sandboxes to ease testing in early stages. For initial deployment, we could prioritise medical logistics, disaster response.

For infrastructure readiness, it is necessary to plan and invest in vertiports and dedicated charging stations at strategic locations. Additionally, timely investment in training programs for the necessary workforce is necessary for seamless deployment.

The expected exhibition of eVTOL symbolises Nepal's interest in next-generation mobility but also highlights the gap between aspiration and readiness.

The Kathmandu Post/ANN.

Crossword | No. 293223



Yesterday's Solution



ACROSS

- 6 Pull bat away regularly after proper bloomer (7)
- 7 Uncanny, Dot (single) making right move twice in highly-strung state (5)
- 9 Setter's power as mischief-maker (3)
- 10 His older TV's repair is not long-lasting (5-5)
- 11 Guy more than once needing to make a dash for it, reportedly (5)
- 13 Recording that male setter's given 6D 10 things (8)

- 15 Stopped talking and did postprandial chore? (5,2)
- 16 Excessive as cost might be, if broadcaster under influence of a drug? (3,4)
- 20 Creative person gets home by taking second north out of IOW town (8)
- 23 Manners shown by Dr. Dre? Not at first, in today's theme... (5)
- 24 Unusually large pets receiving hard-7 messages? (10)
- 27 Country where setters introduce

- thematic content in left/right columns (3)
- 28 On the way out, Indy's recycled? Good (5)
- 29 Creative use of e.g. Corel 6D (2,5)

DOWN

- 1 Having lost case, simply with no case to lose (8)
- 2 Setters' pleasure trips no longer starting with a thematic dash (4)
- 3 German city's missing hotel by river, previously knocked down (3,4)
- 4 Pull up after taking the lead from

- Steve Cram (4)
- 5 Element nitrogen is missing from compound number 1 (6)
- 6 Portrait's head isn't the Queen, according to artist (7)
- 8 Read out, say, writing that's depressingly dull in literary terms (5)
- 12 Burst of letters from higher up, thematically (5)
- 14 Stink is about fine? That's nonsense (5)
- 17 Very strong man in Cheers, playing university lecturer (8)

- 18 Suggest a possible case for secret police (7)
- 19 Stuck bug on leads of peripheral electronic devices? That's about right (7)
- 21 Very much recovered at last, after turning up gas (2,3)
- 22 Wasted time during last two-thirds of second half? It makes you sick! (6)
- 25 Gregory's car registration? Sydney's, actually (4)
- 26 Avoiding 27, maybe Frankfurter is wise (4)

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



Editor's
TAKE

India-China: Towards
Rapprochement

India and China are making concerted efforts to resolve long standing issues that have plagued the relations between the two countries but the momentum must be maintained

After a long gap and years of tension, there is some respite in India-China relations. For the past few years it has been an uneasy relationship, even the visa services were disrupted between the two countries. However, after a low point in relations after incidents like Galwan clash in 2020, things are now looking up. Visa services are restored and now more confidence-building measures are expected which would at least make relations functional if not cordial.

In a significant breakthrough signalling a thaw in bilateral relations, India and China have taken decisive steps to reset their diplomatic and strategic engagement. A high-level meeting between visiting Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Prime Minister Narendra Modi and External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar has broken the ice. The discussions, focused on building trust and reducing tensions, resulted in the agreement to work toward an early settlement of the longstanding boundary issue. An Expert Group under the Working Mechanism for Consultation and Coordination on India-China Border Affairs (WMCC) will now be set up to explore a mutually acceptable framework for delimiting the border. This will involve defining the boundary legally and politically without necessarily erecting physical markers on the ground. The meeting also reaffirmed previous consensus reached at Kazan, emphasising a fair and reasonable approach based on the 2005 Agreement on Political Parameters and Guiding Principles for Settlement of the Boundary Question.

Beyond security and diplomacy, the dialogue also touched on people-to-people and economic ties where both nations agreed to resume direct flights at the earliest, ease visa facilitation, and expand Indian pilgrimages to Mount Kailash and Lake Manasarovar. Border trade is set to resume at three designated points-Lipulekh Pass, Shipki La, and Nathu La-while discussions will continue to enhance trade and investment flows. This was indeed unthinkable a few months back. The visit comes against a complex backdrop of global economic tensions. India recently faced US President Donald Trump's announcement of a 25 per cent tariff on Indian goods, with an additional levy on oil imports from Russia. Similarly, the US and China remain locked in tariff disputes. Improved India-China relations could help both countries better navigate these shifting economic dynamics, reducing dependency on Western markets and creating space for bilateral cooperation. Ironically it is Trump who is facilitating Indo-China rapprochement. Security cooperation is also likely to be strengthened. The two countries have agreed to establish General Level Mechanisms in the Eastern and Middle Sectors in addition to the existing mechanism in the Western Sector. A working group under the WMCC will focus on effective border management to ensure continued peace and stability. Prime Minister Modi is expected to attend the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit in China later this year, signalling India's willingness to engage constructively on multilateral platforms.

Trump and His Tariff Dance

Donald Trump holds the world to ransom with his tariff threats that he is using to browbeat nations to further his political and economic agenda. However, in the long run it would be a self goal as his core votaries may cheer now but they would be the worst sufferers



PRAFULL
GORADIA

Evidently, Donald Trump, as President of the USA, is performing a rather comical dance of tariff for the benefit of his American audience. In the very initial days of his second presidency, he did display flashes of social memory from the days of his German origin. Some history is instructive here.

Adolf Hitler, the Nazi dictator of Germany had taken over Czechoslovakia by calling its prime minister Emile Hacha to his chancellery in Berlin, and by threatening him and his country's security, drove him to collapse. The old man, to save his country from destruction, surrendered to Germany. But no sooner than the stricken prime minister returned to Prague, he jumped out of the fourth floor to end his life. The shame of surrendering to the Nazis had been too much to bear.

Austria too was taken over without pulling a trigger. Its chancellor was most unhappy, but the majority of the people were rather pleased at this union called Anschluss. One also cannot forget the forcible incorporation of Sudetenland, the western part of Czechoslovakia. This happened with the blessings of the British and French governments, in a sellout that was advertised as "preserving peace in our time".

Immediately upon assuming office for the second time in January 2025, President Trump asked Denmark, a Western country and NATO ally, to simply hand over Greenland, which is Denmark's territory, without a murmur. What was even more audacious was to ask the Canadian government to make the country join the US as its 51th state (the Pacific Ocean island territory of Hawaii having been the 50th to do).

The President's new style of different tariffs for different countries seems to depend upon the mood of the White House. Whatever the merits of this new style, it has certainly helped him keep the World Trade Organization (WTO) out of the American window. The "new style" has also gold plated itself with an aircraft, which has come as a dowry from Qatar to Washington DC.

While the going was good during the initial years of World War II, virtually everyone in Deutschland, including many Feld Marshals, were dazzled by the magic wand of the Fuhrer, whose moves resulted in victory after victory on the battlefield.

How an educated and advanced German population fell to the magic of a leader who rose from being a mere private to only a corporal during the four years of the First World War, was a mystery.



The Pioneer
SINCE 1865

ONE HOPES THE AMERICAN NATION, EDUCATED AND AFFLUENT, DOES NOT FORGET THE LESSONS OF THAT WAR. SUCCESS IS INTOXICATING, BUT THE EUPHORIA VANISHES WITH FAILURE

The writer is a well-known columnist, an author and a former member of the Rajya Sabha

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@prafullgoradia
dailypioneer

One hopes that similarly, a lesson from World War Two is not being forgotten again, by the educated and affluent American nation.

Though success is an intoxicating drug, the intoxication disappears with failure. It is difficult to predict what will eventually happen in the "new style" being played out in the USA, although the American culture is more akin to the Anglo-Saxon temperament. Therefore, one can only wait, watch and see.

As someone who was brought up by an American-educated father (he studied in Boston in the late 1920s), I would be much less hasty in judging the drama currently being played out in America, for three very conscious reasons. One, as a banker of the invaluable dollar, the USA must consider sobriety as the soul of responsibility. The current style of its current President and the acolytes around him appears not only unconventional, but also unsustainable for long.

Two, in order to command faith, the world's most powerful country must be consistent, for decades if not centuries. Three, as the only power to have used the atom bomb, the USA must now ensure that it does not frighten the dominantly non-nuclear world.

During the recently concluded conflict between Israel and Iran in West Asia, American bombers bombed Iranian nuclear facilities. Many Iranians were for their part, really apprehensive: what would the Pentagon do in

case an Iranian weapon fired in retaliation hurt the USA somewhere?

All in all, binding faith in a country's ethnics and good-will should behove a leader of a nation, and especially a nation like the USA. What Pakistan or North Korea can get away is something the USA can ill-afford.

In this context, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's conduct during the years of his presidency, particularly during the Second World War, is shining enough for his successors to follow.

The imposition of punishment and penalties may satisfy one's immediate constituency, but what would be the effect on the world audience is a question. By US volumes of trade, imports and exports from India would be comparably smaller; so, would be the gain and losses.

Why risk and throw away all the praises showered on Prime Minister Narendra Modi all these years by trying to earn a comparatively small sum of dollars? Moreover, Indians are one-fifth of the world's people.

The Indian economy today is not what it was during the times of Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi. We are now the world's fourth largest economy and are contributing close to 18 per cent to global economic growth annually, while the USA's contribution at 11 per cent, is actually lower than India's! Surely, this reality should be sobering enough for this tariff-happy.

PIC TALK



Peacocks enchant visitors with vibrant display at the National Zoological Park in New Delhi

PTI PHOTO



ASHA IYER
KUMAR

THE PIONEER
2ND OPINION

Two men met in Alaska last week. They were supposed to have a formal talk feast rounded off with a ceasefire dessert, but it all ended as a piecemeal summit where only starters-symbolism and PR-were served. One terrifies the world with his icy stare and iron fist; the other makes it shake its head in disbelief, sometimes even in hopeless laughter. One threatens with tanks, the other with tweets. Both rule with trademark authority, but are poles apart in how they nurture their realities and project themselves to the world. And yet, only one of them has begun to capture my admiration — slowly, grudgingly, and, most of all, ironically.

I never thought I'd say this, not in ten lifetimes, but here I am, finding a peculiar kind of love for the man who represents everything wacky and preposterous in the world

Grudging love for a showman

today. This newfound affection did not develop in spite of his unapologetic bluster and bombast, but because of them. Who doesn't love a showman, after all? Truth be told, I have never seen anyone turn mass ridicule to personal advantage the way he does. Every gaffe, every outrageous claim, every mangled sentence that should have sunk another politician only seems to buoy him up further and make his brand of politics and posturing a reality no one can ignore. He has mastered the rare art of converting mockery into momentum, of transforming jeers into headlines, and headlines into power. And now, every time he is due to appear on the screen, I stay glued not just to listen to his grand gibberish but to see how this would be translated around the world as veritable geopolitical pronouncements.

It tickles me to see nations and their governing machineries huddle into solemn discussions the moment there is a dubious murmur coming out of the showman's mouth. It makes me wonder if he prepares a list of outrageous decisions and declarations to shock the world day after day, or if he is just a natural impressionist with endless flair for the absurd. If it is the latter, then my love for him will only organically grow, for no one in this world can command attention, spark panic, and dominate news with such effortless chaos. He does it with a wink, a tweet, or a pinched finger, and yet, the world bends to listen. No one has the audacity to pick up the phone and say, "Stop the

war," or the cheek to run phoney peace campaigns in the hope of grabbing the Nobel Prize or making "you are fired" a catchphrase as him. He has a rare acumen that arches over the business, the political, and the theatrical. He can leave you befuddled with his shifting stances and yet be confident in his manner.

There is something almost liberating in that carelessness, a reckless authenticity that bends rules, mocks expectations, and somehow commands respect from a majority of his countrymen. In a world so obsessed with perfection and image, he reminds me that sometimes, power rests not in control but in the fearless freedom to be unapologetically, irrepressibly oneself. We admire people who have the courage to be utterly themselves, even if it makes the rest of us squirm.

And here I am, admitting, with a mixture of disbelief and a strange sort of delight for being an oddball, that I admire a man who could never fit into any mould I know, yet somehow commands my attention, my bemusement, and, yes, my reluctant liking. I may not vote him to power, not even to be the president of a residential society, but I will remember him fondly as one of the most curiously compelling disruptors I have ever known.

The author is a Dubai-based columnist, independent journalist, and children's writing coach

DIGITAL EXPERIENCE



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MONORAIL BREAKDOWN ADDS TO
MUMBAI'S RAIN WOES

Heavy rain has once again disrupted life in Mumbai, with a series of incidents damaging property and endangering lives. On Tuesday, the city's situation worsened when a Monorail train broke down between Chembur and Bhakti Park stations, leaving more than 500 passengers stranded mid-track.

According to officials, the Monorail stopped due to a technical fault. Rescue efforts were swiftly launched by the Mumbai Metropolitan Region Development Authority (MMRDA), supported by the fire brigade and the municipal corporation. Teams reached the site promptly to ensure passenger safety and begin evacuation. All stranded commuters were later rescued without injury, though many reported feeling anxious during

the ordeal. Authorities stated that passenger security was given the highest priority throughout the rescue operation. They also assured the public that measures were being taken to prevent similar disruptions in the future. "There is no cause for panic," an MMRDA spokesperson said, urging Mumbaiers to remain calm.

The incident has reignited concerns about the reliability of the Monorail service, which has faced several operational setbacks since its launch. Combined with the havoc of incessant rains, Tuesday's breakdown highlighted the need for more robust infrastructure and emergency preparedness in Mumbai's public transport system.

DIMPLE WADHAWAN | KANPUR NAGAR

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

Hugs and fists endure

For all the variations in tone and temperament of successive leaders, one thing has remained constant in Washington: America's relations with others are guided by interests, never sentiment. Donald Trump was perhaps unique only in dropping the veil of niceties, but the transactional core was always there.

With China, the equation has been even more clear-cut-an adversarial current running without pause for six decades, no matter the passing optics of summits or smiles.

Which is why our present theatre of strained gestures toward the United States, or the forced courtesies with Beijing, are unlikely to endure as grand milestones. They will pass, as they have before, with the pendulum swinging back to the familiar blend of hugs and fists in both directions.

Russia, by contrast, has stood apart, often less a partner of convenience than a comrade of conviction, stitched in the sturdy fabric of trust. Even as interests shift, trust has a longer shelf life, and the Russian bear hug stays warm.

In geopolitics, sentiment bends easily, but trust endures. For India, navigating this triad means balancing pragmatism with memory

R NARAYANAN | MUMBAI

Assault on Delhi Chief Minister

Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta was assaulted on Wednesday morning by a man from Gujarat during a weekly public hearing at her official residence in Civil Lines.

The alleged attacker, identified as Sakariya Rajeshbhai Khimjibhai from Rajkot district, was promptly restrained by the CM's security entourage before the police took him into custody for questioning.

Sakariya, 41, allegedly attacked Gupta when his turn arrived while the CM was listening to grievances during a Jan Sunwai (public hearing) programme.

I strongly condemn this incident, which is a cowardly attack. In a democracy, there is space for disagreement and protest, but there is no place for violence.

This is very sad; politics must be free of violence. The BJP is the mother of violence. People are angry with the BJP as the promises made are not being fulfilled. Whoever is behind this should be investigated. However, as the BJP used to say when Arvind Kejriwal was attacked — that he had staged it himself-now the same question must be asked.

This incident also highlights the unsafe nature of Delhi. If the CM of Delhi is not safe, how can an ordinary man or woman be safe?

BHAGWAN THADANI | MUMBAI

Rahul's Allegations Turn Heat on EC

Come important elections, whether in a State or at the Centre, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi comes up with provocative and sensational issues.

In the run-up to the 2019 Lok Sabha elections, he coined the slogan *Chowkidar Chor Hai* in reference to Prime Minister Modi, which reportedly left even some seasoned senior leaders in the Congress squirming and for which he subsequently apologised in the Supreme Court. As for the voters, they expressed their displeasure abundantly through the ballot.

Now Rahul has turned his ire on the Election Commission, accusing it of "vote theft and inflated voter lists" in support of the ruling BJP. When the EC challenged him to either submit an affidavit in support of his allegations or apologise, he threatened punitive action against the CEC and colleagues if and when the INDIA bloc comes to power, as if that were the foremost task of a new Government.

For far too long, politicians have abused or intimidated officials and constitutional functionaries, with the latter often silent to avoid confrontation. This trend cannot continue indefinitely. If Rahul has proof, he should place it before the public; likewise, the EC should refute with facts, not engage in a street brawl.

V JAYARAMAN | CHENNAI

Reducing carbon footprint of apparel sector

Minimising this large ecological footprint of the apparel sector requires a fundamental rethinking of our approach to clothing and fashion. The various facets of the circular economy offer options; on one hand, to choose for eco-friendly clothing, and on the other, to allow individuals to stay stylish and socially accepted

FIRST
Column

SUMANA
DATTA

Amidst a world grappling with multiple environmental crisis — from global warming and toxic waste to air pollution and biodiversity loss — many of us remain unaware of how our clothing and fashion choices contribute to these crises.

An estimated 10 per cent of global carbon emissions come from textile industry, surpassing those from international aviation and maritime shipping combined. The textile industry also ranks third in water degradation.

Alarmingly, garment waste is India's third largest municipal waste source, taking up to 100 years to decompose. The entire cycle of clothing production, consumption and disposal leaves a substantial ecological footprint.

Minimising this large ecological footprint of the apparel sector requires a fundamental rethinking of our approach to clothing and fashion. How often do we pause to take stock of the garments adorning our closets? If we were to tally up our clothing possessions, the sheer number might be astonishing; and might also reveal a striking contradiction between our needs and our buying habits.

