

DECCAN Chronicle

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Ranjona Banerji

Off the beaten track

Dharali paid price of our ‘progress’, Mumbai next?

The sun is shining as I write this, a rare occurrence through most of this July and August, too, here in Dehradun. The news is of Mumbai reeling under massive amounts of rainfall in short periods of time and heavy rainfall warnings for Maharashtra. A short while ago, we were dealing with catastrophe in Uttarakhand. Experts are still grappling with the consequences of cloudbursts, glacier bursts, new glacial lakes, landslides, debris, destruction and death. In the neighbouring state of Himachal Pradesh and Jammu and Kashmir to the north, the Himalayas have seen devastating landslides and dam collapses.

There are two threads which underlie what is easy to pass off as normal monsoon theory. The first is irresponsible construction on fragile and vital natural areas. And the other is the effects of climate change. And what the two have in common is human greed and shortsightedness.

We have known about the effects of climate change for years now. We celebrated when the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) and former US vice-president Al Gore shared a Nobel for their work on climate change in 2007. Especially since the IPCC was headed by Indian scientist Dr Rajendra Pachauri. (The allegations of sexual harassment came later.)

The cause of the current signs of climate change is human behaviour. The excessive use of fossil fuels, the heat islands caused by construction and the destruction of forests have led to rises in the Earth’s temperature, which will soon be beyond our ability to withstand. One of the effects of climate change is intense weather situations: Excessive heatwaves, droughts, extreme rainfall, massive flooding, melting polar ice, rising sea levels, loss of biodiversity.

And this is what we’re seeing across the planet. Not just in India but across the world. And the ferocity, intensity and frequency of these extreme weather events is unprecedented.

Make no mistake. The planet will survive until the sun becomes a red giant and the solar system eventually dies. It will readjust because it follows the laws of physics, not human biology or carbon-based life. It is us, life on the planet in our current form, which will suffer. Must as us humans think we are superior, we are also extremely dependent on everything around us. For food, the air we breathe, the spaces in which we live, the manners in which we survive. It is all symbiotic, and perhaps even parasitic.

What we learn is another issue completely. Pollution we cannot control. Garbage we cannot control. Waste disposal we cannot control. Construction we cannot control. Destruction of natural resources we cannot control. In fact, nothing which is within our capability can we actually manage to control. We are so tied to our habits, customs, traditions, innate selfishness and laziness, that we are helpless in the face of our own mass stupidity.

The result is absolute chaos whenever anything goes wrong. As we have seen this monsoon across the country.

Consider Dharali, a “picturesque hamlet nestled on the tranquil banks of the river Ganges” says the official tourist website of Uttarakhand. Dharali is about 2,000 feet above sea level, and known for its apple orchards and rajma cultivation. Given its scenic beauty and proximity to the Gangotri yatra route, it is a popular tourist destination.



Dharali on Kheer Ganga, before the flash floods on Aug. 5

And here lay its downfall. Because the tranquil tributary of the mighty Ganga which flows through the village became a mighty torrent on August 5. As water burst through the village, it took down buildings, homes, orchards, lives and livelihoods. At least five confirmed deaths, and about 65 people are missing. The amount of debris has made search and rescue almost impossible.

To take advantage of the tourist boom, construction took place too close to the banks of the Kheer Ganga stream. The market was built on a fan-shaped area of years of sediment deposit. And it is this area which was destroyed by the water. Earlier reports of a cloudburst have been dismissed, although a glacier burst has not been ruled out.

What is known is that cataclysmic events such as these are now the norm. In spite of knowing that settlements like Dharali are in dangerous zones, construction is encouraged by government. We have seen it with Rishikesh, with Chamoli, all in the recent past.

It is hard to blame the locals when government itself is the main destroyer in these regions. Hundreds of thousands of trees, especially the majestic deodar, one of the true cedars of the world, are cut with glee for new roads and where there are new roads, there are new buildings.

The roads are a personal favourite of our Prime Minister, to help tourists complete an important Hindu pilgrimage. The consequences of ravaging the Himalayas to make these roads was pointed out over and over again by scientists and environmentalists. But their views were dismissed and ignored. Some were dubbed anti-national and anti-development. Not a word of apology has come from anyone in power for the devastation that they have caused by their wilful obstinacy.

Mumbai is in a similar plight. Greed and incompetence now rule what was once called “urbs prima in Indis”, India’s premier city. More roads and highways and buildings are what Mumbai has received. But they have not made life easier when disaster strikes. An area prone to heavy rainfall, as the monsoon makes early landing here for that section of the peninsula, Mumbai has seen its flood plains and its salt pans being turned into buildings. Mangroves have been destroyed to make roads. And thus, all natural safeguards against destruction were happily removed.

The city by the sea was where I grew up, and later became my stomping ground, and the mountains are now my source of beauty and joy. The destruction of both I feel almost personally. It is painful to watch imminent collapse through intentional stupidity and shortsightedness.

It’s not too late to stop and recalibrate. But that seems unlikely. We have chosen our path. Or it has been chosen for us because of our collective apathy which is like a mammoth sediment deposit on individual angst.

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Subhani



Trump tariffs dismantling US security architecture



Manish Tewari

State of the Union

The post-1945 world order, meticulously constructed by the United States over seven decades, stands not upon military might alone, but upon a complex edifice of alliances, economic interdependence and a rules-based framework.

Its genius lies in recognising that American security and prosperity are inextricably bound to the security and prosperity of key regions across the globe. The Trump administration’s aggressive imposition of tariffs, framed within a rhetoric of economic nationalism, constitutes not merely a recalibration of trade policy but a profound act of geopolitical malpractice, actively dismantling this intricate strategic architecture, born from the ashes of the Second World War and the Cold War’s exigencies.

The historical basis for American protectionism, articulated forcefully by its first Treasury secretary Alexander Hamilton, was inherently developmental and temporary, designed to nurture vulnerable infant industries within a nascent republic operating in an era of explicit isolationism. Hamilton’s vision was never intended as a blueprint for a global superpower deeply embedded in a network of alliances and security commitments.

President Trump’s application of protectionism, however, reveals a troubling inconsistency in statutory interpretation, where the Fourteenth Amendment’s birthright citizenship clause is subjected to contextual analysis to “cure a mischief” and the Tariff Act of 1930 and subsequent legislation are construed with rigid literalism to justify sweeping import duties, prioritising immediate, often opaque, domestic political or perceived economic gains.

The post-1945 strategic architecture was in fact a direct consequence of abandoning isolationism. Confronted by the Soviet threat and the imperative of preventing another global conflagration, the

United States erected an unparalleled global security network: Nato became the bedrock of European defence; bilateral treaties with Japan and South Korea secured Northeast Asia; the ANZUS pact anchored the Pacific; and a complex web of partnerships extended across the Middle East and beyond.

This architecture served multifaceted purposes — containing Soviet expansionism, ensuring freedom of navigation vital for global commerce and providing a framework for resolving disputes within a US-led, rules-based order. Investments in partners, however fraught — such as the decades-long military and financial support to Pakistan, a relationship sustained through military dictatorships despite its destabilising role in South Asia, including support for asymmetric warfare against India — were calculated sacrifices within the broader Cold War calculus. Pakistan received significant American military and economic aid as a perceived Cold War bulwark against Soviet influence in Afghanistan and a counterweight to India’s perceived Soviet leanings.

Coming to the trajectory of US-India relations, for decades, India was viewed ambivalently through a Cold War prism, overshadowed and strategically disadvantaged by the US-Pakistan-China nexus. Pakistan, despite its undeniable role as an incubator for jihadist groups like those that attacked Mumbai in 2008 and the sanctuary it provided Osama bin Laden, continued to receive significant military aid, viewed through the lens of regional realpolitik.

India’s emergence as a pivotal strategic partner is a relatively recent phenomenon, painstakingly cultivated over the past quarter-century. The tentative steps initiated during the Clinton-Vajpayee era found concrete expression in the landmark US-India Civilian Nuclear Agreement under President Bush and Prime Minister Manmohan

By forcing nations into binary choices, Trump, echoing Richard Nixon’s diplomatic pressure but lacking its strategic subtlety, effectively pushes Delhi closer to Moscow

Singh, a symbolic and substantive breakthrough over coming decades of non-proliferation orthodoxy. This partnership deepened significantly under Presidents Obama, Biden and Trump, and Prime Minister Modi, driven largely by shared democratic values and, more pressingly, converging concerns over an assertive China, manifesting in frameworks like the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) and the Indo-Pacific strategic concept. President Trump’s tariff policies, however, threaten to unravel these decades of patient statecraft through a combination of perceived motivations — a fundamentally transactional, corporate mindset misapplied to grand strategy, prioritising narrow, short-term “deals” over alliance cohesion; the potential for private financial gain leveraging the market volatility induced by tariff threats; a deliberate strategy to contain the economic and political rise of the BRICS nations, challenging the West-dominated G7; and a blunt instrument to pressure nations like India on unrelated issues, such as ending the Ukraine conflict.

The consequences, irrespective of the precise motive, manifest in the rapid degeneration of the global security order. In Europe, decades of reliance on the US security umbrella are giving way to a tangible push for strategic autonomy, driven by the Franco-German engine under President Macron and Chancellor Merz, alongside Prime Minister Starmer’s Britain, actively developing a credible EU defence pillar — a direct response to Trump’s transactional questioning of Nato’s Article V commitment and his broader unilateralism.

Across the Pacific, profound doubts regarding the reliability of the US defence umbrella now permeate strategic thinking in Tokyo

and Seoul, facing an increasingly assertive China and a nuclear-armed North Korea. These allies perceive Trump’s demands for disproportionate burden-sharing and his disregard for multilateral frameworks as signals of waning commitment, fostering internal debates on nuclear options and regional hedging strategies that inherently weaken the deterrence posture the alliances were designed to provide.

Australia, while maintaining the ANZUS alliance, watches US policy volatility with deepening concern, recognising its own security is inextricably linked to US power projection in the Pacific. This uncertainty compels Canberra towards complex diplomatic manoeuvres, strengthening regional ties and diversifying partnerships.

India possesses significant strategic autonomy absent in traditional US treaty allies — a diversified arms procurement portfolio spanning Russia, France, Israel and domestic production; independent nuclear deterrence; a formidable military ranked fourth globally in firepower; and a massive domestic market less susceptible to external coercion. New Delhi will unhesitatingly prioritise its national interests. The apparent shift in South Asia policy signals a bewildering reversal of the post-9/11 consensus and directly undermines counterterrorism cooperation with India, raising fundamental questions about US strategic priorities. The Quad’s future is now shrouded in uncertainty. Trump’s economic fanaticism risks triggering unintended and counterproductive strategic realignments, pushing India and China towards pragmatic, albeit limited, economic cooperation (“the Elephant and Dragon dining, if not dancing, together”) and significantly reinforcing the already warm strategic partnership between Russia and India.

Realpolitik is not an American monopoly; should the EU, Russia, China and India abandon established frameworks in response to US actions, the entire global strategic calculus faces fundamental, unpredictable alteration.

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LETTERS

STRAY DOG MENACE

Stray dogs have become a big problem in the country requiring the Supreme Court to intervene and arbitrate to find an amicable solution. There is little doubt that stray dogs pose a big threat 24x7 to all. While snake bites kill victims instantly, rabies caused by dog bites put the victims to the most terrible death by what is called hydrophobia. The dog owners are morally and legally responsible for the inconvenience suffered by the neighbours. Kindness to the animals is no doubt a virtue but if that is found in overdose and results in the suffering of others law should intervene and safeguard the latter.

V.Rahul Venkatasubramanian Coimbatore

GOD SAVE AMERICA

Apropos report ‘FBI agents search ex-Trump adviser Bolton’s home’. Did any politician in the world ever promise in the election campaign that he will take revenge against his political enemies? Generally politicians treat those who oppose them as political opponents but not enemies! Here we have Trump who had promised political retribution and now unleashes the FBI recognized as the most independent, unbiased investigating agency but unfortunately now it looks turned into a marionette. It searched John Bolton’s (former NSA) residence, perceived enemy since he has turned hostile, a stubborn critic, lambasting Trump. Imagine the fate of those who oppose, criticise Trump and his policies and if he wields his presidential power and resort to retribution under the ruse of ‘national security’ emulating Putin! May God save America.

A.SESHAGIRI RAO Chennai

STIFLING DISSENT

The summons issued by the Assam police against a senior journalist despite the directions of the Supreme Court to the Assam police not to take coercive steps against him, has raised serious questions about violation of due process and infringement of fundamental rights. Trampling upon the rights of citizens to know the affairs of governance in the nation and the right of journalists to ensure an informed society by weaponising such a draconian law of sedition does not augur well for our country’s standing as a free and vibrant democracy.

M. Jeyaram Sholavandan

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Anita Anand



How to behave in all public spaces: When will Indians learn basic norms?

As India evolves and develops, questions about what constitutes the public and private have become more urgent. Our primary focus remains on the public.

As a society, we have never been good at distinguishing between private and public spaces. One reason might be that we lack privacy in our homes. Traditional and even modern joint family systems often involve multiple generations living closely together, frequently in large households. For those who can afford it, there is live-in household help, which leads to more varied living arrangements. There is little opportunity for privacy. In urban settlements, overcrowding and scarce space are common. What is private often becomes public.

This lack of privacy and unacceptable public behaviour did not bother us until recent decades. Technology, the Internet, and increasing wealth have given us the ability to be private. Take mobile phones: We like to use them (a private convenience) in public on speaker mode, watching cricket matches, reels and films at full volume on small screens in places like restaurants, shops, streets and other non-

private areas. Nobody has taught us that it is inappropriate to do so, and we may be disturbing the peace and being inconsiderate of others around us in public spaces.

A common complaint is that Indians don’t respect personal space. When standing in queues, they tend to get too close to the person in front and crowd them. They worry they might not reach the front of the queue.

We are accustomed to crowds in sacred sites, queues and for transportation like trains, planes, buses and roads. As a highly unequal society with income gaps, there is a common feeling of deprivation. The growing middle class and wealthy can avoid crowds by paying a premium or having others do many uncomfortable tasks for them. Despite our wealth and status, we believe that the pie is limited and that we must keep pushing forward to succeed. Otherwise, we risk falling behind.

I grew up in the 1950s and 1960s in rural and small-town India. There was no pushing or shoving of any kind due to the low population density. However, public urination, defecation, spitting and loud talking were common. Even then and now,

there is an acute lack of public toilets.

We are still noisy, fearing we won’t be heard above others talking, in large families, on busy roads and in crowded places. Noise pollution is high in India.

The public behaviour of Indians often lacks etiquette, which is a set of rules for polite conduct in social situations and public places, showing consideration for others. These unwritten rules guide how we interact in ways that are considered acceptable and appropriate. Citizens in the West usually learn this at home, in educational institutions and through good governance.

As more Indians travel abroad to countries with clear rules for public behaviour, such as littering, using public transport, respecting queues and eating or drinking in public, the question arises: Why can’t we behave this way? When we see Indians acting in an unacceptable manner, we feel outraged and ashamed at the same time.

As a diverse nation, can we expect a single style of etiquette? Our religions, foods and customs vary significantly across regions — north, south, east and west. There are some guidelines for private life,

such as which hand to use when eating, who eats first, where alcohol is permitted, and norms regarding hierarchy and family control. These all mostly relate to religion and patriarchy. However, there are no fixed rules for public behaviour.

Public life then becomes an extension of home life. When away from the control of family and elders, we act like spoiled children given freedom for the first time. We are genuinely unaware that we are in a public space, and should behave accordingly. Our privilege and caste training enable us to litter, spit, shout and be aggressive in public places, oblivious to others around us.

If we want to, how do we agree on and develop norms for good public behaviour? What is good etiquette? What incentives can promote good public conduct? Some advocate civic education in schools, which is a promising idea. However, the family is the first institution that an individual experiences. How do parents become good role models? How do we educate parents?

Agreeing on basic public behaviour is not difficult. It takes time and persistence to develop civic sense. Fines and disin-

centives for anti-social behaviour have proven ineffective because those responsible for enforcement often ignore them.

Given the size and diversity of the country, innovative and clever campaigns should be developed to appear on the social media, television and radio advertisements. Visual media can be used to highlight examples of good civic sense and public behaviour. Public hoardings can also be utilised.

Until then, the privileged middle classes and elites can serve as good citizens and set an example for those who lack exposure. As Indian society evolves, it is gradually shifting towards a more individualistic culture, moving away from a family-centred one. Individualism requires privacy, which families often distrust and discourage.

Modernity calls for a change in attitude, which takes time. Changes in norms of private and public behaviour cannot happen automatically; they must be done intentionally and deliberately. Thoughtfully and strategically.

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SOME THINGS NEVER CHANGE IN A CHANGING INDIA, THEY JUST KEEP TICKING

During Covid, many turned to hidden pursuits – this nut turned to watches in an India where even as Rolex and Patek Philippe are easy reach, the cognoscente waits for his chosen HMT

MEMORY STICK



SIDDHARTH CHOWDHURY

During the pandemic, many people unearthed talents and passions that had been lying dormant in them for a long time. Prolonged isolation has a way of doing that. Confinement, it seems, declutters the mind. As days turned into weeks, and weeks into months, many took to writing fan fiction, or woodwork – all the things they had always dreamt of pursuing, which a regimented 9-to-5 schedule had turned into pipe dreams.

With WFH, office work could be done on a schedule of one's choosing, and what this enforced confinement taught many was that nobody ever owns your time – you merely

share it with your employers and co-workers. Just as the copyright of a story or an essay always vests in the author, time, too, always belongs to the individual.

The isolation, compounded by the second wave of 2021, also brought one face-to-face with mortality. The random ferocity of death all around made clear to many – especially those middle-aged like me – that whatever frivolous or profound endeavour one had saved for a bucket list had to be done now.

So, while those blessed with a profound disposition began composing epic poems on their Kedarnath Yatra, I, shallow and materialistic to the core, started immersing myself in horology, the noble study of mechanical timekeeping devices. I ordered books and old catalogues on vintage hand-wound and mechanical watches, and began following fora like Hodinkee, along with watch gurus like Ben Clymer, Jack Foster,



CHRONOLOGY SAMJHIYE: (CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT) HMT KOHINOOR, PATEK PHILIPPE CALATRAVA, OMEGA SPEED-MASTER, HAMILTON KHAKI

and Teddy Baldassare.

Soon I acquired a snobby disdain for quartz and smartwatches. I learned the difference between Swiss ETA and Sellita automatic movements. Between Citizen Miyota and Seiko NH35 movements. I learnt about straps: Rolex Oyster and Jubilee straps, beads of rice Doxa strap, Milanese suits straps and bracelets like American Speidel of the 1960s and 70s.

The bewildering array of watch styles was another revelation. Prominently, dress watches like the Cartier Tank, Patek Philippe Calatrava, and HMT Sona; dive watches like the Rolex Submariner; and

I started immersing myself in horology, the noble study of mechanical timekeeping devices

Blancpain Fifty Fathoms, and Vostok Scuba Dude; chronographs like Zenith El Primero and Omega Speedmaster; field watches like the Seiko Alpinist and Hamilton Khaki.

Some wits call the Alpinist the writer's watch, because it has a moral compass embedded in its face. Then there was something called the 'daily beater', which was the watch one wore the most, or every day. It was a given, if one believed the watch gurus, that a serious watch guy would at least have 5 different categories. So, the beater could be a Casio F91W that Osama bin Laden and Philip Roth wore, or an HMT Janata, with its humble 0231 movement, that Indira Gandhi wore.

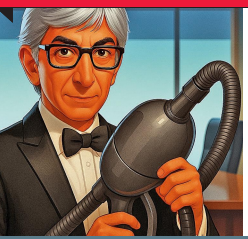
Most Indians, when starting, have a daily beater in their collection. Often, a hand-me-down HMT Kohinoor (the best-looking Indian watch ever), or a Timex Expedition. Mine had been a Seiko Sportsmatic from the late-1960s. I wore that watch right through my school days and later kept it aside for a Casio digital.

It was that rectangular Sportsmatic that first set me off on my journey as a watch nut. Whenever I would publish a book, which would be at an average of 5 years, I would buy a watch to commemorate it. And then for the next 5 years, till I wrote another book, it would be my 'beater' watch.

I would spend only 5% of my advance on the watch. So, my watches were never high-end. A Titan chronograph here, a Citizen field watch with a canvas strap, or a Seiko 5 Pepsi there. Now that my first book for children is out, I am looking forward to the HMT Himalaya.

So, while all over rural Bihar, people are scrambling to show citizenship papers to BLOs, I have put my name down on the HMT website and uploaded my Aadhaar card. Like in the 1970s when one had to book one's HMT Kanchan 6 months before the marriage season, even today, you have to be on a waitlist for an HMT of your choice. It is a comfort how some things never change in India.

RED HERRING



INDRAJIT HAZRA

Flatter-ulence, Negotiate the F-Art of the Deal

To butter up, or not to butter up, that is the question for the flatterati

I have a theory: people who have grown up with vacuum-cleaners in their homes are particularly susceptible to flattery. I suspect it's all that sucking sound that can be heard intermittently over and above the roar of the motor.

I don't know whether the Nehrus of Anand Bhavan in Allahabad had procured an electric vacuum-cleaner by the 1920s, when a young Indira Gandhi was growing up there. The first electrical vacuum cleaners were being sold from 1908 onwards, after an Ohio department store janitor James M Spangler sold the patent to local leather goods manufacturer William H Hoover. But clearly Indira, over time, grew up to be a formidable one to be fawned over by fawnweys.

Watching the European Brady Bunch and Zelen-sky laying on the *maska* extra thick on the Big, Beautiful Trump may have been painful to watch for many people big on pride, humility, and other boomer self-worth products still on the market. But honestly, both parties – European flatterers Macron, Merz and Meloni, Starmer and Stubb (Trump's golf buddy from start to Finnish), as well as the flattered – seemed to know what they were doing. And more importantly, *why* they were doing what they were doing. It would be naive to assume that Trumpus Maximus is a flattery addict who doesn't know when he is being flattered. He isn't your garden-variety narcissist who demands praise like a toddler demands attention. Don't let all that dum-dee-dum fool you. In a landscape that has always been full of flatterers – only the kind of flattery has varied – there are sommeliers of sycophancy who stand out. They nod sagely, believing they're on the way to being handed the Nobel Prize.

Speaking of the Nobel, Trump and his ilk, know the game that is being played. The flatterati may think that all that grovelling and fawning is worth it because of their strategic intent. Such a line of thinking would give them – and their well-wishers – the notion that they are actually smarter than the flattered calf.

That is, of course, exactly what an overling of the calibre of Trump would want them to think. But in the end, a lickspittle is the one who ends up lickspitting – which no amount of spin can make it look like a hug.

At the centre of world-class sycophantic behaviour sits a sycopath who tests how far into cringe territory these tactically obsequious grown-ups can go. The fun (for the sycopath) is pushing this envelope. Like the bizarre gesture of Keir Starmer carrying King Charles' personal letter of invitation to Britain for Trump when he had met him earlier.

Starmer believed he can afford to look like an idiot because his fellow countrymen would (hopefully) know that he's doing it to Make Britain Great Britain Again. But Trumpus Maximus already knows this – that the Brit PM doesn't *really* believe him to be the best thing since marmalade (despite the resemblance). So, he keeps on upping the bar for Starmer and Co. to hit kiss-rock-bottom.

At no point is the flattered obliged to return flatterers the favour. On the contrary, it is to see whether when suggested to bend, they can sidestep the whole crawling business and get straight to the part where they bore into the ground while singing praises. This addiction to being brown-nosed is subtle. When one sucks up to someone, that someone gauges the sucking sound and judges the poor sucker's foldability quotient (FQ) – that is, levels to which one is willing to do to anything at all.

So, does one, for the sake of king, country and desh ki dharti, go through the motions, and flatter away till one's objectives are met? Or should one, for the sake of one's personal image (read: net worth or electoral appeal) and company/desh ki izzat, call out a flattery-junkie – once flattery gets you nowhere?

It's a tough call. But calling out the flateratti can bring you an unexpected bonus: respect from The Flattered One. Which he may or may not then decide to convert into anything worthwhile.

While calling out the flattered can bring you an expected bonus: your stock rising in the mob's esteem for standing up to a bumptious bully no matter how bumptious you yourself may be. And that's because, like dirt and dust, human nature abhors a vacuum-cleaner.

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BEING ARTIFICIAL, SHE'S A NATURAL!

The AI model enters the gatefolds of fashion with Guess' advert in Vogue – the beginning of the end of real models and photo-shoots?

DATA CRUNCHER



ATANU BISWAS

Earlier this month, the fashion industry was set all abuzz by a 2-page advert of California clothing company Guess. It featured a 'picture-perfect' blonde model flaunting a striped maxi dress and floral playuit in Vogue's August print issue, sandwiched between Anne Hathaway's cover appearance and editorials discussing female leadership in fashion and women's representation in sports.

The model appears 'perfect', the much pop cultural-media-manufactured notion of the 'ideal blonde' made 'flesh'. There's one small detail, though. As the advertisement discloses in small text in one corner, the lady's image – indeed, the lady herself – was 'produced by Seraphimne Vallora on AI', Seraphimne Vallora being an AI marketing agency for fashion and luxury brands.

An AI-generated model in the pages of the fashion bible has already created a storm on social media. Despite being an advert – *not* a Vogue editorial – it has sparked a seismic reaction. Using an AI model with the same visual impact as using a real one can save thousands of dollars in fees, starting with that of any modelling agency.

But it's much more than cost-cutting. Fashion has always been about history,

identity, rebellion, and storytelling – never just been about a 'nice photoshoot'. AI-generated models could uphold 'unachievable' beauty standards – till now the domain of airbrushing and other post-shoot processes – and could even endanger diversity in fashion. And what about the future of real models?

The concerns are similar to those expressed in 'Joan is Awful' from the streaming series Black Mirror. In the episode, Hollywood actor Salma Hayek playing herself struggles with the realisation that a production company may use her AI likeness without her consent. Then there was tech entrepreneur and former model Sinead Bovell's 2020 essay for Vogue, 'I Am a Model and I Know That Artificial Intelligence Will Eventually Take My Job.' We may be there already.

So, what are the wider ramifications of the Guess ad? AI is permeating human

lives in today's world, for sure, endangering jobs and eroding *human* creativity. The severity is so great that we have already witnessed real-life human uprisings against AI by Writers Guild of America (WGA) and Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists (SAG-AFTRA). Such fights, however, are likely to continue as a contemporary version of the Luddite movement until the struggle is ultimately lost.

The human-AI relationship is exploring new frontiers. A 36-yr-old New Yorker, Rosanna Ramos, talked about her unconventional marriage to an AI robot in 2023. Consequently, human-AI relationships portrayed in films such as Her, Blade Runner, and Ex Machina seem more and more plausible. No wonder that in her July 2025 Vogue essay, 'Artificial Intelligence Is Changing the Way We Navigate Romantic Relationships,' jour-

nalist Brianna Holt asks, 'What happens to love, intimacy, and emotional growth when our most vulnerable moments are processed with machines?'

The issue of 'automated-authentic' balance is delicate. The human touch and emotional intelligence cannot be replaced – at least, not as of now. But it is then going to be de rigueur to utilise AI as an aid, a supplement, and not as a replacement?

In 1997, Garry Kasparov lost to IBM's 'Deep Blue' supercomputer, marking a defining moment in human history. But the grandmaster quickly learned from his chess defeat. In his 2018 book, *Deep Thinking: Where Machine Intelligence Ends and Human Creativity Begins*, Kasparov argues that a better way to counter AI is to embrace its potential to broaden human horizons.

The cover of Vogue's first issue in December 1892 showed a debutante emerge from an ethereal – and, one imagines, fragrant – cloud of roses and butterflies. The world has changed remarkably since then. Today, AI is all set to take control of every bit of our lifestyles. And Vogue's AI-generated ad could be simply keeping up with the times.

Roger Lynch, CEO of Condé Nast, publisher of Vogue, stated that it was 'crucial' for the company to 'meet audiences where they are and embrace new technologies'. This is pretty much what Kasparov, too, had suggested in his way. The question now remains whether AI models and renditions will become the standard go-to – not just for Vogue, but for publicity material in general that intends to be in vogue across platforms. Watch this spAIce.

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The model appears 'perfect', the pop cultural-media-manufactured 'ideal blonde' made 'flesh'



DON'T HOLD THAT POSE, PROMPT IT

On the Udyan Express, The Long, No Short of It

A 21-hr 21st c. Mumbai-Bangalore journey that feels 19th c. – what's not to enjoy?

FUNNY BUSINESS



ANUVAB PAL

India may be way ahead of the world in digital tech, number of billionaires, meme-making, and Sebi guidelines. But there's one delightful area where we haven't moved ahead from pre-liberalisation days: long-distance, overnight train travel, *not* Vande Bharat, that short-distance media darling. Those long-distancers still have the whims and fancies of decaying mad socialism.

I don't mean Indira-Rajiv-era look and feel, with the thick dirt windows, toilets that are best unmentioned, and the food vendor, who apart from his Gpay, could far more easily be in a Doordarshan serial. It still takes 21 hrs – yes, *twenty-one* hours – on the fastest train from Mumbai to Bangalore.

These are two of India's most dynamic cities. Cities that allow one to buy and sell global stocks in 3 seconds and guide a thing onto the moon. And yet its train connectivity takes about the same time as a British viceroy would have taken to travel by

horseback in 1872. It takes less from Bangalore to San Francisco. Which could explain why more Bangaloreans live there.

Nobody sane would choose to travel by train between these two cities, except for foolish comedians, the truly eccentric, the vagabond with disposable income, people fleeing the law, people afraid of flying. Someday, I hope to meet a combination of all of these folks in one person who would, perhaps, be the Udyan Express gold customer (yes, the train name).

There could, of course, be an argument for a 10-hr high speed train, given it takes about 15 hrs by road, between these two metro business hubs. Which would be something that any reasonable government would consider. But reason would also lead one to consider driveable roads, breathable air, parks, convenience. And once you open that door, there's only danger. So, why let common sense get in the way of a 21-hr journey that feels like a motorised palanquin.

There's also the question of who is going to build this high-speed rail across states with Herculean bureaucracies, state fiefdoms, corruption. And for

Long conversations about nothing can make the interminable tolerable



TRAIN'S DELAYED! WE'LL BE FRIENDS FOR EVEN LONGER THAN 21 HOURS!

what? A thankless citizenry that spits, throws unfinished egg curry dinners straight into the Western Ghats, and steals nice fittings.

On my journey, one sweet tea vendor was chasing a loose chicken through first class shouting, 'Mera nahi hain!' Which led the TT to ask, 'Kiska hain?' To which the vendor, unafraid, replied, that that's the TT's job to find out, not his. This doesn't seem the best route to catch up with China's high-speed train infrastructure.

I've done this journey more than once. Yes, I enjoy sadism. And just on my last 21-hr sojourn, I met a range of characters. First, my compartment companions, a Russian lady and her family, who were carrying four water-purifiers, and tried to sell me one. If I drank the cleansed water, it would apparently eradicate diabetes and heart disease.

They got off in Pune, and a priest got on for the next leg of the journey. He tried to convert me to his sect, which would involve walking barefoot out of the train, and shaving my head. Then came an LIC agent who helps families of the dead. He spent the night trying to coax me into explaining my post-death financial planning, and why it didn't involve LIC.

As we got closer to Bangalore, a family left an infant with me and went snack-shopping. They took so long to get back that I thought I was now a foster parent. The last leg had a voice-over artist who demonstrated the entire range of his vocal chords – from Hollywood villain accents to popular ads – and then asked me what I thought. I told him he was great, but that he should drink more purified water.

So, while India races ahead into the 21st c., long train rides are firmly still locked in the 19th c., where long conversations about nothing, and sharing of food, can make the interminable tolerable, where anyone can get on and off anywhere. The trains haven't changed since 1871. India's long-distance trains aren't a journey. It's all of life in 21 hrs.



NO OFFENCE

Morparia

Is this normal?

'Normal' might be a stretch. But it's not without precedent. During the Cold War, Stalin's intelligence agents are said to have analysed Mao Zedong and other world leaders excrement to construct psychological portraits. What makes Putin unique is how systematic and long-running his poop-protection programme seems to be going on.

Do other leaders have such protocols?

Not quite to this extent. Most leaders guard their medical records, not their bathroom breaks. Franklin D Roosevelt hid his paralysis, John F Kennedy downplayed Addison's disease, and Kim Jong-un's health is a perennial guessing game.

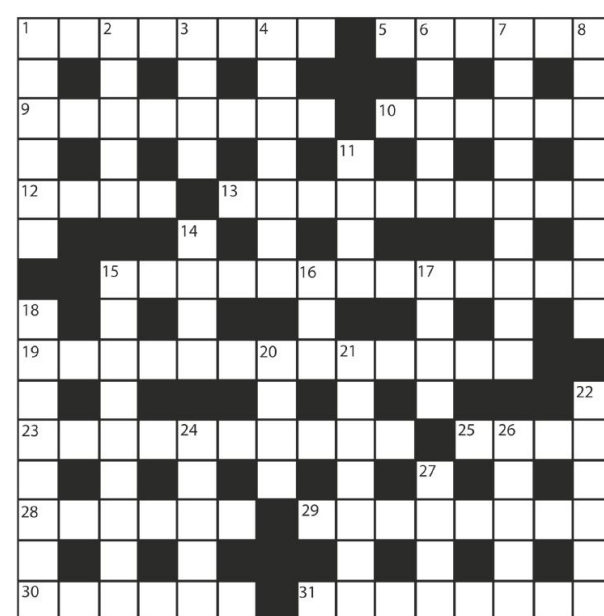
So what does it all mean?

Beyond the giggles, the poop case is really about control. By keeping his health a mystery, Putin maintains a powerful aura: no weakness, no leaks, literally. It's a reminder that in global politics, even the bathroom can be a battlefield.

Text: Team Sunday ET

ET Sunday Crossword

0130



ACROSS

- 1 Fancy footwork bewilders a pedant touring college (3,5)
- 2 Cavalryman has balance right, at least in part (6)
- 3 Triumphs – it's what her does eventually (8)
- 4 Old servant in Virginia rejected girl (6)
- 5 It's not hard to appreciate a symphony's contents (4)
- 6 Ian's climbing over large gap – it's very slow (6,4)
- 7 Butchers catch geese to start eating dairy produce (7,6)

- 19 Like Cameron and Clegg they shape deal (7-6)
- 20 It's trendy playing in Amsterdam without Dutch (10)
- 21 European Union takes credit for greyish colour (4)
- 22 Skiffel person's explosive when drink's taken (6)
- 23 Dull epic it might be but it's very clear (8)
- 24 Hunting dog? Perhaps treat with bit of respect (6)
- 25 Riding event's skimpy even over in African country (8)

DOWN

- 1 Doctor treats small sample (6)
- 2 Crams in lots of cards (5)
- 3 Expert originally raised tree (4)
- 4 Last notes of a dance amazingly blocked by Zulu (7)
- 5 Collect article on manuscripts containing answer (5)
- 6 A handful of Spanish dancers try to catch fish on sabbath? (9)
- 7 Given aid, engineers resided outside base (8)
- 8 High flier – kinetic energy initially controls it (4)
- 9 7 at last lifted gun (4)
- 10 Two-seater taxi hired to go round S. American city (9)
- 11 Stone gleams at odd intervals (3)
- 12 He would briefly read out notice (4)
- 13 It makes ugly mark on skin? I'm impressed by it (8)
- 14 Act in city in Italy not India (4)
- 15 School made changes in a city's boundaries (7)
- 16 A maniac crosses road up in cold zone (6)
- 17 Perhaps one of five seen wandering across square (5)
- 18 Companies start to accept drink (5)
- 19 Side ignores north, generating adverse criticism (4)

SOLUTION TO 0130:
1. FANCY 2. CARDS 3. SAMPLE 4. LAST 5. ARTICLES 6. DANCE 7. SPAIN 8. FLYER 9. GUN 10. TAXI 11. STONE 12. NOTICE 13. MARK 14. ITALY 15. BOUNDARIES 16. MANIAC 17. SQUARE 18. COMPANIES 19. NORTH

Opinion

SUNDAY, AUGUST 24, 2025



Andrea Pavassori (right), and Sara Errani hold up the championship trophy in the mixed doubles final at the US Open tennis championships, in New York

Singles success is the yardstick in tennis

RINGSIDE
VIEW

Tushar Bhaduri

EVERY SPORTTRIES to optimise its viewership and revenue. If it's lagging behind on those parameters, the administrators usually step in and the solution may often lie outside the box.

The changes to the mixed doubles competition at the final tennis Grand Slam tournament of the year, the US Open, has prompted plenty of debate, with some calling it a 'glorified exhibition' and an insult to a large number of players who make their living from that discipline.

The United States Tennis Association (USTA) — who came up with the idea of a two-day competition in the week before the main tournament, attracting marquee singles players with a shorter format before the final, smaller draw and a multi-fold increase in prize money — would argue that with the continuing drop in spectator interest when the mixed doubles event was almost an appendage to the main show, something drastic needed to be done, and the format deserved better than to be played before half-empty stands at odd hours, even at the business end.

By that yardstick, the revamped US Open mixed doubles — which ironically saw Sara Errani and Andrea Pavassori, the defending champions and the only bona fide doubles pairing in fray, walking away with the \$1 million first prize cheque — was a big success. The Arthur Ashe stadium court, with a spectator capacity of 23,000, was almost packed to see the Italians edge past six-time Grand Slam singles champion Iga Swiatek and three-time singles Major finalist Casper Ruud in the final.

Throughout the calendar year, mixed doubles is only played at the Grand Slams, often before or after big singles matches, and is usually a sideshow and an afterthought. As a result, doubles practitioners rarely capture the public imagination. Gone are the days when the likes of John McEnroe used to regularly play singles and doubles. The hectic tour schedule and the relentless physical nature of the modern game makes it almost impossible.

At the Olympics, where mixed doubles has featured since London 2012, players team up with compatriots, with whom they don't play regularly, in the quest of a coveted medal. But on the tour, doubles doesn't quite capture the imagination of the big stars and the casual fans. Hence, the USTA's latest initiative.

Great players adapt

But if singles stalwarts put their minds and energies into doubles, even for a limited period, chances of their success are considerable. Roger Federer and Stan Wawrinka combined to win the men's doubles gold medal at the 2008 Beijing Olympics. Rafael Nadal won the men's doubles gold at the 2016 Rio Olympics with Marc Lopez. Serena and Venus Williams won three Olympic gold medals in women's doubles while at one time, holding the four Grand Slam titles simultaneously. It's difficult to imagine a doubles specialist enjoying such success in singles. Organising the mixed doubles competition as a standalone tournament also helped in the marketing and promotional side of matters, where they would have been shortchanged earlier. The shorter sets, best of four games with no advantage rule, cater to the diminishing attention span of the casual fan and reduce the chance of injury so close to a Grand Slam tournament.

But the reliance on singles superstars

shows that it is the format that really matters for tennis immortality. Rod Laver, Bjorn Borg, Jimmy Connors, McEnroe, Chris Evert, Pete Sampras, Ivan Lendl, Andre Agassi, Steffi Graf, Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic achieved their legendary status through excellence on the singles court. And though the likes of Billie Jean King, Martina Navratilova and the Williams sisters had their share of success in doubles, their stature is largely based on the number of singles Grand Slams they captured.

A 16-team draw largely made up of singles players may seem unfair to doubles specialists, but at the amateur level, the team format is used mainly for recreation and light exercise. Hardly any child aspiring to be a tennis player wants to be known only for his doubles prowess. It's only later on when there's realization that they may not get too far in singles or it's too taxing on the body that they make the switch. The Bryan Brothers — the most successful men's doubles team of all time — are an exception as they would have played together from a very young age.

Easy way out?

Over the last several years, Indian presence at Grand Slams has been almost exclusively in the doubles arena. Any rare singles appearance — Sumit Nagal is the only name that comes to mind — is limited to a round or two. Youngsters who show some promise also invariably gravitate towards doubles after a few injury setbacks or if they find the competition too tough. The disheartening thing is to see them become doubles experts without giving singles a proper go. Somewhere, it betrays a certain lack of ambition. It's for this reason that someone like Somdev Devvarman garners respect, because he reached the 60s in the singles rankings and chose to retire when he couldn't cut it any more, rather than elongating his career via doubles.

Men's and women's doubles are regular features on the tours, so they aren't unlikely to be tampered with at the Grand Slams, and despite the encouraging response to the revamped mixed doubles tournament at the US Open, there doesn't seem to be any immediate likelihood of the other three Major championships doing likewise, even though they would have been paying close attention to developments in New York. But it certainly poses some threat to the livelihood and income of those who play doubles exclusively. The lesson from recent events would be not to give up on singles altogether.

Indian angle

It's important from the national perspective as well. Relying solely on doubles won't get a country anywhere in international team competitions like the Davis Cup and Billie Jean King Cup. It has been a long time since India made any sort of impact in these tournaments, and the lack of quality in the singles field has been the biggest reason. Now, after the retirement of Mahesh Bhupathi, Leander Paes and Sania Mirza, and Rohan Bopanna coming to the end of his career, the optimism at the big tournaments extends to just winning a few rounds to cover the expenses. Being in the draw in both men's (or women's) and mixed doubles just extends their stay at a Grand Slam tournament. That they change partners on a tournament-to-tournament basis points to the ad-hoc nature of their careers.

At the basic level, tennis is an individual sport. That fact should never be forgotten. Even Errani, who won the US Open mixed doubles title recently, was once ranked as high as No. 5 in singles and reached a Grand Slam final in singles, apart from advancing into the later rounds on other occasions.

ACROSS THE AISLE

P Chidambaram



In my view, the Supreme Court must be focused on the legal issue. The ebb and flow of political and security issues ought not to deflect it from rendering justice according to law. The legal issue was crystallised before the Supreme Court. The Court refrained from deciding the issue based on a promise to the Court

THERE IS A widely held belief that the Supreme Court had upheld the actions of the government in 'abrogating' Article 370 of the Constitution that conferred a special status on Jammu & Kashmir. The government claimed that the 'abrogation' was validated by the Court and some scholars seem to have accepted the claim. Wrong, as I had pointed out in a column (*'Towards a Dystopian Future', Indian Express, December 17, 2023*). In fact, the Supreme Court had held to the contrary on the issue of 'abrogation'.

Abrogation illegal, but ...

On August 5, 2019, the government took three steps:

invoked Article 370(1) to add clause (4) to the Interpretation Clause of the Constitution (Article 367);

used the expanded Interpretation Clause and purported to 'amend' the proviso to Article 370(3);

used the 'amended' Article 370(3) and the proviso thereto, and purported to 'abrogate' Article 370 itself.

All three steps were held impermissible and unconstitutional by the Supreme Court.

Nevertheless, the Supreme Court reasoned that the exercise of power under Article 370(1) *applying all the provisions of the Constitution* to Jammu & Kashmir was valid and it *had the same effect* as 'abrogating' Article 370.

Let's have clarity on the legal position: the so-called abrogation of Article 370 was achieved through too clever-by-half drafting. That was ruled it to be impermissible. What was upheld was the application or extension of all the provisions of the Constitution to J&K under Article 370(1).

Matter not closed

Anyway, let's accept that the special status of J&K was revoked. However, it cannot be gainsaid that the revocation of the spe-



Paramilitary personnel stand guard at Lal Chowk on the sixth anniversary of the abrogation of Article 370 and Jammu & Kashmir's special status

EXPRESS PHOTO: SHUAIB HASOODI

A case of breach of promise

cial status rankles the people of J&K and fuels the resentment of the people against the high-handedness of the central government.

The matter was not closed with the revocation of Article 370. On August 5, Jammu & Kashmir, a *State* since its accession, was divided into two *Union Territories*. Was it permissible and legal? The petitioners prayed that the Supreme Court examine this question too. The Court *declined* because the *central government submitted that it intended to restore the status of J&K (minus the UT of Ladakh) and hold elections*. Accepting the submission, the Court left the legal question 'open' but stipulated a time limit of September 30, 2024 to hold elections in J&K. Elections were indeed held in J&K in September, 2024 but statehood has not been restored until this day. It is undeniably a breach of promise on the part of the central government.

The BJP and the NDA government are responsible for dragging their feet on restoration of statehood to J&K. Other parties in the NDA are culpable too, to the extent that they are members of the Cabinet and Council of Ministers of the central government.

After winning the elections, the National Conference (NC) formed the government of the UT of Jammu & Kashmir on

October 16, 2024. It is natural that the NC wished to run the government and give to the people a representative government that had been denied since June 2017.

Presumably, for tactical reasons the NC was not vocal about restoration of statehood. The absence of a strident demand for restoration of statehood led the central government to believe that statehood was not a priority for the people of J&K. On the contrary, deprivation of statehood is a major grievance of the people of the state. Whatever the state government may have delivered in the last 10 months, it does not seem to have earned the goodwill of the people. In hindsight, the NC may realise that it had made a tactical mistake in not being vocal on statehood.

Pahalgam and statehood

The terrorist attack in Pahalgam has shaken everyone. I have maintained that apart from terrorists who are infiltrated by Pakistan there are India-based terrorists. Who strikes where and whether the two groups collaborate in a terror attack depend on the incident and the opportunity. In Pahalgam, the NIA arrested two Indians who allegedly gave shelter to the three Pakistan-based terrorists. After Operation Sindoor, and after eliminating the three foreign terrorists in an encounter on July 28-29, 2025, the government seems to

have drawn the curtains on Pahalgam. There is complete silence on the fate of the two arrested persons. Are they still in custody or have they been released and the case closed? That is a mystery.

But the people remember. They remember that the promise of restoration of statehood has not been fulfilled. When some petitioners moved the Supreme Court for fulfillment of the promise, the Court made certain oral observations to the effect that what happened in Pahalgam cannot be ignored. The observations may have disillusioned the people of J&K further. The next hearing has been scheduled in about 8 weeks.

In my view, the Supreme Court must be focused on the legal issue. The ebb and flow of political and security issues ought not to deflect it from rendering justice according to law. The legal issue was crystallised before the Supreme Court. The Court refrained from deciding the issue based on a promise to the Court. The promise has not been fulfilled in 20 months. The choice is between mandating the fulfillment of the promise *forthwith* or rendering a *judgement* on the legal issue that is at large. I believe the Constitutional Court will render justice.



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INSIDE TRACK

COOMI KAPOOR



Dogged activity

In a way, the wheel has turned full circle in the confrontation between stray dog lovers and the authorities. Bombay's first riot was in 1832, when a mob of 200, mostly Parsis, attacked policemen who were trying to round up strays. The community has special affection for the canine breed and even includes a dog in its funerary rites.

Many Parsis were shocked to discover that one from their own community, SC's Justice Jamshed Burjor Pardiwala, had ordered the rounding up of all strays in Delhi-NCR. He is being unfairly targeted by animal activists, including Parsis, for what is dubbed an unrealistic order. But the judges would perhaps not have called for such extreme measures if activists over the years had not been emboldened to mindlessly oppose every effort to bring rationality in the adherence to Animal Welfare Board (AWB) rules and control the canine population. In their zeal, the activists have misused the court and police to terrorise citizens from undertaking even minor reforms, such as

permitting the municipality to remove biting dogs from colonies, questioning the sterilisation methods thus securing endless stays from the court, fudging figures of strays and defying AWB feeding rules by placing feeding bowls wherever they chose, usually on outer roads and in front of houses. In my own Nizamuddin East colony, a decade ago, the lawyer husband of an activist filed police cases against all members of the RWA, which served as a chilling warning to all subsequent welfare associations.

Complete opposite

CP Radhakrishnan, the ruling party's choice for Vice President, is the complete opposite of Jagdeep Dhankhar. The soft spoken, two-time MP from Tamil Nadu is self-effacing, with simple habits and is a staunch party loyalist. Unlike Dhankhar, who has a legal background, Radhakrishnan may have difficulty controlling the feisty Opposition in the Upper House, where the BJP has a slender majority. He may rely heavily on deputy chairperson Harivansh Narayan Singh, a JD(U) MP, for advice in running the Upper House. Incidentally, Harivansh's term ends in September next year and NDA allies are keen for an appointment of their choice. My own surmise, which admittedly has few takers, is that Dhankhar, the archetypal acolyte, only developed teeth and started hobnobbing with the Opposition after

the BJP indicated to him that he might have to step down before the completion of his term in view of mounting pressure from allies after the Lok Sabha results.

Dynastic dilemma

As a fourth generation political dynast, Mahanaaryaman Scindia — great-grandson of Rajmata Vijaya Raje Scindia and son of Communications Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia — should have an easy entry into politics. But though the erstwhile royal family still exercises enormous clout in the parliamentary seats of Gwalior, Shivpuri and Guna in Madhya Pradesh, it is handicapped because too many family members have political aspirations, while the BJP generally frowns on political dynasties. Apart from his father, Mahanaaryaman's cousin Dushyant is a Rajasthan MP and estranged aunts Vasundhara Raje and Yashodhara Scindia were till recently active politicians. Yashodhara's son, Akshay Bhansali, once talked about a political career, but subsequently abandoned the idea. Jyotiraditya has obviously decided the best way for his son's political future lies through cricket, as the two spheres are closely associated. Mahanaaryaman, 29, the vice president of the Gwalior division of the cricket association and also chairperson of the MP cricket league, hopes to be elected unopposed as president of the state cricket association.

People over politicians

Rao Inderjit Singh is a political heavyweight, minister of state and five-time Lok Sabha MP presently representing Gurugram. Yet, his word seems to count for little with the Haryana authorities. Before the monsoons, Singh repeatedly warned the corporation to rectify the outdated drainage system, but evoked little response from those in charge of the largely rural state. But when the heavy monsoons created havoc in the financial and IT hub, with even the super rich in their high rise complexes and golf courses not spared, influencers like Suhel Seth launched a very effective citizens campaign through social media and the newspapers. In Chandigarh, CM Nayab Singh Saini was finally jolted into action. The Haryana chief secretary and the CM's principal secretary rushed to Gurugram, where they have spent the last week holding marathon meetings, granting sanctions and extensions needed to strengthen basic services. The municipal commissioner is finally responding to videos of dysfunctional services posted by irate residents. If Singh was handicapped in getting his own party to act in time, it is partly because he began his political career in the Congress. Though he switched to the BJP in 2014, he has yet to forge close links with the ruling party's Haryana cadre, especially Saini, who is much junior to him.

HINDUTVA'S DIVIDE OR LOCAL PRIDE? DECODING TG'S MARWARI BACKLASH

APOLOGIST



CR SUKUMAR

THE "Marwari Go Back" movement in Telangana, which began after a clash in a Secunderabad market, seems to be rapidly gaining momentum across the state. The campaign is not a spontaneous one but rather a manifestation of long-simmering tensions. It is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that, while appearing to be a local protest, is deeply embedded in the national political landscape.

What started as a dispute over a parking space has escalated into a broader campaign against the Marwari community, exposing deep-seated economic, social, and political tensions.

In my three decades as a journalist covering India's volatile political landscape, I have seen movements rise and fall, often mirroring deeper societal fissures. A critical analysis of the movement reveals a clash between

local interests, the national Hindutva agenda, and the fundamental rights guaranteed by the Indian Constitution. This movement, echoing separatist sentiments like Telangana statehood, challenges the BJP-RSS's Hindutva project while exposing fault lines in India's unity.

The economic and socio-cultural roots of the movement:

The core of the "Marwari Go Back" movement is economic resentment. Local traders, including the Arya Vysya community, accuse Marwari businesses of dominating markets in wholesale and retail trade, using unfair practices like undercutting prices with cheap, and sometimes counterfeit, goods. The protestors argue that this dominance harms local livelihoods and limits job opportunities for the people of Telangana.

This economic conflict is not isolated; it taps into a historical narrative of regional identity and a sense of being exploited by "outsiders."

The sentiments of the "Marwari Go Back" movement echo the grievances that fuelled the successful Telangana statehood movement, which protested the perceived economic and political dominance of people from Andhra region. The demand for legislation



that reserves a significant percentage of jobs for locals and restricts land ownership by non-Telangana residents shows a clear parallel to the Mulki rules and other protections sought during the statehood movement. This historical parallel gives the current movement a strong emotional and political resonance. The protests are also a manifestation of linguistic and cultural friction, as many locals view the Marwari community as agents of a "north Indian" cultural imposition, particularly the Hindi language, further alienating local communities.

The Hindutva perspective-A conspiracy to divide Hindus:

Leaders from the BJP and the broader Hindutva movement have vehemently condemned the "Marwari Go Back" movement. They have framed the protests as a political conspiracy orchestrated by opposition parties

like the Congress, BRS, and AIMIM to fracture Hindu unity. Their argument is that the Marwari community, as a key component of the Hindu community, is being unfairly targeted to undermine the Hindutva-led consolidation of Hindus under Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

This narrative positions Marwari businesses not just as economic players, but as "pillars" of the Hindu community and "defenders" of Sanatan Dharma. Hindutva leaders claim that by attacking Marwaris, the protestors are harming the larger project of uniting Hindus on religious lines against Muslims and Christians. In a counter-move, BJP leaders have also launched a "Rohingya Go Back" campaign, attempting to shift the focus from the intra-Hindu conflict to communal anxieties about illegal migrants, thereby using anti-Muslim rhetoric to rally Hindu support. This strategy aims to portray the opposi-

tion as anti-Hindu and pro-immigrant.

A fight against Hindutva-backed hegemony:

On the other side, progressive groups, Dalit organizations, Dravidian activists, and religious minorities are supporting the "Marwari Go Back" movement. They argue that the Marwari community, along with the Gujarati community, acts as a financial backbone for the BJP's Hindutva agenda. This includes allegations that they have funded films like The Kashmir Files and The Kerala Story, which are seen by critics as tools for religious polarization and anti-minority propaganda. The claim is that the profits earned by Marwari businesses are funnelled into these Hindutva-aligned projects, which further divide the country along religious lines.

For these groups, the movement is a platform to resist what they see as a two-pronged attack: economic exploitation by a business community and political manipulation by Hindutva forces.

Dalit groups, in particular, find common cause with the movement, linking it to their ongoing struggles against caste-based discrimination and economic marginalization. The Dravidian activists see the movement as a resistance against the cultural and linguistic imposition of a North Indian, Hindi-centric identity. The support from these diverse groups transforms the movement from a simple economic protest into a broader struggle against what they perceive as a majoritarian and exclusionary political project.

Fears of fragmentation:

Both sides of the political

spectrum warn against the social fragmentation that the movement might catalyse. BJP and Hindutva forces claim that the "Marwari Go Back" campaign divides Hindus, weakening a unified front against religious minorities and threatening the consolidation of Hindutva.

Progressive activists argue that in supporting business lobbies with deep Hindutva ties, the BJP perpetuates the exclusion of Dalits, Muslims, Christians, and linguistic minorities, furthering the polarization and weakening democratic institutions.

Repercussions on fundamental rights and social cohesion

The rhetoric of a "Go Back" movement, regardless of its target, poses a serious threat to the fundamental rights of all Indian citizens. The Constitution of India guarantees the right to freedom of movement, to reside and settle in any part of the country, and to practice any profession or business (Article 19).

The calls for boycotts, restrictions on land ownership, and job quotas based on regional identity directly violate these constitutional guarantees. The "Go Back" slogans, regardless of the community it targets, strikes at the very core of these constitutional guarantees and freedoms.

As Telangana negotiates its place within India's turbulent political landscape, such movements highlight the precarious balance between local identity, national unity, and the rights of all citizens, especially in the face of rising majoritarian and exclusionary politics.

The political framing of this conflict is also a major concern. The Hindutva narrative, by labelling the movement as a conspiracy, risks inciting communal tensions and vigilantism. Similarly, the progressive argument, by painting the entire Marwari community as a monolithic financial force behind Hindutva, risks collective punishment and xenophobia. Both narratives, while having different motivations, contribute to social fragmentation and the erosion of a pluralistic society.

The "Marwari Go Back" movement in Telangana is thus a microcosm of the larger ideological and political battles being fought in India, where local grievances are often hijacked by national political agendas, posing a significant challenge to the secular and democratic fabric of India.

(The author is former Senior Editor, The Economic Times, and currently practising as an Advocate at the Telangana High Court)

Tragicomic political theatre-Beware of gatekeepers guarding doors too tightly

VANAM JWALA
NARASIMHA RAO

IN politics as well as in real life, 'Accessibility and Availability' of individuals to the well known, less known and even unknown, is more than an open door. It is the 'Lifeline between leadership and legitimacy; guidance and rightfulness.'

Every individual, especially a political leader, who prefers to be physically present, emotionally connected, and intellectually within reach, earns enduring loyalty. History's greatest statesmen, from Mahatma Gandhi to Nelson Mandela, emphasized that 'Presence alone is power' and 'distance is an unambiguous decay.'

Leaders who once walked freely among their people have become convicts of their own 'kitchen cabinets' who are not truth-tellers, but comfort-seekers, quietly misleading the leader to sever ties with genuine allies. The result is, as predictable as it is tragic: victories without depth, defeats without support, and lonely end in the political spotlight, while the chorus of flatterers vanishes into the shadows. This is the anatomy of 'accessibility and availability', their perils and the subtle betrayals that reshape power from within.

If 'accessibility and availability' are taken as the 'foundation stones for leadership, good governance, and statesmanship' the discussion must begin with the simple truth that leaders who remain within the reach of their people are the ones who earn trust, command loyalty, and foster an environment of participatory governance.

Accessibility and Availability does not merely mean physical proximity, such as an open-door policy or frequent public interactions; it is equally about emotional and intellectual reachability, whether a leader listens, understands, and responds without barriers of arrogance, secrecy, or distance created by 'Kitchen Cabinets.'

Gandhi's open interaction with villagers, his simple life, and his readiness to listen even to the humblest person created an unshakeable moral authority. Churchill's wartime walks through bombed London, Mandela's personal outreach to all communities in post-apartheid South Africa, and Volodymyr Zelensky's decision to stay visible among his people during war are the most persuasive forms of leadership. These are few compelling examples of success where 'accessibility and availability' became the defining factor. The fall of Louis XVI was the best example



where inaccessibility led to alienation, mistrust, and eventual collapse.

Jawaharlal Nehru's warmth and correspondence was his moral authority. Yet his inability to heed ground-level warnings, for instance, before the 1962 China War, revealed how even accessible and available leaders can falter if it is not continuous. Indira Gandhi's early accessibility and availability won her the image of 'Indira Amma' but during the Emergency, she became insulated, filtering information through a small inner circle or the 'Kitchen cabinet' and losing the trust that had made her formidable.

Y S Rajasekhara Reddy sustained accessibility and availability both in and out of power through direct contact with common people and influenced alike.

N T Rama Rao's dramatic political comeback after being unseated in 1984

was possible because he toured villages, met workers without protocol, and never abandoned those who stood by him.

K Chandrashekhara Rao's accessibility and availability during the Telangana movement created emotional momentum, but after assuming power, it was alleged that these were narrowed for numerous early comrades, leaving some bewildered. N Chandrababu Naidu's selective accessibility in his early tenure weakened his base during years out of power, a gap he later successfully bridged.

Many leaders have seen people who were inseparable during their peak years and once closest vanish almost overnight after loss of office. Equally, there are instances, where leaders themselves become less accessible and available to their most loyal comrades once they rise

to power, often due to over-reliance on a 'kitchen cabinet' that acts as a gatekeeper not to speak of inexplicable formal permission, security (nicknamed as bouncers) clearance, and weeks, months, years of waiting.

The most 'tragicomic theatre in politics' is the leader's own residence, where the true artistry of 'distance management' is successfully enacted.

With over 15 years of closely working experience in the media and public relations as well as the experience of meticulously watching through personal contacts with at least seven-eight Chief Ministers, in and out of power, I feel leaders who were otherwise shrewd in public battles, become strangely naïve in public relations. They fail to read the petty insecurities of a dozen self-appointed gatekeepers.

I feel leaders who were otherwise shrewd in public battles, become strangely naïve in public relations. They fail to read the petty insecurities of a dozen self-appointed gatekeepers. These 'trusted aides' whose true qualifications often begin and end with proximity to the leader's chair, live in perpetual fear of being found out. They intelligently protect themselves by cunningly blocking the path between the leader and his or her true loyalists.