In India, numerous occasions from cultural celebrations to personal milestones like weddings and birthdays, each demand their own stylish splendour.

In the era of consumerism and fast fashion, repeating outfits across multiple events can feel like a social transgression, compelling us to constantly acquire new attire.

This relentless cycle of accumulation not only leads to unused garments cluttering our cupboard, but also contributes significantly to ecological footprint.

Reuse Recycle Reduce

The various facets of the circular economy offer options, on one hand, to choose for eco-friendly clothing, and on the other, to allow individuals to stay stylish and socially accepted while minimising the need to own numerous clothes.

Circular fashion principles like sorting, grading, recycling, and redesigning reduce ecological footprint by minimising waste.



THE INDIAN
ONLINE APPAREL
RENTAL MARKET
IS ESTIMATED TO
BE WORTH US\$ 3-4
BILLION,
INDICATING
SIGNIFICANT
POTENTIAL FOR
FURTHER
GROWTH

The writer is Delhi-based Environmental Social Scientist. She served as an Assistant Professor at Ambedkar University Delhi and holds a PhD from the Sustainable Consumption Institute at the University of Manchester, UK

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In recycling, fibres extracted from used textiles as also polyester from plastic bottles, are being repurposed to create new fabrics. Major global brands, including those operating in India, are increasingly incorporating recycled fibres into their production processes, driven by both environmental concerns and consumer demand for sustainable products. Marks & Spencer, for example, is committed to sustainability in its clothing production.

The brand ensures that the cotton used in its garments is either organic or sourced from recycled materials. Furthermore, it has set a goal to use only recycled polyester by 2025.

Similarly, the H&M Group has made significant strides in integrating recycled materials into its products. In 2023, 25 per cent of the materials used were recycled, with a target to increase this to 50 per cent by 2030.

To further enhance sustainability efforts and transparency, the Higg Index, developed by the Sustainable Clothing Alliance (SCA) in the United States, offers

an online self-assessment tool to provide valuable insights to promote responsible practices in the fashion industry.

In another approach to recycling, discarded clothing and factory waste from garment production are salvaged and repurposed through cutting, reassembling, or refurbishment to create new garments.

Patchwork denim stands out as a prime example of this refurbished product category.

Although refurbished, remanufactured, and redesigned garments crafted from discarded materials cater to high-end clientele in the global North markets, their popularity remains relatively limited in India.

The most critical yet underexplored facet of circularity with tangible potential to advance environmental sustainability in India is rental fashion.

While informal clothes exchanges among friends and relatives have long been part of Indian culture, formalised clothing rental services offer a more structured and scalable approach.

These services allow individuals to rent garments for a set duration and also contributes their own pieces for others to use. Renting high-end Indian traditional attires like wedding sarees or lehengas for women and sherwani or suit for men can be particularly popular.

It underscores the potential for innovative solutions to address sustainability concerns while still enables individuals to access a variety of outfits without the need for repeated use, avoid overspend their money and overuse of global precious resources.

The global trends

According to Global Data, the global clothing rental market reached a value of US\$ 6.2 billion in 2023, with North America leading as the largest market, followed by Europe and Asia.

By Rotation, a UK-based peer-to-peer fashion rental mobile app, encourages members to rent clothes they need and lend the ones they use occasionally.

Since its launch in 2019, the app has amassed over 150,000 users. Ralph

Lauren, the renowned fashion designer from New York City, ventured into the rental market by introducing a subscription service in the US in 2021, with plans starting at US\$125 per month.

This market is projected to grow to US\$ 4.4. billion by 2028. Meanwhile, the Indian online apparel rental market is estimated to be worth US\$ 3-4 billion, indicating significant potential for further growth and expansion.

Although there is no available data, anecdotal evidence suggests that the practice of renting clothes, especially for wedding, is most prevalent in the state of Gujarat.

A survey conducted by Rent the Runway found that rented clothes resulted in a 24 per cent reduction in energy use, a 6 per cent decrease in water use, and a 3 per cent reduction in CO2 emissions compared to retail purchased clothes.

However, the advantages of clothing rental exten beyond environmental conservation. By allowing multiple users to access and enjoy fast fashion garments, rental services promote equitable consumption, with rental fees typically ranging from 10-15 per cent of the item's original costs. Despite these potential benefits, the

widespread adoption of clothing rental faces challenges, particularly regarding hygiene standards and logistical issues such as dry cleaning and delivery. Moreover, the seasonal nature of demand, with peaks during wedding seasons, presents a unique challenge for service providers, especially in countries like India.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the emergence of apparel rental services presents a captivating opportunity to merge style, social status with ecological sustainability, demonstrating that mindful consumption can coexist with fashion-forward choices. Ultimately, embracing clothing rental and other circular fashion practices can not only reduce waste and minimise resource consumption but also inspire a broader shift toward more sustainable lifestyles.

Through collective action of stakeholders, including producers, consumers, and the broader apparel industry, conscious choices can pave way for a future where style and sustainability seamlessly coexist, leading to an environmentally responsible tomorrow.

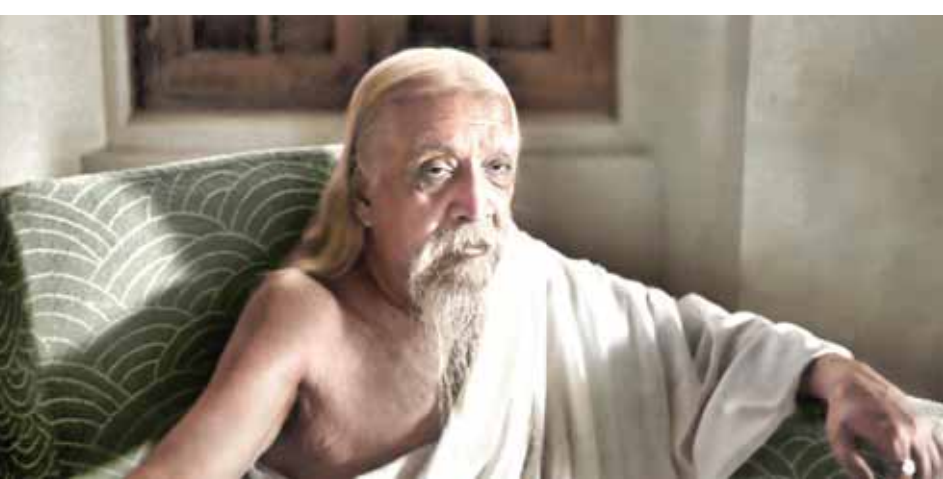
Sri Aurobindo's ideals in the age of Artificial Intelligence

MANOJ
SINHA

RAMANAND
SHARMA

The machines have learned to dream. They can paint in Monet's hues before breakfast, sing like Kishore Kumar, and draft legal briefs by night-fall. Artificial Intelligence dazzles with feats that would have been science fiction a decade ago. Yet the brighter their intelligence burns, the dimmer the human flame of meaning seems to grow. This is the paradox of our era: technological power accelerating at unprecedented speed, while our sense of purpose falters.

Ray Kurzweil, herald of the Singularity, charts humanity's arc from stone tools to a future where, by 2045, non-biological intelligence eclipses all human minds. His timeline predicts artificial general intelligence by 2029, brain-cloud fusion in the 2030s, and lifespans approaching a millennium. Kurzweil speaks in quasi — spiritual tones of the Universe "waking up," yet his path is entirely material: faster chips, denser data, sharper scans, until mind and machine converge. In his vision, transcendence is engineered, immortality uploaded, creativity distilled into code — a dream intoxicating for engineers, because here, existence itself can be debugged. A century before Kurzweil, Sri Aurobindo drew a different map. A revolutionary turned yogi with a Cambridge mind and poet's voice, he recognised the mind's vast potential but did not equate intelligence with evolution's end. For him, the next leap was the supramental consciousness: a luminous awareness that knows without division, loves without calculation, and creates without exhaustion. While Kurzweil measures ascent in computational throughput, Aurobindo measures it in depth and breadth of consciousness. One seeks transcendence through augmentation; the other through awakening. The distinction is not incremental but fundamental. Modern neuroscience reinforces this gap. Anil Seth emphasises that consciousness is a biological property shaped over millions of years, not a guaranteed byproduct of computation. AI can be brilliant yet never conscious, just as a simple organism may experience subjectivity without high intelligence. Intelligence is a faculty of



doing; consciousness is a state of being. The "hard problem" of consciousness cannot be solved with faster processors or larger datasets.

For Aurobindo, evolution is unfinished. The next stage is spiritual, not mechanical or genetic. "The end of evolution," he asserts, "is not the perfection of matter or mind, but the emergence of the supramental consciousness." This mode of being integrates knowledge, will, and creativity, harmonising inner and outer life. Humanity could wield technologies without being enslaved by them. His warning resonates today: intelligence without consciousness is a half-built bridge over a bottomless abyss.

AI is now spilling into arts once considered uniquely human — music, literature, painting. Yet these feats are pattern recognition, not self-aware creation. As Aurobindo argued, the mind analyses; consciousness integrates and liberates. Beyond ethics, these applications expose legal gaps in ownership, liability, and consent. Western capitals respond with lawsuits; the EU flexes regulation; Beijing exercises preemptive control. All are material solutions — technical fixes — but they miss the evolution Aurobindo insisted upon. Without consciousness, every corrective measure merely redistributes symptoms. India stands at a crossroads. With its moon rover, vibrant startups, and national AI mission, the country can compete technologically. But Aurobindo's vision suggests a higher calling: moral and spiritual guidance when machines outrun conscience. Leadership in AI need not mean dominating chip foundries; it can mean setting ethical, philosophical, and legal boundaries that shape human destiny.

Thinkers such as Iain McGilchrist highlight that understanding — embedded in the human body and mortality — is distinct from

information processing. AI can simulate knowledge and ethics, but cannot experience loss, mortality, or love. Rajiv Malhotra warns against confusing simulation with reality: a silicon mind is a copy, not consciousness itself. Yuval Harari's "Dataism" reduces life to algorithms, erasing individuality; Aurobindo counters that data is raw marble, consciousness the sculptor. The struggle between consciousness and code will define civilisations. Economically, AI concentrates power; politically, it frames global thought; personally, it risks eroding judgment and agency. India's path is not to out-build the West or out — surveil the East, but to out-guide both, rooted in Dharma, Nyaya, and Lokasangraha. Digital public goods, from UPI to the Open Network for Digital Commerce, hint at inclusive, principled governance, a foundation for AI ethics.

Kurzweil's Singularity seeks mind-machine fusion. Aurobindo's seeks mind-self fusion. One is coded transcendence; the other, awakened. Consciousness is the operating system for intelligence; without it, even the most sophisticated algorithms are unstable. Policy, law, and design must amplify human creativity, not reduce it to algorithmic obedience.

The choice is stark: let AI amplify our lowest instincts, or harness it for the highest possibilities. For India, the challenge is historic: to ensure that, even in a world of machine brilliance, humans remain conscious. The West delivers machines; the East, if mindful, can give the world meaning. In the age of AI, the question is not whether machines will awaken — but whether we will.

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Soft Skills Will Reshape India's Employment Landscape

DINESH
SOOD

Over the last decade, India's job market has undergone a quiet but profound transformation. Technical qualifications and professional degrees remain essential, but employers are increasingly looking beyond certificates. The spotlight today is firmly on soft skills - communication, adaptability, teamwork, problem-solving, leadership, and emotional intelligence. In a rapidly changing economy where technology evolves faster than formal education can adapt, these human-centric skills have become the bridge between employability and long-term career success.

The rise of automation and artificial intelligence is redrawing the contours of work. The World Economic Forum's Future of Jobs Report 2024 projects that by 2027, almost 44 per cent of workers' skills will be disrupted. Roles demanding analytical thinking, resilience, empathy, and continuous learning will see the fastest growth.

The Employability Gap

Every year, India produces 1.5 million engineers and 3 million graduates, yet employability across disciplines still hovers below 50 per cent. The reason is straightforward: soft skills remain absent from mainstream curricula. Classroom teaching focuses on technical competence but neglects communication, teamwork, spoken English, presentation skills, and time management. The result? Fresh graduates who are technically sound but ill-equipped for real-world workplaces.

Emerging Workplace Realities

IT Services: India's \$250 billion IT industry thrives on global contracts. Here, technical prowess gets you in the door, but it is cultural sensitivity, effective communication, and collaboration that propel careers forward.

Start-up Ecosystem: With 90,000+ registered start-ups, India is the third-largest start-up hub in the world. In this fast-paced environment, leadership, negotiation, and crisis management are not add-ons — they are survival skills.

Manufacturing and Retail: As global supply chains look to India under the "Make in India" push, technical proficiency must go hand in hand with discipline, adaptability, and customer orientation.

Gig and Freelance Economy: India already has 7.7 million gig workers, a number projected to

rise to 23 million by 2030. For freelancers, delivery executives, or digital professionals, skills such as professionalism, conflict resolution, and online etiquette often matter as much as task execution.

Why are soft skills so central today?

Globalisation of Work: Remote collaboration and cross-border projects make cultural sensitivity and effective communication non-negotiable.

AI & Automation: As machines take over repetitive tasks, uniquely human abilities — creativity, emotional intelligence, and leadership — become the competitive edge.

Building a Soft Skills Revolution

If India is to truly harness its demographic dividend, soft skills training must become a national priority. The need for this is urgent. Some strategies are already visible, but they need scale and urgency:

Curriculum Integration: The National Education Policy calls for holistic learning. Colleges and vocational institutes must embed role-play, debates, and teamwork-based projects into their pedagogy.

Corporate Skillings: Companies need to ramp up investments in employee training. Infosys, for example, spends ₹1,200 crore annually on re-skilling, with significant emphasis on soft skills.

Public-Private Partnerships: Apprenticeship models for communication, leadership, and workplace etiquette should be a key part of government — run technical training programmes, especially in semi-urban and rural India.

Digital Platforms: With 800 million internet users, EdTech platforms have the potential to deliver affordable, scalable soft skills modules, transforming workforce readiness nationwide. This digital revolution is a key part of the solution.

Conclusion

One thing is clear: hard skills alone are not enough. The careers of tomorrow will be built as much on emotional intelligence, adaptability, and communication as on coding or engineering. India's challenge — and opportunity — lies in embedding these soft skills into classrooms, corporate cultures, and public skilling initiatives. If we succeed, the country will not just meet its employment challenge but also emerge as the global powerhouse of talent in the 21st century.

The writer is a Co-Founder and MD of Orane International and a Network Member of India International Skill Centres (IISCs), an initiative of Govt

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INDIAN EXPRESS IS NOT AN INDUSTRY. IT IS A MISSION.
— Ramnath Goenka

GIG WORKERS' WELFARE NEEDS URGENT ATTENTION FROM STATES & BUSINESSES

THE Karnataka Assembly on Tuesday passed the Karnataka Platform-based Gig Workers (Social Security and Welfare) Bill to ensure a degree of security for those working on contract with digital platforms for delivering services. The bill provides a dispute resolution mechanism; establishes a gig workers' welfare board, which will set up a welfare fund; provides for registration of workers, aggregators or platforms; income security; and reasonable working conditions. These are essential covers for gig workers who have worked through a pandemic and continue to toil through regular extreme weather conditions to deliver goods while braving a range of threats from air pollution to traffic hazards.

The timing of the bill's passage in Karnataka coincides with heavy rains and inundation in several parts of India—a steep challenge through which gig workers continue their work of delivering even when offices, schools and colleges are ordered shut for people's safety. Besides, gig workers also face challenges such as income instability, lack of paid time off, and limited access to health insurance.

The gig economy has been in India since around 2010, when food delivery and ride-hailing platforms arrived. But a regulatory mechanism to ensure security for gig workers has remained conspicuous by its absence across India. So far, Rajasthan is the only state with a regulatory mechanism for gig workers with its Rajasthan Platform-based Gig Workers (Registration and Welfare) Act, 2023. The Karnataka Bill now has to pass through the legislative council to become an Act and benefit four lakh workers in the state.

The gig economy has emerged as a key employment generator globally. According to Niti Aayog's estimates, India's gig sector had 77 lakh workers in 2020 and is expected to triple to 2.35 crore by 2029-30. The sector's growth has drastically shifted work practices over the last few years. It has led to new issues relating to employment, to which employers and business membership organisations have responded within a regulated framework in many countries. The regulatory landscape and various aspects of worker welfare in the gig economy are still nascent in India. The need of the hour is for institutions like business organisations to take up a greater role in shaping social dialogue and organising efforts to address the challenges faced by gig workers.

SCHOOL MERGERS RAISE CONCERNS ABOUT ACCESS

THE Uttar Pradesh government's decision to merge over 10,000 government primary and upper primary schools with fewer than 50 students has triggered a serious debate. The move is explained as being in line with the National Education Policy 2020, which encourages school clusters and resource sharing for improving learning environments. Several states are taking similar steps, suggesting that this is becoming a broader trend in the management of primary education. However, concerns are being raised and legal redress is being sought. The Right to Education Act, 2009 guarantees free and compulsory education in neighbourhood schools for children aged between six and 14. The Act does not set any minimum enrolment requirement for schools to exist. Closing or merging schools in ways that make them less accessible poses a risk of diluting the neighbourhood principle that underpins the law. Neither the NEP nor a government order can supersede children's fundamental right enshrined under Article 21A of the Constitution.