These 'trusted aides' whose true qualifications often begin and end with proximity to the leader's chair, live in perpetual fear of being found out. They intelligently protect themselves by cunningly blocking the path between the leader and his or her true loyalists.

The technique is simple but devastating. First, they filter communication, like WhatsApp messages, from true loyalist friends and well-wishers, obviously by saying like: 'Sir/Madam, I will handle it, no need for you to waste time on such small matters.' Next, they plant doubt as, 'These old friends of yours seem to be drifting, I am not sure they are with you anymore.' Then they create busyness, 'Your calendar is full, let us push this meeting to a later date.' Ill-informed leader believes that, those once-close, loyal associates are less important and less relevant.

The 'kitchen cabinet' meanwhile, thrives in this closed circle. They become the gate, the guard, and the gospel, ensuring that the only voices the leader hears are those that echo their own self-interest. And because the leader hears them every day, and the genuine well-wishers increasingly less, the truth is slowly rewritten. It is a strange form of political brainwashing: gentle, persistent, and almost invisible.

By the time the leader realizes what has happened the damage is complete. The leader is now surrounded only by 'Yes men and women' who always nod, always flatter, and always make sure the real picture never reaches the desk. These are the very people to first abandon when the winds turn rough. I have often thought that there should be a warning plaque on every leader's desk: 'Beware of those who guard your door too tightly. They may be guarding it against your interests.'

Because the hard truth is that when

the curtains fall and the leader moves from triumph to disaster, it would not be the 'kitchen cabinet' standing beside the leader on that deserted stage. It will be the very people they allowed to be pushed away, provided they did not give up entirely. But by then, as in an old Telugu drama, the hero stands alone in a dim spotlight, and the kitchen cabinet is nowhere to be found. They have already set up camp in someone else's kitchen.

The moral is, a leader's accessibility and availability is not merely about meeting people, but it is about guarding the channels of trust from being hijacked by those who thrive in darkness. A true statesman keeps their door open wide enough for truth to walk in freely, even if it steps in with muddy shoes. Those who close that door, intentionally or otherwise, are not protecting the leader. They are writing the first lines of their political obituary.

Accessibility and Availability is not a decorative trait of leadership. It is the very oxygen without which political life suffocates. A leader who allows loyal, competent voices to be silenced by self-serving intermediaries, it is not merely committing an error of judgment but dismantling their own support system brick by brick.

Triumph and disaster alike demand the counsel of those who dare to speak the uncomfortable truth, not just the convenient lie.

When a leader's door becomes a fortress guarded by those afraid of their own inadequacy, they trade the long-term stability of trust for the short-term comfort of flattery.

In politics and in real life, the lights go out, the crowd disperses, and the leader is left in the company of those who never really believed in them, because the ones who sincerely served, had chosen the way out long ago.

{ THE BIG PICTURE }

Superman entrepreneurs driving the Indian economy

Their energy and vision have transformed the industrial landscape and helped India grow. But these factors of success also become the biggest bottleneck to scaling up their business

The Indian economy has been powered by the ambition and grit of a growing bunch of superman entrepreneurs. As per Hurun India, last July, India had 334 billionaires, 55% of whom were first generation. Post the 1992 economic reforms, the number of superman entrepreneurs grew rapidly and between 2000 and 2025, the number of ₹1,000 crore plus revenue companies in India has gone up manifold.

The superman entrepreneur (SE) is a "force of nature". They have achieved what very, very few people could have. It's their superpowers that have allowed them to overcome the odds and build unlikely high-growth businesses. At the start they had few things going for them – just a burning ambition. These superman entrepreneurs could have had different origins – some may have been driven to start a business because they couldn't find a job; others may have just hated the thought of joining the existing small family business; others felt claustrophobic in the companies they worked in repelled by the bureaucracy and conservative decision making; and a few had a driving passion that they could not shed and so went after it and ultimately succeeded.

None of these SEs had it easy. Everyone

doubted them, they scrounged to raise capital, finding people to join them was tough, and they faced failure at the start but did not get deterred. They persevered and have lived to tell the tale. We are talking about entrepreneurs seeking to create industries and great companies, and not some shady businessmen with a high share of bad loans.

Here, we are creating a Weberian ideal type of the SE. While it is not specific to anyone, it attempts to capture essential traits. It's not an accurate description of reality, but rather a simplified representation, highlighting essential characteristics. This allows for comparison and analysis of real-world situations by contrasting them with this constructed model. Let's construct aspects of their personality.

Unbounded optimism: Most SEs are optimists, and see opportunities where others see roadblocks. They can pivot and change swiftly and adjust where needed. They are driven by what can be more than what others believe is realistic. It both inspires and scares their teams. It allows them to make bold decisions. Sometimes, this optimism and positivity can make them irritated about naysaying pragmatists or risk-conscious managers; they want people to believe and trust their instincts. But these instincts can expose the business to huge, real risks.

Can do, can learn: Most of the SEs are relentless in learning and doing. Often, they are self-taught without fancy degrees. They hear out many people but assimilate in private. All of them understand their balance sheet better than their profit and

loss accounts. They understand the importance of corporate structure and cash (raising equity or debt, leverage, multiple management, free-cash flow, portfolio, tax and regulations). They are curious and always want to know about other entrepreneurs and experiment all the time.

All in, all the time: They are all in all the time. They are consumed by their journey, are alert and resilient. They also would like to know every detail of their business and always choose investment and risks over conspicuous consumption. They resent entitlement in their children and respect only those who are as committed as they are. It's tough to be their children as they are larger than life figures, poor teachers with very high expectations. They rarely give their children true autonomy and succession planning is talked about but never implemented. They are also always instituting processes and rules, for employees and even their children, but never use them themselves. This undermines the processes they seek to introduce but mostly they do not see how it applies to themselves.

Resilience and persistence: In the journey of most of these businesses, there is often one or more moments of deep, life-threatening crisis – a failed joint venture, a fire in a factory or shutting down of a business line. In these times, SEs always double down. They bet on themselves against the odds. They take charge. They may hear other opinions, but they decide alone.

They like the loyalty of their teams but often not their judgment. And they never forget the crisis – it shapes them for the



Janmejaya Sinha



Vikram Bhalla



Most superman entrepreneurs are optimists, and see opportunities where others see roadblocks and can pivot and change swiftly and adjust when needed. HT ARCHIVE

future. It also reinforces their belief in their own abilities.

Loyal order takers: SEs build the business with loyal order takers. Initially, they could not hire great talent and so they valued loyalty and liked people who could take orders and execute their orders well. People who were there before they became successful – partners, employees, vendors, – will always have a special place in their hearts, and quite often, in their business. These loyal "friends" occupy key positions. They provide internal and external information. But at some point, the SE and the business outgrows the capabilities and skills of the loyal employees. The loyal friends can become a drag on the business, but the SE finds it hard to acknowledge.

Failed professionalisation: Often the limi-

tations of their original teams push them to think about professionalising – bringing in top talent, putting in place rules and processes.

Many of them intellectually know that they need to do this, but few of them emotionally commit to it. Often because they lack high-quality formal education, they seek branded talent.

But their honeymoon with such talent is short. They are impatient with professional managers – offering a shorter rope for failures than they would do for themselves or their loyalists. The loyalists feel threatened by new talent and make it harder for them to settle or succeed in the business.

India owes a great debt of gratitude to these SEs. Their drive and vision have transformed the industrial landscape and

helped India grow. These SEs start to face challenges as they graduate beyond ₹5,000 crore revenue and face a real challenge by the time their business has grown to around ₹15,000 crore. At that point they become the biggest bottleneck to the growth of their business.

Changing gears to go from being SEs to creating truly iconic companies is tough. They need to learn the importance of leverage for themselves and to be able to trust and give autonomy to others. They need help to move to the next orbit! That's the subject of another article.

Janmejaya Sinha is chairman India, Boston Consultancy Group (BCG) and Vikram Bhalla is managing director and senior partner, BCG. The views expressed are personal

{ SUNDAY SENTIMENTS }

Karan Thapar



Shimon Peres and the war on Palestinians

Recently, I've been thinking about Shimon Peres. When I first met him in the mid-1980s, it was, I think, just after his first term as prime minister of Israel. He had moved to the foreign ministry. He served a second term as premier in the mid-1990s and then went on to become president from 2007 till 2014. He was a member of 12 cabinets, represented five political parties and served 46 unbroken years in the Knesset, in a political career spanning seven decades. Quite honestly, I know few politicians like him.

At the time I was anchoring "The World This Week", which London Weekend Television used to make for Channel 4. It was a Sunday morning show that dwelt on the key foreign affairs concerns of the time.

We flew to Tel Aviv to interview Peres. When he first walked into the room

where we had set up our cameras, he was polite but perfunctory. I thought he was in a hurry to get the interview over with. I soon realised that my first impression was terribly wrong.

Peres spoke at length. He seemed to read deeper meanings into my often shallow questions and honoured them with lengthy detailed answers. He never rambled. He wasn't prolix. But he wasn't brief either. It wasn't long before I realised he was enjoying the interview. He liked being drawn out. He liked holding forth.

When the formal interview ended, we hastily packed up our equipment and I stood up to bid him farewell. "Can't you have a cup of tea with me and a chat before you go?" he asked to my surprise. "There's so much more to tell you about Israel which one can never fit into a half hour interview."

We moved to his office which was next

door, and he began to talk about the Palestinian people. I'm not sure why. It was as if he had a weight on his mind that he wanted to alleviate. Forty years later, I can't accurately recall his words but I will never forget their drift or the impact that made on me and the producer and director who had accompanied me to Israel.

Peres spoke from the heart and I felt I could sense an unexpressed anxiety and concern. The need to solve the Palestinian problem lay at the core of his conversation. Unless I'm mistaken, it lasted for over half an hour. He quoted Mahatma Gandhi, who he clearly admired. I felt that gave him strength. His problem was that he knew what he wanted to do but wasn't sure how to persuade his countrymen. A dilemma Gandhi also faced.

I guess the Oslo Accords were the natural result of what he was starting to articulate that day. It is the closest that Israel has come to a solution of the Palestinian problem. But it was aborted or stillborn.

How different was that time to Benjamin Netanyahu's Israel of today? Peres wanted to solve a situation that had already lingered for four decades. In 2025, Netanyahu doesn't care about the Palestinian people. Peres had a conscience. The Palestinian people mattered to him. Netanyahu is only concerned about himself.

Decades later I met Peres a second time. I'm not sure if he was president of Israel but he was staying in a suite at the

PERES QUOTED GANDHI, WHO HE CLEARLY ADMIRER. HIS PROBLEM WAS THAT HE KNEW WHAT HE WANTED TO DO BUT WASN'T SURE HOW TO PERSUADE HIS COUNTRYMEN. A DILEMMA GANDHI ALSO FACED.

Ashok Hotel. There were others in the room. I wasn't his only guest. But he remembered our earlier conversation. "At the time I thought we could make the world we wanted," I recall him saying. "Now I'm older and wiser and accept there are some mountains you cannot move. But I'll keep trying." We were at the door and I was saying my farewells when this conversation happened. Once again, it wasn't what I expected.

Peres died in 2016 at the age of 93. Politics and other connected developments may have thwarted him but his spirit remained undiminished. If he had been prime minister today, we might have had a solution to the Palestine problem.

Karan Thapar is the author of Devil's Advocate: The Untold Story. The views expressed are personal

{ ANOTHER DAY }

Namita Bhandare



Where's the freedom of choice for daughters?

She had boarded coach B3 at Indore to travel home for Rakshabandhan. When the Indore-Bilaspur Narmada Express chugged into Katni station on August 7, her family was waiting on the platform but she did not alight.

The disappearance of a 29-year-old woman, a law graduate with dreams of becoming a civil judge, was a mystery. Had she been trafficked? Or had she somehow fallen off the train? Nobody could say.

Tracing her movements through CCTV footage and eyewitness testimony, Madhya Pradesh police tracked her down two weeks later to Lakhimpur Kheri on the Nepal border. Astonishingly, she had engineered her own disappearance, the police said. "She wanted to become a judge while her family wanted her to leave her studies, her ambitions and get married."

Archana Tiwari had made a life of her own living in a hostel in Indore as she practised in the high court and prepared for the judicial services exams. The future she saw for herself did not include giving up her career after marriage to a family-approved man. Archana has not yet issued a statement. We only have the police version. Yet, you have to ask: What would drive a 29-year-old lawyer to plot and execute her own disappearance from her family? How desperate does she have to be? Modern India is seeing a generational clash of aspiration with tradition where educated women are pushing to exercise autonomy in matters of career and love – in that order. But their parents remain enmeshed in tradition where it remains their primary duty to marry off their daughters to a man they choose for her. It's a tension that is increasingly manifesting itself in tragedy and in crime.

In Palanpur, Gujarat, an 18-year-old dreams of getting into medical college. Earlier this month, her father and uncle were arrested for killing her. Tennis player Rad-

hika Yadav's professional success was too much for her father to handle so he allegedly shot her while she was cooking a birthday breakfast for her mother. Across the border in Lahore, a 24-year-old woman was shot dead by her younger brother because he couldn't stomach the fact that she was in love with a fellow doctor.

Women continue to bear the burden of family honour – not that different from 79 years ago during Partition, when families chose to make their daughters *shahed* (martyrs) rather than risk their falling into enemy hands, feminist publisher and writer Urvashi Butalia told me in a recent interview.

The imperative to control daughters in the name of protecting them seeps through society. We see it in the judiciary – who can forget that the Kerala high court said a 23-year-old Hadia was too feeble to choose her partner? We see it in our laws, with states introducing so-called anti-conversion laws that all but prohibit interfaith marriages. Independent India's first uniform civil code in Uttarakhand requires cohabiting adults to fill out a 16-page form to be submitted to a government official. What is this if not control by a nanny State?

Bridging the education gap has been India's great success story. But if education is supposed to free the mind, why do we still insist our daughters remain obedient and unquestioning of parental authority? And yet, the heart knows what it wants. In Uttar Pradesh, last June, as many as 11 married women took the money disbursed to them under the prime minister's Awas Yojna and ran off with their boyfriends.

Maybe it is time for parents to consider the radical idea of leaving daughters free to make their own decisions – even if they don't agree.

Namita Bhandare writes on gender. The views expressed are personal

How the corporate life spawns entrepreneurs

It is late at night on a Friday. The street near the desolate office building is empty. This is the non-70-hour work week business district. Office workers have clocked out early, to get stuck with the thousands who also clocked out early, proving that Friday night traffic is governed by Game Theory. The security guards at the office gate – utilising the relative calm – are sharing banter with the housekeeping staff. One of them has cautiously lit up a *beedi*. At a distance, the designated *chai tapri* (tea stall) is winding up for the day. The *tapriwale bhaiya* – that's the trade-name – is unhooking the never-ending strips of *guthka* packets hanging over a thread. He still has to wait for his last customer – standing six feet away, in formal wear, uncomfortable-looking leather shoes and a blue lanyard around his neck with the plastic ID card safely tucked in his shirt's front pocket. He's smoking his bi-annual cigarette, alone, staring into nothingness, lost in thought – an island of storm in the surrounding calm. Something has gone wrong.

Bhaiya is used to this. He is the silent therapist for many such boardroom casualties.

Usually, Friday evening is when the human resources department delivers bad news to an individual, so that he takes two precious days to recover from it at the expense of his weekend. Also, if he wishes to tender a resignation, the notice period kicks in from a Monday and not a Friday,

thereby saving two more days for the company.

Maybe, our guy had an altercation with the boss. While he is gazing into nothingness, he is probably thinking of all the fitting responses he could have given to his superior's jibe, but stopped short due to the weight of his responsibilities, with the job market not being good as well. How much could he have given back while keeping his self-esteem semi-alive? Will he lose face on the floor for being a pushover?

How will he face his colleagues after the news of his purported humiliation leaks out of the conference room? Workplace friendships are fleeting, they depend a lot on common misery. It's like a bond you develop with other prisoners; the day the misery of your compatriot ends and he escapes, you will have to look for other victims to bond with.

Or maybe you will face it alone, late at night, near a *chai tapri*. All such battles are won in hindsight – while driving, in cold showers, or at 2 am in the night while you are struggling to sleep. Jobs are tough.

One big issue with corporate life is the useless stress inducers it throws at you. Exhibit A: How can a guy who's a batch junior to me be at the same designation as I am? In a dog-eat-dog world, people still look for outdated concepts like batch parity. Such stress is non-productive, but occupies your mind-space. A businessman can call a younger person "Sir" or "Boss" to sell his stuff. But a corporate guy can never report to his junior no matter how big the



Workplace friendships are fleeting; they depend a lot on common misery. HT PHOTO

compensation is. It is crazy how a non-material issue can change the course of your corporate career.

Another key issue is having a boss with an ego as fragile as the current Indo-US relationship. One joke you cracked at his expense, at a house party four appraisal cycles ago, is remembered and is used to ruin your one calendar year of weekends. If the super-boss likes you, and your boss doesn't, it is a career long Mercury retrograde. "He is a talented guy, just that we are not able to utilise his talents well," your boss would say in a talent calibration meeting where they eventually decide against your promotion.

Bad bosses are a boon to a growing economy. They contribute the most by pushing talented individuals out of corporate slavery to start their own ventures and create jobs. You complete your last day, put out a heartfelt yet needlessly long LinkedIn post, where you thank the

ex-bosses you missed, tag the current boss covertly in a cloud of other colleagues and claim excitement about the journey ahead.

All co-workers give a thumbs-up to the emotional LinkedIn post where you announce your venture, which gets 100+ comments. Everybody wishing you the best are also waiting for your eventual misery, to feel good about their recurring monthly salary and its certainty. Truth be told, only 1% of ventures survive. Most such adventurers are found pining their litany of ex-bosses for suitable opportunities at the same salary they left. Entrepreneurship is tough too. But your 2 am battles aren't about words, they are about numbers. Such razor-sharp focus is what helps in life.

Abhishek Asthana is a tech and media entrepreneur, and tweets as @gabbarsingh. The views expressed are personal

{ SUNDAY LETTERS }

Trump's hypocrisy

This is in reference to "Hell hath no fury like Donald Trump scorned" (17 August). It must be noted that the Americans being hypocrites is not surprising in the least. What India needs to internalise is there are no permanent friends or enemies, only permanent interests. And the Americans are following this dictum.

Shweta Karandikar

Female enrolment in higher studies

This is with reference to "Empowering young women to higher education" by Lalita Panicker (August 17). Young women need mental, emotional and financial support from families and society to pursue higher education. The government should start schemes to empower them to get enrolled in higher studies.

Abhilasha Gupta

An educated woman has the potential to transform our society. We need counselling of families to encourage their girls to study and more women role models to inspire them.

Bal Govind

Write to us at: letters@hindustantimes.com

Across
THE AISLE



PCHIDAMBARAM
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In my view, the Supreme Court must be focused on the legal issue. The ebb and flow of political and security issues ought not to deflect it from rendering justice according to law. The legal issue was crystallized before the Supreme Court. The Court refrained from deciding the issue based on a promise to the Court

A case of breach of promise

THERE IS a widely held belief that the Supreme Court had upheld the actions of the government in 'abrogating' Article 370 of the Constitution that conferred a special status on Jammu & Kashmir. The government claimed that the 'abrogation' was validated by the Court and some scholars seem to have accepted the claim. Wrong, as I had pointed out in a column (*'Towards a Dystopian Future', Indian Express, December 17, 2023*). In fact, the Supreme Court had held to the contrary on the issue of 'abrogation'.

ABROGATION ILLEGAL, BUT ...

On August 5, 2019, the government took three steps: invoked Article 370(1) to add clause (4) to the Interpretation Clause of the Constitution (Article 367); used the expanded Interpretation Clause and purported to 'amend' the proviso to Article 370(3); used the 'amended' Article 370(3) and the proviso thereto, and purported to 'abrogate' Article 370 itself. All three steps were held impermissible and unconstitutional by the Supreme Court. Nevertheless, the Supreme Court reasoned that the exercise of power under Article 370(1) *applying all the provisions of the Constitution* to Jammu & Kashmir was valid and it **had the same effect** as 'abrogating' Article 370.

Let's have clarity on the legal position: the so-called abrogation of Article 370 was achieved through too clever-by-half drafting. That was ruled it to be impermissible. What was upheld was the application or extension of all the provisions of the Constitution to J&K under Article 370(1).

MATTER NOT CLOSED

Anyway, let's accept that the special status of J&K was revoked. However, it cannot be gainsaid that the revocation of the special status rankles the people of J&K and fuels the resentment of the people against the high-handedness of the central government. The matter was not closed with the revocation of Article 370. On August 5, Jammu & Kashmir, a *State* since its accession, was divided into two *Union Territories*. Was it permissible and legal? The petitioners prayed that the Supreme Court examine this question too. The Court *declined* because *the central government submitted that it intended to restore the status of J&K (minus the UT of Ladakh) and hold elections*. Accepting the submission, the Court left the legal question 'open' but stipulated a time limit of September 30, 2024 to hold elections in J&K. Elections were indeed held in J&K in September, 2024 but statehood has not been restored until this day. It is undeniably a breach of promise on the part of the central government. The BJP and the NDA government are responsible for dragging their feet on

restoration of statehood to J&K. Other parties in the NDA are culpable too, to the extent that they are members of the Cabinet and Council of Ministers of the central government. After winning the elections, the National Conference (NC) formed the government of the U.T. of Jammu & Kashmir on October 16, 2024. It is natural that the NC wished to run the government and give to the people a representative government that had been denied since June 2017. Presumably, for tactical reasons the NC was not vocal about restoration of statehood. The absence of a strident demand for restoration of statehood led the central government to believe that statehood was not a priority for the people of J&K. On the contrary, deprivation of statehood is a major grievance of the people of the state. Whatever the state government may have delivered in the last 10 months, it does not seem to have earned the goodwill of the people. In hindsight, the NC may realize that it had made a tactical mistake in not being vocal on statehood.

PAHALGAM AND STATEHOOD

The terrorist attack in Pahalgam has shaken everyone. I have maintained that apart from terrorists who are infiltrated by Pakistan there are India-based terrorists. Who strikes where and whether the two groups collaborate in a terror attack

depend on the incident and the opportunity. In Pahalgam, the NIA arrested two Indians who allegedly gave shelter to the three Pakistan-based terrorists. After Operation Sindoor, and after eliminating the three foreign terrorists in an encounter on July 28–29, 2025, the government seems to have drawn the curtains on Pahalgam. There is complete silence on the fate of the two arrested persons. Are they still in custody or have they been released and the case closed? That is a mystery.

But the people remember. They remember that the promise of restoration of statehood has not been fulfilled. When some petitioners moved the Supreme Court for fulfillment of the promise, the Court made certain oral observations to the effect that what happened in Pahalgam cannot be ignored. The observations may have disillusioned the people of J&K further. The next hearing has been scheduled in about 8 weeks.

In my view, the Supreme Court must be focused on the legal issue. The ebb and flow of political and security issues ought not to deflect it from rendering justice according to law. The legal issue was crystallized before the Supreme Court. The Court refrained from deciding the issue based on a promise to the Court. The promise has not been fulfilled in 20 months. The choice is between mandating the fulfillment of the promise *forthwith* or rendering a *judgement on the legal issue* that is at large. I believe the Constitutional Court will render justice.

Fifth COLUMN

TAVLEEN SINGH
Twitter @tavleen_singh



Parliament must function

AS I watched another session of Parliament wasted because of the Opposition parties' street-fighting style of debate, an odd conspiracy theory occurred to me. Could the Congress party be acting as a secret agent for Narendra Modi? Or are its leaders too removed from reality to notice that every time they shout slogans when they should be making laws, they harm themselves and not the Prime Minister? He sits quietly with a smug half-smile on his face and watches until the sloganeering gets so out of control that both Houses end up adjourned. Again. And again, session after session.

According to 'vital stats' sent to me by a think tank with a very long name, the Lok Sabha functioned for 29% of its scheduled time and the Rajya Sabha for 34%. And, while his MPs were disrupting Parliament, the Leader of the Opposition wandered off to Bihar on yet another 'yatra', perhaps forgetting that some very important laws were being passed without debate. It should come as no surprise when I tell you that there are serious political pundits in Delhi who say, wearily wiping the sweat from their foreheads, that Modi's greatest asset is Rahul Gandhi.

The Prime Minister began his third term in office, much humbled by the voters having denied him a full majority. Those of us who have the tedious job of observing politicians (instead of glamorous, sexy movie stars) noticed that Modi seemed to almost physically shrink when he discovered that his boast of bringing the BJP back with more than 400 seats had been tossed into the garbage bin by Indian voters. Then, there was some serious introspection at the highest levels of the BJP and the Sangh Parivar. Humility became part of political strategy. The RSS chief declared publicly that those who genuinely served the nation did not take personal credit or make silly boasts. I paraphrase so Hindutva hysterics desist from yet another attack on my character and patriotism.

In a parliamentary democracy, there is no institution more important than parliament because it represents the will of the people. So, when our elected representatives spend their time on protests and placards instead of on debates, they let down those who voted for them. There are vital issues that need to be addressed in these times when India seems to be on its knees externally and falling apart internally. Bad governance and corrupt practices, especially at the municipal and state level, have caused whole towns to be washed away in the Himalayas and Mumbai spent all last week drowning.

In Delhi, where I sit and write on a very rainy day, I have driven on streets so filthy I was happy not to need to get out of my car. All along one street were garbage dumps that seemed to have flowed into each other and made a nauseating panorama of putrefying urban trash. It was not so happy a situation if you were driving either because the rain had turned streets into broken ribbons of dangerously deep potholes. These might seem like simple municipal problems to our exalted parliamentarians, but when was the last time there was a debate on how municipal governance must be improved?

While on the subject, may I add that I cannot remember the last time that governance was discussed in either House of Parliament. Opposition leaders like to blame this absence of debate on them 'not being allowed to speak', but there are ways of forcing the government into a debate by putting pressure inside Parliament instead of shrieking and sloganeering outside. There are rules under which discussions are held, but the Leader of the Opposition appears to believe that he can decide what these rules should be.

What is worrying is that because the Opposition chooses to remain absent, laws get passed without any debate at all. This latest Bill that seeks to keep criminals out of the highest echelons of politics is more than slightly dodgy. The Modi government has shown how it can use its law enforcement agencies as political weapons, so it is scary what could happen if a chief minister can be dismissed without a crime being proven against him in a court of law.

This newspaper deserves full credit for its excellent reportage on the Election Commission's Special Intensive Revision in Bihar. It is clearly a clumsy and hasty exercise and Opposition leaders are right to demand answers, but surely it would have been more effective to have a public discussion with the Election Commission than to go around yelling 'vote chor' at public rallies. To come back, though, in these final sentences to the functioning of Parliament may I say that I really cannot abide any more wasted parliament sessions.

Our MPs have been elected to be inside the house and that is where they should be. The Speaker of the Lok Sabha likes to lecture them on good behaviour and reminds them often that the whole country is watching. Instead of this, would it not be more effective to deprive those who cause disruptions to be denied their daily wages and their privileges? Why should taxpayers pay elected representatives when they are not doing their job? And to return, more seriously, to the point I made at the beginning of this piece in jest. It is time our Opposition leaders noticed how much they have helped the Prime Minister.

inside TRACK

COOMIKAPOOR



DOGGED ACTIVITY

IN A way, the wheel has turned full circle in the confrontation between stray dog lovers and the authorities. Bombay's first riot was in 1832, when a mob of 200, mostly Parsis, attacked policemen who were trying to round up strays. The community has special affection for the canine breed and even includes a dog in its funerary rites. Many Parsis were shocked to discover that one from their own community, SC's Justice Jamshed Burjor Pardiwala, had ordered the rounding up all strays in Delhi-NCR. He is being unfairly targeted by animal activists, including Parsis, for what is dubbed an unrealistic order. But the judges would perhaps not have called for such extreme measures if activists over the years had not been emboldened to mindlessly oppose every effort to bring rationality in the adherence to Animal Welfare Board (AWB) rules and control the canine population. In their zeal, the activists have misused the court and police to terrorise citizens from undertaking even minor reforms, such as permitting the municipality to remove biting dogs from colonies, questioning the sterilisation methods thus securing endless stays from the court, fudging figures of strays and defying AWB feeding rules by placing feeding bowls wherever they chose, usually on outer roads and in front of houses. In my own Nizamuddin East colony, a decade ago, the lawyer husband of an activist filed police cases against all members of the RWA, which served as a chilling warning to all subsequent welfare associations.

COMPLETE OPPOSITE

CP Radhakrishnan, the ruling party's choice for Vice President, is the complete opposite of Jagdeep Dhankhar. The soft-spoken, two-time MP from Tamil Nadu is self-effacing, with simple habits and is a staunch party loyalist. Unlike Dhankhar, who has a legal background, Radhakrishnan may have difficulty controlling the feisty Opposition in the Upper House, where the BJP has a slender majority. He may rely heavily on deputy chairperson Harivansh Narayan Singh, a JD(U) MP, for advice in running the Upper House. Incidentally, Harivansh's term ends in September next year and NDA allies are keen for an appointment of their choice. My own surmise, which admittedly has few takers, is that Dhankhar, the archetypal acolyte, only developed teeth and started hobnobbing with the Opposition after the

BJP indicated to him that he might have to step down before the completion of his term in view of mounting pressure from allies after the Lok Sabha results.

DYNASTIC DILEMMA

As a fourth generation political dynast, Mahanaaryaman Scindia — great-grandson of Rajmata Vijaya Raje Scindia and son of Communications Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia — should have an easy entry into politics. But though the erstwhile royal family still exercises enormous clout in the parliamentary seats of Gwalior, Shivpuri and Guna in Madhya Pradesh, it is handicapped because too many family members have political aspirations, while the BJP generally frowns on political dynasties. Apart from his father, Mahanaaryaman's cousin Dushyant is a Rajasthan MP and estranged aunts Vasundhara Raje and Yashodhara Scindia were till recently active politicians. Yashodhara's son, Akshay Bhansali, once talked about a political career, but subsequently abandoned the idea. Jyotiraditya has obviously decided the best way for his son's political future lies through cricket, as the two spheres are closely associated. Mahanaaryaman, 29, the vice president of the Gwalior division of the cricket association and also chairperson of the MP cricket league, hopes to be elected unopposed as president of the state cricket association.