Besides the legal concerns, the education ministry has pointed out declining enrolments in many government schools, a trend confirmed by UDISE+ data. Rather than merging schools, it is pertinent to ask why parents are withdrawing their children from schools. The answers are well known: inadequate facilities, teacher absenteeism, and a lack of accountability. These are failures of governance rather than a lack of demand for education. If resources were directed towards improving infrastructure, training teachers, and ensuring consistent quality, enrolments could rise again. For many families in towns and villages, especially for the marginalised, a nearby school is what makes education possible. When that school is shut, the burden of distance falls on the child, girls in particular. When schools move farther away, dropout rates for girls rise sharply. In UP, with a 57.18 percent female literacy rate, the loss of neighbourhood schools can only deepen the existing inequalities.

Such mergers may appear efficient in the short term, but the long-term costs could be considerable. A practical approach would be to strengthen the schools that already exist—by improving classrooms, ensuring teachers' presence, and making schools centres of community trust. The constitutional promise under Article 21A is not simply about cost-effective administration. It is about opening doors of opportunity for every child, regardless of background. Ensuring that neighbourhood schools remain accessible and vibrant is central to that promise.

QUICK TAKE

CONNECTING NORTHEAST

IT'S heartening to note the government's statement in parliament on Wednesday that 40,663 villages across the seven northeastern states and Sikkim have been brought under 4G mobile coverage. This includes 3,094 out of Arunachal Pradesh's 5,343 villages, 2,132 in Manipur out of 2,581, and 1,213 in Nagaland out of 1,355. The BharatNet project is indeed an essential effort in extending and upgrading the country's mobile network to farflung areas. When mobile coverage was stopped in Manipur during ethnic clashes, commerce and education suffered a lot. When we talk of strengthening our borders with better infrastructure, mobile connectivity is as important as building roads and bridges. The rest of the Northeast, too, must be covered.

LAWRENCE Freedman, emeritus professor of war studies at King's College London, has an acerbic description of the statecraft of US President Donald Trump: "Never assume you know what Donald Trump is going to do or say next because it is unlikely he does. Take seriously what he says at any time because that probably accurately reflects what he is thinking, but some of his thoughts can be very transitory and are soon replaced by others. If you don't like the positions being held on one day, push back because he might be convinced to hold a different position the next. Equally, when satisfied with today's position, do not assume it will last."

Unsurprisingly, the representatives of Europe's ruling elite who headed to the White House to meet with Trump on Monday counted that there was scope to push back the consensus reached at the Alaska meeting between Trump and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin on August 15 to the effect that achieving "a comprehensive, just, and sustainable resolution to the conflict surrounding Ukraine—including the eradication of its root causes" should be the priority, rather than an immediate ceasefire to end the war.

The European allies are alarmed that Trump dropped the idea of imposing crippling sanctions on Russia. But they feel excited that on the contentious issue of security guarantee for Ukraine, Trump extracted a "horosho" (okay) from Putin, which could open a pathway for inserting themselves into the Ukraine settlement process. The play here is to lock Trump into Europe and an anti-Russian Ukraine. Trump seemed to acquiesce when he told *Fox News* that American forces could assist Ukraine's allies in deterring future Russian attacks.

It will be extremely difficult for the present-day European leaders, whose rhetoric even today is replete with animus against Putin and Russia, to resume contacts directly with Putin. But on the other hand, the Europeans anyway have nothing concrete to propose constructively, either—apart from beating the dead horse of a ceasefire and piling even more sanctions on Russia and repeating the idea of a Western force to give security guarantee in a post-ceasefire politico-military scenario in Ukraine. In the final analysis, the Europeans' efforts narrow down to loosening the newfound bonding between Trump and Putin, which could make the Alaska matrix fluid and inchoate.

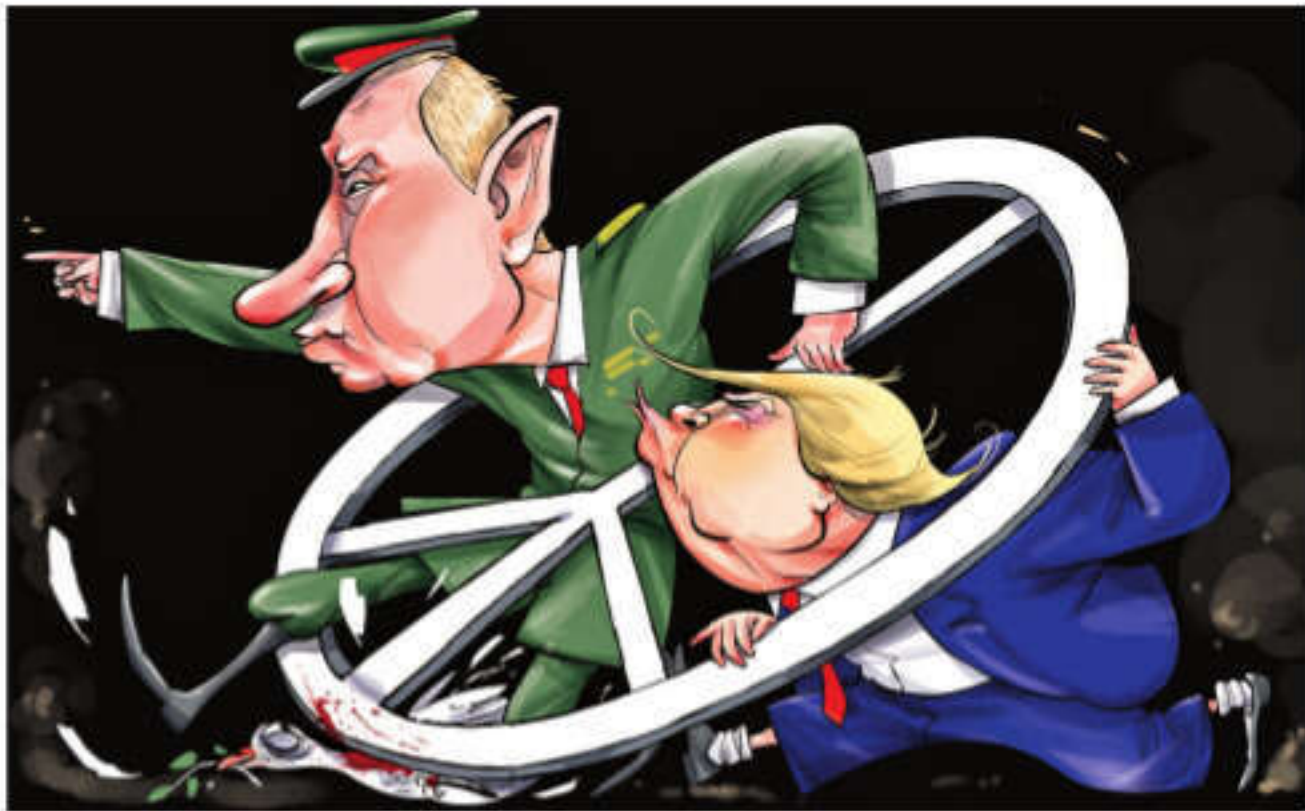
How far these efforts will succeed

Though Europe has inserted itself into the Ukraine peace process and may raise a force to ensure it, Trump is clear he and Putin are the main deciders

TRUMP FOCUSES ON PEACE, EUROPE ON THE PIECES

M K BHADRAKUMAR

Former diplomat



SOURAV ROY

time only can tell. But the interplay of these contradictions through the week since the Alaska meeting has made the overall "constructive and mutually respectful atmosphere" at Anchorage—to quote Putin—and his "friendly and trust-based conversation" with Trump less alluring and seemingly fragile.

And then, there are the moving parts. Principally, the Russian offensive is sharply accelerating as it made it a point to launch the largest strike this month on Ukraine after Trump hosted Volodymyr Zelenskyy, and EU and UK leaders for talks. This is no small matter, since major sticking points of the peace talks are said to be potential land swaps and security guarantees for Ukraine.

In the run-up to the Alaska meeting, Trump had threatened Russia with "se-

vere consequences" if it did not accept a ceasefire, but afterwards, he summarily dropped that demand and said it was best to focus on a comprehensive peace deal, as Putin had pushed for. Again, Zelenskyy's European partners are not only supportive of a strong Ukrainian army that is provided with weapons and training by Western partners, but also are offering Ukraine a guarantee resembling Nato's collective defence mandate, Article 5, which stipulates that an attack on one member of the alliance is considered an attack on all.

Over and above, the European allies are looking to set up a force that could backstop any peace agreement in Ukraine. A 'Coalition of the Willing'—30 countries, including European nations Japan and Australia—has signed up to

BATTLING AI THREATS WITH AI

SASMIT PATRA

Rajya Sabha MP from Odisha

launched a pilot project implementing a federated AI model in collaboration with leading banks to enhance fraud detection and risk assessment across the banking ecosystem. Mastercard's decision intelligence platform analyses 16,000 crore transactions annually, assigning risk scores in milliseconds to block unauthorised activity.

Some of the key roles of AI-driven models include threat detection and prevention through anomaly detection and behavioural analysis for recognising suspicious actions. With ML algorithms, AI models continuously monitor transactions and detect unusual activities. It



XCOM

With the growth of digital transactions, frauds have also grown manifold—including those driven by AI tools. While the RBI and National Payments Corporation are deploying AI to detect and prevent threats, systemic compliance lapses can also be fixed with the help of AI to strengthen the system

also consists of automated incident response systems. With these systems, AI-based cybersecurity models can execute predefined responses by quickly recognising cyber incidents with AI-powered security orchestration, automation and response or SOAR systems. This incident response significantly minimises the damage before it escalates.

Further, AI-powered endpoint security solutions and antivirus provide pro-

MAILBAG

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Russian gains

Ref: *There is no logic to Trump's secondary tariffs anymore* (Aug 20). While the Alaska meet concluded indecisively, Russia successfully came out of isolation caused by the US sanctions. As a triangular meet is still on the cards, a pause on tariffs imposed on countries for buying Russian oil should be inherent.

NR Nagarajan, Virudhunagar

Unealthy evidence

Ref: *Set politics aside in mass burials probe* (Aug 20). The Dharmasthala mass burials case demands an inquiry free from political and religious pressure. Though little evidence has surfaced, families still report missing persons—fueling suspicion. The SIT must act quickly, for justice delayed is justice denied. Only fairness and science can reveal the truth.

M Barathi, email

Insurance vigilance

Ref: *Cover when needed* (Aug 20). With many claims denied, regulators must enforce fairness. Proposal forms, often complex and in tiny print, should be simplified, and insurers must carefully check them during registration to prevent disputes and protect policyholders.

A Senthil Kumar, Tiruppur

Propping banks

Ref: *Too big to fail isn't too clever to regulate* (Aug 20). Privatising banks through writing off bad corporate loans and eventually gaining control will not sustain in the long run. It would be at the cost of small and medium range depositors. Strict financial discipline by the regulator is needed to build trust among depositors.

Jayachandran C, email

Misguided Tiger

Ref: *Beyond Tigerism in Sri Lanka* (Aug 20). Egged on by self-serving acolytes in Sri Lanka and Tamil Nadu, Velupillai Prabhakaran developed megalomaniac tendencies and frittered away the opportunities that lay in front of him for a peaceful solution of the Eelam issue. Consequently, he and his misguided followers paid a heavy price.

M V Sundaraman, Chennai

Veep balance

Ref: *Ex-judge Reddy is Oppn's VP pick* (Aug 20). The INDIA bloc has demonstrated to the nation at large that it is no less than the NDA when it comes to making sagacious political moves. At least linguistic fanaticism would take a back seat in the matter.

S Ramakrishnasayee, email

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{ OUR TAKE }

Desirable, but unfeasible

In an ideal world with apolitical institutions, a minister's conduct should be above reproach. The realpolitik backdrop of the three bills raises the possibility of misuse

The statement of objectives and reasons for three controversial bills introduced in the Lok Sabha on Wednesday—which propose that a sitting minister, chief minister or even the prime minister can lose their post if they are arrested or detained for 30 consecutive days over an offence that carries a jail term of five years or more—make for interesting reading. They say that elected representatives represent the hopes and aspirations of ordinary people and hence, they need to rise above political interests and keep their character and conduct above “any ray of suspicion”. They add that any allegations of serious offence and subsequent arrest diminish the constitutional trust reposed in them by the people and hence they must resign or be removed. In an ideal State with robust institutions and apolitical investigation agencies, such an eventuality could well be possible, even desirable. After all, elected representatives should adhere to a higher moral standard and set an example for probity in public life. And to be fair, most senior ministers or CMs do resign when arrested or sent to jail, even as they deny the allegations involved or call them politically motivated.

Unfortunately, the political landscape is far from ideal. Rarely has the Indian polity been more polarised: There is a complete breakdown of any working relationship between the government and the Opposition; public trust in political allegations and counter-allegations are at an all-time-low; most institutions and police forces have been politicised; and the highest court in the land has repeatedly questioned the credibility of probes conducted by federal agencies.

Against such a backdrop, it is not difficult to imagine that the three bills can turn the police or probe bodies into political weapons used to destabilise unfriendly governments in the same way that Article 356 once did. It can turn bail hearings into summary acquittal hearings, weaponise the endemic delays in the criminal justice system, even threaten to subvert popular electoral verdict with motivated arrests. The potential for misuse—especially in a context where agencies have been accused by the Supreme Court of using stringent laws such as the Prevention of Money Laundering Act to keep people in jail without any conviction—will remain high.

In any case, since one of the three bills amends the Constitution, it requires the support of at least some sections of the Opposition to garner a two-thirds approval. In today's charged political atmosphere where any common ground between the government and the Opposition is fast vanishing, that will be hard to come by.

Looking for the forest, losing the way in lexicon

Should the State's understanding of what constitutes forests be a matter of semantic jugglery? Haryana seems to think so, holding the “dictionary definition” of forests to mean areas with 40% canopy density spread over at least five hectares if isolated or at least two hectares if contiguous with government-notified forests. Its excuse is that the Supreme Court last year directed states to use the dictionary definition of forests in the broad sense for identifying forests, as established in the 1996 *Godavarman* judgment. While the Oxford Learner's Dictionary defines forest as a large area of land that is thickly covered with trees, Haryana seems to have adopted a very restrictive, literal understanding of the same, ignoring its particular vegetation context. As a consequence, vast tracts of the Aravallis will now be left out of protection under the Forest Conservation Act (FCA). The vegetation has adapted to the scant rainfall in these areas; the open forests and scrublands gives the Aravalli ecosystem a much-needed shield against exploitation. This is particularly important for the national capital region, where the urbanisation push poses a significant threat to the deemed forests.

The Haryana government seems to have prioritised its revenue imperatives over conservation ones, given FCA barriers to mining, construction, etc, will now not apply. The apex court ordered states to implement the *Godavarman* judgment, a defining order in forest protection, in “letter and spirit”, but Haryana's move falls far short of this. A scientific understanding of what constitutes a forest in a particular geography, with its unique climatological canvas is what Haryana needs. It must prioritise ecological value and not subvert conservation through dubious lexical phrasing.

{ GRAND STRATEGY }

Happymon Jacob



Anatomy of the budding India-China bonhomie

The geopolitical moment marking power shifts among nations and blocs has influenced both Asian powers to recalibrate their relationship

Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi's just concluded visit to India and the agreement between the two sides on the India-China boundary question is an encouraging sign in mending the relationship between the two countries, which has been struggling to normalise since the border stand-off in 2020. Wang Yi's visit to Delhi and the agreement outlining several measures to manage the contested border ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's planned trip to China for the annual Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Summit also reflect broader changes occurring in geopolitics. The India-China dynamics must also be read in conjunction with the engagement of the two countries with Russia. The three-way conversations involving Russia, India, and China are noteworthy as it is reflective of the broader regional geopolitical realignments in response to US policies towards them.

External affairs minister S Jaishankar is now in Russia. For both India and China (as also for Russia), the three-way conversations present an excellent opportunity to signal to Washington that there are possibilities of alternative global blocs and realignments outside of Washington's orbit and influence.

What is perhaps more important and consequential are the underlying causes behind the current bonhomie between India and China. Beyond the optics, it is also evident that both India and China are eager to achieve a degree of normalcy in their relationship. The statement from the ministry of external affairs on the outcomes of Wang's India visit testifies to that.

It is, therefore, possible to argue that there is a convergence between New Delhi and Beijing on the need to normalise bilateral relations. However, their respective definitions of normalcy are different.

For China, normalcy means moving on from the current border impasse with India and focussing on the global balance of power. As Wang said, “We (India and China) should never allow bilateral relations to be defined by the boundary question or specific differences to affect the overall picture of our bilateral ties.” Without normalcy with India, China knows that it will not be in a position to leverage Indian unhappiness with US President Donald

Trump for its own larger geopolitical purposes. In other words, China seeks to exploit the current opportunity to challenge the US's global supremacy, and for that purpose, normalcy with India would be helpful. But the question is whether Beijing is willing to engage in sustained give-and-take negotiations with New Delhi to settle the border issue. For New Delhi, normalcy with China is centred on disengagement at the border so that it can focus on the larger geopolitical questions of India-China relations, India-China-Russia dynamics, and so on. For India, normalcy on the border and *status quo ante bellum* as of 2020 is key.

China's global objectives behind the current warmth towards India should not be missed. Wang stated recently that “as important members of the Global South, we have the responsibility to take the lead in opposing hegemonism and power politics”. There is little doubt that China would want to use India and Russia, and the Global South, to target the US-led world order. However, let's be clear. If Trump offers a G-2 with China, Beijing is likely to settle for it, sacrificing its secondary geopolitical equations.

A similar logic extends to Russia as well. Moscow would vociferously promote the virtues of an alternative world order outside of the US orbit, but what it wants is to be recognised and treated by Washington and



In an ideal world, New Delhi would prefer to see Chinese power balanced by the US and/or Russia.

AFP

Europe as a great power and be accommodated within the European balance of power system, rather than being part of a China-led global order.

As for India, it will continue to emphasise the importance of the Global South, multipolarity, and global alternatives, but New Delhi is not comfortable being part of a China-led, Russia-backed, non-American world order. If India is accommodated into a US-led world order as an important stakeholder, New Delhi is likely to accept that.

In an ideal world, New Delhi would prefer to see Chinese power balanced by the US and/or Russia. However, since these options are not currently available, it is inclined to settle for underbalancing China, given its lack of capacity to balance Beijing on its own. In that sense, the three countries—India, China, and Russia—are hedging against geopolitical uncertainties and opting for their respective second-best options. This essential geopolitical dynamic should not be lost on our policymakers.

In the meantime, and notwithstanding the deep mistrust between

the two countries, India needs to engage with China for two key reasons. For India, conflict management with China is a key issue, as the fundamental contradictions in the relationship are unlikely to disappear soon.

Therefore, it is essential to establish and strengthen confidence-building measures (CBMs) to manage Sino-Indian tensions. In that sense, the recent agreements are in the right direction.

A no less important reason for India to engage with China on a sustained basis is that managing the relationship with Beijing—its rise as a global power and ambitions for superpower status, aggressive pursuit of its territorial ambitions, and attempts at unipolarity in Asia—is going to be India's most crucial task for the next several decades. From that perspective alone, New Delhi will need to engage productively with Beijing.

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ECI accountability call must not erode faith in democracy

India's democratic experiment has been predicated on our constitutional architecture which distributes power in a manner that tempers tyranny of majority, protects minority voices and institutionalises dissent. Electoral process remains the primary instrument through which legitimacy is conferred and accountability secured. Yet, in recent years, an unsettling pattern has emerged—to question the outcomes of elections and suspect the credibility of democratic process.

Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi's sustained narrative—interventions in Parliament, public rallies and international forums—has consistently projected India as a polity where democratic institutions are hollowing out under the weight of majoritarianism. Beyond partisan disagreement, it carries an implicit suggestion that the electoral mandate is compromised. This rhetoric bears intriguing parallels to populist strategies employed by Donald Trump in the US, albeit emerging from markedly different ideological traditions. Both leaders, in their own registers, have positioned themselves as insurgents against an allegedly compromised establishment. Such strategies, when normalised, recalibrate political discourse from policy and governance to a theatre of existential crisis with long-term implications on institutional resilience.

Gandhi's critique of the government's record on economic inequality, institutional autonomy or minority rights is legitimate and necessary. Yet, when these critiques are coupled with a narrative that elections themselves are a façade, it shifts the debate from “what the government is doing” to “whether democracy itself works”. This is a leap that, once made, is difficult to retract from. For a democracy as vast and fractious as India's, political actors bear a dual responsibility—to mobilise dissent and to safeguard the credibility of institutions that make dissent meaningful. This requires the discipline to challenge those in power without damaging the democratic process itself, while also avoiding blind celebration of every election result.

Critique of governance is essential. It is the lifeblood of a functioning democracy. But underlining the importance of dissent also necessitates a vital distinction between holding power accountable and undermining the foundational and almost sacred compact between the State and its citizens. When political actors portray elections as fundamentally untrustworthy without incontrovertible evidence, they risk transforming healthy scepticism into corrosive cynicism. Such cynicism can breed disengagement, apathy, and an appetite for illiberal alternatives. India is a complex polity and society where a politically acclaimed democratic habitus still struggles to consolidate itself against deeply entrenched social hierarchies. Here, reckless delegitimisation of electoral processes can be especially destabilising.

History offers instructive warnings. In interwar Europe, democratic backsliding often began with gradual undermining of electoral legitimacy by political elites. Once the electorate began to believe that ballots cannot alter outcomes, the logic of democracy collapsed and made space for demagogues who promised order without any pro-

cessual mess. India, with its robust electoral machinery and high voter turnout, has resisted this descent so far. Yet, seeds of distrust, if continually sown and irrigated by prominent leaders, can germinate over time into systemic disillusionment.

Having said this, it is also necessary to point out that the Election Commission of India (ECI)'s conduct too has been far from ideal. An institution entrusted with the sacred task of refereeing democracy must embody a moral poise that commands trust in addition to procedural rigour. Too often, ECI responses have been marked by indignation, defensiveness and petty pique as opposed to clinical transparency. A referee who bristles at scrutiny forgets that in democracy, appearance and legitimacy are as important as the arithmetic of votes. Authority here flows from the letter of law but also fills the intangible reservoir of public confidence.

Philosophically, ECI carries a fiduciary responsibility to the Republic's faith. It is a custodian of that belief which ensures that ballots translate into will and procedures produce justice. But when opacity or defensive retorts replace openness, this fiduciary bond weakens. Institutions must enact the respect they demand through composure, restraint and willingness to be accountable without rancour. The grandeur of a democracy rests on the assurance that processes are beyond suspicion. If those charged with guarding the sanctity of elections appear fragile before criticism, the edifice of trust that sustains the Republic begins to tremble.

Among the many systems devised to govern collective life, democracy endures as the least coercive, the least arbitrary, and the least corrosive of human dignity. Its greatest strength lies in its capacity for peaceful transfer of authority which rests upon the fragile yet profound trust in the fairness of electoral processes. Power, in truth, belongs to the people. Those who govern do so only temporarily, after fulfilling the solemn ritual of votes cast, counted and hands exchanged in accordance with public will. To erode trust in this sacred covenant is to shake the ground on which democracy stands.

However, democracy has its flaws. Its legitimacy derives from reconciling conflicting interests through procedures that are imperfect yet capable of self-correction. To embrace democracy is to embrace the endless negotiation between principle and compromise, between idealism and pragmatism. And this tension is the essence of democratic maturity. For citizens, this maturity means learning to live with outcomes they dislike while also trusting the system's capacity for peaceful redress. For political leaders, it means resisting the temptation to weaponise institutional scepticism for fleeting partisan gains.

In choosing democracy, India has chosen the arduous but noble path of self-government. Preserving it demands more than courage to speak truth to power. It requires the wisdom to speak in ways that keep democratic conversations alive and ensure that faith in the system which sustains the Republic itself.

Shubhrastha is co-author of *The Last Battle of Saraghat: The Story of the BJP's Rise in the North-east*. The views expressed are personal

{ JOHN HEALEY } SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DEFENCE, THE UK



(The UK must be) ready to step in, in the event of a permanent ceasefire, with a multinational force led by Britain and France that is prepared to try and secure that peace for the long term

IBC as a preventive for funds diversion

The Supreme Court ruling annulling its earlier order on the liquidation of Bhushan Steel under Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) reignited the debate on the credibility and transparency of the existing corporate debt resolution framework. On May 2, the Supreme Court ordered the liquidation of Bhushan Power and Steel Ltd., marking one of the most significant tests of the IBC since its enactment in 2016. In that order, the court revoked the resolution plan by JSW Steel and directed the National Company Law Tribunal (NCLT) to initiate liquidation proceedings. The order, which was based on the finding that the resolution plan had procedural flaws and violated the IBC, was annulled on July 31. With promoters and creditors locked in courtroom battles, a key question arises: Does the bankruptcy law have hidden benefits? The prophylactic effects of such legislation often go unnoticed.

An important consideration in the context of India is the effect of the IBC reforms on how managers divert resources. The last decade saw several high-profile cases of fund diversions, leading to financial distress at firms and adverse consequences for their lenders. Can stronger creditor rights reduce fund diversion? The standard approach of using large-scale financial audits to achieve reductions in fund diversions is very costly and is unlikely to work given the fact that auditors are hired by the firms. A well-implemented bankruptcy law can act as an effective deterrent because the penalties arising out of bankruptcy accrue privately to the managers and lead to a larger reduction in the need to conduct deep financial audits. Such hidden effects would, therefore, be a panacea to any country that cannot conduct large-scale audits every so often. A well-functioning bankruptcy law is, therefore, a substitute for the costly, time-consuming, and highly uncertain process of financial audits.

The effect and the underlying mechanisms are tested in a research paper by the author of this article, along with Prasanna Gai, Akshat Singh, and Asha Sundaram. We studied the impact of the IBC reform within Indian business groups, focusing on financially distressed firms. Indeed, IBC does reduce fund diversions (using suspect Related Party Transactions, or RPTs, as a proxy). The strongest effect of the reform was seen in the form of reduced related party loan outflows—a clear indication of a reduction in fund diversion.

What explains this change? The IBC law contains provisions that act in both directions—for

creditors to force firms to reduce diversions as well as for firms to willingly reduce diversions to avoid bankruptcy. On the creditors' side, higher and quicker expected recoveries would make them more willing to initiate insolvency proceedings against firms. A streamlined, time-bound resolution process and the establishment of specialised courts (NCLTs and the appellate courts) further increase creditors' hopes of higher recoveries. On the firms' side, the fact that the control of the company shifts to a professional resolution manager upon admission of insolvency disincentivises managers when it comes to fund diversion. This threat in itself makes pre-default fund diversion a much costlier proposition.

The research finds that after IBC, firms voluntarily reduced fund diversions and repaid banks. This is an ideal outcome, given the lower costs associated with voluntary changes in behaviour. Firms relied on internal funds by cutting back on dividends and related-party payments to reduce bank debt. However, there was no improvement in firm profitability, sales or investment after the reform, indicating that the reduction in dividends and RPTs was a result of improved financial discipline rather than firm performance.

For the policy to continue to generate sound financial behaviour over time, the threat of penalty under bankruptcy must be sustained. The fact that most cases under IBC do not adhere to the prescribed timelines is not ideal. In line with this hypothesis, in the study, the most pronounced effects were observed in the first two years following the reform. The signs of early deterrence were strong as financial RPTs ceased altogether in many cases. By 2019, the effect weakened, becoming smaller and more uncertain, hinting that the law's grip may have loosened over time.

The early outcomes from the IBC are promising and encouraging, though they also highlight the areas that require sustained attention. Amidst this, allowing creditors to start the insolvency process outside the court system—under the new Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (Amendment) Bill—is a much welcome provision. Ensuring timely resolution, strengthening creditor rights, and addressing practices that undermine transparency can contribute to building a more resilient corporate insolvency framework.

Gautham Udupa is with the Centre for Advanced Financial Research and Learning (CAFRAL), Mumbai. The views expressed are personal

‘Trust but verify’ holds the key for improving ties with China

THE thaw in India-China ties, strained by the 2020 border clash, is a welcome development. The recent visit of Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi to New Delhi has resulted in several tangible outcomes, including the decision to resume direct flight connectivity and strengthen trade and investment flows. There are also unconfirmed reports that Beijing is willing to address India's concerns regarding fertilisers, rare earths, and tunnel boring machines. However, our policy and decision makers must not go overboard about the thaw. The two governments have decided to facilitate visas for tourists, business professionals, media personnel, and other visitors, aiming to improve people-to-people and commercial exchanges. In a symbolic move

to enhance cultural and religious linkages, they will resume the Indian pilgrimage to Mount Kailash (Gang Renpoche) and Lake Manasarovar (Mapam Yun Tso) in Tibet from next year. Additionally, border trade will reopen through three designated points-Lipulekh Pass, Shipki La Pass, and Nathu La Pass. These arrangements underscore efforts to gradually normalise border-related interactions and build confidence. On the sensitive boundary question, the two sides agreed to establish at least three new mechanisms dedicated to managing disputes.

Both countries reaffirmed their commitment to using existing diplomatic and military channels for border management and to advance discussions on de-escalation. The Ministry of Exter-

nal Affairs highlighted that these steps were aimed at preventing misunderstandings and ensuring stability along the Line of Actual Control. Prime Minister Narendra Modi met Wang at his residence following a round of high-level talks with National Security Advisor Ajit Doval and External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar. In a post on X, the Prime Minister noted that “stable, predictable, constructive ties between India and China will contribute significantly to regional as well as global peace and prosperity.” Modi is scheduled to visit Tianjin for the SCO Summit on August 31 and September 1, a trip that adds significance to the renewed dialogue. According to China's foreign ministry, Wang conveyed to Doval that maintaining stable relations serves the

core interests of both nations. He called for building trust through dialogue, broadening cooperation, and working toward consensus on sensitive issues, particularly boundary management. Doval emphasized that the special representatives' talks hold “very special importance” considering Modi's upcoming visit.

All these are nice expressions, but the Indian side should never forget the fact that the Chinese are adept at interpreting the otherwise unexceptional phraseology as it suits them—often in a most disingenuous manner. This diplomatic engagement has come against the backdrop of growing sourness in New Delhi's relations with Washington. US President Donald Trump's decision to raise tariffs on Indian ex-

ports—doubling them to 50 per cent, including an additional 25 per cent levy—over India's purchase of Russian crude has created new challenges for India. Against this shifting geopolitical landscape, India's balancing act with China acquires added urgency. Still, enthusiasm must be balanced by prudence. New Delhi must assess every assurance by Beijing carefully. The current rapprochement should not obscure the reality of unresolved border disputes (primarily because of China's stubbornness), deep mistrust, and divergent strategic goals. Rebuilding ties with China may indeed open new avenues for cooperation, but it must proceed with vigilance and verification at every step. India should follow the adage ‘trust but verify’.

MEDLEY



LETTERS

India to have a south Indian V-P

Election to the august post of Vice-President has been necessitated by the sudden resignation of incumbent Jagdeep Dhankar. The September 9 election is a brutal south vs. south showdown as both the ruling and opposition groups have nominated candidates from the southern states. C.P. Radhakrishnan from Tamil Nadu, the NDA nominee, is pitted against Justice Buchireddy Sudarshan Reddy from Telangana as the I.N.D.I.A bloc candidate. However, there is a lot of difference between the two contenders. While Radhakrishnan was an active politician until he became Maharashtra's Governor, Justice Reddy hails from an agrarian family and has a long experience in judiciary, whose apt decisions can enrich our democratic functioning. But there is a clear majority for the ruling nominee in the electoral college. It is an ideological battle that is being held amid growing issues like SIR in Bihar, vote-theft orchestration during the Karnataka and Maharashtra elections and introduction of bills that empower arrest and exit of political leaders if they spend 30 days in jail.

Pratapa Reddy Yaramala, Tiruvuru (AP)

Onus on GHMC chief

This has reference to the news that the GHMC has received around 152 complaints during the Prajwani. Everyone is aware of the perennial issues that have been tormenting citizens for several years now. Many of them air their grievances through media platforms. The common complaints revolve around damaged and overflowing roads, fully occupied footpaths, manholes, undetectable ditches, sagging electrical wires, stray dogs and mosquito menace, to name just a few. The GHMC commissioner must sort out all these recurring issues and provide permanent solutions. It is one way the people can be assured of a clean and healthy environment.

Gudipati Shanti Priya, Secunderabad

Safety measures during Ganesh visarjan

I have been deeply concerned about the tragic incident (THI August 20) in which two youngsters lost their lives after a Ganesh idol accidentally came in contact with high-tension wires in Bandlaguda. This unfortunate accident occurred a day after a similar electrocution case was reported in Ramanthapur. These expose the safety lapses during public processions. Deaths of the two youth are a reminder of the dangers posed by unsafe overhead power lines in residential and procession routes. Despite denials of negligence by the electricity department, it is evident that precautionary measures were far from satisfactory. Festivals are meant to joyfully unite communities and not end in tragedies due to avoidable hazards. It is imperative that local authorities, electricity boards, and civic bodies coordinate better to ensure that idols are transported safely. Temporary shutdowns of high-tension lines, clear markings, and designated safe routes must be mandated during the festive season. I urge the concerned authorities to treat this as a serious public safety issue. Chalking out preventive measures and implementing them can save lives.

Varsha Omprakash, St. Francis College for Women

ISRO's vision is a matter of pride

I'd like to appreciate the report "ISRO working on 40-storey tall rocket: ISRO Chief" (THI, Aug 20). It fills me with pride to see India setting its sights on such an ambitious mission — a rocket capable of carrying a 75-tonne payload into space. For decades, ISRO has shown the world that dedication and innovation can achieve extraordinary results, even with limited resources. From Chandrayaan to Mangalyaan, our space scientists have made India a respected name in global space exploration. This new project, envisioning a 40-storey rocket, reflects not just scientific progress but also the confidence of a nation aiming high. Such initiatives inspire millions of students to dream of careers in science and technology. They also strengthen our country's role in satellite communication, climate monitoring, and global collaborations. More importantly, they prove that India's future lies in combining vision with perseverance. I wholeheartedly applaud ISRO's leadership for daring to think big and for continuing to expand the horizons of our nation. Achievements like these remind us that the sky is no longer the limit.

Vallari, St Francis College for Women

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BENGALURU ONLINE

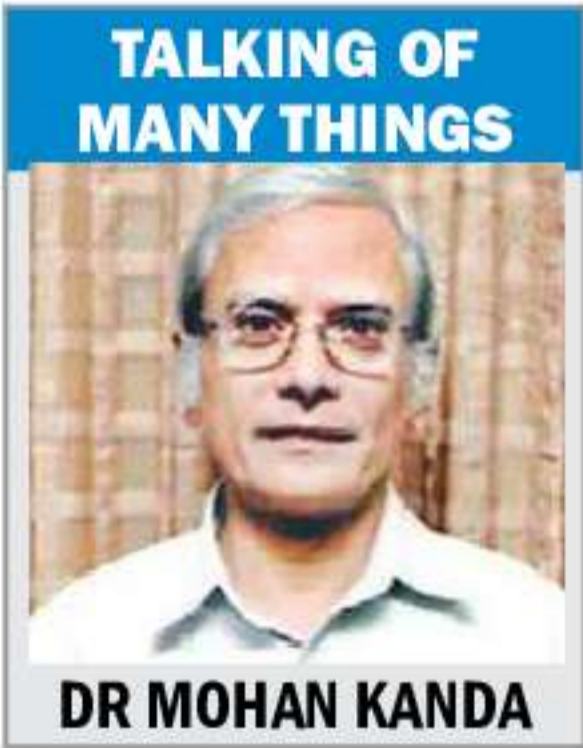
Over 1,300 children still missing as abduction cases rise in state

BENGALURU: In a shocking revelation, more than 14,000 children have been kidnapped across Karnataka in the past five years, of which 1,336 remain untraced. Official data highlights that girls are disproportionately affected, raising serious concerns over child safety in the state.