PEOPLE OVER POLITICOS

Rao Inderjit Singh is a political heavyweight, minister of state and five-time Lok Sabha MP presently representing Gurugram. Yet, his word seems to count for little with the Haryana authorities. Before the monsoons, Singh repeatedly warned the corporation to rectify the outdated drainage system, but evoked little response from those in charge of the largely rural state. But when the heavy monsoons created havoc in the financial and IT hub, with even the super rich in their high rise complexes and golf courses not spared, influencers like Suhel Seth launched a very effective citizens campaign through social media and the newspapers. In Chandigarh, CM Nayab Singh Saini was finally jolted into action. The Haryana chief secretary and the CM's principal secretary rushed to Gurugram, where they have spent the last week holding marathon meetings, granting sanctions and extensions needed to strengthen basic services. The municipal commissioner is finally responding to videos of dysfunctional services posted by irate residents. If Singh was handicapped in getting his own party to act in time, it is partly because he began his political career in the Congress. Though he switched to the BJP in 2014, he has yet to forge close links with the ruling party's Haryana cadre, especially Saini, who is much junior to him.

History HEADLINE

SAMAYETA BAL



ON AUGUST 15, India celebrated its 79th Independence Day. While the freedom struggle continues to be defined by towering figures and well-documented milestones, it is equally marked by quiet, determined resistance, often led by those whose names were pushed to the margins. Among these are the women revolutionaries of Bengal, who not only confronted the British Empire but also defied the deeply entrenched patriarchy of their own society. Their legacy is not only inspirational; it is essential to our understanding of what true freedom demands.

These women waged a battle on two fronts: Against colonial domination and social constraints. In early 20th-century Bengal, women were expected to adhere to narrow roles — their education was discouraged, early marriage and widowhood were common, and *purdah* kept upper-caste women confined to the domestic sphere. In this atmosphere, even joining the nationalist cause came with suspicion. Revolutionary groups like Surya Sen's initially doubted women's capacity for leadership and sacrifice.

Despite such scepticism, they emerged as forces of resistance, often surpassing expectations. Their methods ranged from the armed and overt to the intellectual and covert. Some led attacks, some smuggled weapons, and others educated the next generation of girls quietly in their court-yards. Every act was calibrated resistance. Pritilata Waddedar, for instance, led a daring armed assault on the European Club at Chittagong in 1932, a site infamous for its racial segregation policies. Refusing capture, she consumed cyanide and embraced martyrdom, leaving behind leaflets and letters urging Indian women to "not remain in the background". Her courage was matched by Kalpana Datta, who participated in the Chittagong armoury raid and later chronicled her experience, documenting how women were not mere auxiliaries but "equal tacticians and partners".

Bina Das, another formidable name in Bengal's revolutionary history, attempted to assassinate the Governor of Bengal, Stanley Jackson, during a university convocation in 1932. Her act was not one of desperation but of calculated protest against an empire that thrived on violence and control. Earlier too, she had taken pointed steps like wearing khadi in her conservative college, writing about banned literature in her exam papers and distributing revolution-

Untold stories of Bengali women revolutionaries



(From left) Pritilata Waddedar, Kalpana Datta and Begum Rokeya Sakhawati Hossain. *Wikipedia*

ary materials through student networks. These were layered protests, against the empire and social orthodoxies that silenced women in public and intellectual spaces.

Parallel to these overt actions ran a powerful current of literary resistance. Begum Rokeya Sakhawati Hossain, whose contributions predate the armed revolutionaries, remains a towering figure in feminist and intellectual circles. Her novella *Sultana's Dream* envisioned a society led by women, governed by reason and peace, and freed from the shackles of both patriarchy and colonialism. Her writing was not utopian fantasy but a radical blueprint. She not only established schools for Muslim girls in Kolkata but went door to door, persuading families to educate their daughters, turning quiet dialogue into a revolutionary act.

Kamala Das Gupta combined daily domesticity with secret defiance. While managing a women's hostel in Kolkata, she served as a courier for underground revolutionary groups, hid fugitives and coordinated logistics under the guise of routine household management. In her memoir *Rakter Akshare*, she reveals the depth of female-led resistance networks, arms smuggled in food baskets, messages stitched into embroidery, and *rakhis* tied across religious lines to defy the divisive partition of Bengal in 1905.

Then, there were those who used their bodies as shields. Nanibala Devi, a widowed Brahmin woman, defied caste and gender expectations by posing as a mother, wife, servant — anything the revolution required. Arrested and tortured in Peshawar, she chose silence over betrayal. Her story, like so many others, survived not in textbooks but in oral histories, forgotten journals and the recollections of fellow fighters.

In rural Bengal, Labanya Prabha Ghosh organised reading groups, wrote regularly for nationalist publications like *Mukti*, and opened her home as a site for underground meetings. Literacy, for her, became a weapon. Her impact on local consciousness, especially among women, remains a quiet but indelible part of the broader movement.

The legend of Matangini Hazra, affectionately remembered as Gandhi Buri, underscores the scope of popular resistance among women across class lines. An illiterate widow from Tamruk, she led a procession during the Quit India Movement in 1942 and was shot multiple times while holding the tricolour aloft, chanting "Vande Mataram" till her final breath. Her death was not just an act of martyrdom; it was a national statement. It declared that freedom was not the preserve of the elite, but the rightful inheritance of every Indian soul.

These stories do not exist in isolation. They represent a powerful continuum of resistance that has too often been overshadowed by male-centric narratives. From *Pather Dabi* hidden in bags to underground journals passed in secret, and leading armed raids to enduring torture in silence, these women expanded the very definition of what it meant to be a revolutionary. They were not just fighting to liberate a nation but to redefine their place within it. They demanded, through action, an India where women would not have to fight again for the right to participate equally in the shaping of their destiny.

As India stands tall this Independence Day, it is time to remember these women — not as footnotes to a masculine history, but as foundational architects of freedom.

The writer is advocate and parliamentary and legislative researcher

On the LOOSE

LEHERKALA
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ONE WEEK before my son was moving to the US for college, he tripped over a stray dog snoozing peacefully in a Gurgaon market. My son is an accident-prone klutz and it was entirely his fault for disregarding the old adage about letting sleeping dogs lie, thereby incurring a nasty bite. There wasn't enough time to finish the anti-rabies injection course. Dog rabies has been eradicated in the US and I couldn't figure out a way for him to get the final shot there. Desperate, I sought the advice of my dog's vet, who, over a 30-year-practice, knows a thing or two. All strays aren't rabid, he as-

We let the dogs out

sured me, suggesting we go back to check on the dog. If the animal was hale and hearty, we had nothing to fear. Sure enough, the dog was chilling in exactly the same place. Relieved, we abandoned the medication and my son left as planned. It's an unfortunate reality in Delhi-NCR that every family has a stray dog story; but all the strays in major markets are vaccinated and sterilised due to efforts by citizens and NGOs.

Currently, there is no more contentious topic in Delhi society than the SC order of August 11, that strays need to be taken off the streets and moved to (non-existent) shelters. People are divided between the righteous — who believe that man's best friend, neglected and abandoned though he may be, has every right to live — and the

practical, who are firmly of the view that human safety takes precedence over everything else. In this, the second lot are supported by SC Justices Pardiwala and Mahadevan who rather dramatically invoked dialogue from *The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly* before condemning lakhs of dogs to an unseemly end: "When it's time to shoot, shoot. Don't talk." The tone throughout the SC's order suggests an odd sort of bloodthirsty brutality, a metaphorical sifting once and for all, of the powerful from the powerless. The SC wittingly used the phrases "so-called animal activists" and "so-called animal lovers" as if it's their fault that the municipalities-mandated CVNR protocol — Capture, Vaccinate, Neuter and Release — has been an abject failure.

Nuanced debate is dead in India but it should strike everyone as weird that dog lovers have unfairly become enemy number 1 post this order. I have never fed a stray; maximum, if I remember, I put out water for birds in June. On my daily walk, I see a guy on a bike distribute biscuits to strays. Lacking the same level of compassion, I have a grudging sort of admiration for people who have it. Urban life tends to make one insular and selfish. Should I be so dismissive of my fellow citizens who exhibit kindness? Everyone falls short of the glory of God, nevertheless, we all have small but vital roles to play in the unfolding destiny of the world. Strays, too, need a champion. Infuriating though we may find strays moving ominously in packs, the alternative, a starving dog at our

doorstep, is worse. Somebody sharing privileges with beasts from whom they receive nothing in return can't be all that evil. At worst, their search for existential meaning is clashing with community responsibility.

Nobody wants children mauled or terrorised by dogs and indeed, something needed to be done. To cultivate awareness means to remain as true to the truth as possible; and to make peace with all the ugliness that comes with, as Camus said, the terrible responsibility of life. In that spirit, can we at least agree the arbitrary jailing of a million community dogs is a horrific solution? Even if we must philosophically accept that solving crises in India means choosing the least awful option.

The writer is director, Hutkay Films

A GOVERNANCE QUIZ MISSED AT MONSOON SESSION

In a rare exhibition of consensus, the opposition parties and the ruling alliance have deemed the monsoon session of parliament a washout. The trigger for a parade of adjournments was the scandalous handling of the revision of electoral rolls. Who can vote, what defines citizenship, who decides who is a citizen and more. There are questions galore in this classic Indian conundrum and the Election Commission has covered itself with infamy.

Chaos unravelled in parliament while the issue is in the Supreme Court. Typically, the elected MPs end up representing their parties, not those who elect them. The cost of the washout—estimated at ₹2 lakh a minute—is important. More critical is the price paid in failing oversight on legislation and governance. The circumstance merits a review of governance on issues that affect lives and livelihoods. Here are a few snapshots.

Like the big challenge before India is the threat of unilateral tariffs imposed by the Trump administration. The statement on their potential impact was lost in a din of rhetoric. The issue sparked seven questions in the Lok Sabha and 13 in the Rajya Sabha. Ideally, the issue should have catalysed a debate, even an all-party select committee on strategies. That was not to be.

Be that as it may, the government has rightly focused on issues haunting the domestic economy and created two iGoMs (informal groups of ministers) for economic and social sector reforms. The two panels are tasked with laying out legislative and policy reform agendas. While this is welcome, it raises questions about the declarations of measures made in Budget 2025.

In February, the Budget announced the creation of a high-level committee for regulatory reforms to review the landscape of what is, effectively, a permission raj. It is well recognised that business is daunted by regulatory burdens. A study by Avantis Regtech shows entrepreneurs face 1,500 laws and over 69,000 compliances. Did MPs query the government? Fact: there are two committees on the job and their first meetings were held on August 21.

A bulk of the much-needed reforms is pending in the states. The Investment Friendliness Index of States announced in February awaits launch by Niti Aayog. A fund for boosting innovation and research in the private sector was announced in July 2024; its budget of ₹20,000 crore for this year is yet to see disbursements.

The 2024 budget declared 'cities as growth hubs'. This led to the creation of an 'Urban Challenge Fund' in February 2025 with an allocation of ₹1 lakh crore in this budget. Did MPs query the status? Meanwhile, floods continue to terrorise towns and cities. As early as in 2021, a report of the ministry of housing and urban affairs revealed that construction on floodplains had made cities vulnerable. In August 2025, a parliamentary standing committee was told that guidelines on floodplain zoning drafted in 2024 are "pending with states for their inputs".

Quality of life and habitat determine investments and reinvestments. The fact is net foreign direct investment into the country—inflows minus outflows of repatriation and investments by Indian companies—fell sharply to \$400 million, as against \$10 billion last year, even though gross FDI was at \$80 billion. The data should have catalysed debate on the reasons and corrections to the production-linked incentive scheme, and woo investments whether the China+1 model is alive or not.

One of the successes of this regime has been the opening up of defence production to the private sector. Operation Sindoor validated this. That said, the system is wracked by issues. Consider this nugget: the government issued 43 licences to manufacture bullet-proof body protectors. The parliamentary standing committee on defence has discovered that 33 of these companies have not commenced production! Knowing why is critical to the quest of amanirbhar defence.

Investment in higher education expands capacity and propels innovation; it needs boosting faculty strength. Fact: hundreds of posts are lying vacant across institutes focused on scientific research. Over 700 posts, including of scientists, are vacant at the Satish Dhawan Space Centre. Over 2,500 posts are vacant across 23 AIIMS centres and over 2,200 posts are vacant at bodies under the Ayush ministry. At the primary education level, a total of 7,765 teacher posts in Kendriya Vidyalayas and 4,323 in Navodaya Vidyalayas are vacant.

Like its known investors are troubled by delays in redress of legal issues. On August 1, the government revealed data on pendency of cases—86,844 in the Supreme Court, 63.32 lakh in high courts and 4.66 crore in subordinate courts. Pendency is a much-studied subject and one major cause is vacancies—334 judge posts in high courts and one in five posts in lower courts are vacant.

The promise of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code is stranded—there are 14,961 cases pending at the National Company Law Tribunal. Tax disputes are constant punctuations in conversations at investment conferences. The total tax arrears pending as on June 2025 under indirect taxes was ₹7.01 lakh crore and under direct taxes ₹47.5 lakh crore. There are over 6.11 lakh cases with ₹31 lakh crore demands pending litigation under income tax and over 97,400 cases and ₹3.71 lakh crore under indirect taxes.

India's governance and potential are hostage to the short-termism of petty partisan politics. And no party can claim innocence amid this cacophony of unanswered questions.

VICE PRESIDENCY: A TARNISHED THRONE



POWER & POLITICS

PRABHU CHAWLA

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THE vice presidency, once the republic's quiet conscience, is now its loudest cockpit. From a sanctified sanctum of sobriety and sagacity it has degenerated into a dramaturgical amphitheatre of ideological antagonism, caste cartography, and regional recalibration. What was formerly the perch of philosopher-statesmen and constitutional custodians has metastasised into a platform for partisan praetorians, electoral emissaries, and ideological incendiaries. The chair that once epitomised equipoise has been transfigured into a stage of confrontation. The 2025 vice-presidential contest is not a procedural prosaic—it is a pupa of political metamorphosis.

This year's confrontation, like its predecessors, dramatises the dialectic of two Indias. NDA, with deliberate dramaturgy, has unfurled C P Radhakrishnan: an inveterate RSS swayamsevak of impeccable integrity from Tamil Nadu. His candidature is no ceremonial cipher; it is a strategic subterfuge designed to destabilise Dravidian dogma and insinuate the ideology of centralised nationalism into the southern terrain.

In contrast, the INDIA bloc has Justice B Sudershan Reddy, a juristic luminary, an upper caste by birth but liberal by leaning whose bench-burnished reputation evokes civil liberty, constitutional morality, and jurisprudential conscience. To his proponents, he is the face of Nehruvian rationalism and a protector of the Naxal movement. To the Sangh, he is the quintessence of 'judicial adventurism', an avatar of 'activist overreach', a juridical Jacobin who imperilled security in the name of sophistic legality. Thus the duel is more a battle of archetypes, a confrontation of cultural cosmogonies: one privileging homogenised nationalism, the other

heralding pluralist liberalism.

Why, one may ask, such febrile fervour for an ostensibly ornamental office? Because the Vice President presides over the Rajya Sabha, the institutional interlocutor between unbridled majoritarianism and constitutional moderation. In an epoch where the Lok Sabha has become an assembly line for legislative bulldozers, the Rajya Sabha endures as the last rampart of resistance. A supine Vice President can lubricate legislative leviathans; a principled one can thwart authoritarian audacity. Hence, the office transmutes from ceremonial to consequential, from symbolic to strategic.

In the pristine decades of the republic, Vice Presidents were chosen through consensus, embodying gravitas rather than grubby partisanship. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, Zakir Husain, Gopal Swarup Pathak were all elevated unopposed, exemplars of equilibrium and erudition. But Indra Gandhi inaugurated the era of instrumentalism, preferring loyalty over legacy and compliance over conscience. Thereafter, caste, creed, and constituency became the metres of choice. The role has gained strategic importance precisely because the ruling regime increasingly sees parliament not as a forum for dialogue, but as an assembly line for legislation. As the successive governments bulldoze key bills through the Lok Sabha with brute majority, the Rajya Sabha has become the final frontier of democratic virtue. In such a context, the Vice President's control over the Upper House becomes a tool of either suppression or salvation, depending on who occupies the chair. And here lies the BJP's motivation: a neutral arbiter would be a speed bump; a fellow traveller would be a catalyst.

The roster of Vice Presidents reads like a sociological syllabus: Brahmin, Dalit, Muslim, Lingayat, Jat, Kayasth, Kamma. Each election encoded a cultural calculus; each defeat disclosed a deeper

dissonance—Shinde vs Shekhawat (Dalit vs Rajput), Heptulla vs Ansari (Muslim diversity vs Muslim diplomacy), Alva vs Dhankhar (Christian minority vs Hindu majoritarianism). Now, in 2025, the dialectic continues: Tamil saffron vs Telugu jurisprudence; Stalinist federalism vs Sangh centralism; Nehruvian conscience vs nationalist consolidation.

Equally revealing is the gallery of those who lost. And each contest tells a story. In 2002, the UPA chose Sushil Kumar Shinde, a prominent Dalit face from Maharashtra, to take on Bhairon Singh Shekhawat, a tall Rajput leader from Rajasthan and a BJP veteran. The contest laid bare the caste lines—with the Congress attempting to consolidate Dalit sentiment, while the NDA banked on upper caste dominance. In 2007, the NDA reversed the narrative: It fielded

Najma Heptulla, a Muslim woman, against fellow Muslim Hamid Ansari, a career diplomat, vice chancellor, and someone with deep ties to academic and foreign service institutions. The choice was deliberate since NDA sought to project diversity while countering UPA's institutional liberalism.

The trend continued in 2022, when the UPA put forward Margaret Alva, a senior Christian woman leader from Karnataka. The symbolism was unmissable—gender, minority, region were all bundled into one candidature. Alva faced Jagdeep Dhankhar, a Jat from Rajasthan and a known Modi loyalist. The result was emphatic: Dhankhar won by a margin of 346 votes. But the subtext was larger than the score line. The BJP had once again asserted control over the House of Elders. The caste equation, once used to balance representation, is now often used to divide and disrupt opposition unity.

In 2025, that story continues. The contest is layered. It pits a liberal legal mind against a loyal ideological worker. The South is at a crossroads: will Tamil pride accept a BJP man, or will Andhra loyalty bow before central diktats? The



SOURAV ROY

THE RIGHT TO A CLEAN ENVIRONMENT



OPINION

GEETHA RAVICHANDRAN

Former bureaucrat and author, most recently of *The Spell of the Rain Tree*

THE Supreme Court's judgement on pollution in Palar river is significant as it emphasises the responsibilities of both industry and government. In the court's opinion, while the 'polluter pays' principle is valid, the government is equally responsible to regulate and contain environmental damage. It's a matter of concern that this pertains to a public interest litigation moved more than 30 years ago and the problem of pollution caused by untreated effluents discharged by tanneries still persists.

Pollution of water bodies is happening right under the nose of pollution control boards, despite environmental protection laws and activists raising alarm. The argument that industries contribute to GDP, pay compensation when ordered, and are not the only

source of effluents is specious. Time and again, the judiciary has emphasised that a healthy environment is integral to human rights and the right to life itself.

The success stories that have contained environmental damage and restored ecosystems point to the efficacy of collaborative efforts among all stakeholders: citizens groups, non-profits, administrations and industries.

In the textile hub of Tiruppur in Tamil Nadu, joint efforts involving the entire community affected by the pollution of water bodies have resulted in cleaning and restoration. But this is a mammoth task and involves continuous monitoring.

In Sivakasi, where water-guzzling paper units are located, efforts to restore Chola-era lakes have been undertaken in recent years. With support from the local industries and a responsive district administration, the Sivakasi Green Forum, a citizens' group, has set about cleaning and desilting lakes that were either dry or were filled with sewage.

It has been an uphill task at every step—from overcoming the local population's initial scepticism to raising funds that involved volunteers bringing in small amounts and industries contributing. Gradually, with the removal of encroachments, their efforts are beginning to show results. Miyawaki forests have been planted in areas surrounding the lakes to ensure better

precipitation, air quality and a living habitat. Six water bodies covering 205 acres have been restored. The mission is to maintain the quality of water and make Sivakasi fully green by 2035.

Sewage and effluent treatment plants are vital in industrial hubs. Such plants can be approved as private-public partnerships. Projects funded by private parties and ultimately transferred to a local body would allow access to recycled wa-



The Supreme Court has ruled that apart from the polluter, the govt is responsible for containing pollution. Examples from Sivakasi and Tiruppur show much can be achieved if all stakeholders come together

ter wherever required by businesses. While the polluter pays principle is laudable, a better option would be to enforce extended producer responsibility. This will shorten timelines in creating infrastructures and tackle the problem at the source itself. Opposition from vested interests can be overcome with political will and administrative support.

A systematic approach that promotes solutions to environmental challenges, if

factored into business processes, would be a game changer. This can be incentivised by offering tax breaks, deduction of maintenance expense and GST concessions for using recycled materials. It's true that contributions are being made out of CSR funds; but making a direct contribution to a capital expenditure that benefits both the business and the community would result in a win-win.

Just as the problems are unique to a particular region, so are the solutions. Delegating implementation to local authorities that are more in tune with the ground realities would be efficacious. While there are several government schemes in place under the Swachh Bharat umbrella, there is a need for continuing vigilance and rapid response to tackle environmental challenges.

Treating environment as a limitless resource has resulted in disease and suffering to countless human beings. This largely affects those who live in the vicinity of polluting industries and have little recourse to justice.

Robert McFarlane, in *Is a River Alive*, writes about his encounter with a villager in Ennore Creek who, while talking of the future, says, "We are all getting cancer. It would be nice if we just got asthma." It's indeed unfortunate when we start thinking of a lesser evil as a greater good. The right to clean air and water is a basic human right. Coordinated efforts can make this a reality.

QUOTE CORNER

The growing danger today is that we're focused exclusively on the 'self' part of enlightened self-interest—at the expense of the 'enlightened' part... If intelligence analysts at the CIA saw our rivals engage in this kind of great-power suicide, we would break out the bourbon. Instead, the sound we hear is of champagne glasses clinking in the Kremlin and Zhongnanhai.

William Burns, former CIA director, in an open letter to US diplomats

We're still a long way off. I mean, we're not at the precipice of a peace agreement; we're not at the edge of one.

Marco Rubio, US secretary of state, on the prospects of a Ukraine deal

It's great to fall in love, but eventually one of you will be dog-tired and doing the bins.

Benedict Cumberbatch, starring in a stage version of *The War of the Roses*

MAILBAG WRITE TO

Redress grievances

Re: *Balance security for and access to leaders* (Aug 23). The attack on Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta shows rising intolerance among citizens towards leaders who neglect public grievances. People's frustration grows when their problems are ignored and leaders remain indifferent. Such anger, though undemocratic in expression, reflects deep disillusionment with governance. It is a warning that accountability and responsiveness are no longer optional for those in power.

Narayanan Kizhumundayur, Thrissur

Gaza conscience

Re: *A civilian tragedy* (Aug 23). It's heart-rending to learn that there is famine in war-torn Gaza. The manmade catastrophe is the result of Israel's offence for 22 months. Systematic blockade of food supplies and humanitarian aid by Israel has led to this inhuman situation, which is growing fast to af-

fect many more people. It's a blot on modern human history, a collective failure of humanity. World powers failed to avert the war in the first place, and the war crimes that followed. India and other nations should persuade Israel to allow humanitarian aid to Palestine in the interest of humanity.

D V G Sankara Rao, Vizianagaram

Lake eerie

Ref: *Man kills dad, live-in partner, dumps chopped bodies in lakes* (Aug 23). This news made for a terrifying read. Killing people over extramarital affairs is not new in Tamil Nadu and elsewhere. But it is perplexing why offenders dump the body parts in water bodies. They are already polluted with effluents from factories, polythene waste, etc. Who can advise these insane criminals?

S Vaithianathan, Madurai

Using SIR

Sub: *SC opens online SIR claim window* (Aug 23). The Supreme Court has directed the Election Commission to allow excluded voters to submit their

claims online in the special intensive revision exercise in poll-bound Bihar. That must have cleared the confusion the INDIA bloc has been entertaining. But the opposition should be chastised for fear-mongering for political advantages, and they should file status reports with the court.

S Lakshmi, Hyderabad

Students' letterbox

Ref: *Class 8 student stabs, injures classmate* (Aug 22). I propose installing letterboxes in schools for students to express their concerns anonymously. Sharing problems and bottled up feelings instead of keeping to oneself would foster healing. Trusted teachers and dedicated counsellors can listen and provide guidance with effective solutions. Encouraging open communication and dialogue will empower students to confront challenges and enhance emotional well-being and resilience.

T S Karthik, Chennai

Build infrastructure

Ref: *Lifeline to strays* (Aug 23). It's welcome that

the Supreme Court has kept in abeyance the idea of permanently relocating stray dogs to shelters citing a shortage of infrastructure. It would have been very difficult to comply with the previous order. However, it may be noted that sterilised and vaccinated strays, when let loose in their original place, may still pose a risk as one can't say when a dog would become aggressive. States and Union territories are expected to build infrastructure on a war footing in the wake of the court ruling.

V K Kumar, Thiruvananthapuram

Stray worry

Ref: *Lifeline to strays* (Aug 23). The Supreme Court modified its August 11 order, directing to release stray dogs back to their original locations after sterilisation and immunisation, except those infected with rabies or displaying aggressive behaviour. The so-called dog lobby welcomed this move as they can now adopt the stray dogs and keep them as pets. But lingering doubts still remain on people's minds if this would lead back to square one.

K V Raghuram, Wayanad

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The Pioneer AGENDA

The West must have a
sober realisation that
everything will not
always "go our way"
— Martin Luther King Jr

The world is undergoing a radical change as the Global South is now an assertive force. From driving new models of economic cooperation to reshaping the rules of trade, technology, and climate negotiations, the Global South is taking on Western hegemony head-on. It is no longer a passive recipient of global diktat but an active architect of its own future



The Rise of the Global South



India's Strategic Autonomy Tested in the Age of Trumpian Disruption

As Prime Minister Narendra Modi travels to Tianjin for the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit later this month, and India prepares to host Russian President Vladimir Putin later this year, New Delhi is signalling a decisive shift—asserting itself as an independent pole in global affairs, shaped as much by its own historical impulses as by the disruptions of the Trump era.



VIKAS SWARUP
Ambassador

The Strategic Autonomy

India's foreign policy has consistently avoided subordination to any single global bloc. From Nehru's early advocacy of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in the 1950s to the present era of multi-alignment, New Delhi has sought to preserve independence of judgment. The term "strategic autonomy," which gained currency in the 1990s, captures this instinct well. Under Prime Minister Modi, this has translated into building coalitions not just across the Global South but also with the US, European Union, the United Kingdom, Australia, Japan, and other major partners—reflecting India's determination to engage widely without being locked into rigid blocs.

Russia has been a trusted strategic partner since the days of the Soviet Union, providing critical support in defence, energy, and multilateral forums. What changed after 2000 was India's carefully calibrated opening to the United States, which transformed ties through civil nuclear cooperation, trade, and deepening defence collaboration. Crucially, this did not come at the expense of Moscow, with which India maintained robust links, nor of Beijing, where efforts to manage differences and keep channels open have remained constant. This blend of continuity with Russia, renewal with America, and engagement with China reflects India's enduring tradition of charting its own course.

Trump's Disruptive Turn

The latest phase of reassessment comes courtesy of Donald Trump's return to the US presidency and his sharp turn against Indian exports. His decision to impose punitive 50 per cent tariffs on a wide range of Indian goods has jolted New Delhi and placed strains on what many had viewed as the most consequential partnership of the 21st century.

The logic of Indo-US strategic convergence remains sound—shared concerns about an assertive China, the Indo-Pacific balance of power, and collaborations spanning technology to counterterrorism. But trust, once shaken, is difficult to repair. Trump's impulses—transactional, unpredictable, and often dismissive of partners' sensitivities—have

compelled India to reassess its options.

Unlike in earlier trade disputes, this time the tariffs are not isolated. They fit a pattern of Washington's retrenchment and unilateralism that makes India wary of overdependence. The idea of relying too much on the US, even for critical technology supply chains or defence imports, now seems imprudent.

Reset with China

Paradoxically, turbulence in one relationship has often created space in another. Nowhere is this clearer than with China, where India's recent trajectory has been marked by recurring border crises—Depsang in 2013, Chumar in 2014, Doklam in 2017, and the ongoing standoff in eastern Ladakh. These confrontations, compounded by economic rivalry and Beijing's close ties with Pakistan, have eroded trust. With some 50,000 troops still deployed in Ladakh, the road ahead hinges on a credible, time-bound framework for de-escalation and de-induction. Yet the calculus is shifting.

The SCO Summit in Tianjin will be Modi's first visit to China after a seven-year hiatus. The decision to participate is emblematic of evolving pragmatism on both sides. For Beijing too, a cooperative relationship with New Delhi is valuable as it seeks to steady its neighbourhood, even while managing its fraught rivalry with Washington.

Modi's likely interactions with Xi Jinping will not erase differences, but they underscore a willingness to compartmentalise disputes and find functional overlaps, from regional stability in Afghanistan to cooperation under BRICS finance frameworks, guided by the principles of mutual respect, mutual sensitivity, and common interest.

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India, Russia, China: The New World Matrix Under Construction

As the world navigates a period of intense geopolitical flux, two cataclysmic disruptions in the early 21st century have fundamentally reset the trajectory of global affairs: The COVID-19 pandemic, which paralysed systems and shook globalisation to its core, and the Russia-Ukraine conflict, which reintroduced large-scale war to Europe and has fractured long-standing alignments.

These twin shocks did not just disturb the old-world order—they triggered a systemic reset globally. What we are witnessing is more than a drift toward multipolarity or a Cold War redux. It marks the dawn of what I call the New-Muco Era—an era in which a New World Matrix is Under Construction.