According to records, child abduction cases have been steadily increasing year after year. By the end of July this year alone, 2,170 children were reported missing. Bengaluru city tops the list, followed by Davanagere, Udipi, Dakshina Kannada, Haveri, Chitradurga, Tumakuru, and Mysuru districts. Home Minister G. Parameshwara himself informed the Legislative Council on Tuesday about this issue.

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

‘One India’ league can instill sense of oneness among people



TALKING OF MANY THINGS

DR MOHAN KANDA

FOR a nascent democratic republic such as India, a period of 75 years is but like a moment in its history. Still, in its short life, the country has managed to face and weather many a storm. Soon after its birth as an independent nation, free after centuries from the clutches of imperialist domination, she had to overcome the aftermath of the unfortunate partition into two countries, and the consequent violent upheavals in various regions.

Once that troublesome period had passed, a constitution was put in place, so drafted by visionary freedom fighters as to promote the concept of a secular state and provide for single citizenship, fostering a sense of unity and economic integration across the country.

It was followed by the establishment of constitutional and statutory institutions of the state, comprising the executive, legislature and judiciary. A robust effort at planned economic development began, heralding the beginning of an era of steady growth and development across fields, particularly in areas such as creation of infrastructure and ensuring self-sufficiency in

food. Within four decades thereafter, however, another watershed event occurred in the country's history, in the wake of the advent, worldwide, of the forces of liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation.

India also had to steady its ship, to survive the turbulence caused by an international financial meltdown. Thanks to the political acumen of its leaders, fiscal policy makers, dynamic and imaginative steering of the ship of the country's economy, the sagacity and foresight of senior civil servants and technocrats, as also the remarkable determination and innovation displayed by the scientific community and industrial houses, the country came out of those testing times with flying colours and earned global appreciation.

Now, once again, there are worrying concerns on various fronts, such as geopolitical and economic, not to mention internal security. A time, clearly, when the people of the country have to call upon their well-known ability to stand up to the challenges of such forces and display the vigour and the innovative capacity that they are known for, and resume the journey towards beckoning destination, of enjoying the fruits of rapid growth and sustainable development.

It is as though Mother India or Bharat Mata is calling upon her children with the spirit conveyed by the lyrics of the famous and rousing song from yesteryear Hindi film 'Jagriti', a stanza of which goes as follows.



Going forward, one looks to the political leadership, and the administration at the national and state levels to exhibit the statesmanship and vision required to consolidate the unity of the nation. Firm but sympathetic treatment will be needed to deal with communal tensions and separate tendencies, evident in some regions, on account of a feeling of neglect leading to uneven socio-economic development, which can pose a challenge to the integrity of the country.

मंजिल पे आया मुन्का हूँ बला को टाल के
सदियों के बाद फिर उड़े बादल मुझाल के
हम साथ हैं नुस्खान से कचरी जिनमाल के
इस देश को रखना मेरे बच्चों सम्भाल के

And one has little doubt that the citizens of India will rise to the occasion as they always have in the past during times of crisis. India is home to myriad religions, languages, cultures and traditions, people belonging to which have, for centuries, coexisted harmoniously, contributing to the rich tapestry of its society. The differences in faiths and other aspects like food, clothing, and celebration of festivals have served the purpose of strengthening the bonds between them, creating a sense of national identity and unity, rather than act as barriers. It is thus that India, with its ability to embrace its diverse heritage while remaining united as a single nation, has famously come to be known for its 'unity in diversity', a concept often attributed to great national leaders of the freedom struggle era, such as Pandit Nehru,

Sardar Patel and Mahatma Gandhi.

The feeling of oneness among the people of the country has come to the fore on several occasions. For instance, during the days when I was working as a Probationary Officer in the State Bank of India (SBI) and, subsequently, in the Indian Administrative Service (IAS), I had the privilege and opportunity of working with colleagues from all faiths, including Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Jainism, Buddhism and Zoroastrianism. Each had their own firm conviction in the value of their faith, but once outside their homes, everyone behaved as though he/she was what all of us essentially are—an Indian. As telling a reflection of national integration as any other I have experienced or been witness to.

Enjoying, as I do, the privilege of being a proud citizen of the twin cities of Hyderabad and Secunderabad, I have often felt that the cities represent India, on a miniature scale; what one wishes the country could be like. Diwali, Ramzan, Christmas, Mahavir Jayanti, birthday



Justice B Sudarshan Reddy

President would enhance the stature of the Constitution and uphold moral values. This role would be a fitting tribute to a life devoted to justice.

Landmark Salwa Judum judgment:

Particularly worth discussing is his historic verdict in the Salwa Judum case, which stands as a milestone in Indian judicial history. This decision played a vital role in defending citizens' fundamental rights and upholding constitutional values.

The Salwa Judum case:

In the case Nandini Sundar & others vs State of Chhattisgarh, on July 5, 2011, Justice B. Sudarshan Reddy, along with Justice S.S. Nijjar, delivered a historic and significant judgment. This verdict deserves an entire book of its own (which the author had the privilege of translating and was published by Malupu Publications). The case dealt with the Chhattis-

garh government arming tribal youth under the banner of Salwa Judum to combat Maoists.

Key points of the verdict:

- Salwa Judum declared unconstitutional:** The Court held that the government's act of arming tribal civilians to fight Maoists was against the Constitution.
 - Arming civilians is unethical and dangerous:** Appointing untrained villagers as Special Police Officers (SPOs) and giving them weapons was described as highly unethical and risky.
 - Violation of fundamental rights:** The policy was deemed in violation of Article 14 (Right to Equality) and Article 21 (Right to Life) of the Constitution.
 - Immediate disbanding ordered:** The Court ordered an immediate halt to Salwa Judum activities and withdrawal of arms given to civilians.
 - Citizens' safety must be ensured:** The ruling stressed that the government must address the Maoist problem through legal and secure means, not by turning civilians into combatants.
- Through this landmark judgment, Justice Reddy sent a clear and powerful message to the government about the protection of citizens' rights. It was a significant step in defending human rights and constitutional values. This verdict

of Guru Nanak and Buddha Jayanti are celebrated with great enthusiasm and in a spirit of dedication and devotion. What is more, people of all religions join in, with mutual respect and understanding. So much so that with the usual closure of government and other offices on weekends, and celebration of events such as the Independence and Republic days, very few days are left in the year for people to attend to their work!

Many national symbols serve the purpose of strengthening the spirit of national unity, such as the national anthem and the tri-colour flag. Among other factors that have contributed to the feeling of oneness are the Indian army, a diverse force with its soldiers representing various states and religions, working together in the cause of protecting the nation, the country's diverse cultural and natural attractions, draws tourists from all over the world, contributing to the economy, and fostering global understanding. Other factors, such as the Goods and Services Tax (GST), a recent innovation aimed at creating a single market, further strengthening economic unity.

Going forward, one looks to the political leadership, and the administration at the national and state levels to exhibit the statesmanship and vision required to consolidate the unity of the nation.

Firm but sympathetic treatment will be needed to deal with communal tensions and separate tendencies, evident in some regions, on account of a feeling of neglect leading to uneven socio-economic development, which can pose a challenge to the integrity of the

country. Determined efforts will also be needed to protect and promote minority languages and cultures, ensuring that all communities feel represented and valued. The National Integration Council, established in 1961 to address issues of communalism, casteism and regionalism, and foster national unity, will need to be rejuvenated and employed as an instrument for furthering the objectives of government policies.

My faith and conviction that India will, in the very near future, become a country known for the exemplary spirit of unity of her people, is reinforced by the memory of what my father advised me when I was on the threshold of adult life.

He encouraged me to form a "One India" League, to combat the evils of communalism and casteism, and to promote a sense of oneness among the people.

The aggressive and, on occasion, almost boisterous manner, in which the oneness manifests itself in the twin cities brings to memory a story I heard about my father and his brothers. One night, after dinner, the three Kanda brothers walked out of their ancestral house at Amalapuram in Andhra Pradesh and were engaged in lighthearted banter. Very soon, hundreds of people from the surrounding areas gathered there, as much out of curiosity as concern, as they had formed the impression that the brothers were having a violent quarrel while, as a matter of fact, it only was their natural way of conversing with each other!

(The writer was formerly Chief Secretary, Government of Andhra Pradesh)

April 31, 1946, even before the Partition Plan.

Justice Reddy questioned critics who belittle Nehru's contribution, asking whether they even understand his depth of knowledge—evident in his seminal work The Discovery of India, which explores the Upanishads, the Himalayas, the Ganges, the Aryans, and Mohenjo-Daro. He challenged those who pretend to be learned while unfairly blaming Nehru.

Gandhi's wisdom:

Quoting Gandhi, "I keep all my windows open to let in fresh ideas from wherever they come," Justice Reddy remarked how some people try to create artificial conflict between Ambedkar and Gandhi and then take satisfaction in such misrepresentations.

Justice Reddy stands as a symbol of judicial ethics, human rights, and constitutional morality. His nomination to the Vice President's office reflects a broader commitment to preserving democratic and humanitarian values in India.

His judicial career, particularly the Salwa Judum verdict, is a legacy that exemplifies how law can be a tool for justice and compassion in a democratic society.

(The writer is a former CIC and Advisor, School of Law, Mahindra University, Hyderabad)

DECCAN Chronicle

21 AUGUST 2025

India must look to China, Russia to expand trade, ties

US President Donald Trump might fancy himself for being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for playing a role in pausing or ending six to seven conflicts around the world. A clinching argument in his favour could be that he may even have brought peace in inducing an India-China thaw since it is his use of punitive tariffs that may be driving India to look north.

India-US ties may be compromised by the tariff tantrums, but the contretemps could lead to wider consequences as anti-India and Indians feelings seems to be spreading now with MAGA loyalists taking aim at the H-1B visas that thousands of skilled Indian IT workers use as the route to jobs in America.

So much has global geopolitics changed since the advent of Trump 2.0 that India is disregarding Chinese support to Pakistan in recent military skirmishes to actively pursue a resetting of ties, including in a broader look at trade with China as in agreeing to open three designated trading posts on the frontier even though de-escalation on the border remains only a topic of deep discussion more than action.

The ball has been set rolling in most other spheres with positive decisions to resume direct flights, which China has desired for long, facilitating visas to tourists, businesses and media, sustaining spiritual tourism among Indians to Tibetan places like Mount Kailash and Lake Manasarovar, which opened to them this summer, and creating three new mechanisms on managing border issues.

It is significant in this regard that China has also moved towards removing irritants in export of rare earth minerals, fertilisers and tunnel boring equipment needed for the Bullet Train project in western India. And India may respond by easing some of the strict scrutiny on FDI proposals that inhibit investments from countries having land borders with the country.

The warmth with which the Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi was received in New Delhi is a clear pointer to what can be expected in Tianjin even as his New Delhi visit went beyond the optics with positive changes promised from China to ease supply chain pressures amid the current uncertainties in the global trading order.

All the signs are pointing to a positive push to mend relations with China five years after troops were pushing each other in the Galwan Valley. The coming meeting of Prime Minister Narendra Modi with President Xi Jinping of China and President Vladimir Putin of Russia at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit in Tianjin, China, this month-end should give further impetus to the rungs below to remove many other irritants that have built up over the years.

There is an equally sympathetic response to India's current trade dilemma after Trump took aim only at India, ostensibly "for profiting from refining and exporting discounted Russian oil", with Moscow now promising to look at taking more goods even as it expects India to sustain the oil purchases for its own domestic consumption against rising needs in energy.

Finding the balance between India's longer term strategic ties to the US and its military dependence on Russian weapons while also resetting ties with China is going to be challenging. But so long as the idea has sunk in that Trump's America is going to be unpredictable in its approach, national compulsions require India to look further afield to secure its own security and employ its freedom to trade with anyone to best serve its own interests.

South vs South in V-P polls

The vice-presidential election has entered the crucial phase with the INIDA bloc naming former Supreme Court judge and venerable jurist B. Sudershan Reddy as its candidate. He will be taking on veteran RSS pracharak and BJP leader C.P. Radhakrishnan in an election in which the NDA candidate's victory is a foregone conclusion given the power equations in the electoral college comprising the members of the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha.

Retired Justice Sudershan Reddy, 79, has an unblemished record as a jurist and is held in high esteem by the legal fraternity. By and large, he represents the plural, secular, liberal values the INDIA bloc claims to uphold and hence fits into its scheme of things. Having retired from the Supreme court 14 years ago, he doesn't suffer from the stigma carried by some of his fellow jurists that they occupied some position of power or the other without having observed a cooling period after leaving the high judicial office.

The candidacy of Mr Radhakrishnan was interpreted as a shrewd move by the ruling NDA as it could have put the Tamil Nadu's ruling DMK, a major constituent of the Opposition INDIA bloc, in an uncomfortable position if it would mean going against a person from the state. But DMK president and chief minister M.K. Stalin put an end to all such speculation and endorsed former Justice Reddy. Mr Stalin has been battling the saffron alliance ever since he came to power in the 2021 elections knowing fully well that the BJP has its eyes set on the state. Though his immediate political rival is the AIADMK, he has been positioning himself as a champion of Dravidian model that is locked in an uncompromising battle against the Hindutva politics. The machinations of governor R.N. Ravi have given him enough room to play up the Dravidian versus Hindutva narrative quite effectively. In such a situation, opposition to Mr Radhakrishnan will add legitimacy to his Dravidian politics.

Andhra Pradesh chief minister and Telugu Desam Party president N. Chandrababu Naidu, on the other hand, also lost no time announcing his support to the NDA candidate instead of backing a fellow Telugu.

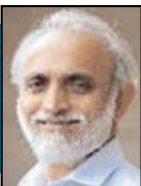
It's politics first for the parties, and rightly indeed.

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Subhani



India's options few amid Trump's tariff tantrums



Parsa Venkateshwar Rao Jr

US President Donald Trump's tariff aggression against India — 50 per cent, of which 25 per cent is a punitive penalty for buying oil from Russia and making profits — is full of drama, rhetoric and too many twists in the tale. First, there is Mr Trump's description of India as the "tariff king". The more intriguing one is when Mr Trump claimed that it was because of the 25 per cent extra tariff on India that Russia has agreed to talk about the Ukraine war. In a curious way, Mr Trump seems to think that one of the ways of pressuring Russia is to twist India's arm!

Convolutd or contorted thinking? It certainly seems so! The India side of the Trump tariff story is one of gloom and doom. The United States is the biggest trade partner of India, followed by the United Arab Emirates. The India-US trade turnover is around \$130 billion, of which India's exports account for \$85 billion and imports \$45 billion. Mr Trump is surly because of the trade deficit of around \$40 billion. Put these figures in context. India's overall trade deficit is around \$17 billion plus. The figure fluctuates. It can go up to around \$30 billion when there is a surge in imports. What is America's overall trade deficit? It is \$918.4 billion in 2024. India's overall trade deficit stands at \$78.1 billion in 2024, a sharp decline from \$121.6 billion in 2023. The differences are not astounding because America's GDP was \$29 trillion in 2024, and that of India was \$3.9 trillion in the same year.

There has been a rising

sense of panic in political and economic establishments across India. The clear skies with prospects of India's speedier growth and becoming the world's third biggest economy after the US and China, which was swelling the hearts of politicians and policymakers in the government, seems to have turned gloomy with Mr Trump's nasty tariff moves! So, advice has been pouring from the experts' quarters as to what needs to be done to respond to the crisis. One of them has been the negative, defensive one, articulated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi — that India should become self-reliant. This has been the theme song since May 2020 — with the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic — and the phrase that was coined, of "Atma Nirbhar Bharat" (self-reliant India). This announcement was not backed by any argument, and no explanation was given. Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman had once said, as quietly as possible, that "Atma Nirbhar Bharat" does not mean that we close our doors to the world. One of the themes behind this concept of a self-reliant India is the old "import substitution" policy pursued in the bad old socialist planning era. There were not many voices which spoke out against this discredited concept. Prime Minister Modi began to speak less and less of India becoming the global hub for this and for that. The nation's thinking was suddenly on the backfoot. Mr Trump's tariffs only deepened the economic blues.

There have been experts who have been making use of the

There's been much talk of 'Look East'. Southeast Asia and the Far East should be attractive propositions. There will be challenges. The competition is intense, profit margins narrow compared to the West.

Chinese saying that "every crisis is an opportunity". They are saying that India should look to markets other than that of the United States. That is what many countries like Brazil have been doing for many years before Donald Trump had come on to the American political stage. Brazil has become the main exporter of soya beans, pork and beef to China, along with Argentina and Australia. Brazil's soya beans exports have been growing steadily, and it had overtaken the US in 2013 as the largest soya beans exporter. India is not a leading exporter of farm products. Its forte is services, and it stands as the seventh largest exporter of services in the global pecking order.

The experts are raising the old chant of "reforms" to counter Mr Trump's tariff policy. They are suggesting that this is a "1991 moment" for India again, and it should take a bold decision. But they have not specified which markets to tap, and which export products to promote. What the experts harking back to the 1991 magic moment are not willing to say is that India has to open up its markets, and that tariff barriers must be lowered, if not flattened altogether. The problem is that, like any other developing country, India wants to maximise its exports and minimise its imports. And to minimise imports, it maintains a differentiated tariff rate card, which hovers at five per cent in the telecom sector, and 35 per cent in the agricultural sector. So, when

the experts call for "reforms" and the "spirit of 1991", what do they really mean? Does it mean opening up markets more to global goods. There is already the complaint that India has become the dumping ground for Chinese consumer goods. Can India withstand the flood of imported goods while trying to push its goods and services in foreign markets? India doesn't want to lose the \$85 billion exports to the US. It is quite a major chunk of India's total exports of \$829.4 billion, but not too big. So, can India tap alternative markets and reduce its dependence on the American market? India has been focusing rather exclusively on the West — the US, Britain and European Union countries. These three markets are in the shrinking mode. There has been much talk of "Look East", but nothing positive has been done on that front. Southeast Asia and the Far East should be attractive propositions. There will be challenges. The competition is intense, the profit margins narrow compared to the West. Interestingly, India's trade with Southeast Asia was \$123 billion in 2024 — exports were \$41.20 billion and imports \$79.67 billion. It is almost the exact reverse to that with the US.

Indian experts and policymakers, and the ruling party, have to decide what it is they want in specific terms. Their dreams of turning into a global manufacturing hub or the "pharmacy of the world" have to take some concrete shape. The new dream of being the global hub of the semiconductor industry has to be brought down to earth. There is a dangerous vagueness about the Narendra Modi government's entire economic vision. And it gets ruffled by things like Donald Trump's tariffs. The time has now come to talk specifics.

The writer is a Delhi-based commentator and analyst

LETTERS

AMBULANCE ALLEGATIONS

EPS' allegations against the DMK of sending ambulances often to derail his political campaigns is immature. He seems to have forgotten or is oblivious to the fact and rule that ambulances have the right to travel on a priority basis on all roads to save lives. Obstructing an ambulance and preventing the driver from doing his duty needs to be viewed seriously.

M.C.VIJAY SHANKAR Chennai

COOLIE'S SUCCESS

Rajinikanth received congratulatory messages for his contribution and achievements in his 50 years of Indian Cinema. This was not a mean task for a person who started his career as a bus conductor as Shivaji Rao in Bengaluru, identified through the lens of Director K Balachandrar whose style made KB introduce him as Rajinikanth. From then on there's no turning back for this simple man to reach stardom status. His movie 'Coolie' has raked in a record in Tamil cinema history within 4 days of release. When stars retire after a period of time, maybe for Rajinikanth he is addressed as a super star only because he comes out stronger by his magnetic presence.

A.P. Thiruvadi Chennai

ARMY TAKES CARE OF SOLDIERS

It is surprising that the Supreme Court has ordered the Government to come out with a plan of action on alternative jobs and cost of treatment for injuries suffered by trainee soldiers while in their training period. The condition is that the injuries sustained should be ones while performing duties assigned to the trainee by the commander in charge. For injuries and ailments caused by accidents related to performance of duties, Military Hospitals provide free treatment. For permanent physical disabilities, alternative jobs are also provided in the military depending on the cadet's educational qualifications and post-accident physical fitness.

MuthuSubramanian Coimbatore

Mail your letters to chennaidesk@deccanmail.com

Dilip Cherian Dilli Ka Babu



As chief's exit looming, RTI's watchdog is on life support

As of September 14, the Central Information Commission (CIC) may be headless. Chief Information Commissioner Heeralal Samariya retires, and unless the government acts at lightning speed (not its strong suit), the country's transparency watchdog will be leaderless yet again.

This isn't exactly uncharted territory. Back in 2023, when Y.K. Sinha retired, the CIC post was left vacant until the Supreme Court had to step in and remind the Centre that the RTI law risks becoming a "dead letter" without a functioning Commission. Clearly, the warning didn't sink in.

It's not just the chief's chair that's emptying. Out of 10 sanctioned Information Commissioners, only two are left. Eight seats have been vacant for nearly a year, even though 161 applications were received last August. Translation? A massive backlog of appeals and complaints, citizens waiting endlessly for decisions, and the RTI process quietly choking on delay.

Is this simply bureaucratic laziness, or a more deliberate attempt to starve transparency of oxygen? Either way, the outcome is the same. The citizens' right to know is being casually sidelined. If the CIC continues

like this, India's most empowering democratic tool will be reduced to a paperwork graveyard.

Transparency delayed is transparency denied. And when the watchdog is asleep, or worse, missing, it's the public that ends up paying the price.

BIHAR DENIALS, BENGAL DRAMA: CAN EC SAVE FACE?

The Election Commission of India is having one of those "look, but don't touch" moments. On one hand, it's vehemently denying any wrongdoing in Bihar's electoral rolls, brushing off opposition allegations like a minor irritation. On the other hand, a very similar mess is unfolding in West Bengal, where chief secretary Manoj Pant had to rush to Delhi after the state dragged its feet on disciplining four officials caught handing out their login credentials for the voter database.

The EC's language is stern — "grave lapses" and a clear deadline of August 21 to comply. And rightly so. This isn't just sloppy paperwork; in an era where data is currency, careless handling of electoral rolls is a direct threat to the integrity of elections.

The optics, however, are tricky. The commission may be showing teeth in West

Bengal, but the contrast with its vigorous denials over Bihar raises eyebrows. Opposition parties are quick to spot it, critics are ready with their tweets, and the public's trust, which is already wearing thin, takes another jolt.

At the end of the day, credibility is everything for the referee in a democracy. Suspensions and deadlines can plug holes, but they can't patch over the perception that the Commission is fighting fires selectively. Treat voter data carelessly in one state, deny problems in another, and suddenly the watchdog looks like it's running, rather than keeping the game fair.

CRACKING UPSC IS JUST HALF THE BATTLE

Every year, lakhs of hopefuls pin their dreams on the UPSC exam. Only a tiny fraction — around 1,000 — make it through, and an even smaller club of 200-250 land the IAS, IPS or IFS. But here's the part outsiders often miss: clearing the exam doesn't make you a government officer. The real game begins with training and, more crucially, cadre allocation.

Sounds simple, but in practice, it's a mix of merit, vacancies, reservation rules, and a

healthy dose of luck. Even toppers don't always get what they want; some may recall Tina Dabi, the 2015 topper? Haryana was her first choice, but Rajasthan got her instead.

The system tries to balance insiders and outsiders using a 30-point roster, ensuring no cadre is overrun by locals while still giving states their share of homegrown officers. Add to that the five-zone grouping system, where candidates must rank their preferences. Skip this formality, and the UPSC decides for you, with no regard for dreams of a "home state" posting.

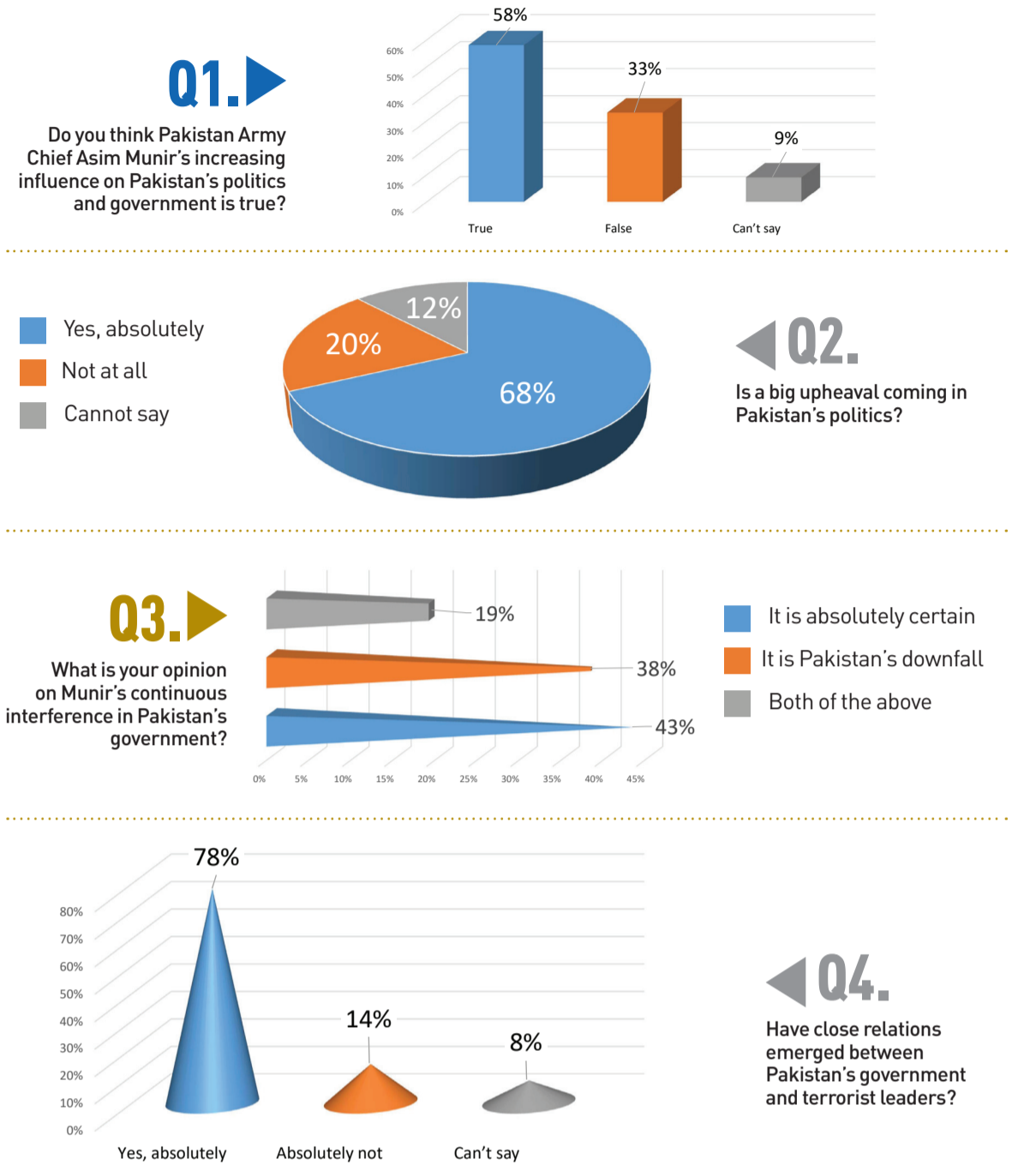
Why such complexity? To keep the services nationally integrated, spread talent across deficit states, and prevent bureaucratic fiefdoms. Noble goals, but for young officers, it often feels like fate being sealed by a spreadsheet. In short, cracking UPSC is like winning a ticket to the big league. But where you play is decided in the quieter, less glamorous backrooms of cadre allocation. The steel frame of India, it seems, still bends first to the logic of rosters and quotas.

Love them, hate them ignore them at national peril, is the babu guarantee and Dilip's belief. Share significant babu escapades dilipcherian@hotmail.com.

THE DA ILY GUARDIAN SURVEY ON PAKISTAN POLITICAL CRISIS

78% respondents said close relations have emerged between Pakistan’s government and terrorist leaders.

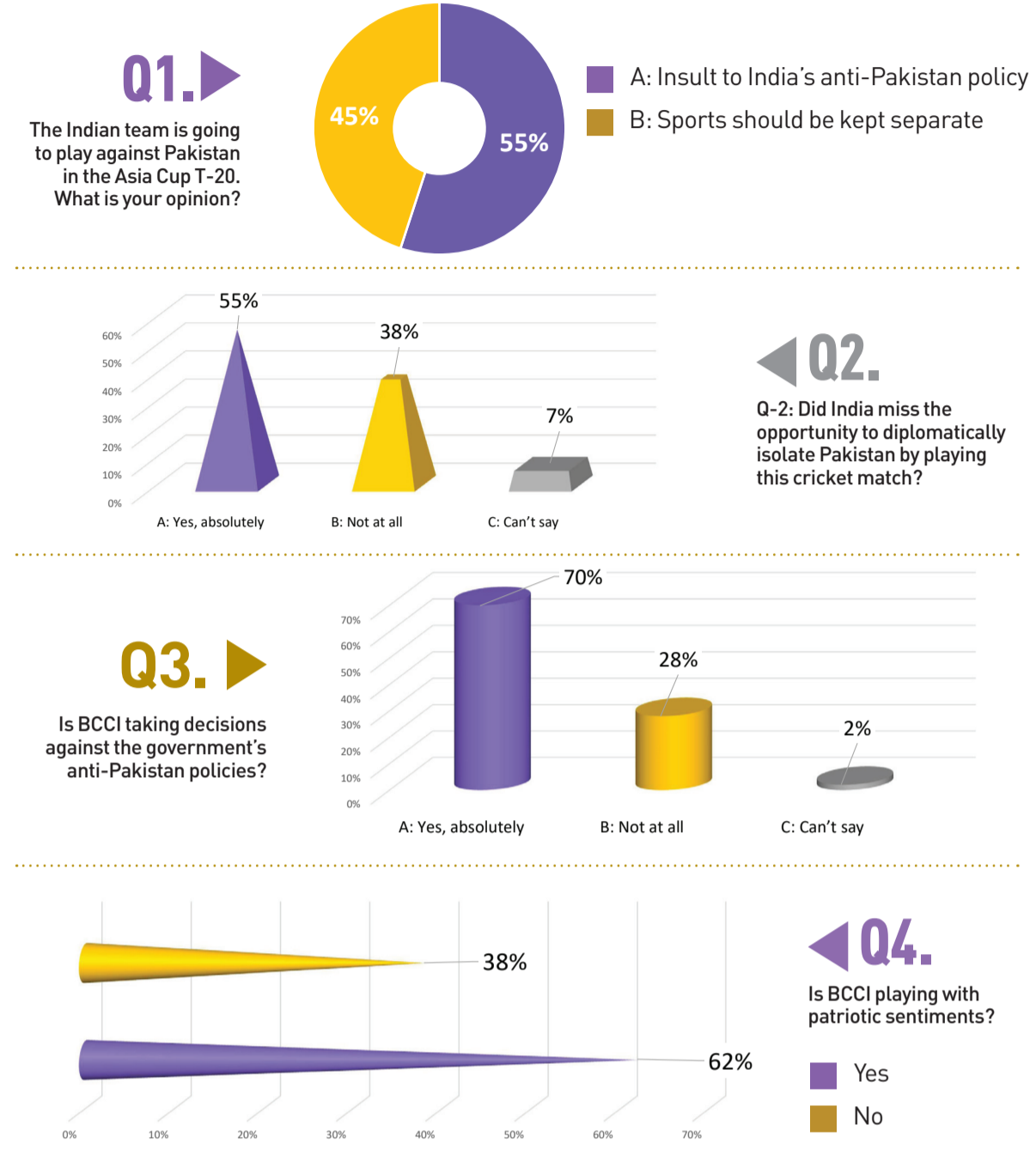
A survey on Pakistan’s political crisis revealed that 58% believe Army Chief Asim Munir’s influence on politics is real, while 68% foresee a major upheaval. Nearly 78% think Pakistan’s government shares close ties with terror leaders, and 72% feel the country is losing balance in its foreign policy, highlighting rising instability concerns.



THE DA ILY GUARDIAN SURVEY ON ASIA CUP INDIA-PAKISTAN MATCH

55% believe India missed a chance to diplomatically isolate Pakistan by playing the match.

The survey on India playing Pakistan in the Asia Cup reveals strong discontent. A majority (55%) feel it insults India’s anti-Pakistan stance, and 70% say BCCI is acting against government policies. 62% believe patriotic sentiments are being undermined, while 57% want players to oppose BCCI’s decision. Public opinion is divided.



Rekha Gupta vows stronger return

CONTINUED FROM P1

the CM’s residence prior to the attack. Delhi Minister Parvesh Sahib Singh added that the accused had spent the previous night near Gupta’s home before striking during the public hearing.

Environment Minister Majinder Singh Sirsa al-

leged a possible political conspiracy, claiming that the attacker had links with former Delhi CM Arvind Kejriwal’s associate Gopal Italia. Sharing a photograph of Khimji with Italia, Sirsa demanded answers from Kejriwal, saying: “Is this a coincidence or a deliberate act? The public is angry, and those behind

this attack will not escape the law.”

Police sources said none of Khimji’s relatives is in jail and that he did not bring any petition or grievance to the CM’s office. Investigators are now seeking his remand to determine the motive and whether others were involved in the conspiracy.

Oppn cries foul as Govt tables bill on removing...

CONTINUED FROM P1

ers cannot serve as Prime Minister, Chief Minister, or Minister. Second, if bail is not secured within 30 days of arrest, they are automatically disqualified. And third, if granted bail later, leaders may resume office.

Inside the House, Shah reiterated that the government wanted to “elevate the declining level of morality in public

life”. He requested that the bills be examined by a Joint Parliamentary Committee of 21 members from the Lok Sabha and 10 from the Rajya Sabha.

The Opposition, however, mounted a united resistance. AIMIM MP Asaduddin Owaisi said the bills would “be the final nail in the coffin of elected governments”, accusing the government of turning India into a “police

state” where agencies act as “judge and executioner”.

Congress MP Manish Tewari called the measures unconstitutional, warning that they violated the presumption of innocence and Article 21, which guarantees the right to life and liberty. “This bill makes an investigating officer more powerful than the Prime Minister of India,” he said, alleging that it could be politically mis-

used.

Congress leader KC Venugopal accused the BJP of attempting to “sabotage the basic principles of the Constitution”. In a heated exchange, he questioned Shah’s own past conduct during his arrest in Gujarat. Shah retorted that he had resigned on moral grounds before his arrest and only resumed office after being acquitted.