This is a renovation—and—restart phase, where traditional institutions like the UN and WTO show signs of erosion, and sovereignty is reasserting itself over globalisation across sectors like semiconductors, AI, and energy. The dollar, though still dominant, is being cautiously counterbalanced. At the heart of this transition is a quieter revolution—optopolitics, or the battle of perceptions. In today's world, influence flows as much through screens and algorithms as through treaties and tanks.

India's Moment: From Participant to Architect

India now stands at a rare inflection point—not as a disruptor, but as a potential co-architect of the next global order. It is one of the few nations that enjoys credibility across both East and West, the trust of the Global South, and the civilisational depth to shape, not just survive—the new matrix. Its G20 leadership, legacy of Gandhi, democratic institutions, and digital innovations like UPI and Aadhaar highlight India's capacity to deliver at scale. But to seize the moment, India must shift from reactive diplomacy to proactive system design—helping construct new global



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President of the Imagindia
Institute

frameworks across trade, finance, tech governance, and people-to-people exchange across cultures.

Five areas demand immediate focus:

- Creating digital currency corridors with trusted partners to reduce dollar dependence.
- Co-authoring tech standards in AI, quantum, and data governance.
- Leading South-South cooperation in climate, health, and education.
- Embedding itself in resilient, diversified supply chains.
- Building narrative capital—global storytelling that projects India's values and vision.

India must also scale up its optopolitics and strategic imagination—by investing in think tanks, knowledge diplomacy, and intellectual capital that can shape international discourse from a position of confidence.

China: Builder and Rival

China is not merely reforming the global order—it is constructing parallel architectures. From the Belt and Road Initiative to the Digital Yuan, to its agenda—setting in the SCO and BRICS, Beijing is creating a system with Chinese characteristics, challenging existing frameworks on its own terms.

For India, China is both a strategic competitor and a necessary counterpart. Long-standing tensions remain, particularly over Himalayan border disputes, Indo-Pacific dominance, and tech rivalry in AI and telecommunications. At the same time, both countries share tactical space in platforms like BRICS, the SCO, and the G20. Moreover, China remains one of India's largest trading partners, reflecting mutual interdependence. Navigating this duality demands clarity and composure. India must resist China's hegemonic templates while asserting its own vision—not by isolation, but through constructive engagement and regional leadership.

Russia: A Strategic Lever

Post-Ukraine, Russia has pivoted eastward, deepening ties across Asia, Africa, and Latin America. It is actively promoting de-dollarisation through mechanisms like SPFS and MIR, positioning itself as a disruptor with enduring ambitions, even if diminished as a classical superpower.

For India, Russia remains a vital—and historically trusted—partner. The Indo-Soviet relationship during the Cold War was foundational to India's industrial, strategic, and diplomatic evolution. That legacy still resonates.

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BY GYANESHWAR DAYAL

It may be premature to assume that the spirit of 'Hindi Chini Bhai Bhai' is back and that *Panchsheel* would once again become the guiding principle of relations between India and China as in the 1950s, but surely something extraordinary is taking shape when it comes to Indo-China relations. After hitting its lowest ebb in 2020, when the Galwan clash took place, the two countries are now making concerted efforts to cross the Himalayan heights. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's China visit starting August 31 will mark more than just his first official visit after the Galwan clash. It will symbolise the

Exploring the imperative of Indo-China relations

possibility of a thaw in a relationship that has been defined by distrust, suspicion, and, at times, open hostility. The fact that New Delhi and Beijing are even talking of reconciliation tells us something important: The logic of geography and economics has once again pulled Asia's two giants back to the table.

Because if the two countries can overcome their differences, it would be an Asian Century with tiger and dragon engaged in a tango. This is not to say that differences have disappeared. Far

from it. The border dispute remains unresolved, Tibet is still a sensitive issue, and China's stance on Pakistan is unlikely to change. India has every reason to remain cautious about Beijing's strategic ambitions, which often blend commerce with coercion. Yet, in diplomacy, timing is everything.

The global order is in churn, the United States has adopted a policy which leaves little room for negotiations, and it makes a lot of strategic sense for India to re-engage China—not out of naïveté,

but out of pragmatism. More than anything, trade and economy provide the much-needed glue, and Trumponomics is pushing the two to come closer. Ironically, it is Trump who should get the credit for bringing the two Asian giants closer.

However, a lot needs to be negotiated and corrected. India's trade deficit with China is staggering, but therein lies the opportunity: studies suggest more than USD 160 billion worth of untapped export potential. With India emerging as the fastest-growing major economy,

it is well placed to become an alternative global supply chain along with China. Beijing, too, needs India's vast market and digital innovation ecosystem at a time when its own economy faces slowing growth and mounting global pushback, especially from the US.

To put it in a larger perspective, India, China, and Russia are well equipped to take on the Western challenge, more so when Europe and the US are facing numerous challenges.

India's digital edge, China's manufacturing muscle, and Russia's energy resources could together constitute a growth engine that reshapes and redefines the global economy.

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Living a Stable and healthy life with Multiple Sclerosis

We are three girls with Multiple Sclerosis (MS) from the same batch of the same school. I have a friend who has been living with MS for 20 years and another who has had it for more than a decade. My good friend's relative was diagnosed with MS recently. Even the wife of Manish Sisodia (former Deputy Chief Minister of Delhi) has Multiple Sclerosis.

Despite knowing so many people within my circle who have MS, I still see that there is very little awareness about this condition. We've all heard of illnesses like Cancer, Alzheimer's, Parkinson's among other conditions. We instantly grasp the seriousness of the condition the moment we hear these names. We start treatment without delay, change our diet, adjust our lifestyle and do everything we can to get better or at least stay stable.

When you hear the words Multiple Sclerosis, it doesn't immediately tell you what's happening to your body. MS is an autoimmune neurodegenerative disorder. Autoimmune, neurodegenerative- two very heavy, complex terms. They're not words we use in everyday conversations. Doctors rarely have the time to explain things in the depth you would like, and most people around you have never even heard of it. There is no strong support system, not many organisations or influential voices to help people truly understand the gravity of MS.

Why isn't there enough awareness around Multiple Sclerosis?

Despite people around us living with this disease for decades, there is still very little understanding of MS. I have been living with MS for six years now, yet I still find it difficult to explain to people what it truly is. More often than not, I see them making their own assumptions about my condition.

It's true that MS cases are now increasing in India. Maybe earlier the numbers weren't as visible because the right tools for diagnosis weren't available. But one thing is certain, the rate at which MS cases are rising is far higher than the rate at which awareness is spreading.

This lack of awareness around MS delays timely diagnosis and proper treatment. MS patients often struggle to have their condition understood by others, which leads to difficulties in different aspects of life, especially at the workplace.

Ensure you are insured in MS

While this applies to many illnesses, for MS in particular, financial independence becomes absolutely critical. Most treatments are costly, and being financially independent can make a huge difference in how one manages the condition.

Before I talk more about work, I want to emphasise something extremely important: Health Insurance. And when I say this, I'm not just talking to people with MS, I'm talking to everyone. Please, make sure you have a proper health insurance.

Corporate insurance is never enough. The moment you lose your job, which often happens when you lose your health, you also lose your corporate coverage. That is why you need personal health insurance that stays with you no matter what.

I've spoken to so many friends and relatives who hesitate to spend money on premiums every year because they think, "Why should I pay when I'm healthy? I won't be diagnosed with anything serious." And that's true for all of us. Like Matthew Perry says in the very first chapter of his book, you never think something bad can happen to you, until it does. I'm not trying to scare you; I'm only asking you to be prepared for the unforeseen. That's why we need to stay prepared. That sense of security,



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Communication Expert

just knowing that at least your finances won't become a problem if something as serious as MS happens, takes a huge part of the burden off your shoulders.

Getting back to the issue of knowledge gap, when you tell most people that you have MS, the usual reaction is a blank face. And those who do want to know more often turn to the internet. But the problem is, when you search about MS online, what you usually find are the harshest descriptions, the worst case scenarios. This lack of awareness often leads to stigma. I know someone who once overheard her colleagues doubting her ability to handle certain tasks just because she has MS. I know someone else who felt forced to leave her job because of it.

These situations point to a pressing need for empathy, understanding, and honest conversations around MS. The first few things you see online when you type in MS are terms like "invisible disability" and "no cure for MS." That ends up creating more fear and judgment, instead of understanding and support.

The word disability itself creates a lot of misunderstanding. Most people immediately think of visible mobility challenges, but that's not always the case. MS is called an invisible disability because symptoms like fatigue, brain fog may not be visible externally.

And while it's true that there's currently no cure for MS, that doesn't mean there's no hope. Doctors and researchers are working tirelessly towards a cure, and today, we already have excellent treatments available that allow people to live active, fulfilling lives. With timely diagnosis, the right medication, and proper guidance, people with MS can absolutely lead normal, balanced lives.

Building support to combat stigma

This is where we all have to come together. Professional organisations need to start offering opportunities to people with MS. Even small changes can make a huge difference, like creating reasonable adjustments for employees who may be struggling with certain symptoms.

When I talk about professional organisations, I'm not referring to just any workplace. I'm talking about the same organisations where people with MS have chosen to build their careers. I don't mean the jobs that are "given" to MS patients out of assumption, as if they can

only handle a limited set of roles. I'm talking about the jobs they have worked hard for, the roles they have chosen for themselves, and yet are not taken seriously, simply because they have MS.

If someone is committed and doing good work, then why not give them a chance? Why not make adjustments so they can continue to contribute in the ways they are able to?

The last thing we want society to believe is that a diagnosis of MS automatically means the end of a person's career. This mindset needs to change. It will only change when organisations step forward with empathy and flexibility.

Businesses cannot truly achieve their goals without fostering an inclusive society and workplace. When we talk about diversity and inclusion, it's easy to focus on visible aspects, different geographical locations, caste, gender and languages. But diversity goes beyond what we can see. It also means recognising and accommodating people with invisible conditions. We can create a prosperous society only when we tap into this often overlooked talent pool, unlocking the potential of a hidden market that holds immense value.

I also feel that we, as MS patients, carry a part of the responsibility for this lack of awareness. Many of us choose to remain silent about our condition, often because society doesn't know how to respond or accept it. But if some of us can begin to speak openly, it could change so much. By sharing our experiences, we can help others recognise the early signs of MS and seek timely treatment.

Living with MS should not be a taboo or something whispered about in fear. It should be spoken of as openly as someone saying, "I have BP" or "I have diabetes." The more we normalise these conversations, the more we build understanding, acceptance, and strength as a community.

We need stronger, large scale campaigns dedicated to Multiple Sclerosis. We need doctors to talk about it more openly. We need the media to cover it more widely. And above all, we need patients themselves to share their journeys, their symptoms, the turning points that led them to seek help, and their experiences, so that more people can recognise the signs early and get timely diagnosis.

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Shifting Monsoon Exposes vulnerability of the Marginalised

Monsoon has always been an important part of life in India, especially for those who depend on farming. Earlier, it followed a fairly steady pattern, allowing people to plan around it. That consistency is harder to find now. Rain often arrives in short, intense bursts or is delayed for weeks. Some areas flood, while others stay dry longer than expected. The season has become less reliable, and that change is affecting many lives. For India's marginalised communities, it is devastation.

The Weight of Unpredictability

A warmer atmosphere is changing how rain behaves. It pours heavily in short bursts, then disappears for long stretches. Systems built for earlier patterns, for instance drains, embankments, and irrigation, cannot keep up. Fields flood. Crops rot. Homes collapse.

People living in weak houses or flood-prone areas face the worst of it. A single heavy rain can wipe out a small farmer's entire crop. For tenant farmers and daily wage workers, income stops overnight. With no insurance or credit to fall back on, even one bad spell can mean debt, hunger, or having to move.

When Shelter Fails

In flood-prone states like Odisha, Assam, and Bihar, the damage to housing is a recurring crisis. Kachcha houses, made of mud, thatch, or other temporary materials, are common among Dalits, tribal communities, and urban informal settlers. These homes have little resistance to flooding. They collapse easily, taking with them cooking stoves, school books, stored grains, and clothing. The loss is near total.

A study by ACAPS confirms that during major flood events, most destroyed homes are kachcha. Their occupants, already on the edge of subsistence, have neither savings nor access to quick recovery mechanisms. Shelter camps often serve as temporary patches, but rebuilding takes months, if not years, when there is no land title or collateral to secure assistance.

Learning Interrupted

Education is another casualty. Flooded schools shut down. Many are turned into relief shelters. But the disruption does not end with physical closures. Children from lower-caste and minority families, already more likely to face academic disadvantage, drop out in greater numbers after such events. School uniforms are gone. Mid-day meals stop. Families shift to temporary locations where access to education is patchy or non-existent. In the worst cases, children join the workforce to compensate for lost household income.

The long-term impact is difficult to reverse. Without catch-up mechanisms, these children fall behind and are less likely to return to formal schooling. This sets in motion a cycle of exclusion that extends into adulthood.

Gaps in Relief and Alerts

Disaster relief, when it does arrive, does not always reach everyone. Communities located in remote or informal settlements are often excluded from local government databases. Without official recognition, they fall through the cracks of aid distribution. Those living in unauthorised colonies or encroachments are frequently denied rebuilding assistance or compensation.

Communication is another critical point. Most early warning systems depend on internet or mobile access, assuming that alerts through apps or SMS will reach everyone. In reality, many of India's rural poor lack smartphones or live in areas with patchy network coverage. Even when the technology is available, low digital literacy acts as a barrier. Messages do not get read. Instructions are misunderstood. Opportunities to move to safety are lost.



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Invisible During Planning, Forgotten During Recovery

Most emergency planning frameworks do not account for the unique challenges faced by women, children, Dalits, and other marginalised groups during and after disasters. Relief materials often fail to consider menstrual hygiene needs, child nutrition, or the

safety of women in overcrowded shelters.

Moreover, long-term rehabilitation plans rarely address structural exclusion. Families who lose homes in slums or on disputed land continue to live in temporary arrangements because they lack land rights. They are excluded from official schemes designed to 'build back better.' For these communities, recovery is not about resilience. It is about survival.

What Needs to be done

A few simple but focused steps can make a real difference in how relief reaches those who need it most:

- **Warnings people can actually use:** Early alerts should be in local languages, and shared through formats people are comfortable with spoken messages, simple instructions, and not just written text. This helps ensure the message reaches people who may not read well or have regular phone access.
 - **Know where the risk is highest:** Local authorities can use existing data to find areas that are more likely to flood, like places with kachcha houses or poor drainage. When these areas are clearly identified, help can reach faster and more efficiently.
 - **Keep local records updated:** Many people, especially migrants, tenants, and daily wage workers get missed during relief work because they are not officially listed. Regular updates to local records at the ward or panchayat level can help make sure no one is left out.
 - **Plan with real lives in mind:** Different groups have different needs. Relief kits, shelters, and services should consider the specific challenges faced by women, older adults, Dalit families, and people with disabilities.
 - **Support people in rebuilding, not just recovering:** Families living without legal land titles are often excluded from rebuilding schemes. Recognising informal settlements and giving people more security where they live can help them rebuild with stability, not start over from scratch each time
- Monsoons are changing, and extreme weather events are likely to become more frequent. While it may not be possible to avoid all damage, the impact on people can be reduced if systems are built to include those who are most exposed.
- Investments in embankments and forecasting are necessary, but they are only one part of the solution. Planning must begin by identifying who faces the greatest risk. This includes people in low-income housing, informal settlements, and those without secure land or regular income.

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India's Strategic Autonomy Tested...

India's China policy is often misread as a binary of confrontation or appeasement. In reality, it is about competitive coexistence. New Delhi insists on defending its territorial sovereignty, but it also recognises that a "cold peace" with Beijing frees it to focus on domestic development and multiple alignments abroad.

Historical Friendship with Russia

Where China remains a strategic challenge, Russia continues to stand as India's enduring partner of choice. Since Soviet times, Moscow's support in defence and nuclear energy has been indispensable; even today, some 60-70 percent of Indian military platforms are of Russian origin.

Presidewnt Putin's expected visit later this year underlines the durability of that bond. Despite Western sanctions and Moscow's global isolation after the invasion of Ukraine, India has neither criticised Russia nor condoned its actions. Instead, it has pursued a pragmatic middle course-deepening energy imports, exploring rupee-rouble settlements, and continuing defence cooperation.

This is not nostalgia but hard-nosed realism: Russia remains a dependable partner in areas where others hesitate, from defence co-production to affordable energy. India's deftness lies in keeping this cooperation distinct from its parallel engagements with the US, Europe, and other partners-preserving a reservoir of goodwill built over seven decades without being blind to the costs of Moscow's choices.

India as Voice of the Global South

The connective tissue between these balancing acts is India's historical role as a leader of the Global South. That phrase, once shorthand for

developing countries, now expresses a more confident political identity. It signifies a bloc of nations demanding fairer trade, climate justice, and multipolar respect in global institutions.

India has placed itself at the heart of this resurgence. Its presidency of the G20 in 2023, with a strong focus on debt relief and South-South technology exchange, set the tone. Where others faltered, India succeeded in securing the African Union's entry as the G20's 21st member. Today, as the African Union spearheads new initiatives and Latin America asserts its autonomy, India stands out as a bridge-builder across regions.

Challenges Ahead

None of this is easy. India's attempt to reset ties with China might provoke worries in Washington. Its continued warmth with Russia risks pushback from Europe. And Trump's mercurial style ensures that trade wars could erupt cyclically.

Domestically, India must also balance foreign policy with economic needs. Access to US markets and technology remains vital. At the same time, affordable Russian oil and collaborative Chinese supply chains are equally critical for growth. The true test of strategic autonomy, therefore, lies in the ability to derive benefits without succumbing to external pressures.

Conclusion: India's Moment

As August 2025 draws to a close, India stands neither in Washington's camp nor Moscow's shadow, nor daunted by Beijing's power. It stands where it always has — on its own ground, navigating great-power rivalry through strategic autonomy.

Trump's tariffs and erratic diplomacy have accelerated a moment of reckoning. India is not abandoning the US, but it is refusing to be subservient. It is not embracing China, but it is finding pragmatic space. It is not romanticising Russia, but it is drawing on proven trust.

FROM AGENDA COVER

In the process, India is once again articulating a unique position: that of a civilisational state turned modern power, representing not only its own 1.4 billion-plus citizens but also the wider aspirations of the Global South. The choices India makes today will shape not just its own destiny but also the balance of voice, equity, and justice in the 21st century world order.

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India, Russia, China: The New World Matrix...

Today, the partnership continues to offer India:

- Energy security - via long-term oil, gas, and nuclear agreements.
- Defense and space collaboration - including the S-400 system and joint production of submarines and aircraft.
- Strategic flexibility - serving as a buffer against binary global alignments.

However, Russia's increasing dependence on China introduces new complexities. India must engage Moscow with calibrated realism - preserving historical ties, but ensuring the relationship remains independent of China's growing shadow.

The United States: Partner, Not Patron

The US remains the most powerful global actor, but its posture has shifted from building the global order to defending it, and to promoting an America-centric, Western dominated world. Its strategic focus is now also on containing China's rise - militarily, technologically, and economically.

For India, this presents both opportunity and

risk. The United States remains a vital partner - in defense cooperation, advanced technology ecosystems, and strategic alignment across the Indo-Pacific, particularly through the Quad. However, rising trade tensions and shifting US priorities could strain medium- to long-term bilateral relations. India must tread with strategic care: Deepening collaboration where interests align, while firmly resisting any role as a junior partner in a containment strategy that could compromise its autonomy or strain relations with other key global actors.

Instead, India should position itself as a sovereign peer — advancing shared interests while preserving autonomy in areas like digital regulation, trade policy, and South-South diplomacy. The partnership must evolve from one of alignment to one of co-authorship - allowing space for constructive disagreement and mutual respect.

India: From Balancer to Builder

India's strategic identity must now transcend the role of "balancer" among great powers. It must become a builder — one that offers frameworks, ideas, and institutions rooted in sovereignty, pluralism, and pragmatic modernity.

This means:

- Engaging seriously with forums like BRICS, SCO, the G20, and the still-notional "IRC" (India-Russia-China) trilateral — a term India can champion to shift the narrative center and avoid being a silent participant in the older "RIC" nomenclature.
- Driving global conversations on future tech, climate equity, and inclusive development.
- Investing in institutional innovation and global education.
- Asserting narrative leadership that reflects India's ethos and ambitions.

The world is not waiting. The scaffolding of a new global matrix is already rising. In this

New-Muco Era, India's task is clear: Not just to rise — but to help the world rise with it.

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Exploring the imperative of Indo-China relations

However, the biggest impediment is a matter of trust. Both India and China need to recalibrate their relations and can benefit from each other. For instance take the question of connectivity. India has long resisted China's Belt and Road Initiative because of sovereignty concerns, particularly the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. That hesitation is valid and should not be abandoned. But the idea that India cannot derive any benefit from the broader infrastructure network being laid down across Asia and Europe is short-sighted. By engaging selectively-while simultaneously pursuing its own projects such as the Middle Corridor to Central Asia and the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor with Japan-India can ensure it participates in the opportunities BRI creates without surrendering its strategic autonomy. The choice is not binary; it is about using leverage intelligently.

It is easy to dismiss the idea of "Asian century" as rhetoric, but there is a hard truth beneath it: the 21st century cannot belong to Asia if its two largest nations remain locked in permanent rivalry. Stability between India and China is not just a bilateral matter; it is a global good for humanity, a prerequisite for peace, trade, and growth at a time when the world desperately needs anchors of stability.

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Stray Reckoning

The Supreme Court has now redrawn the battle lines in the country's long and troubled relationship with its street dogs. After weeks of controversy over an earlier directive to confine every stray in the national capital region (NCR) within newly built shelters, the court has shifted course, opting instead for a calibrated balance between public safety and animal welfare.

The new order allows healthy, non-aggressive dogs to be sterilised, vaccinated, and returned to their capture sites ~ a return to the globally recognised model of population control that India had already legislated. At the same time, it insists that rabid or aggressive animals be confined in shelters, and it bans the feeding of strays in public places, requiring municipal bodies to designate proper feeding zones. Adoption has been permitted through civic authorities, but adopted dogs must not be sent back to the streets.

This is a significant correction. The earlier blanket directive to round up and cage nearly a million dogs in Delhi alone, within two months, was logistically impossible and morally fraught. It provoked a storm of opposition because such mass confinement risked producing overcrowded shelters, disease outbreaks, and eventual culling. The revised position signals that the judiciary has recognised the limits of state capacity and the dangers of overreach.

Yet the judgment also raises a fresh set of challenges. Enforcing feeding bans in crowded cities is easier written than done. Ensuring that designated feeding areas are created, maintained, and used responsibly will require coordination between civic authorities, resident groups, and animal welfare volunteers.

Adoption too, while a humane pathway, will call for rigorous monitoring to prevent abandonment or abuse. And the classification of "aggressive" dogs could quickly become subjective, opening the door to misuse.

At its core, the court has placed the burden squarely back on municipal governance. India's urban local bodies have long struggled ~ and often failed ~ to implement sterilisation and vaccination programmes at the scale required. Funds are routinely underutilised or siphoned off, while waste management, a key driver of stray proliferation, remains woefully inadequate.

Why, even getting a dog license for a pet is a challenge in Delhi. Without fixing these basics, even the best-framed judicial orders risk sinking into the familiar cycle of half-measures and neglect.

The promise of a national policy on strays, as hinted at by the court, is perhaps the most consequential part of this ruling. Fragmented state-level responses have created inconsistency and confusion, with each crisis spawning litigation instead of coordinated solutions. A central framework could finally bring uniform standards for sterilisation, vaccination, shelter design, and accountability mechanisms.

India stands today not at the end of a dispute, but at a pivot. The court has avoided an unworkable extremity and steered the issue back toward a humane middle path. The task now is for governments - national and local alike ~ to treat this reprieve not as closure, but as a call to act decisively where they have long faltered.

Fuel Vs Food

India's decision to fast-track ethanol blending into petrol marks a milestone in its search for energy security and climate responsibility. By reaching the E20 blend ~ 20 per cent ethanol mixed with petrol ~ five years ahead of schedule, the country has demonstrated the political will and industrial capacity to alter its fuel mix at scale. The achievement has already yielded tangible benefits: reduced carbon emissions, trimmed oil import bills, and a message to the world that India intends to be a serious player in the clean energy transition.

Yet, beneath these successes lies a knot of contradictions. Ethanol is not a perfect substitute for petrol. Its lower energy density means that mileage tends to fall, especially in vehicles that were not designed for such blends. For millions of drivers, this translates into higher costs over time, compounded by the need to replace parts or buy special kits to make older vehicles compatible.

Insurance gaps add another layer of unease, as policies often do not cover damage from non-compliant fuel use. For a nation of two-wheelers and small cars, these concerns are not trivial. The larger worry, however, extends beyond the road. Ethanol production depends heavily on crops like sugarcane, maize, and increasingly even rice.

This raises uncomfortable questions about whether a poor and populous country can afford to use food to power its vehicles. The diversion of maize into ethanol has already made India a net importer for the first time in decades, pushing up feed costs for the poultry industry. Allocating rice stocks meant for subsidised distribution into ethanol manufacture risks undermining food security in a nation where millions still struggle with hunger.

There is also the environmental dimension. Sugarcane, which currently provides a major share of India's ethanol, is notoriously water-intensive. Expanding its cultivation risks exacerbating groundwater stress in already fragile regions. A shift to maize may be more balanced, but it still requires large increases in yield or new farmland ~ both of which could squeeze out oilseeds, pulses, and other vital crops. The prospect of devoting vast new tracts of land to fuel production sits uneasily with the demands of nutrition, ecological balance, and rural livelihoods.

Policymakers face a delicate balancing act. The E20 push has proven India's ability to move quickly on climate commitments, but racing further to E25 or E30 without recalibrating may create new crises.

A more prudent course may be to consolidate at E10 or E20, while aggressively exploring next-generation biofuels from non-food sources ~ such as crop residues, algae, and waste. These would offer the same emissions benefits without competing with the dinner plate. India's biofuel drive represents progress, but progress must be measured against sustainability. The true test is not whether ethanol cuts emissions today, but whether it does so without mortgaging tomorrow's food security and environmental health.

Emerging Faultlines

The net effect of shifting positions is a growing perception that Trump's foreign and trade policies lack coherence and are driven more by short-term gains and political optics than by long-term strategic thinking. For India, this unpredictability represents a significant challenge. The country must now navigate an increasingly volatile external environment in which even its traditional partnerships can no longer be taken for granted



Indian goods, raising the overall tariff to a staggering 50 per cent. The rationale given was India's continued purchase of Russian oil, which the White House claimed represented an "unusual and extraordinary threat" to American national security and foreign policy interests.

Yet this reasoning appears riddled with inconsistencies and accusations of double standards. Data shows that India accounted for only 13 per cent of Russia's fossil fuel revenue since the start of the Ukraine war, whereas the European Union ~ despite its anti-Russian rhetoric ~ contributed 23 percent. Still, the EU has been spared punitive tariffs, while India faces the economic brunt.

This selective application of punitive measures suggests that the logic behind the tariffs is not solely grounded in principled foreign policy. It increasingly looks like an attempt to pressure countries that have limited leverage over the United States. Unlike China, which retaliated against earlier tariffs by banning the export of rare earth minerals ~ forcing Washington to reduce its tariff burden ~ India lacks such economic levers.

With a vast population dependent on agriculture and dairy, New Delhi has long resisted opening up these sensitive sectors. Trump's insistence that India must make concessions in these very sectors adds further strain, as such demands are politically unacceptable in the Indian domestic context.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has responded with firmness, making it clear that India will not compromise the interests of its farmers, fishermen, and dairy producers. Speaking at a public event, he acknowledged that India might have to pay a heavy price for its stance, but asserted his readiness to bear it.

This defiant posture marks a significant deterioration in US-India trade ties, especially

since Washington has simultaneously ruled out any further trade talks until the matter is resolved. For a relationship once touted as among the most consequential of the 21st century, the fallout is deeply concerning.

What adds to the complexity is Trump's seemingly contradictory behavior towards other global actors. His previous hostility toward NATO and its European members has, in this tenure, given way to more transactional economic deals with both the EU and the UK. He has managed to extract higher defense spending from them, fulfilling one of his long-standing demands.

Meanwhile, Trump's initial soft posture toward Russia ~ based on the belief that he could persuade President Putin to end the war ~ has hardened as that expectation failed to materialize. Yet, rather than directly penalizing Russia, Trump has chosen to exert pressure on countries like India that maintain energy ties with Moscow.

Even more puzzling is Trump's stance toward China. Despite earlier confrontations, he now appears to be exploring a potential trade deal with Beijing. There is speculation that he may even visit China, signaling a thaw that could have wide-ranging geopolitical ramifications.

This approach stands in stark contrast to the harsh tariff measures directed at India and Brazil, both of which are BRICS members. Trump has also described BRICS as an anti-US bloc and blamed the group for pushing de-dollarization ~ claims that are contested and oversimplified, but serve to justify further economic penalties.

The net effect of these shifting positions



ANAND KUMAR
The writer is Associate Fellow, Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies & Analyses

The Daily Star

When climate change becomes your doctor's problem too

Climate change used to be that thing your cousin from abroad mentioned while nibbling gluten-free brownies. Now? It's here. It's in your armpits, your nosebleeds, your prescriptions, your health records, and your mum's dizzy spells. And it's barging into our hospitals ~ uninvited, unfiltered and, naturally, unfunded.

Dhaka has just endured one of the worst heatwaves in recorded history. Except we didn't really endure it; we sweated, we wheezed, we staggered around like dazed kebabs in an open tandoor. The government, ever efficient, issued guidelines, "Stay indoors," as if we all had the luxury of lounging in centrally air-conditioned drawing rooms, sipping electrolyte water and waiting for foreign remittance. Most of us were marinating in rooftop heat, trapped in tin sheds, or passing out on public buses that felt like mobile saunas with steering wheels.