Speaker Om Birla ad-

joined the House twice, first until 3 pm and later till 5 pm, amid slogans and uproar. He warned MPs against lowering the dignity of Parliament, saying, “People are watching.”

Despite fierce opposition, the government succeeded in sending the bills to the Joint Committee of Parliament, where they will now undergo detailed scrutiny before being reconsidered.

LS clears Bill to ban online games

CONTINUED FROM P1

we compromised on its interests,” he told the House, urging members to pass the legislation, which was cleared by voice vote despite Opposition protests.

Vaishnav explained that online gaming comprises three segments—e-sports, online social games, and money gaming. While the first two will be promoted, he said money gaming posed grave risks including addiction, financial ruin, suicides, money laundering,

and even terror financing.

The Bill prescribes imprisonment of up to three years and/or fines up to 1 crore for offering or facilitating money games. Advertising such games may attract up to two years in jail and fines of 50 lakh. Financial transactions linked to money gaming carry the same penalties as offering them. Repeat offenders may face harsher punishments of three to five years’ imprisonment and fines up to 2 crore.

Key offences under the law will be cognisable and non-bailable, with provisions empowering authorised officers to search, seize, and arrest without warrant in specific cases.

For e-sports, now recognised as a legitimate form of competitive sport, the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports will establish a dedicated framework. Online social games such as Chess, Sudoku and Solitaire will also receive government support.

Shadow of Chawla looms...

CONTINUED FROM P1

had underscored the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government’s weaknesses in countering terrorism. Public outrage, compounded by insensitive remarks and actions of Union ministers, fuelled a strong anti-UPA sentiment. Yet the UPA secured a second term.

Chawla’s tenure was dogged by allegations of partisanship, particularly over his alleged ties to the Nehru-Gandhi family. The most striking rebuke came from within the Election Commission itself. In an extraordinary move on 31 January 2009, Gopalaswami recommended Chawla’s removal to the President of India—without consulting fellow Election Commissioner S.Y. Quraishi.

The recommendation

followed a meeting between Gopalaswami and a small NDA delegation in his chambers. They accused Chawla of acting in a partisan manner to favour the Congress party. Gopalaswami alleged that Chawla had shared sensitive Election Commission information with Congress officials and had opposed issuing a notice to Congress president Sonia Gandhi for accepting honours from Belgium—a complaint that Chawla and Quraishi had dismissed in a two-to-one majority.

Gopalaswami’s action marked a rare instance of a CEC publicly seeking the removal of a fellow commissioner, effectively accusing him of undermining the Commission’s impartiality. But President Pratibha Patil rejected the recommendation, allowing

the 1969-batch IAS officer Chawla to assume charge as CEC on 20 April 2009 and oversee the parliamentary elections.

Chawla’s career had long been controversial. The Shah Commission, led by former Chief Justice of India J.C. Shah to probe Emergency-era excesses, had declared him “unfit to hold any public office which demands an attitude of fair play and consideration for others” for his role as a senior official in the 1970s. Though the Delhi High Court later dismissed the Commission’s findings, the stigma endured.

Even before Gopalaswami’s intervention, the NDA had targeted Chawla. In March 2006, led by the BJP, the alliance submitted a memorandum to President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam—signed by over 200 MPs—

demanding his removal as election commissioner. The government rejected the demand. In May 2006, Jaswant Singh, then Leader of Opposition in the Rajya Sabha, approached the Supreme Court seeking Chawla’s ouster, citing his ties with Congress leaders and issues related to the MPLADS scheme. The petition was later withdrawn after Gopalaswami asserted his authority to remove an election commissioner, though the Court left the legal questions unresolved.

Despite the anti-UPA wave following 26/11, the Congress-led alliance won the 2009 polls. No definitive evidence of electoral malpractice emerged. Party leaders maintain that the elections were free and fair, and that the UPA’s victory reflected voter priorities such as economic policy.

India successfully test-fires Agni-5

CONTINUED FROM P1

sile with Multiple Independently Targetable Re-entry Vehicle (MIRV) capability, allowing it to carry and release multiple nuclear warheads simultaneously. India conducted its first MIRVed test launch of the missile on 11 March 2024 from Kalpakam in Tamil Nadu, validating this technology.

With a current range of over 5,000 kilometres, an upgraded variant under development is expected to extend its reach to 7,500 kilometres. Future enhancements are also aimed at integrating bunker-buster bomb technology, expanding its strike capability against fortified targets.

India, Russia push trade ties

CONTINUED FROM P1

Strategic Partnership” between the two countries.

The visit comes as India’s ties with the United States face strain over New Delhi’s continued purchase of Russian crude oil. Washington has doubled tariffs on Indian goods to 50 per cent, with the White House stating the measures are intended to apply secondary pressure on Moscow over the Ukraine conflict. A planned round of India-US trade talks has also

been postponed.

In Moscow, Russian officials expressed optimism about expanding cooperation with India despite Western sanctions. Roman Babushkin, Charge d’Affaires at the Russian Embassy in Delhi, said the India-Russia-China trilateral dialogue could soon be revived, calling it vital for regional stability. Deputy Trade Representative Evgeniy Griva highlighted that rupee-rouble payments were proving resilient under

pressure, noting stable annual trade growth of around 10 per cent and a surge in Indian exports, particularly in pharmaceuticals, machine tools and electronics.

Babushkin criticised unilateral sanctions as “illegal” and stressed that Russia’s economy was adapting despite “tremendous pressure.” He also described the recent Russia-US summit in Alaska as a “breakthrough development” in restoring trust between global powers.

Bihar, Bengal set for mega infra projects worth Rs. 18,000 cr

CONTINUED FROM P1

vices on newly constructed routes, including the Noapara-Jai Hind Bimanbandar corridor, and take a metro ride from Jessore Road station to the airport. Through video conferencing, he will also launch the Sealdah-Esplanade and Beleghata-

Hemanta Mukhopadhyay metro services, which are expected to significantly reduce travel times and improve connectivity to Kolkata’s airport, IT hub, and commercial centres.

Additionally, Modi will lay the foundation stone for the six-lane elevated Kona

Expressway in Howrah, worth over 1,200 crore, to ease traffic flow and boost trade and tourism.

The Prime Minister’s two-state visit underscores the government’s push to upgrade infrastructure, connectivity, and public services across eastern India.

Rahul warns of political unrest in Bihar

CONTINUED FROM P1

spreading in Bihar. “A 4-year-old child in Bihar is shouting ‘vote chor, vote chor’... They stole the Maharashtra and Haryana elections. They will steal elections in Bihar, West Bengal and Assam. But now the fire has spread in Bihar... You can see there is a storm,” he said. Backing party general secretary KC Venugopal, Gandhi praised his role in shaping social justice policies and the Telangana caste census, adding that Venugopal always carried a copy of the Constitution. “There is a fight going on between those attacking the Constitution and those defending it,” he remarked.

Agnihotri claims threats

CONTINUED FROM P1

against me. Since then, I haven’t sat in a car with my children. We haven’t done anything together. I didn’t

have as much trouble making The Kashmir Files as I am having with this film,” he said, alleging that he was facing “social media lynching.”

The director noted that the film, which depicts Bengal’s culture alongside the violence of the 1940s, had originally been titled The Delhi Files: Bengal Chapter.

FREE SPEECH ON TRIAL: JUDICIAL SENSITIVITY AND THE LIMITS OF CRITIQUE

OPINION

DR.S.KRISHNAN AND
RANVEER SINGH RATHORE



‘Whoever the person may be, however high be or she is, no one is above the law notwithstanding how powerful or how rich be or she may be’. This is the basic principle of the concept of ‘Rule of Law’, which asserts the supremacy of law and puts everyone on equal footing. It is the basic principle of governance of any liberal and democratic society. The judiciary, which is the central pillar of democracy, is the guardian of the Rule of Law. It holds a crucial position in the order and the maintenance of democracy. The recent proceedings of the Ajmer District court in

Kamlesh Mandoliya v. Vikas Divyakirti have reignited the national debate over a fault line in modern Indian Jurisprudence: how do we reconcile robust public criticism of our institutions with the urgency to protect individual and collective reputations? When a YouTube video allegedly authored by a coaching institute founder Dr. Vikas Divyakirti sparked criminal defamation proceedings u/s 353 (2), 356 (2) & (3) of the *Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita*, and section 66 A (b) IT Act (for online transmission), it pave the way for an extensive debate about free speech, judicial sensitiv-

ity, and the chilling effect of sweeping defamation laws. Justice Manmohan Chandel taking cognizance of the matter observed *prima facie* evidence linking Divyakirti’s remarks about judges and judicial system with malicious intent. At this initial stage though, the judge explicitly noted that one only need to ask whether the allegations warrant further action, not whether guilt is proven citing *Sonu Gupta v. State of Haryana [(2015) 3 SCC 424]* and *Nupur Takwar v. CBI [(2012) 11 SCC 465]*. However, the court’s detailed remarks suggest an unusually low threshold for finding harm to the judiciary’s “dignity, impartiality, and reputation”. The order raised concerns that such content “could create distrust and confusion among the general public” about the judicial system. Dropping other charges, the court took cognizance of the offence u/s 356 (1)(2),(3) (4) *Bhartiya Nyaya Sanhita* 2023, and ordered Dr. Divyakirti to appear in person. To sum up, the court treated a general criticism of judicial appointments as equivalent to a serious offence. Instead of robust debate, it appears that the court is focused on protecting its own image.

RELATION OF MEDIA WITH JUDICIARY –

LEGAL PERSPECTIVE

The relationship between the judiciary and the media is an interplay of transparency, accountability, and the integrity of the judicial process. The media (press), referred to as the “fourth estate,” plays a very crucial role in informing the public, shaping opinions, and holding the Government machinery, leaders and institutions accountable. However, this relationship can sometimes lead to conflicts, particularly when media coverage influences public perception and judicial proceedings. The defense of Dr. Divyakirti’s offensive remarks against the judicial officers and legal professionals was twofold, first, he insisted on the authenticity and the authorization of the video, claiming it to be a third-party made edit, which extracted and reposted it without his consent. Second, he sought multiple exceptions u/s 356 (1) and the protection of Article 19 (1) (a). These defenses invoked landmark precedents like *S. Khushboo v. Kanniammal* (2010 5 SCC 600) on *locus standi*, and *Subramaniam Swamy v. Union of India* (2016 7 SCC 221) on balancing free speech with reputational rights. In contrast, the court bluntly rejected the freedom of speech claim. Citing *Re Arundhati Roy* (2002) and

Re Prashant Bhushan (2020), it observed that while freedom of expression is protected, it “does not extend to speech that insults or undermines the dignity of courts”. The court emphasized that Dr. Divyakirti had not apologized or taken remedial steps thus degrading his credibility. Practically, a policy critique in a lecture hall or a provocation in a social media post might land its speaker in a criminal dock. This brings the two main aspects of democratic discourse under scrutiny. First, academic freedom: more often than not, academic professionals like Dr. Divyakirti routinely dissect policy and legal norms on multiple platforms including digital ones. If expressing a critical opinion from a podium or dissecting judicial appointments in a coaching session risks criminal sanction; think-tanks, universities, and professional institutes may self-censor. This cripples the very essence of scholarship which revolves around probing, scrutinizing and sometimes offend entrenched sensibilities. Second, journalistic and civic critique: a belief that designating media as the forth pillar of democracy will constitute it functional is merely a hoax unless they have been armed with the

necessary freedom to name, criticize, and lampoon authorities including public figures and bodies. A nebulous “imputation” standard, untethered to falsity or malice, chills that freedom. Editors may readily spurn stories about judicial inefficiency, fearing criminal contempt or defamation claims. **CRITICISM OR INTOLERANCE—WHAT LOWERS THE AUTHORITY OF COURTS?** Criticism of the judiciary, particularly in relation to freedom of speech, often revolves around the use of contempt of court laws and the potential for these to stifle dissent. While the judiciary plays a crucial role in upholding the rule of law, concerns are raised about the balance between protecting judicial authority and ensuring citizens can freely express their opinions about the courts. When it comes to criticism, the apex court itself has stated that every authority is subject to public scrutiny. The free and open criticism increases the accountability of the judiciary towards the people. In several judgments, the Supreme Court has tried to establish a fair balance between free speech and contempt jurisdiction. In *C. K. Daphtary v/s Gupta* (1971), Supreme Court stated that

though the existing law of criminal contempt comes within reasonable restriction, it does not mean that one cannot express one’s ire against the judiciary for the fear of contempt. In many other judgments, the Supreme Court stated that it is necessary to balance two greats, but occasionally conflicting principles of freedom of speech & expression, and the fair fearless justice. It is said that judges are supposed to be men of fortitude who can thrive in a hardy climate. The freedom of expression is said to be one of the basic conditions for the progress of advocacy and for the development of everyone - including legal fraternity practicing the profession of law. Restriction on the freedom of speech and expression can be imposed if it exceeds the reasonable and fair limit and amounts to contempt of court. It is interesting to note that Indian judges have been touchier in the cases of contempt of court as compared to English judges. For example, in the case of *Balogh v. Court Crown*, the defendant said to the judge, “You are a humourless automaton. Why don’t you self-destruct?” The judge just smiled but didn’t hold him liable for contempt of court. In an instance where a person tagged judges as ‘fools’, Fali

S. Nariman asked Lord Templeman that why the person isn’t tried for contempt of court, he answered that they (English judges) don’t take notice of such comments. It is the judiciary that needs to understand the importance of criticism of any judicial action and not to hold every such act as contempt of court. **WAY AHEAD** While it is to be noted that all citizens of India are guaranteed the right to freedom of speech and expression, contempt of court is indeed one of the reasonable restrictions that can act as a rider on this right. In an era in which social media are full of critics, commentators and observers who deem it necessary to air their views in many unrestrained and uninhibited ways, the higher judiciary should not really be spending its time and energy invoking its power to punish for contempt of itself. If the contempt has to continue, a review mechanism within the judiciary should be there as a safeguard against judicial tyranny. *Dr.S.Krishnan is an Associate Professor in Seedling School of Law and Governance and Mr. Ranveer Singh Rathore is a 4th year student of BALLB, Seedling School of Law and Governance, Jaipur National University, Jaipur.*

‘Coded Commanders’ are ‘new General’ as AI takes centre stage in warfare

OPINION

DR.S.KRISHNAN AND
RANVEER SINGH RATHORE



Warfare is no longer confined to trenches, tanks, and territorial lines. The battlefield of the twenty-first century has shifted to codes, algorithms, satellites, and quantum signals. In this new age, decisions are not just taken by generals in command rooms but also by machine learning systems parsing terabytes of real-time data. The United States and China have embraced this transformation with clarity and urgency, pouring unprecedented resources into artificial intelligence, cyber dominance, quantum networks, and unmanned systems. For India, a nation with strategic imperatives across two hostile borders and maritime vulnerabilities, the urgency is far greater. The question is not whether India should modernize but whether it can do so fast enough to ensure survival in wars where the first shots may be fired in cyberspace or space, not on land.

ALGORITHMS AT WAR: HOW AI IS RE-WRITING COMMAND AND CONTROL
Artificial intelligence has

become the defining marker of military modernisation. The United States leads in the integration of AI into its command and control systems, combining battlefield simulations with predictive analytics to give commanders decision superiority. In war-gaming scenarios, American forces rely on AI to identify enemy vulnerabilities, optimise troop movements, and execute precision strikes with minimal human latency. AI-driven ISR (Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance) is already a reality in the Pentagon’s doctrine, where unmanned systems feed vast amounts of battlefield data into real-time decision networks. China, meanwhile, is aggressively pursuing what it calls “intelligentised warfare.” Beijing has directed enormous resources into AI-driven war-gaming, electronic warfare, and predictive decision-making systems. Chinese companies, operating in close synergy with the People’s Liberation Army (PLA), are designing AI tools for faster battlefield simulations, autonomous targeting, and even psychological operations powered by big data profiling. China’s approach is systemic, linking civilian research institutions with military applications in a model of state-directed innovation that accelerates military readiness. India, though making strides through defence startups and research agencies, is still at the early stages of AI integration. Initiatives

like AI-based battlefield management systems, predictive logistics, and indigenous drone platforms are promising. Yet the scale remains modest compared to the U.S. and China. Bureaucratic hurdles, lack of seamless data sharing between services, and a fragmented ecosystem of research and defence industry limit India’s ability to operationalise AI at a decisive scale. The danger is that while India builds pilots and prototypes, adversaries are already deploying AI in live conflict scenarios.

INVISIBLE BATTLEFIELDS: THE CYBER DOMAIN AS THE NEW FRONTLINE

If AI is the brain of future warfare, cyber is its bloodstream. The United States commands perhaps the most mature offensive cyber capability in the world, with U.S. Cyber Command operating as a fully-fledged warfighting unit. From disrupting ISIS propaganda networks to launching precision cyber strikes on adversarial infrastructure, the U.S. has demonstrated that cyber power can substitute or supplement conventional military campaigns. Its doctrine of “persistent engagement” ensures that adversaries are always on the defensive, never secure in their digital networks. China, in contrast, has perfected the art of cyber-enabled espionage and long-term infiltration. From the theft of intellectual property to the sabotage of strategic networks, Chinese cyber units have shown skill in operating below the threshold of open warfare. Beijing uses cyber tools as both a strategic equaliser and an enabler of hybrid warfare, penetrating supply chains, financial systems, and critical infrastructure of rivals. The Chinese state’s close ties with

its technology giants give it both reach and plausible deniability in global cyber operations. India’s cyber posture, though evolving, remains predominantly defensive. The creation of the Defence Cyber Agency and increased focus on protecting critical infrastructure are steps in the right direction. But India still lacks a clearly articulated offensive cyber doctrine. Without credible offensive capacity, deterrence in cyberspace is weak. Adversaries perceive India as a soft target for asymmetric attacks, whether through ransomware, espionage, or sabotage. To secure its position, India must invest not just in firewalls but in the capacity to strike back decisively in cyberspace.