Let's talk healthcare, that miraculous thing we keep expecting to work despite treating it like the last kid picked in a game of cricket. During the heatwave, hospitals were flooded with patients with heatstroke, dehydration, asthma, and rashes ~ the full buffet of climate-induced ailments. Doctors were trying to resuscitate fainting grandmothers while wiping sweat

off their own brows. And all this in buildings that haven't been renovated since the British Raj, with ceiling fans that sound like dying goats, and ventilation systems that give up by noon.

Meanwhile, dengue has returned with the punctuality of a Shakib Khan film on Eid. Mosquitoes are thriving in places they never used to ~ hello, climate change ~ and bringing the gift of viral fever to all. In 2023, over 1,700 people lost their lives suffering from dengue, not because they didn't use mosquito nets, but because our health system failed to contain the disease. Coastal areas are now grappling with rising salinity, which is causing high blood pressure, kidney disease, and complicated pregnancies among the locals. In Satkhira, women are developing urinary tract infections (UTIs) simply because the water they're using consists of elements that are unsafe for their hygiene. But sure, let's keep pretending climate change is just about "weather" and not the fact that it's literally picking people.

Rural clinics, meanwhile, are collapsing under climate-linked disasters. Cyclones destroy infrastructure. Floods cut off access. There's one community clinic in

a char area with no electricity, no medicine and no doctor. Still, climate change is treated like a side hustle in our health planning. Most district health strategies don't mention it. No one's training doctors to identify or respond to climate-related illnesses. There's no fund going into climate-proofing hospitals. And the best we've got are donor-funded pilot projects that disappear faster than ORS sachets in a paediatric ward.

But wait, there's more: the healthcare system is not just the victim. It's part of the problem too. Hospitals running on diesel generators, air conditioners from the '90s, and supply chains that emit enough carbon to make a Thanos snap look gentle. Medical waste ~ needles, bandages, expired medicines ~ ends up in rivers, lakes, and, if you're lucky, your nearest beel.

Now let's talk mental health ~ or the lack of it. Eco-anxiety isn't just some Western indulgence. It's what happens when Bangladeshi youth are told to study hard and dream big, only to see their future swallowed by floodwater or smog. One day it's their exam results, the next day it's their school collapsing in a landslide. How are they supposed to function when climate-induced trauma is now a graduation requirement?

And let's not forget the healthcare workers. Expected to be Florence Nightingale, Bear Grylls and Dr House all rolled into one, while working 12-hour shifts in unbearable heat without PPE, training or even a working fridge to keep insulin cool. When a system burns out its staff as quickly as its diesel, you know the emergency isn't coming ~ it's already here.

The solution? No, it's not more awareness campaigns with "climate-smart" slogans and forced group photos. It's hard cash and hard reform.

It means redesigning hospitals to withstand floods and heatwaves. It means training healthcare workers on climate-linked illnesses. It means integrating climate data into epidemic forecasting. It means treating climate not as a buzzword, but as the underlying diagnosis behind half our public health crises.

Climate change is no longer creeping in ~ it's taking your blood pressure, biting your ankles, and casually suggesting an ICU admission. And if we don't act now, your next trip to the hospital won't be for treatment. It'll be for shelter.

So yes, climate change is your doctor's problem now. And if our leaders don't start treating it like one, they'll soon need a different kind of prescription: one for a collective collapse.

absence of a pre-existing international consensus.

To name a Kolkata street like "Esplanade Row West" as "Radhabinod Pal Sarani" is a fitting tribute to the historic personality. The intervention of Trinamool Congress national general secretary Abhishek Banerjee and the role of Kolkata Municipal Corporation for this naming episode deserve praise.

Yours, etc., Sukhendu Bhattacharjee, Sheoraphuli, 21 August.

Corrigendum

The author of "Nil Darpan" was erroneously named as Deshbandu Mitra in Sushila Ramaswamy's article "Nationalist Movement ~ I" published on 22 August. The author was Dinabandhu Mitra. The error is regretted. ~ Ed. S.



Middle-class migrants need greater support

SKNAG

When immigration enters public debate, the conversation usually pivots between two extremes. On one side are refugees, who move out of necessity, often invoking humanitarian concerns. On the other are ultra-high-net-worth individuals, who purchase residency and citizenship through golden visas and fast-track schemes. Missing from this debate, however, are the millions of middle-class immigrants - the steady contributors to economies, societies, and nations across the world.

This group is neither destitute nor elite. They are teachers, engineers, nurses, IT professionals, small business owners, and skilled workers. They move across borders not for survival, but for opportunity - for education, work, and the prospect of a better life. Unlike the wealthy, they cannot buy citizenship; unlike refugees, they rarely receive global sympathy. Yet they form the backbone of host economies.

Across developed nations, this contribution is undeniable. In the United States, immigrants account for nearly 17 per cent of the civilian workforce, a large share of them middle-class professionals. In Canada, skilled immigrants are central to sustaining productivity as the population ages. In Europe and Japan, where demographic decline threatens growth, middle-class immigrants keep essential

services- from healthcare to education-functional.

Beyond labour markets, their impact extends deep into domestic economies. They buy homes, pay taxes, consume goods, and start businesses. Their children integrate into schools, eventually becoming part of the skilled workforce of the future. This multiplier effect is critical: every middle-class immigrant family represents not just current consumption, but future taxpayers, innovators, and citizens.

Yet, paradoxically, this group remains the least recognised in immigration policy. Governments spend energy attracting billionaire investors or debating refugee quotas, while middle-class immigrants navigate slow visa systems, restrictive quotas, and uncertain paths to permanent residency or citizenship. They contribute fully, but live in limbo - citizens in practice, not in law.

This gap has costs. Economically, uncertainty limits their long-term investment in housing, entrepreneurship, and local economies. Socially, it risks alienating families who already see themselves as part of the national fabric. Politically, it leaves them voiceless despite being deeply affected by policy decisions.

By contrast, countries that create clear, credible, and timely pathways to citizenship reap the benefits. Canada, for instance, has structured a relatively predictable skilled migration framework, linking immigration directly to labour shortages and demographic needs.



The result is not just higher productivity, but also stronger civic participation and long-term national cohesion.

The case for recognising middle-class immigrants goes beyond morality - it is a matter of economic strategy. In a global economy where talent mobility shapes competitiveness, nations cannot afford to overlook a group that brings both skills and stability. By locking them out of citizenship or delaying recognition, governments undermine their own growth potential.

Citizenship is more than a legal identity. It is a vote of confidence in

a family's future, a signal that their adopted nation sees them not as temporary workers but as partners in growth. For middle-class immigrants, this recognition translates into stronger ties, deeper economic participation, and higher loyalty to their new country. For host nations, it means sustainable tax bases, stronger communities, and a competitive edge in the global talent race.

As the world navigates demographic challenges, political populism, and economic uncertainty, the middle-class immigrant may be the most reliable

stabiliser. They are not a burden to be carried, nor elites to be courted. They are the silent majority of migration - ordinary families with extraordinary potential.

The global economy is not built only by billionaires and rescued only by refugees. It is sustained, day after day, by the steady contribution of middle-class immigrants. Recognising them as citizens is not an act of generosity; it is an investment in the future.

(The writer is a Mumbai-based freelance writer, MSME strategist and industry mentor.)

Now and Again Give credit where due

GEORGE NETTO

They go by many names - Man Friday, assistant, aide, secretary, factotum, junior, peon et al. - and they willingly perform multiple functions, many often not among their specified duties. They are basically our facilitators and troubleshooters who, by virtue of their commitment, make our working lives less burdensome and even hassle-free.

They are our so-called subordinates who often work, unsung and unobtrusive, behind the scenes as it were. The mainstay of our working lives, they quietly ensure in their own efficient way that everything goes swimmingly for us, their bosses or employers. Yet, unfortunately, we often take them for granted. We tend to usurp all the credit that comes our way, forgetting to acknowledge their contributions for the simple (and erroneous) reason that we consider these to be insignificant in comparison with ours.

We conveniently forget that our subordinates are as indispensable to the organization as we loftily consider ourselves to be. They are the ones who keep the cog-wheels of our working lives running smoothly. But for them we wouldn't be able to get things done on time or meet our time-bound official targets and other objectives. To keep them motivated, it's vital to give them credit where due. Besides being a morale-booster, such recognition will surely enhance their commitment and loyalty apart from minimizing disgruntlement.

Openly sharing credit for collective achievements marks one out as a fair-minded person and, of course, earns one the respect of one's subordinates. A former British boss of mine - the Visiting Agent for a group of 12 tea estates and a principled man - was also a tough taskmaster. He took great pains to ensure that the planters under his charge achieved their far-from-easy targets year after year. During a bad year of plummeting tea prices, the company was reluctant to give planters their annual bonus. However, my boss stoutly stood up for them and saw to it that they got their rightful dues.

Indeed, often a subordinate's true worth is fully understood - and keenly felt - only in his or her absence. It is only then that we realize how much easier they make our lives and how heavily dependent we are on them.

So why are we generally chary of appreciating the good work of our subordinates? The reasons are varied, not the least of these being that we sometimes salve our conscience with the specious argument that they are paid to do their jobs. We easily overlook the fact that the success of a project or assignment crucially hinges on teamwork down the ladder. Fair-mindedness is, therefore, needed to ensure that individual or collective contributions are duly recognized and never glossed over. Otherwise the inevitable fallout is discontent and poor employee morale.

In the heady euphoria of success or official recognition, it is all too easy to forget that success is invariably the result of joint endeavours. Therefore, the role of our subordinates in the overall scheme of things needs to be highlighted and rewarded (rather than underplayed or overlooked).

Europe shops for a new Iron Curtain

NATASHA LINDSTAEDT

In 1946, Winston Churchill announced an "iron curtain" had descended across Europe "from Stettin in the Baltic, to Trieste in the Adriatic". This time it is the west that is building the barriers.

Every European nation bordering Russia is accelerating plans to construct hundreds of miles of fortified border to defend against possible Russian aggression.

The reasons are clear. The post-cold war European security framework - which relied on strengthening international institutions and trade, Nato expansion and US military guarantees - is being eroded.

Sharing an 832-mile border with Russia, Finland proposed building a wall in 2023 that would cover about 15 per cent of its border, costing over US\$400 million and with hopes that it will be completed by 2026.

Motivated in part by Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, but also due to a rise of Russians fleeing to Finland to escape conscription, Finland's government passed a law in July 2023 to build stronger and taller fences, as the previous wooden fences were designed only to prevent livestock from crossing. Eight border posts were erected (including north of the Arctic Circle) alongside greater obstacles in the southernmost strip of the country.

There are even defences being erected in remote areas of north-eastern Finland, where in the not-too-distant past, a steady flow of Russian and Finns would regularly come and go across the border to buy groceries.

And Finland is not the first. In August 2015, Estonia announced

that it would build a fence along its eastern border with Russia, after Moscow's 2014 annexation of Crimea.

In 2024, the Baltic states and Poland proposed to further fortify their borders with a defensive wall. It would cover 434 miles, costing over £2 billion. Plans and construction are now speeding up as leaders of the Baltic states worry that the prospects of a ceasefire between Ukraine and Russia could mean Moscow redirects its military towards them.

Latvia will invest about US\$350 million over the next few years to reinforce its 240-mile border with Russia, while Lithuania is planning a 30-mile defence line against a possible Russian invasion. Poland has started building a permanent fence on its border with Belarus as part of its defence against Moscow's potential allies.

These walls will also be accompanied by other physical barriers such as antitank ditches, 15-tonne concrete dragon's teeth (which can stop Russian tanks advancing), massive concrete blocks and pyramids, roadblocks, massive metal gates, mined fields and blocked bridgeheads.

Lithuania is planning up to 30 miles of reclamation ditches, bridges prepared for bombing and trees designated to fall on roads when necessary.

The Baltic states are also building more than 1,000 bunkers, ammunition depots and supply shelters to further protect the 600 miles of territory that borders Russia. Bunkers are expected to be about 377 square feet, capable of housing up to ten soldiers and being able to withstand artillery strikes from Russia.



The Baltic nations plus Finland and Poland also all announced in 2025 that they would withdraw from the 1997 international treaty banning antipersonnel landmines, while Lithuania revoked its pledge to a cluster bomb treaty. Poland announced in June 2025 that it had added minefields to its "East Shield" border plans.

These border defences will be using the latest technology and early warning systems and artillery units. Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Poland, Finland and Norway met in Riga in 2024 to begin plans to build a 1,850-mile "drone wall" to protect their borders.

This drone wall will have a sensor network, consisting of radars and electronic warfare tools to identify and destroy Russian drones. Within seconds of detecting a target crossing

the border, there would be a system of close reconnaissance of drones.

This project will require a great deal of cooperation among participating states. Estonian companies are already designing drones that can both detect and neutralise threats along complex terrain in lakes, swamps and forests that blanket Russia's border with the Baltic countries.

Both cooperation from all countries that border Russia in Europe and an understanding of the terrain is critical to avoid the failures of the Maginot Line, part of a set of defensive barriers that France built along its borders in the 1930s, and which failed to prevent a German invasion in the second world war. In that case, it was assumed that the Germans could not pass through the Ardennes forest in Belgium.

While the Maginot Line fortifications did cause the Germans to rethink their plan of attack, Belgium was left vulnerable. Today, European nations are aware that they cannot fully prevent a Russian attack, but they can, possibly, shape the nature of a Russian invasion. The goal of these barriers is both deterrence and to try to control the location of any invasion.

If a ceasefire between Ukraine and Russia is announced, the leaders of the Baltic nations fear the Kremlin could redeploy troops to their borders.

Countries neighbouring Russia are trying to be as prepared as possible for whatever Vladimir Putin might do next.

(The writer is Professor in the Department of Government, University of Essex. This article was published on www.theconversation.com)

News Items RAIL COLLISION SERIOUS ACCIDENT NEAR SIMLA

Simla, Aug.

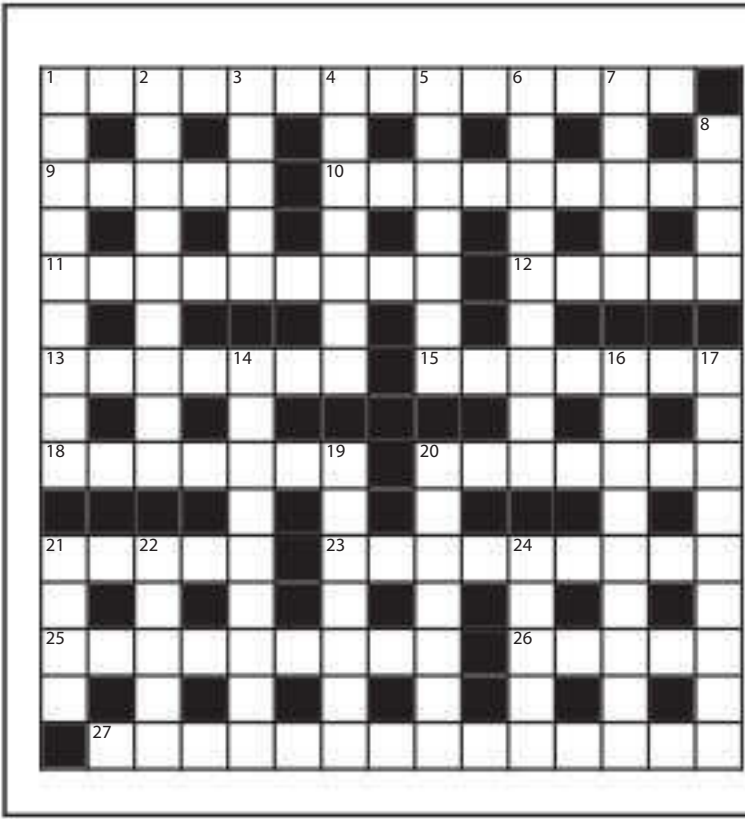
A serious collision took place this morning on the Kalka-Simla Railway near Kandhaghat, between a trolley and a rail motor, resulting in a coolie being killed and in four persons being severely injured. None of the occupants of the rail motor was injured. It appears that the trolley conductor started on the understanding that the rail motor would meet him at the next station. The conductor did not notice the rail motor coming from the opposite direction. The motor driver however noticed the trolley, stopped the motor and shouted but the trolley could not now be controlled and collided. A coolie on the trolley died shortly after the collision. A contractor had both legs smashed. The rail motor's radiator was smashed and also the oil pipe. Tire occupants of the motor included Colonel Franklin, Civil Surgeon, Delhi, and Mrs. Franklin, Mr. Johnstone, Administrator, Nabha, Mr. Mohanlal, Mr. Moss of the N-W. ft and Mrs. Moss. The rail motor was abandoned and the party travelled up to Simla in a railway train. The injured persons have been sent to hospital.

SIR S. N. BANERJEA RS. 20,000 PROMISED FOR MEMORIAL FUND

Simla, Aug.

A meeting of the Committee of the Sir Surendranath Banerjee Fund was Held at No. 62 Bowbazar Street, at 4 p.m. yesterday. A working committee was appointed with the following office-bearers: President: The Rt. Hon'ble Lord Sinha. Treasurer- Sir R. N. Mukerji, 6 and 7, Clive Street. Joint Secretary: Mr. J. N. Basu and Mr. S. M. Basu, 62, Bowbazar Street. Joint. Assistant Secretaries: Rai F. L. De Bahadur and Lieut Bijoy Prosad Sinha Roy. It was suggested that committees should be constituted locally in different parts of the province to assist the Committee in collecting subscriptions. It was also decided that the organizers of memorial meetings already held should be requested to take steps to collect funds in their respective centres. A sum of Rs. 20,000 has already been promised. Subscriptions may be sent to the Treasurer.

Crossword | No. 293226



Last Sunday's Solution

L T H U S F C
M A R A T H O N C H O R A L
S R E S O R S
T E N O R E N T R E A T Y
G B N F L
L A R G E I N T E S T I N E
S E V E N H N
P A T R O N S I N G L Y
A R P E O
B A L L E T M I S T R E S S
E O T H E
P A R A F F I N A L B U M
U D O T P L I
S T R O L L A D E Q U A T E
Y F D L R E

ACROSS

1 Mishap ultimately stops new girl with Angus making European Festival (9,5)

9 Barely spot obvious signs of injury (5)

10 Partner is desperate to become known (9)

11 Emphasise instruction to student for improving ungrammatical essay? (9)

12 Popular tenor starts to ruin ostentatious musical opening (5)

13 Contradiction of soldier coming to place where sailors are seen in conversation (7)

15 Some inconspicuous car certainly is harder to find (7)

18 Salesman born in Idaho felt discontent (7)

20 Without nurse regularly around, must reset bone (7)

21 Two leading characters dropped from pleasant story (5)

23 Pen sort of language that's found on UK banknotes (5,4)

25 Cake that was to help neither side during World War II reportedly? (5,4)

26 Head of society chasing supporters for money (5)

27 A charge that is concocted to arrest international author (6,8)

DOWN

1 Desktop image that is cut and pasted (9)

2 Tour de France winner runs over towards parents initially. Sweet! (5,4)

3 Completes puzzle, on reflection admitting surprise (5)

4 Ten grand used up entertaining American with meal and posh cakes (7)

5 Sisters experience taking out first European young boys (7)

6 Start eating, it's freshly made (9)

7 Tackle landlord about source of infestation (5)

8 Ban day of celebration supported by electorate essentially (4)

14 Admit nine Euros went oddly missing in collection plates (6,3)

16 Close friend of Tory worker seen outside bar (9)

17 Think nostalgically about car having small coupe's shell (9)

19 Tactful individual must sacrifice time to get qualification (7)

20 Crushing retort from second schoolmaster to Billy Bunter (7)

21 Mouldy smell caused commotion, so to speak (4)

22 Former Welsh politician avoids criticising fancy jewellery (5)

24 Name major road in Middle Eastern city (5)

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

PROFILES

The ‘silver fox’ of Chinese diplomacy

Wang Yi

The Communist Party of China Politburo member, with more sway than other Ministers due to his seniority in the party structure, is now the unassailable Czar of President Xi Jinping’s foreign policy

Suhasini Haidar

In June 2014, days after Prime Minister Narendra Modi had been sworn in for the first time, one of the first high-level visitors from outside the SAARC region was Wang Yi. Mr. Wang, who was appointed the Foreign Minister of China in 2013, travelled to New Delhi as Special Envoy of President Xi Jinping to meet Mr. Modi, whom he called an “old friend of China”, referring to Mr. Modi’s visits during his tenure as Gujarat Chief Minister, and said the NDA’s return to power had “injected a new vitality into an ancient civilisation”.

Mr. Wang’s mission was clear – to secure a visit by Mr. Xi to Delhi that September, and to invite Mr. Modi to Beijing soon after. Both visits were cleared quickly. A few days after Mr. Wang’s visit on June 8-9, the government also decided to put off two other engagements: the India-U.S.-Japan trilateral (the Quad was not revived until 2017), set for June 23-24 in Delhi, was cancelled, and Mr. Modi postponed his visit to Japan that had been fixed for July 3-5, ostensibly due to an upcoming Parliament session, much to his hosts’ disappointment. Speculation in South Block was rife: did the Chinese Foreign Minister have something to do with the decisions, to clear the “optics” before the Xi visit in September 2014?

Called the ‘silver fox’ for his grey haired visage as much as for his slick manner, Wang Yi is now the unassailable Czar of Xi Jinping’s foreign policy, with more sway than other Ministers due to his seniority in the party structure.

Insiders point out that he wears several hats now – he was elevated to the elite 24-member Politburo in 2022, and is Director of the Office of the Central Commission for Foreign Affairs. He was elevated to the Politburo after the informal retirement age of 68, another sign of his clout, and although he handed over charge as Foreign Minister to Qin Gang in December 2022, he was brought back within months.

Like Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, and more recently

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, Mr. Wang is part of a breed of seasoned and professional Foreign Ministers who present and sell their leader’s political vision in diplomatic terms. In the 2010s, he was credited with China’s ‘wolf warrior’ diplomacy, of abrasive and assertive public messaging that reflected China’s hard power status. However, when Chinese popularity dipped worldwide, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, Mr. Wang was also credited with abandoning the policy, mending fences, and replacing ‘wolf warrior’ diplomats in embassies worldwide with more polished colleagues.

Mr. Wang’s education in state-fare began, as many in his generation’s did, when he was “sent down” as part of the ‘Xiaxiang’ movement during the Cultural Revolution to work in the icy climes of Heilongjiang province, where he was recruited by the ‘Northeast Construction Army Corps’, after finishing his schooling in 1969. He studied Japanese history and language during college thereafter in Beijing, and joined the Foreign Ministry in 1982. He served twice in the Chinese Embassy in Japan, including as Ambassador from 2004 to 2007.

Backroom talks

South Block Mandarins had an introduction to Mr. Wang’s manner, more suave but also more purposeful than his predecessors, in the early 2000s. As Vice Foreign Minister for Asian Affairs, he had conducted many of the backroom negotiations to prepare for Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee’s visit to Beijing in 2003. Officials at the time remember his hard bargaining for a deal on India’s recognition of China’s control over Tibet and for China to recognise Sikkim as an Indian State. Eventually, Indian officials felt disappointed that although the joint declaration issued had an explicit paragraph saying India “recognises that the Tibet Autonomous Region is part of the territory of the People’s Republic of China and reiterates that it does not allow Tibetans to engage in anti-China political activities in India”, the paragraph on Sikkim was not a similarly unequivocal declaration, with

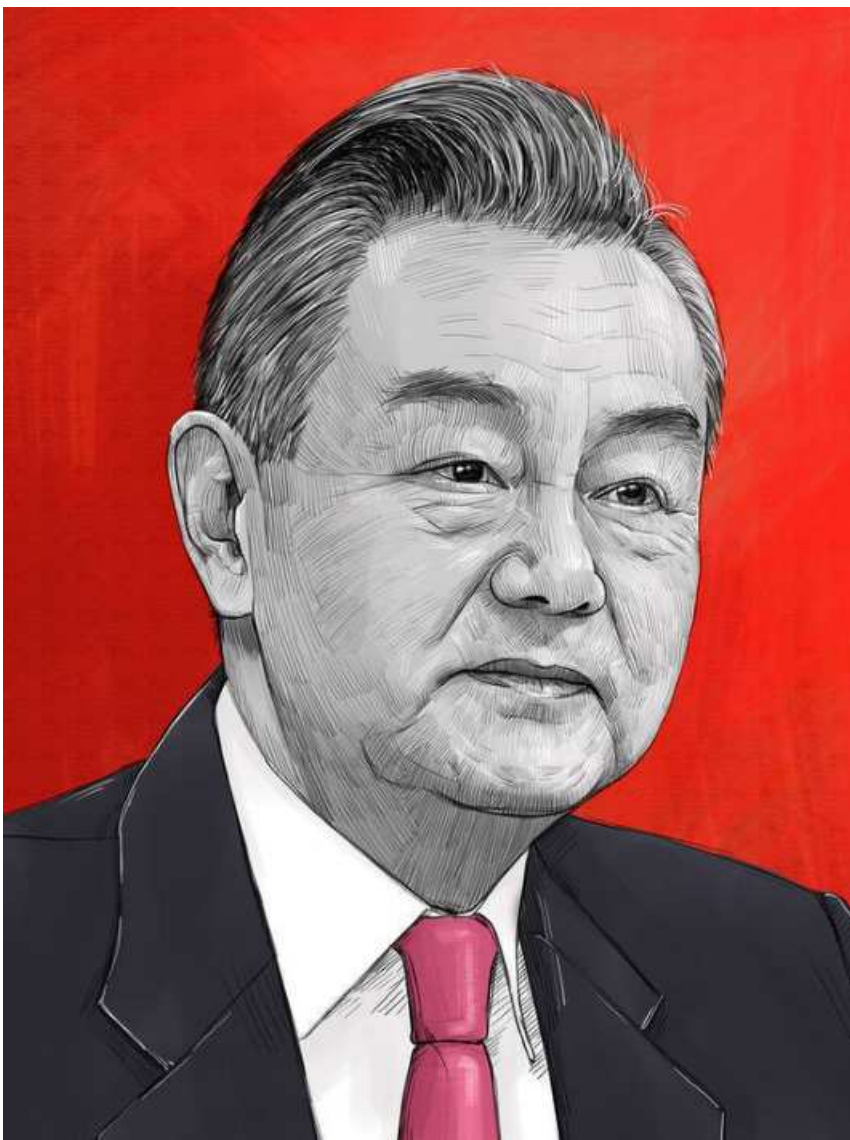


ILLUSTRATION: R. RAJESH

only a designation of ‘Sikkim State’ referring to the opening of border trade at Nathu-La pass.

“He is suave and sophisticated, but also quite tenacious, and can dig his heels in during negotiations, so it is necessary to always be vigilant,” says former Ambassador to China Ashok Kantha, who was posted to Beijing in 2014-2016, and had served on the China desk in the 2000s. “Indian officials have often had to push back in talks, but found him a result-oriented interlocutor,” he added.

As a former Director of China’s ‘Taiwan affairs office’ (2008-2013), Mr. Wang has been keen for India to refer

to its ‘One China’ policy recognising Beijing’s control over all of China, including Taiwan. However, New Delhi decided to stop including the phrase in its statements since 2010, in protest against Chinese policy of issuing stapled visas to Indians from Arunachal Pradesh and Jammu & Kashmir. When pressed by Mr. Wang to reaffirm India’s adherence to the ‘One China’ policy, former External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj, who had been briefed about Mr. Wang’s persuasive skills, once retorted: “If China affirms its One India policy, we will consider it”. Nonetheless, Mr. Wang has persisted, including this

week in talks with External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, where the Chinese side slipped a line on Taiwan into its readout. The Ministry of External Affairs had to scramble to clarify its position.

Diplomatic missions

As Foreign Minister, Mr. Wang is known for many diplomatic missions over the past decade, including bringing U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson to Beijing to kickstart talks for Mr. Xi’s Mar-a-Lago summit with U.S. President Donald Trump in April 2017 and brokering talks between Iran and Saudi Arabia to reopen diplomatic ties in 2023. He also helped with U.S.-North Korea talks; more recently between Cambodia and Thailand, Afghanistan and Pakistan, between Myanmar’s military junta and armed ethnic groups as well as a bid in 2023 to bring Russia and Ukraine to the table for talks.

India has often been concerned about his ‘South Asian’ groupings, including a recent one with Pakistan and Bangladesh on trade, which appear to be part of a plan to create a ‘SAARC minus India’. As Foreign Minister, but also Special Representative for border talks, Mr. Wang now deals in Delhi with both Mr. Jaishankar and National Security Adviser Ajit Doval, and is known for his tough but smooth-talking engagement style during the four-year military standoff after PLA transgressions along the Line of Actual Control and the Galwan clashes, and earlier, during the Doklam standoff.

Setting up the first “inter-governmental organisation for international mediation” in Hong Kong in May this year, Mr. Wang outlined his vision. “The birth of the mediation centre will help transcend the ‘you-lose-I-win’ zero-sum mentality, promote the amicable resolution of international disputes and foster more harmonious international relations,” he said. However, for interlocutors bruised during hard-fought diplomatic negotiations with him, Mr. Wang’s version of “win-win” is more aligned to the old maxim – when Beijing says “win-win”, it means China must “win twice”.

THE GIST

After finishing his schooling in 1969, Wang Yi was “sent down” as part of the ‘Xiaxiang’ movement during the Cultural Revolution to work in the icy climes of Heilongjiang province

He studied Japanese history and language during college thereafter in Beijing, and joined the Foreign Ministry in 1982

He was appointed the Foreign Minister of China in 2013 by President Xi Jinping, and elevated to the elite 24-member Politburo in 2022

Saffron’s southern face

C.P. Radhakrishnan

The BJP leader, who rose to prominence after his 1998 Lok Sabha election victory from Coimbatore, soon after a series of blasts shook the city, is the party’s Vice-Presidential candidate

B. Kolappan

A series of bomb blasts on February 14, 1998 in Coimbatore proved to be a significant turning point in the career of C.P. Radhakrishnan, the BJP-led NDA’s Vice-Presidential candidate. The explosions occurred at various locations, including near a rally that was to be addressed by BJP leader L.K. Advani, just before the second phase of the Lok Sabha elections. The blasts claimed 58 lives.

The blasts, orchestrated by Al-Umma – a radical Islamist organisation born in the aftermath of the Babri Masjid demolition – had polarised the political terrain of the city. Founded by S.A. Basha in 1993, Al-Umma had previously targeted the RSS office in Chennai, resulting in the deaths of 11 people. The Coimbatore blasts turned the tide in favour of the BJP, which was then part of the AIADMK alliance.

Three BJP candidates secured victories, including Mr. Radhakrishnan, who won the Coimbatore Lok Sabha seat with a margin of over 1.4 lakh votes. Following this success, the BJP and its allies, led by A.B. Vajpayee, formed the government at the Centre. However, the government lasted only one year, as AIADMK leader Jayalalith-



aa withdrew her support.

Subsequently, the BJP formed an alliance with the DMK, then the ruling party in Tamil Nadu. Mr. Radhakrishnan was re-elected from Coimbatore in the 1999 general elections. His election from Coimbatore – the ‘capital’ of the Kongu region and an industrial hub of Tamil Nadu – further propelled his political ascent.

Turn to the Sangh

Mr. Radhakrishnan, a businessman who runs textile units, comes from a family of Congress supporters. However, his political leanings shifted towards the Janata Party and Jan Sangh. He accompanied the late Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar on a nationwide padayatra from Kaniyakumari in 1983. He also worked closely with the Hindu Munnani, founded by Rama Gopalan, who spearheaded the Hindutva ideology in Tamil Nadu. Later, he joined the RSS, eventually becoming the

president of the Sangh in Tiruppur.

A member of the socially dominant and economically prosperous Kongu Vellalar community, he became the secretary of the BJP’s Tamil Nadu unit in 1996. He served as the party’s president between 2003 and 2006. Within the Tamil Nadu BJP, while the late L. Ganesan was the blue-eyed boy of L.K. Advani, Mr. Radhakrishnan had a similarly close bond with Vajpayee. An avid sportsman, he is a table-tennis champion.

The communally polarised Kongu belt, following the Coimbatore bomb blasts, prepared the ground for the emergence of BJP leaders from the Kongu Vellalar community, known as Gounders. The Kongu region is also a stronghold of the AIADMK, now an ally of the BJP, which elected more MLAs from the party in the last two Assembly elections in the State. AIADMK leader and former Chief Minister

Edappadi K. Palaniswami is also a member of the community.

As the Kongu region is a key focus for the BJP leadership, it has consistently chosen leaders from the area and rewarded them accordingly. In many ways, Mr. Radhakrishnan is the first prominent BJP face from the region. After him came L. Murugan, hailing from the Scheduled Caste, who became the BJP’s State president and is now a Union Minister. K. Annamalai, an IPS officer-turned-politician, is also a Kongu Vellalar. The party’s All India Mahila Morcha leader and MLA Vanathi Srinivasan also belongs to the community.

By nominating Mr. Radhakrishnan as the Vice-Presidential candidate, the BJP seeks to offer the community a prominent national presence after a gap of many years. After Dr. P. Subbarayan, a Congress leader and Union Minister, and C. Subramaniam, who served as Union Minister and Maharashtra Governor, the community did not secure a vital place in national politics.

The BJP appointed Mr. Radhakrishnan as the Governor of Jharkhand before transferring him to the Raj Bhavan in Maharashtra. His position as Vice-President is expected to bolster the BJP’s influence in the Kongu region.

Institutional voice

Jerome Powell

The U.S. Federal Reserve Chairman, who has come under constant attacks from President Trump, stands firm in protecting the autonomy of the central bank

Kunal Shankar

At his acceptance speech as the Chairman of the U.S. Federal Reserve Board at the White House Rose Garden on November 2, 2017, Jerome Hayden Powell finished by saying: “I am committed to making decisions with objectivity and based on the best available evidence, in the long-standing tradition of monetary policy independence.” He said this fully cognisant of the friction that lay ahead between the Treasury and the American Central Bank, as has often been the case since the Federal Reserve system’s creation through an Act of Congress in 1913. But he would not have expected to be publicly berated as a “knucklehead”; or as an “enemy worse than Xi”, by the very man, President Donald Trump, who nominated him for the Chair’s position.

Mr. Powell is a registered Republican. But he was appointed to the seven-member Board of Governors of the Fed by a Democratic President – Barack Obama in 2012 – and will serve on the Board till his term ends on January 31, 2028.

An undergraduate in politics from Princeton and law from Georgetown University, Mr. Powell had a wealthy upbringing in



ILLUSTRATIONS: SREEJITH R. KUMAR

the posh Washington suburb of Chevy Chase. His father was a lawyer and mother a mathematician who also volunteered at the Republican National Committee. Conventionally, Fed Chairs have been re-nominated several times by Presidents cutting across party lines, to mark continuity, non-partisanship, and stability – all factors favoured by markets and enterprises.

Not since the Treasury-Fed Accord of 1951 has there been a more frontal attack on the independence of the U.S. Central Bank in the vitriolic manner pursued by President Trump both during his first and current term.

Trouble began weeks after Mr. Powell took office on February 5, 2018. He continued with incremental interest rate hikes through the year, pursued by Mr. Powells’ predecessor Janet Yellen. She had begun revising rates in December 2015 for the first time since the 2008 Global

Financial Crisis, when rates were reduced to near zero for the first time in 50 years. But Mr. Powell pivoted in 2019 to “insurance cuts” amid trade war uncertainty, and financial markets rallied strongly.

Call for resignation

Mr. Trump broke with convention by publicly commenting on the Central Bank’s monetary policy stance by stating that he was “not thrilled” with the rate hikes beginning in March 2018. In the months to come, criticism quickly turned into jeering, peaking with Mr. Trump calling for Mr. Powell’s resignation in December 2018.

In contrast, Mr. Powell has shown restraint, with a rare interview to CBS’s 60 Minutes in June 2019, where he responded to the President’s calls for his resignation by saying “the law is clear that I have a four-year term. And I fully intend to serve it.”

Among his most notable policy interventions would

be Mr. Powell’s post pandemic response when the Fed printed \$2.9 trillion, expanding its balance sheet from \$4.7 trillion in March 2020 to more than \$7 trillion in May and reduced interest rates to near zero between March 3-15, 2020.

However, Mr. Powell was slow to respond in reigning in the post-pandemic inflationary spike – a phenomenon he wagered would be “transitory”. He later admitted it to be a miscalculation. The Fed under Mr. Powell once again pivoted from near zero interest rates for more than a year, steadily raising them beginning March 2022 to get it to 5.5% by July 2023.

During his last Jackson Hole speech on Friday, where central bank leaders gathered from across the world for their foremost annual global summit, Mr. Powell received a standing ovation. Not so much for his policy interventions, but for standing firm and safeguarding the independence of the most consequential pillar of the world’s monetary system.

Mr. Powell mentioned “downside risks” to unemployment, and “upside risks” to inflation, indicating that a near certain rate cut cycle would begin in September. This would most certainly be music for Mr. Trump’s ears.

She chose September, that most excellent month, to make her move. The monsoon had receded, leaving Kerala gleaming like an emerald strip between the mountains and the sea. As the plane banked to land, and the earth rose to greet us, I couldn't believe that topography could cause such palpable, physical pain. I had never known that beloved landscape, never imagined it, never evoked it, without her being part of it. I couldn't think of those hills and trees, the green rivers, the shrinking, cemented-over rice fields with giant billboards rising out of them advertising awful wedding saris and even worse jewellery, without thinking of her. She was woven through it all, taller in my mind than any billboard, more perilous than any river in spate, more relentless than the rain, more present than the sea itself. How could this have happened? How? She checked out with no advance notice. Typically unpredictable.

The church didn't want her. She didn't want the church. (There was savage history there, nothing to do with God.) So given her standing in our town, and given our town, we had to fashion a fitting funeral for her. The local papers reported her passing on their front pages; most national papers mentioned it, too. The internet lit up with an outpouring of love from generations of students who had studied in the school she founded, whose lives she had transformed, and from others who knew of the legendary legal battle she had waged and won for equal inheritance rights for Christian women in Kerala. The deluge of obituaries made it even more crucial that we do the right thing and send her off the way she deserved. But what was that right thing? Fortunately, on the day she died the school was closed and the children had gone home. The campus was ours. It was a huge relief. Perhaps she had planned that, too.

Conversations about her death and its consequences for us, especially me, had begun when I was three years old. She was thirty then, debilitated by asthma, dead broke (her only asset was a bachelor's degree in education), and she had just walked out on her hus-

'I left my mother not because I didn't love her, but in order to be able to continue to love her'

In her new memoir *'Mother Mary Comes To Me'*, Booker Prize winner **Arundhati Roy** explores her complex bond with the mother who both shaped and scarred her



SUNDAY
EXCLUSIVE

band — my father, I should say, although somehow that comes out sounding strange. She was almost eighty-nine when she died, so we had sixty years to discuss her imminent death and her latest will and testament, which, given her preoccupation with inheritance and wills, she re-wrote almost every other week. The number of false alarms, close shaves and great escapes that she racked up would have given Houdini pause for thought. They lulled us into a sort of catastrophe complacency. I truly believed she would out-

live me. When she didn't, I was wrecked, heart-smashed. I am puzzled and more than a little ashamed by the intensity of my response.

My brother put his finger sharply on that nerve. 'I don't understand your reaction. She treated nobody as badly as she treated you.' He could be

right, although according to me, it was he who held that trophy. I can understand him feeling that I was humiliating myself by not acknowledging what had happened to us as children. But I had put that behind me a long time ago. I have seen and written about such sorrow, such systemic deprivation, such unmitigated wickedness, such diverse iterations of hell, that I can only count myself among the most fortunate. I have thought of my own life as a footnote to the things that really matter. Never tragic, often hilarious. Or perhaps this is the lie I tell myself. Maybe I pitched my tent where the wind blows strongest hoping it would blow my heart clean out of my body. Perhaps what I am about to write is a betrayal of my younger self by the person I have become. If so, it's no small sin. But I'm in no position to be the judge of that.

I left home — stopped going home, or what passed as home — after I turned eighteen. I had just entered my third year at the School of Architecture in Delhi.

In those days we finished high school at sixteen. That's how old I was in the summer of 1976 when I first arrived at Nizamuddin Station, alone, without even a working knowledge of Hindi, to take the entrance exam for the School of Architecture. I was terrified and had a knife in my bag. Delhi was three days and two nights away by train from Cochin, which is a three-hour drive from our town, Kottayam, which in turn is a few kilometres away from our village, Ayemenem, where I spent my early childhood. In other words, for me Delhi was a different country altogether. Different language, different food, different climate, different everything. The scale of the city was beyond my

comprehension. I came from a place where everybody knew where everyone lived. Pathetically, I asked an auto-rickshaw driver if he could take me to the home of my mother's older sister, Mrs Joseph. I assumed he knew where she lived. He took a deep drag of his bidi and turned away, looking bored. Two years later I was the one smoking bidis and cultivating that peerless look of bored disdain. In time I traded in my knife for a good supply of hashish and some big-city attitude. I had emigrated.

“In that conservative, stifling little South Indian town, where, in those days, women were only allowed the option of cloying virtue — or its affectation — my mother conducted herself with the edginess of a gangster”

I left my mother not because I didn't love her, but in order to be able to continue to love her. Staying would have made that impossible. Once I left, I didn't see or speak to her for years. She never looked for me. She never asked me why I left. There was no need for that. We both knew. We settled on a lie. A good one. I crafted it — 'She loved me enough to let me go.' That's what I said at the front of my first novel, 'The God of Small Things', which I dedicated to her. She quoted it often, as though it were God's truth. My brother jokes that it's the only piece of real fiction in the book. To the end of her days, she never asked me how I managed during those seven years when I was a runaway. She never asked

where I lived, how I completed my course of study and took my degree. I never told her. I managed well enough.

After our brittle, tentative reunion, I returned to her, visiting her regularly over the years as an independent adult, a qualified architect, a production designer, a writer; but most of all as a woman watching another with love and admiration — and a fair amount of disquiet — not just for her great qualities, but the opposite, too. In that conservative, stifling little South Indian town, where, in those days, women were only allowed the option of cloying virtue — or its affectation — my mother conducted herself with the edginess of a gangster. I watched her unleash all of herself — her genius, her eccentricity, her radical kindness, her militant courage, her ruthlessness, her generosity, her cruelty, her bullying, her head for business and her wild, unpredictable temper — with complete abandon on our tiny, insular Syrian Christian society, which, because of its education and relative wealth, was sequestered from the swirling violence and debilitating poverty in the rest of the country. I watched her make space for the whole of herself, for all her selves, in that little world. It was nothing short of a miracle — a terror and a wonder to behold.

Once I learned to protect myself (somewhat) from its soul-crushing meanness, I even grew fascinated by her wrath against motherhood itself. Sometimes the barefaced nakedness of it made me laugh. Not the laughing-out-loud kind of laughter, but the kind that comes upon you when you are alone. When you surgically excise an incident from its circumstances and look at it dispassionately, shorn of context. As though she were someone else's mother and as though it were not I but someone else who was the object of her wrath.

Excerpted from *'Mother Mary Comes To Me'* by Arundhati Roy with permission from Penguin Random House India

Together but apart! Why some Indian couples are choosing LAT marriages

Living separately while married may sound strange, but some couples say the distance and independence is what makes their relationship work

Sneha.Bhura@timesofindia.com

If marriage is about building a life together, then why do some couples choose to live apart? Shouldn't matrimony mean sharing a home, a routine and bearing witness to the everyday messiness of life? Why would two loving individuals willingly put distance between themselves? Yet, for a growing number of Indian couples, Living Apart Together (LAT) isn't just an arrangement — it's what makes their marriage work.

Mumbai-based advertising professionals Rohan Pillai and Meera Rao seemed to have a conventional marriage — until the arrival of their daughter shifted their living situation. Rao (names changed on request) didn't get along with Pillai's parents, and rather than force an uneasy cohabitation, they arrived at a practical compromise: Rao moved into a nearby rented home with their five-year-old daughter, while Pillai continued living with his elderly parents. It allows Pillai to fulfill

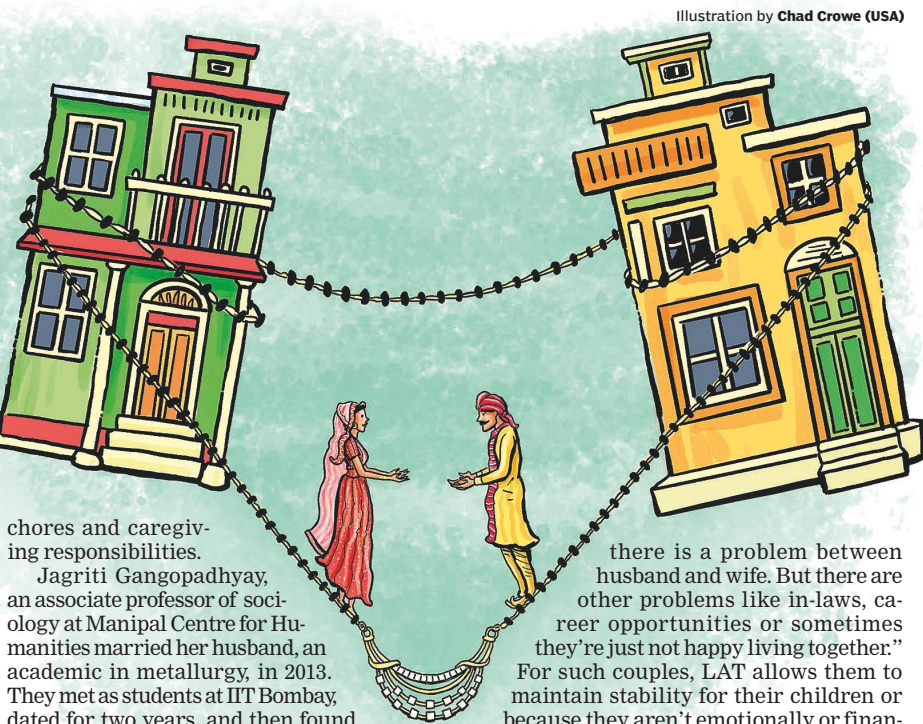


Illustration by Chad Crowe (USA)

chores and caregiving responsibilities. Jagriti Gangopadhyay, an associate professor of sociology at Manipal Centre for Humanities married her husband, an academic in metallurgy, in 2013. They met as students at IIT Bombay, dated for two years, and then found themselves accepted into different institutions for their PhDs — Gangopadhyay at IIT Gandhinagar, her husband at IIT Kharapur. The initial years were not easy. The heavy workload and distance were barriers, ones that the financial constraints that come with modest PhD stipends only worsened.

Even after their PhDs, neither felt the need to merge their lives under one roof. They got jobs in different cities, and having a child only solidified the decision. "My workplace offers excellent childcare and medical facilities. Everything is within a ten-minute radius — subsidised daycare, community centers, extracurriculars. My husband agrees that I have better facilities here, which is why our son stays with me," Gangopadhyay says, adding that the arrangement doesn't jeopardise family time: holidays and summer vacations are synchronised according to their academic calendars, and technology enables constant contact.

Gangopadhyay says the secret to sustain an LAT relationship is trust and a shared commitment to their careers. "Trust plays a big role in this kind of relationship. I also think this whole idea of masculinity is changing in India — husbands are now gradually leaning towards being supportive of their wives' careers rather than expecting them to make sacrifices," says the academic who has also researched LAT marriages.

Over the last three years, Gurugram-based matrimonial lawyer Palak Jairath has increasingly heard from clients considering LAT. "Usually, when we talk about divorce, we think

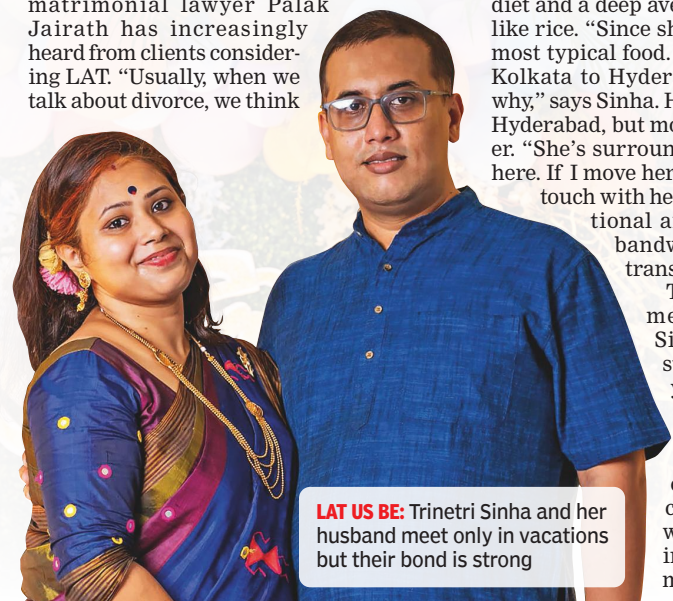
there is a problem between husband and wife. But there are other problems like in-laws, career opportunities or sometimes they're just not happy living together." For such couples, LAT allows them to maintain stability for their children or because they aren't emotionally or financially prepared for divorce.

Societal stigma around the unconventional set-up persists. "People wonder — she's living alone, her husband is also on his own, but they meet at parties, arrive in different cars, leave separately, go on holidays. It's confusing for the neighbours," says Shibani Singh (name changed), an interior designer who has been in an LAT arrangement with her husband for five years. She lives with her teenage son, while her husband stays with his parents. "My son is perfectly happy with the arrangement. He sees his father almost every day. Even my in-laws don't mind anymore. You know how society is — people say, 'Because of the wife, the son left the parents.' I never wanted that tag," she adds.

LAT couples are often dismissed as selfish or uncommitted. "Just because a couple chooses not to live together doesn't mean they don't value their marriage. They have simply refined the institution in a way that works best for them," says Ruuh. "Most research from the West indicates that LAT couples experience fewer household disagreements, avoid repetitive conflicts and make more intentional efforts to nurture their bond rather than taking each other for granted."

For Trinetri Sinha, who teaches at a govt school in Medinipur district in West Bengal, the decision to live separately from her partner is shaped by her daughter's needs. Writanya, now four, has an extremely restricted diet and a deep aversion to common staples like rice. "Since she was two, she's rejected most typical food. We've seen doctors from Kolkata to Hyderabad, but no one knows why," says Sinha. Her husband is working in Hyderabad, but moving there is a non-starter. "She's surrounded by a support system here. If I move her to Hyderabad, she'll lose touch with her mother tongue and emotional anchors. I don't have the bandwidth for those kinds of translocation experiments."

Though the couple only meets during vacations, Sinha insists their bond is strong. "We dated for seven years before marriage. That understanding carries us through." As for the romantic ideal of constant proximity, she is clear: "Living apart hasn't weakened our marriage — in many ways, it's made it more intentional."



LAT US BE: Trinetri Sinha and her husband meet only in vacations but their bond is strong

“Trust plays a big role in this kind of relationship. I also think this whole idea of masculinity is changing in India. Husbands are now gradually leaning towards being supportive of their wives' careers rather than expecting them to make sacrifices”

Jagriti Gangopadhyay,
ACADEMIC WHO HAS BEEN IN A LAT RELATIONSHIP FOR TWELVE YEARS



his duty as a son while Rao maintains her autonomy as a mother and an individual. "People keep asking if we're separated, but we're still a family, just not in the way others expect. My husband visits, our son goes over to his grandparents on the weekend, and we still function as a couple. Not every couple needs to live together to stay together."

Forget snoring snafus and laundry piling up on 'his' and 'her' chairs, these married couples are proving that love doesn't need constant proximity, just trust, respect and well-timed video calls. Plus, the freedom to chart individual paths while staying committed to each other. Unlike long-distance marriages driven by necessity, LAT is a conscious choice. Ruchi Ruuh, Delhi-based relationship counsellor, who has clients practising LAT, admits it's a still niche lifestyle choice, at least in India. "We see this more among high-achieving professionals, women seeking independence, people in second marriages, and those in unconventional careers like artists and freelancers," she says.

It's not always a logistical choice, driven by work obligations. "Some function better when they have solitude and independence. Others may have vastly different lifestyles — whether it's social preferences, sleeping patterns or cleanliness habits — making separate living arrangements a practical solution," Ruuh says. For many Indian women like Rao, LAT also provides a way out of traditional gender expectations in marital homes where they are still expected to shoulder most

KABOOTAR JA JA JA, but humans kha kha kha

8am Last weekend, along with India, the contents of my stomach also celebrated Independence Day for a good 24 hours. Like all freedom struggles, there was a steep price to pay, but this morning the scale rewarded me with a loss of 0.65 kilos. I immediately called up my sister with the good news. "If only you tracked the stock market with the same zeal you track your weight, you would be Warren Buffett," she said.

I would have retorted, but a mosquito began its solo dance recital around my head before landing on my leg for brunch. Thanks to dengue, I keep my racket charged and ready. Without moving a single thigh muscle, I swatted the pest into oblivion.

India's tennis champions owe their victories not to foreign coaches but to generations of mosquito combat. It takes real skill to smash an object 800% smaller than a tennis ball and one that zigzags like it's failing a sobriety test. When Leander Paes and Mahesh Bhupathi lifted the Wimbledon doubles trophy in 1999, they should have thanked the mosquitoes for providing decades of hand-eye coordination exercises.

'Hello? What's wrong with you?' My sister's tinny voice interrupted. I'd forgotten she was still on the line. When I recount my mosquito duel, she sighed, 'You only battle mosquitoes. Delhi now has snakes slithering about.'

'Snakes are manageable,' I told her. 'It's the two-legged chameleons in Delhi politics that terrify me. At least, vipers don't get to pass motions in Parliament.'

11am The office ceiling continues to drip. I have even suggested installing a basin with a cherub under it to turn it into a fountain. Water has seeped into the meter room, so the power is out for two hours. Despite the drizzle, it's so warm and humid that, combined with my hot flashes, my bones are turning into paya soup. As I start tearing a sheet of paper from an investment proposal to turn into an accordion fan, I am reminded of a recent news item. The principal of Lakshmi College smeared cow dung on classroom walls, claiming it would cool the room. The students asked for fans. They got faeces. Tit for tat — or rather, tit for turd. The students retaliated by decorating the principal's office in dung rangoli.

Lacking both a cow and some dung, I flap away with my homemade fan, which is a better use of all these investment plans anyway, where I put in all the money and the finance minister pockets a good percentage of my earnings for her kitty. The fan alleviates my symptoms, so I suppose some traditional cooling methods work better than others.

2pm Lunch break means collapsing into a black hole called Instagram. Einstein was right that time slows down, but only when you're watching airport-look reels.

For over a fortnight, my feed has been buzzing about the Supreme Court's order to remove thousands of stray dogs from Delhi streets, citing a rise in rabies cases. Our building, too, has a few strays that have been unofficially adopted. It started with a little tawny pup that we named Coco and then encompassed all her children over the years. The dogs are vaccinated, but we haven't sterilised them. The threat of them being taken away and locked up made it more personal than something seen through a phone screen.

On the flip side, the protests against removal of strays also revealed an inherent hypocrisy prevalent in human nature, including mine. I applaud the protesters who show up with placards, braving downpours and getting dragged through the mud by the police. But there are also an infinite number of armchair protesters who seem to spend their lunch break posting about the strays between bites of mutton biryani. We thrive on selective empathy. Either all life is precious, or none is, but morality tastes better when served with a McDonald's hamburger. Still, there has to be a middle path. Sterilisation and vaccination protect both people and

Mrs. Funnybones



TWINKLE
KHANNA

strays. Fortunately, the Supreme Court has modified its previous order. Blanket removal of the dogs was, at best, convenience turned into policy.

4pm A pigeon lands on my balcony railing. Fortunately, it's not 'bring your dog to work' day. The last time our golden retriever came to the office, he lunged with startling speed at a pigeon perched in the exact spot and brought it to me, dangling from his mouth with a triumphant expression. Perhaps he was secretly working as a govt agent to control the pigeon population in light of the recent ban against feeding them. Their droppings, doctors warn, are a respiratory hazard. My mother-in-law's pulmonologist even advised us to install spikes on the balcony to keep them away. The Mumbai pigeon ban has also caused an uproar. While protestors cite religious reasons and compassion,

Illustration by Chad Crowe (USA)



The Mumbai pigeon ban has also caused an uproar. While protestors cite religious reasons and compassion, experts say the birds have become a menace. Shakespeare wrote about roses with different names smelling the same but should have added a caveat, 'A bird by any other name does not taste the same'

experts say the birds have become a menace. Shakespeare wrote about roses with different names smelling the same but should have added a caveat, 'A bird by any other name does not taste the same.'

6.30pm Pruning my pots of mint, I watch squirrels turn my garden into Cirque du Soleil as they leap between mulberry and coconut trees. This is the first year that I have noticed a few squirrels in my garden. They have reproduced quickly, and now there are over a dozen scampering across the building compound. Morality is what the majority approves. We decide which animals should be exterminated, saved or roasted. Squirrels and rats are both rodents and carry similar diseases — leptospirosis and even rabies to some extent — but one gets its photographs posted on Instagram while the other gets poisoned.

Humans are by far the most dangerous creatures with our warring, murdering, polluting ways. Snakes, mosquitoes, and dogs bite to survive. We chew the world alive. Then when our insides occasionally rumble, like mine did all of last week, we pop a Hajmola and burp out platitudes before going back to finish our chicken wings.



'Touching Light' is an ode to the practice and practitioners of photography

ARTS PAGE 3

The Sunday Tribune

SPECTRUM



Manu Joseph's 'Why the Poor Don't Kill Us' is a mirror, an indictment, a summons

BOOKS PAGE 4

CHANDIGARH | 24 AUGUST 2025

A tribute to art historians BN Goswamy, Milo Beach and Eberhard Fischer, Museum Rietberg's GBF Foundation carries forward their seminal work

Crafting BNG's LEGACY

RITIKA KOCHHAR

N OBEL laureate Ernest Hemingway once wrote that "every man has two deaths: when he is buried in the ground and the last time someone says his name. In some ways, men can be immortal". On August 15, the 92nd birth anniversary of one of India's most respected art historians — Padma Bhushan awardee Brijinder Nath Goswamy (1933-2023) — was celebrated in Zurich, Switzerland, a place close to his heart and where his legacy has found a permanent address.

The Museum Rietberg in Zurich has been intimately associated with seminal work on South Asian art, particularly miniature paintings. In a fitting tribute, the museum, in association with private donors, has established a Foundation named after three art historians who brought South Asian miniature paintings to the world — the late Dr Goswamy, the founding chairperson of Panjab University's fine arts department who made Chandigarh his home; the German art historian and ethnologist Dr Eberhard Fischer (born in 1941), and the former director of the Smithsonian's Freer Gallery of Art, Dr Milo Cleveland Beach (born in 1939).

pants hands-on experience in traditional Pahari miniature painting techniques. The programme trained art historians, conservators, and artists in every stage of practice — from preparing paper and pigments to brush-making and final compositions.