QUANTUM DAWN: THE RACE TO SECURE THE UNSEEN

Quantum technology represents the next seismic shift in warfare, promising secure communication, ultra-fast computing, and unprecedented decryption capabilities. The United States has taken significant strides in quantum computing and encryption, particularly in military-grade applications aimed at securing command networks and disrupting enemy cryptography. China, however, is arguably ahead in this field. With its successful demonstration of satellite-based quantum communication, Beijing has established itself as a leader in secure communication networks that are resistant to interception. Its investment in quantum radar, capable of detecting stealth aircraft, underscores the disruptive potential of this technology. In the quantum race, China’s blend of state direction, academic research, and military application is creating a formidable edge.

India has begun its journey, with ISRO experimenting with quantum key distribution and several research projects under the National Mission on Quantum Technologies. Yet, these remain early-stage efforts. India must bridge the gap between laboratory research and military deployment, or risk falling irreversibly behind. Quantum technology is not a distant frontier; it is a race already underway. The winners will control the most secure communications and potentially render traditional stealth and encryption obsolete.

BEYOND GRAVITY: MILITARISATION OF SPACE AND MULTI-DOMAIN CONVERGENCE

The future battlefield is no longer confined to land, sea, and air—it now extends into outer space. The United States has institutionalised its space dominance through the establishment of the U.S. Space Force, focusing on satellite swarms, orbital surveillance, and counter-space weapons. The ability to dominate the orbital layer provides the U.S. unmatched intelligence, communication, and navigation superiority. China, too, has invested heavily in counter-space capabilities. Its successful tests of anti-satellite (ASAT) weapons, development of satellite-killer systems, and integration of space warfare into its strategic doctrine indicate a clear ambition: to deny adversaries the use of space while ensuring its own freedom of action. Beijing views space not as a supporting domain but as a decisive one. India demonstrated its ASAT capability in 2019 through Mission Shakti, a milestone achievement. However, India’s space militarisation remains reactive

rather than proactive. While ISRO’s technological prowess is undeniable, translating this into military-grade space dominance is still an unfinished agenda. Without deeper integration of space assets into tri-service operations, India risks lagging in a domain that may determine the tempo of future wars.

HYPERSONICS, UNMANNED SYSTEMS, AND THE FUTURE ARSENAL

Hypersonic weapons and unmanned systems represent the sharp edge of next-generation arsenals. The United States has advanced programmes in hypersonic glide vehicles and missile defence systems capable of intercepting them. Its use of unmanned aerial systems in Afghanistan, Iraq, and beyond demonstrates both maturity and operational dominance in drone warfare. China has already tested hypersonic glide vehicles, reportedly achieving manoeuvrability and speeds that alarmed Pentagon analysts. Its focus on unmanned stealth combat platforms and drone swarms signals a strategy aimed at overwhelming adversaries with speed and quantity. India is developing hypersonic technology in collaboration with Russia through the BrahMos-II project, and indigenous drone capabilities are expanding through startups and defence initiatives. However, the scale and pace remain modest compared to the U.S. and China. Without sustained investment and ecosystem support, India risks staying on the margins of the hypersonic and unmanned revolution.

INDIA’S ASCENT: PROMISE AMIDST THE PARADOX
Despite these challenges, In-

dia is not without promise. The Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative has galvanised indigenous defence R&D, fostering a new generation of startups and innovators. Collaborations with France, Israel, and the U.S. are enhancing India’s technological ecosystem, particularly in drones, sensors, and AI-driven systems. India’s demonstrated ASAT capability, growing cyber command structures, and expanding AI research are significant achievements. Yet, India’s paradox remains: ambition without full-scale integration. Budgetary limitations, bureaucratic inertia, and siloed functioning of the tri-services impede the transformation. Unlike the U.S. with its unified command structures or China with its state-driven civil-military fusion, India struggles with fragmented execution. The danger is not the absence of vision but the inability to operationalise it at scale and speed.

THE WAR OF TOMORROW: A GLIMPSE INTO THE CONVERGING FUTURE

The battlefield of tomorrow will not be a linear clash of armies but a converging storm of technologies. AI will drive real-time decision-making, quantum systems will secure communications, cyber operations will paralyse enemy infrastructure, space assets will control orbital dominance, and hypersonic weapons will compress decision timelines to seconds. The victor will be the nation that integrates these domains seamlessly, achieving decision superiority before the adversary can even respond. For India, this means making bold choices. Incremental progress will no longer suffice. The wars of tomorrow will be algorithmic, unmanned, and multidomain.

A military that lacks AI-driven command networks or quantum-secured communications risks paralysis. A state without offensive cyber capabilities risks humiliation without a single bullet fired. India must therefore prioritise disruptive innovation, accelerate civil-military integration, and invest not just in catching up but in leapfrogging where possible.

FROM CATCH-UP TO LEADERSHIP: INDIA’S STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE

India stands at a crossroads. The choice is stark: remain a reactive power that struggles to match adversaries’ innovations, or transform into a proactive power capable of shaping the rules of next-generation warfare. The stakes are existential, for wars in this new era are not merely about territory but about national survival, economic security, and geopolitical relevance. The United States and China are already scripting the doctrines of algorithmic wars. For India, the task is not simply to avoid falling behind but to create a distinct path that leverages its democratic innovation, technological talent, and strategic geography. The journey will be difficult, but the imperative is clear: in an age where wars are won before the first shot is fired, India must move from catch-up to leadership—or risk becoming a spectator in the wars that will define the twenty-first century. “Prof. Dr. Nishakant Ojha, a leading strategist in defence and national security, is globally recognized for his expertise in AI, cyber warfare, and quantum defence. Trusted advisor to governments, he dissects modern battlefields with rare clarity, positioning India’s security discourse against China, the United States, and emerging threats.”

IMPEACHING THE ELECTION UMPIRE: INDIA'S REPUBLIC-ERA STORY

India's election umpire faces an unprecedented impeachment push, exposing the Constitution's high removal bar and the autonomy-versus-accountability tension in the world's largest democracy.

TDG NETWORK
NEW DELHI

Two days ago India's Opposition (the I.N.D.I.A. bloc) announced plans to table an impeachment motion against Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar, accusing him of bias after he demanded Rahul Gandhi retract allegations of election "vote theft" with a sworn affidavit. At a press conference, Kumar dismissed Rahul's claim as "an insult" to the Constitution and insisted Gandhi must either "submit a signed affidavit or apologise" for his charges. The Opposition has condemned the CEC's remarks as "ludicrous" and out of character for an impartial election authority. Congress MP Gaurav Gogoi warned colleagues that "our democracy is alive solely because of [the right to vote] - [and] the Election Commission is the protector of this right," implying that Kumar's conduct threatened public faith.

Parliamentary removal of a CEC is extremely difficult. By constitutional design, the CEC can only be removed by impeachment on grounds of "proved misbehaviour or incapacity" via a special motion in Parliament. That motion must be supported by at least 50 members in the Rajya Sabha or 100 in the Lok Sabha and then passed by a two-thirds majority of those present and voting in both Houses. In practice, this supermajority has never been secured - President Pratibha Patil famously rebuffed CEC N. Gopalaswami's 2009 recommendation to oust Election Commissioner Navin Chawla, noting that the CEC's advice was **not binding**. As one former CEC, T.S. Krishnamurthy, wryly observed, "If there is a constitutional provision, let the opposition employ it," but without the ruling party's support an impeachment motion "would lack numbers". In short, the I.N.D.I.A. bloc's threat - even if formally tabled - faces long odds under India's entrenched protections for the Election

Commission.

CONSTITUTIONAL ORIGINS AND FOUNDING ELECTIONS

The Election Commission of India was established by **Article 324** of the Constitution (1950) as an independent constitutional body. Article 324 mandates a Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) and such other commissioners as the President decides, with the exclusive duty to "superintend, direct and control" elections to Parliament, state legislatures, and the President/Vice-President. In fact, the ECI was constituted on January 25, 1950 - one day before India's Constitution came into force - underscoring its foundational role. To guard its autonomy, Article 324(5) provides that the CEC "shall not be removed...except in like manner and on the like grounds as a judge of the Supreme Court". Former CEC V.S. Sampath explained this was done "to give autonomy" - hence the CEC has the same status as a Supreme Court judge, and needs a two-thirds parliamentary vote for removal.

The first CEC, **Sukumar Sen** (1950-54), faced the monumental task of India's maiden general elections (1951-52). His office meticulously prepared electoral rolls and polling arrangements for ~170 million eligible voters (85% illiterate) in an era of scarce infrastructure. Ingenious solutions - custom steel ballot boxes, indelible ink, radio education campaigns - were devised to ensure a credible vote. Eventually ~8,00 million people turned out (45.7%), giving Congress a sweeping majority. Sen later recalled that he insisted

TDG EXPLAINER

on rigorous standards (e.g. special bridges and ink for remote areas) despite pressure for speed. The image below shows Sukumar Sen at work:

In its early years the ECI was a lone-wolf body: the CEC was the sole commissioner from 1950 until the Election Commission (Conditions of Service) Act 1989 formally introduced additional Election Commissioners. Since 1989, the Commission has operated with three members (one CEC and two ECs). All are appointed by the President (on the advice of the Union cabinet), and may only be removed as per Article 324(5) (like judges). This constitutional framework - independent appointment plus high removal bar - was meant to keep elections "out of the hands of the government of the day" (as Dr. B.R. Ambedkar insisted).

ELECTORAL REFORMS UNDER KEY CECS

Over the decades, successive CECS have driven major reforms and also sparked controversy by their zeal. T.N. Seshan (10th CEC, 1990-96) is the most celebrated reformer. Known for his no-nonsense style, Seshan aggressively enforced the Model Code of Conduct and curtailed illegal practices. He insisted on **mandatory photo voter IDs** (introduced in the 1993 Representation of the People Act), banned booth loiterers, campaign excesses, liquor distribution, and misuse of official machinery. One journalist

noted that Seshan "cleaned up Indian elections" by making politicians fear enforcement. (He famously quipped "You are very corrupt-corrupt" to raucous audiences.) His reforms included the indelible ink rule and strict scrutiny of election expenditures. In the photo below, Seshan is shown in 1993 - the year he instituted voter ID cards nationwide.

The Model Code of Conduct itself has a longer history. It originated in 1960 (during a Kerala assembly election) and was first formalized by the ECI as the "Minimum Code" in 1968. The Code (which is not statutory law but has quasi-legal standing) imposes constraints on parties and candidates during polls - a cornerstone of India's orderly campaigns today. Seshan's successors have continued this tradition. For instance, CEC **Syed Yousuf Raza** (Y.S. Quraishi, 2008-11) advocated legally backing the Code to penalize breaches more effectively.

Other reforms include the gradual rollout of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) starting in 1998, expansion of postal ballots and proxy voting for the disabled, and revisions of electoral rolls (such as the intensive revision drives in recent years). Former CEC B.B. Tandon introduced the maximum age of 65 for EC members; current law sets terms of six years or until 65, whichever is earlier. Throughout, the Election Commission has prided itself on inclu-



Chief Election Commissioner T.N. Seshan (in office 1990-96) became known for ushering in strict electoral reforms and enforcement. (File)



CEC Gyanesh Kumar. (File)

cess".

KEY CONTROVERSIES

● **1952 First Election:** Conducting the inaugural general election involved unprecedented logistics. Sukumar Sen's team overcame literacy barriers by inventing new symbols and educational campaigns, ultimately delivering a 45.7% turnout among 170 million voters. No major disputes arose over the process itself - it is remembered as a successful start for independent India.

● **1990-96, T.N. Seshan Era:** Seshan's radical enforcement of rules courted both praise and ire. Many politicians chafed at his rigidity (some branded him "authoritarian"), yet he drastically reduced vote-buying and election violence. His tenure set a new norm that the CEC could suspend elections and even recommend disqualification for code violations.

● **2006-09, Gopalaswami-Chawla Clash:** In a rare intra-EC showdown, CEC N. Gopalaswami accused fellow Commissioner Navin Chawla of bias (Gopalaswami alleged Chawla favored a certain party) and recommended his removal. This triggered litigation over the removal process: the government forwarded Gopalaswami's petition to the President rather than the CEC (as Article 324 implied), and in 2009 President Pratibha Patil ultimately **rejected** the recommendation. The episode revealed ambiguity: only the CEC can initiate remov-

al of other ECs, and even then the President must act on CEC advice (which in 2009 the President declined to do).

● **2013-2022, EVM and Roll Debates:** In recent years, opposition parties have repeatedly questioned EVM security (claiming machines can be hacked) and alleged mass deletions from voter rolls. The ECI has defended its technology, even inviting international experts to certify EVM integrity. Meanwhile, the Commission's special summary revision drives (e.g. Bihar SIR 2024) have triggered protests when large numbers of names were purged. Each controversy tests the Commission's fact-finding powers and transparency - as reflected in the current row.

● **2024-25 "Vote Chori" Row:** The latest flashpoint began when Rahul Gandhi accused the ECI of "vote theft" in a Karnataka constituency. CEC Gyanesh Kumar's counter-demand for proof led to a public clash. Opposition leaders now threaten an unprecedented impeachment motion. Rahul Gandhi has himself protested what he calls partisan enforcement, noting that the ECI demanded an affidavit from *him* but had not required one when BJP leader Anurag Thakur made similar allegations. Trinamool's Mahua Moitra scolded Kumar: "it is not the job of the CEC to attack the Opposition; your job... is to address the valid queries raised". CPI(M)'s John Brittas ac-

cused the "new ECI" of acting as the ruling party's "B-team," alleging a "diabolical design" to alter voter rolls nationwide (from Kerala to Jammu). These sharp charges underscore the high stakes: controlling the integrity of India's elections means controlling the lifeblood of democracy.

A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

India's election system stands out internationally in scale and structure. As a 2013 Brookings analysis noted, India's electorate (~900 million eligible voters, ~780 million actual turnout) **vastly** exceeds that of entire continents: Europe (~449 million) or North America (~324 million). The U.S. presidential electorate is far smaller, and American voting is done in a single day nationwide. By contrast, India's parliamentary elections may span six weeks to mobilize its 800,000 polling stations. Strobe Talbott of Brookings highlighted this by quip: "In short, there is a very big difference between the Indian system and our own here in the United States where... we know before we go to bed at night who has won".

Structurally, many democracies also employ independent election bodies. India's design - a single, top-level Election Commission (one CEC + two ECs) insulated by constitution - is relatively unique. For example, the **United Kingdom** created its Electoral Commission by Parliament in 2000; it is a statutory multi-member body appointed by the Crown on advice of the Commons. (It regulates campaign finance and sets election standards, but with different powers and a later establishment date.) In the **United States**, there is no national election commission; instead election administration is decentralized to states, and federal law (via the Help America Vote Act of 2002) improved uniform standards. Countries

like **Canada** (Elections Canada) and **Australia** (Australian Electoral Commission) have bodies akin to India's ECI. Universally, these bodies are meant to be independent. India's CEC even enjoys the same rank as a top Supreme Court judge - a status mirrored in other places by requiring legislative supermajorities or judicial review for removal. In sum, while modalities vary, democratic norms demand that election administrators be shielded from partisan pressures.

SO FAR...

Since 1950, India's Election Commission - led by its CEC - has been central to the nation's democratic journey. From Sukumar Sen's pioneering efforts in 1952 to T.N. Seshan's 1990s crackdown on malpractices to today's debates over electronic voting and voter rolls, the ECI has repeatedly confronted challenges and controversies. The recently mooted impeachment motion against CEC Gyanesh Kumar may never succeed (given the high constitutional bar), but it underscores the uneasy balance between accountability and independence. As former CEC Y.S. Quraishi warned, India has "the most powerful Commission in the world" - yet one with a "defective" appointment system. Debates over reform (such as a judicial-like selection collegium) continue. Through it all, however, the Commission remains the guardian of India's voting rights. As voices in Parliament reminded us, if elections are the bedrock of democracy, "the Election Commission is its protector". The memories of past struggles - the engineering feats of 1952, the stern injunctions of 1990s CECS, the testimonies of politicians past and present - paint a vivid picture: India's election story is one of continual reform and contest, writ large against the world's largest electorate.



3. Sukumar Sen, India's first Chief Election Commissioner (in office 1950-54), photographed during preparations for the 1952 election. (File)

siveness (all adults can register) and transparency (scrutiny by the Supreme Court, introduction of *Form 17C* counting certificates, etc.). As Sampath noted, the Commission strives so every adult Indian gets "an opportunity of participating in the electoral pro-

KEY EVENTS
1950: Article 324 establishes the Election Commission [EC]. Sukumar Sen becomes 1st CEC (Jan 25).
1951-52: India's first general election (Jan-Feb 1952) - massive polling with new ballot symbols.
1968: First Model Code of Conduct issued (as "Minimum Code").
1990-96: T.N. Seshan serves as CEC, introducing voter IDs and rigorous enforcement.
1998: All electronic voting machines (EVMs) deployed nationwide.
2006-09: N. Gopalaswami (CEC) vs. Navin Chawla (EC) controversy over alleged partisan bias; President rejects removal order.
2024-25: I.N.D.I.A. bloc threatens impeachment of CEC Gyanesh Kumar over "vote theft" claims.
Size of India's gamer base: ~488 million online gamers (2024), per FICCI-EY.