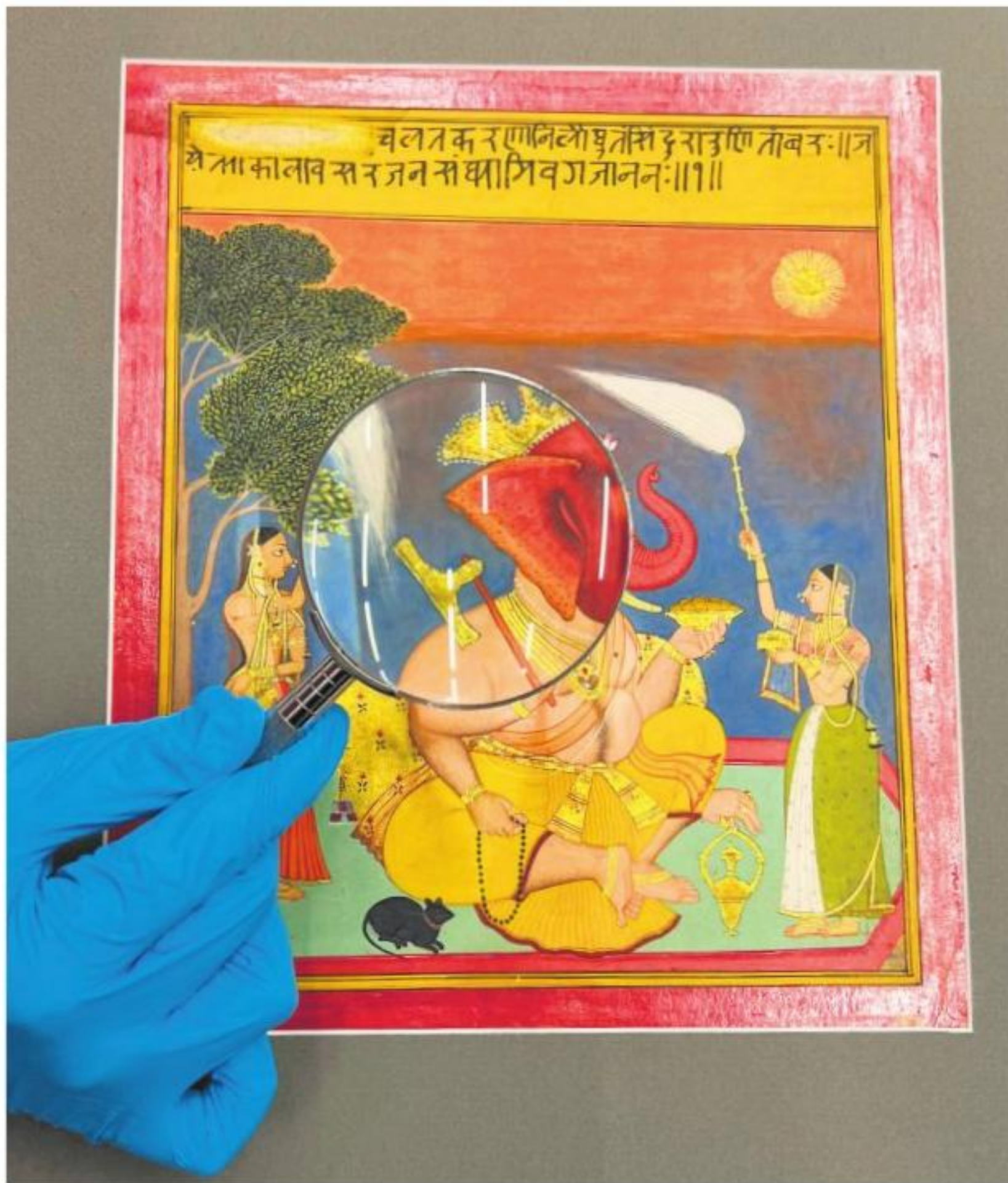
Johannes Beltz, managing director of the Foundation, shares the vision: "As a museum curator, I am committed to sharing our collections with diverse local and global audiences, experts and non-experts alike. I want to initiate joint research projects with our colleagues around the world — particularly those from South Asia — to study our collections and learn from each other. This learning should be based on open access to our collections. Apart from sharing our archives and online database, I want experts to work with the original artworks in our storage facilities. Handling real artworks cannot be replaced by digital copies."

Beltz is also committed to supporting the next generation of museum professionals. "Now, more than ever, museums need well-trained and experienced staff as they face increasing global challenges in terms of funding, political autonomy, media attention, and relevance." Much like Dr Goswamy, Beltz is an author, teacher, curator, and historian. He lectures at the University of Zurich and the Zurich University of Teacher Education and has authored books such as 'Mahar, Buddhist and Dalit: Religious Conversion and Socio-Political Emancipation' and 'Elephants, Swaying Gods, and Dancers in Trance', which focuses on bronze sculptures from the Bastar region.

"We work in three areas," he says: "research residencies at the Museum Rietberg, summer schools, conferences, training, teaching, and publications."

The Foundation's programmes are already proving to be innovative and engaging. The residency programme, 'One Object in Question', invites artists and scholars to immerse themselves in a single object from the collection and use it as the basis for new research, writing, and creative work. Featured objects included a Mahishasur Mardini Devi painting by the Nainsukh family, and a tantric painting from Udaipur.

Sonika Soni, Guest Curator of the GBF Foundation's Fellow Research programme, who earlier won a fellowship to research a mid-18th century Ragamala painting series from the Bundi-Kota region, curated an exhibition on Ragamalas at the museum earlier this year. Two contemporary miniature artists were invited: Murad Khan Mumtaz, an assistant professor at Williams College, University of Virginia, and Manish Soni. Interestingly, Soni portrayed Nainsukh in Amit Dutta's film of the same name



Musavvari, a 10-day summer school, offered 12 participants hands-on experience in traditional Pahari miniature painting techniques. PHOTOS COURTESY: GBF FOUNDATION

MASTERCLASS

INDIAN art history was a world shrouded in secrecy illuminated only by people like the Ceylonese metaphysician and historian Ananda Coomaraswamy (1877-1947). BN Goswamy was an accidental entrant into the field, having left the Indian Administrative Service in 1958 to pursue a PhD in history with a focus on miniature paintings.

While paintings were typically known by their patrons, in the post-Independent India, Goswamy was determined to identify the artists. He recalled that his family name was registered with their family panda (priest), and by sifting through the bahis (ledgers) in Haridwar, he found unimpeachable evidence of a painter named Nainsukh, his brother Manaku, their father Pundit Seu and their descendants. Fischer was learning to handle miniatures and Goswamy, who gave an annual lecture at the museum, helped him date and attribute paintings. Their relationship developed, and they collaborated

on a catalogue of the Alice Boner collection. By 1997, Artibus Asiae released a book on Nainsukh. In 2010, inspired by Goswamy's monograph, Fischer and the Museum Rietberg produced Amit Dutta's film, 'Nainsukh'. The New Yorker included it in its list of the best biopics ever made. A book about the film was published by the museum.

Nainsukh is now recognised as one of India's most important miniature artists. A painting by him depicting Raja Bahwant Dev hosting a musical soiree sold for ₹15 crore at a Mumbai auction in 2024. Fischer was awarded the Padma Shri in 2012.

Milo Cleveland Beach collaborated on the exhibition in Zurich and New York. Accompanied by a two-volume publication covering artistic traditions, techniques, and cultural contexts from 1100-1650 and 1650-1900, the project is considered a significant contribution to the understanding of Indian art history.

Prof BN Goswamy, who passed away in 2023, wrote a column for The Tribune for 27 years.

and serendipitously, Milo Beach also once chaired the art department at Williams College. For the exhibition, Mumtaz created a painting on Basant Raag, while Soni created one on Megh Raag.

Musavvari, the name of the summer school, comes from the Arabic word al-Mus, one of the 99 names of God. Through the Mughals, it became established in South Asia. Practising artists call themselves Musavvir, mostly in the northern Hindustani tradition. "We thought because we're teaching historical practice, it would be nice to use the word that goes along with it originally, rather than just 'miniature painting'. It's a wonderful group because they're all professionals related to miniature painting — conservators, art historians, artists, and educators. So, it's about giving them a hands-on experience with elements they already know historically," says Mumtaz.

The participants were thrilled. "We often think miniature painting is a dead tradition. But it's high time we start thinking of it as a living tradition that continues uninterrupted... Seeing masters like Manish and Murad working together reminded me of Mughal ateliers, where artists from different regions collaborated," says Indranil B, an art historian who has both won a GBF research fellowship and participated in Musavvari.

Sonika Soni adds, "The materials probably remain the same. What has changed is perception, and how we see the world. The world of paintings in the 15th or 17th century kept changing, and it changes today as well. Perceptions change, but the materiality remains consistent."

"Right now, especially in India and in other parts of the world as well, there is fresh awareness about working in the museum field and in archiving and documentation," Mumtaz observes. "A lot of youngsters are already stepping in. Even collectors are more conscious of the upkeep of paintings. I think we are in a very, very good position compared to probably 50 years ago."

But, these tiny pieces of paper painted with watercolours are easy to overlook and destroy, and history gets rewritten often. The GBF Foundation is nurturing a new international generation, inspired by the work of the three stalwarts over half a century, to ensure the vibrant traditions of South Asian art not only survive, but thrive.

— The writer is a Delhi-based contributor



Contemporary miniature artists Murad Khan Mumtaz and Manish Soni conducted the workshop.

It was in the 1970s that Dr Fischer, the then head of the Museum Rietberg, discovered the world of Pahari miniature paintings at the first lecture given at the museum by Dr Goswamy. Fischer, a specialist in African and Indian art, became fascinated with Indian miniature painting — one of the world's most intricate styles. Beach, an American art historian who worked mainly on Mughal and Rajput paintings, collaborated with the duo on the landmark exhibition, 'Masters of Indian Painting', held first at the Museum Rietberg in 2011 and then at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art.

To honour their dedication to fostering, supporting, publishing, and promoting research, the Museum Rietberg last year launched the GBF Foundation for Collaborative Research on South Asian Art and Artists, which seeks to advance research and appreciation of this shared cultural heritage.

The Foundation's mission is to strengthen the museum's role as an international centre for research on South Asian art, particularly painting, and to advance global recognition of its collections. A key focus is supporting the education and professional development of emerging scholars and curators from South Asia, especially India and Pakistan, specialising in South Asian art history.

The Foundation also aims to facilitate scholarly research based on original artworks from the museum's collection.

This August, the Foundation held Musavvari, a 10-day summer school offering 12 selected partici-



(L-R) Art historians Dr Eberhard Fischer, Prof BN Goswamy and Dr Milo Cleveland Beach.

RIETBERG MUSEUM'S PAST

THE Museum Rietberg has a complex history. It consists of three 19th-century villas and a coach house. One of these buildings, Villa Schonberg, was once home to composer Richard Wagner. He fled to Zurich from Germany in 1849 to avoid arrest for his involvement in the May

Uprising in Dresden and his radical views.

The owners gave Wagner and his wife Minna asylum, and he composed masterpieces like 'Tristan und Isolde' here. He also famously fell in love with Mathilde. The property was later owned by the Rietter family, who hosted even German

Emperor Wilhelm II and Adolf Hitler.

In the early 1940s, the city of Zurich purchased the Rietterpark and the Wesendonck Villa. In 1949, a referendum called for the villa to be rebuilt into a museum for the art collection of Baron Eduard von der Heydt, a German-Swiss banker. He described his col-

lection of Asian, African, American, and Oceanic art, acquired primarily in the 1920s and 1930s, as ars una — there is only one art.

The Museum Rietberg der Stadt Zurich opened in 1952. Today, it is Switzerland's largest art museum dedicated to non-European art and design.

Tailormade for the politician

MADHAV AGASTI

DELHI airport was buzzing with activity in the winter of 1984. Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Parooq Abdullah was among those present along with friends and fellow politicians, Sharad Pawar and NKP Salve. Out of the blue, he noticed Salve's *bandhgala* — designed by me — and said he was mighty impressed with its look and cut. Abdullah was ecstatic when he was told that I was at the airport too. He was also pleasantly surprised when he got to know that I had a measuring

Manohar Joshi, and Arun Sathe. Work flowed as word spread about the quality.

I met Pawar because of my industrialist friend Mama Kapadia, whose son used to get clothes made by me. This was 1983, and after our first meeting, I designed some clothes for him. He liked them a lot, and our partnership remains unbroken to this day. The Nationalist Congress Party bigwig and former CM of Maharashtra isn't demanding when it comes to his sartorial choices — he prefers a white shirt and white trousers. However, it's his wife Pratibha Pawar who takes a call on his clothes.

My association with the late Balasaheb Thackeray began around the same time. Theatre veteran Mohan Wagh, a relative of the Shiv Sena supremo, had worn a *kurta-pyjama* that the Sena chief liked. Wagh got me to meet him, and we hit it off instantly. I had used a new material for the *kurta-pyjama*. I made a white one for him and complemented it with a stole to complete the look. He loved it and began wearing the same material. At home, he would wear a *kurta-lungi* that I began designing for him. He would tell me to use a thick cloth; he did not like thin fabrics.

Once I asked Abdullah to send an off-white Kashmiri shawl for me. The Jammu and Kashmir leader sent that, and an additional saffron-coloured one as well. I gave that to Balasaheb, who was thrilled to bits. Vilasrao Deshmukh was an extremely stylish politician, and was also very fond of clothes. He particularly loved safari suits. He was among the rare politicians who could carry any outfit — *kurta-pyjama*, *dhoti-kurta*, jacket, or a suit.

A day before Deshmukh was sworn in as CM, I made a golden *bandhgala* suit for him. There was no official confirmation, but when the Congress came to power in 1999, it was evident that he would get the top job. I made the outfit in a day, voluntarily, and presented it to him, much to his surprise. He was fascinated by what he saw and wore it for the function.

When the Shiv Sena-BJP combine came to power in Maharashtra in 1995, Manohar Joshi was made CM. A day before his oath-taking ceremony, Thackeray asked him to meet me and get his clothes stitched for the occasion. He wore a *kurta-pyjama*, although I had also made a *bandhgala* for him.

I still design clothes for Devendra Fadnis. Blue is his favourite colour, so I try to give him variations in that when it comes to jackets. I observed him grow from mayor of Nagpur in 1997 to Chief Minister of Maharashtra in 2014. Over the years, he has started experimenting more with colours.

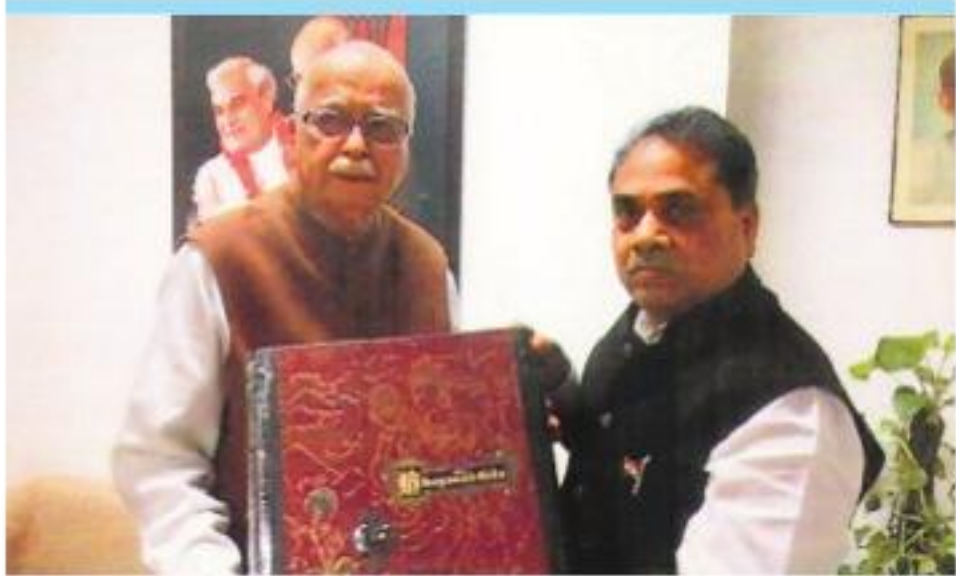
Earlier, politicians had a peculiar style of dressing; *dhoti*, *kurta*, *pyjama*, and jacket ruled that era. Everyone had fixed outfits. BJP stalwart LK Advani, for instance, would wear a jacket with three buttons. Former Deputy CM Gopinath Munde preferred a *kurta-pyjama*-jacket combination.

Today's politicians are stylish, fashionable, and have an acute understanding of dressing. They also voice their tastes and preferences openly, without the fear of being judged. After 1985, people started wearing Jodhpuris and even polo necks in Parliament. I believe Deshmukh and Joshi were the most well-dressed politicians. Salve, who used to get his clothes from London, would be well-groomed too.

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla is stylish as well. It was amazing to work with LK Advani. He's a simple man who wears anything that you give him.

— Excerpted with permission from Penguin Random House

A new book offers a unique perspective on the world of fame and power, from a tailor's chair



The author (right) with LK Advani.

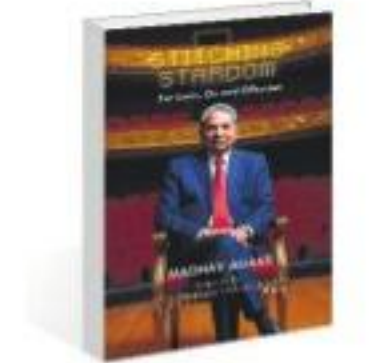
tape with me. I took him to the VIP lounge at the airport and took his measurements there. I first made a *sherwani* for him. He loved it so much that I followed that with a suit, a *pathani*, a safari, and a *kurta*; he remains my client to date.

My brush with politicians was organic. Often one contact led to the other. When I was working in the film industry, some actors introduced me to a few political heavyweights. For instance, the likes of Dilip Kumar, Sunil Dutt, and Rajendra Kumar had excellent relations with top leaders such as Balasaheb Thackeray and Pawar.

While I was designing for film stars, I got a chance to make clothes for the likes of Salve, Patangrao Kadam, and Sushilkumar Shinde, among others, in the 1980s. I also worked with Ghulam Nabi Azad, who was Amrish Puri's friend. Sunil Dutt and Sanjay Khan facilitated our meeting in 1985-86.

Dutt also introduced me to PC Alexander, former Governor of Maharashtra. At a party hosted by Alexander, and attended by Dutt and Marzban Patrawala (Congress MLA and Supreme Court lawyer), he was impressed by their attire and asked Johnny Joseph (former chief secretary of Maharashtra) to find out who their tailor was. Joseph got in touch with me, and I made a suit for Alexander. He could not stop singing my praises.

Piyush Goyal's father, Ved Prakash Goyal, connected me to the top BJP brass — Advani, Murli



STITCHING STARDOM: FOR ICONS, ON AND OFFSCREEN by Madhav Agasti. Penguin Random House. Pages 152. ₹499



Seerat Hafiz (right), who runs an online Kashmiri reading club, with poet, writer and critic Prof Shafi Shauq.

Saving a language

BILAL GANI

KASHMIRI, or Koshur, is one of the oldest spoken languages in the world. It originated in the Dardic region and is mainly spoken in Kashmir and Chenab valley, and in parts of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. However many scholars, including George Grierson, place Kashmiri in the Indo-European language family.

For centuries, Kashmiri had the distinction of being a medium of Sufi poetry and philosophical thought of such literary giants as Lal Ded and Sheikh Noor-ud-Din. Despite its richness and status as a classical language, Kashmiri has been in constant decline. Recently, UNESCO declared the language as "vulnerable" and in danger of extinction since its use has been restricted to certain domains. The lack of inter-generational transmission is one of the pivotal reasons for the decline of the language.

Kids are encouraged to speak in English or Urdu since these have taken on a hegemonic character over the native language. There's been a marginalisation of Kashmiri as a wave of urbanisation has swept the Valley, where social and economic mobility is often associated with proficiency in Urdu or English.

Noam Chomsky, a foundational figure in modern linguistics, often emphasises the deep connection between language, thought, and culture. According to the American theoretical linguist, "A language is not just words. It's a culture, a tradition, a unification of a community, a whole history that creates what a community is. It's all embodied in a language."

As the use of Koshur declines among the new generation of Kashmiris, many young students and content creators have turned to digital platforms to preserve the language.

Touqeer Ashraf, a science graduate from Kashmir University, made it his mission to promote the language after witnessing a decline in its use among students in Srinagar. In November

As the use of Kashmiri declines, digital platforms helmed by youngsters have taken the lead in promoting the language



Touqeer Ashraf's (R) digital platform has got an overwhelming response.

2021, he launched Keashur Pawar, a digital platform aimed at promoting Kashmiri among youth and raising awareness about the need to preserve this dying language.

Touqeer says, "While many Kashmiris are using digital platforms to earn money, I am using it as a medium to raise awareness about our rich language and the need to preserve it — purely out of passion. Despite this, platforms like YouTube do not recognise Koshur and have not monetised my channel, which is a prerequisite for earning through digital media."

Touqeer has received an overwhelming response, but believes the preservation of Koshur requires institutional intervention. "The government needs to conduct workshops involving various stakeholders and experts to devise strategies for promoting this language. It is essential for the University of Kashmir to col-

laborate with the government to initiate a multipronged approach for its preservation," he says.

Another digital platform working to make learning Kashmiri accessible to GenZ is Yikvot (together), a digital space started by 22-year-old Seerat Hafiz as an online reading club. Here, original and translated Kashmiri works are read every week.

Studying 'Conflict Transformation and Peacebuilding' at Lady Shri Ram College, New Delhi, Seerat says she started the club just for the purpose of reading together, which is why the group is called Yikvot.

"I was young when I left Kashmir for better educational opportunities, and naturally I didn't have enough exposure to Kashmiri, and the literature. I knew of nothing the language has to offer. I thought it was a problem specific to me; I realised much later that living in Kashmir wouldn't have been any different. People don't really read their own literature, mostly because there is no proper structure or system in place. That's when I decided to look for Kashmiri books and began visiting Kashmiri departments and libraries which might house these. When I had a good rough sketch, I launched Yikvot, which meets every week to read original and translated Kashmiri works," she says.

Seerat believes that digital spaces are an effective medium to engage youngsters to learn their mother tongue. "As GenZ, we understand how trends can make a thing work. There is a good audience for it, because Kashmiri literature comes off as unheard of to the youth today."

Prof Shamshad Kralwari, a poet and translator who translated Fyodor Dostoevsky's 'Crime and Punishment' into Kashmiri, believes in a multifaceted approach that blends cultural stewardship, education, media and technology. Kralwari feels that widespread promotion of Kashmiri can be made possible through reels, podcasts and storytelling formats that resonate with youth.

— The writer teaches at Gout Degree College, Beerwah, J&K

CAPTION CONTEST 1524

SARAJIT SINGH



Entries are invited to suggest a caption for the photograph. The caption should only be in English, witty and not exceeding 10 words, and reach Spectrum, The Tribune, Chandigarh, 160030, by Thursday. The best five captions will be published and awarded ₹300, ₹250, ₹200, ₹150 and ₹100, respectively. Each caption must be accompanied by a clipping of the caption contest and its number. Photocopies or scans of the caption photo won't be accepted. Online subscribers may attach an epaper clipping at captionpics@tribunemail.com or a scanned copy of the e-paper clipping. Please mention the pin code and phone number, along with your address.

SELECTED ENTRIES FOR CAPTION CONTEST 1523



SPECTRUM AUGUST 17 ISSUE (SEE PHOTO)

- (Swing Commander) — Pariyat Kapuria via epaper, Pathankot
- (Emotional) connection — Manpreet Kaur, Mohali
- Love that swings across generations — Sakshi Badsara via epaper, Bhiwani
- Grandmother's king under wing — Anmol Chadha, Patiala
- Love is the grandma of this invention — Pushajit Gill, Ludhiana

Indian sweets like burfi, kheer, rasmalai and more can be prepared with almond or coconut milk

Go inventive with vegan desserts

RAHUL VERMA

A SMALL sweet shop in my neighbourhood prepares the most delicious *khoya* *barfi*. Having grown up on milk and milk products, I am a great votary of milk-based sweets. And I have often wondered what vegans — whose diets exclude all that is milky — have for sweets.

Quite a lot, it transpires. I realised that a few days ago when a recipe for a coconut *barfi* popped up in my inbox. It seemed like a fair alternative to a milk-based coconut *barfi*, and it got me thinking. There are many Indian veggie sweets, of course, from all our *halwas* to *jalebis* and *laddoos*. But how do chefs create traditional milk-based sweets without using dairy products? Chef Pradip Rozario, who runs food outlets in Kolkata, tells me that there are many ways of doing so.

According to him, if you like *sandesh*, for instance, you don't have to prepare *chhena* with milk. They use almond milk instead. The process remains the same — boil almond milk, add lemon juice, strain it through a muslin cloth, rinse the pulp, squeeze it well and let it hang for 20 minutes. Then knead until smooth, mix in powdered sugar, cardamom powder, and a few tablespoons of fresh pomegranate juice for flavour and colour. Place this mix in small moulds, chill for 30 minutes, and serve. Garnish each *sandesh* with a few

VEGAN COCONUT BARFI

INGREDIENTS

Coconut powder	3/4 cup
Coconut milk	1-3/4 cup
Sugar	1/2 cup
Vegan butter (any brand)	4 tsp
Cardamom powder	1/8 tsp
Almonds & pistachios (sliced)	1 tsp

METHOD

Soak the coconut powder in coconut milk for about 30 minutes. In a flat-bottomed pan, heat 1 tsp of vegan butter. Once melted, add sugar and spread it evenly across the pan. As the sugar starts to melt, stir until it turns a light brown. Do not overheat as it will burn fast. Turn off the heat once the colour changes. Gradually add the soaked coconut mixture and stir continuously until the mixture turns brown. Turn on the heat again to medium and stir for 12-15 minutes until the mixture becomes lumpy. Add the remaining vegan butter and continue stirring until it reaches a soft dough-like consistency. Mix in the cardamom powder. Pour the mixture onto a greased tray or plate and flatten it using a greased spatula. Garnish with sliced almonds and pistachios. Let the *barfi* set and cool for a few hours before cutting it into pieces of your desired shape.

(PHOTO AND RECIPE COURTESY: VEGANUARY INDIA)

pomegranate arils. *Rasgullas* can be prepared similarly, and also with soy milk and sugar, flavoured with a few drops of natural rose essence and garnished with dried rose petals and chopped pistachios.

These are all novel ideas, for veganism was not popular even some decades ago. Nowadays, there is a strong global movement against the

use of dairy products. Its proponents tell us that veganism is a kinder diet, as it safeguards animals as well as the environment. And combined with seeds and other sources of protein and calcium, it can be a healthy diet, too. There are many celebs and athletes who uphold veganism.

But you don't have to be a full-fledged vegan to enjoy these alterna-

tive milk-based sweets. Agnibh Mudi, chef at a popular chain called One8 Commune, prepares vegan *rasmalai* with almond or cashew milk, *kheer* and Mysore *pak* with oat milk, and *sandesh* with coconut milk. "Almond and cashew milk have a nutty taste, so they need to be skimmed or strained for the right texture. Coconut milk is creamy and aromatic. Soya milk has a different viscosity and consistency," he explains.

Clearly, there is no end to ideas when it comes to inventive dishes. Want something special for dessert? Chef Nishant Choubey suggests *makhana*-based dessert with dates and almond milk. To prepare, roast one cup of *makhana* (fox nuts) till golden. Coarsely grind half, and keep them all aside. Warm two cups of almond milk in a thick-bottomed pan. Add some threads of saffron, and simmer. Add the *makhana*, both ground and whole, to the almond milk. Cook on low heat, stirring until it thickens to a *kheer*-like consistency. Stir in 6-8 chopped and pitted dates, add 1-2 tablespoons of jaggery powder or date syrup, if you like it sweet. Sprinkle cardamom powder on top, garnish with toasted almond slivers and, if desired, a drizzle of date syrup.

The best bit about these desserts is that they make you feel virtuous. And what could be sweeter than that...

— The writer is a food critic



Deepti Naval. By Neeraj Priyadarshi



DARKROOM STORIES

ADITYA ARYA

TWO hundred years ago, a Frenchman named Nicéphore Niépce created the first 'photographic' image using a camera obscura. His colleague, Louis Daguerre, went on to invent the iconic daguerreotype process, laying the foundation for truthful likeness of the image. Nineteenth-century alchemists took image-making processes to new and inventive heights, making the arrival of photography, without doubt, one of the most impactful developments in the history of humankind. *'Touching Light: A Prelude to the Bicentennial of Photography (1827-2027)'* is a tribute, an ode to the practice and practitioners of photography, as we celebrate the bicentennial of the medium.

At the age of 16, my journey began in the darkroom of the renowned photographer Kul-

want Roy, who chronicled the events that defined the destiny of India as it struggled for and achieved Independence.

I started by washing his prints and was introduced to the world of photography in the dim red glow of his darkroom. There, I learned the slow, deliberate process of analog photography: watching an image slowly emerge on paper, and understanding the patience, precision and anticipation that defined the craft.

The journey of analog photographers in India over the past two centuries is a tapestry interwoven with colonial history, social transformation, artistic exploration, and the preservation of memory, alongside a rich and robust commercial practice.

Its history is not a single story, but rather, many intertwined tales, with each photograph a precious fragment, each artefact an anecdote. Together, they form an evolving narrative that continues to inspire, inform and connect us to our past and each other.

'Touching Light' features *carte de visite* from the Bourne & Shepherd Studio (1860s), original albumen prints from the 'People of India' series (1850s-1860s), and the 'Beauties of Lucknow' series attributed to Darogah Abbas Ali (1874), from the collection of Museo Camera/India Photo Archive. Alongside, it showcases analog silver prints, chemigrams and diapositives (slides) by 28 contemporary Indian photographers.

The analog photographs bear unique characteristics — grain, light leaks and colour shifts — that arise from the physical and chemical processes involved. These imperfections add personality and authenticity to each image and the inherent fragility of the medium, both in materials and process.

The show is a celebration of the practitioners who have shaped the visual history of India, and invites viewers to reflect on the enduring allure of analog photography.

— Arya is founder-director of Museo Camera, Centre for the Photographic Arts. He has curated the exhibition, on display at Museo Camera in Gurugram until September 29

'Touching Light' is an ode to the practice and practitioners of photography, as we celebrate the bicentennial of the medium



Naveej Johar. By Bandheep Singh



Rohit Bal. By Rohit Chawla



Bourne & Shepherd Studios, 1860s, *carte de visite*



'Beauties of Lucknow', 1870s. By Darogah Abbas Ali

Qissa of Dara Shikoh, prince of tides

MAI VIKA KAUL

CINE actor, theatre director and poet Danish Husain plans to introduce a new Dara Shikoh in his directorial venture, *'Qissa Dara Shikoh Ka'*, the story of a Mughal prince who, in popular narratives, is portrayed as someone who would have been a better emperor than Aurangzeb. The play portrays the prince as a man of extraordinary strengths and certain weaknesses. So, while he is as ambitious as the 'devil' Aurangzeb, he is equally complex. In telling his story, Danish also presents multiple shades of a historical icon of syncretic India.

Danish is always particular about his protagonists. They are not conventional heroes, but humane characters — those who may speak truth to power (like Sahir Ludhianvi in the acclaimed *'Main Pal Do Pal Ka Shayar Hoon'*, which featured both acting and direction by him), possess follies (like Dara Shikoh), are underdogs and often wrestle with their demons.

His choices stem from his desire to tell stories that are more humanistic and go beyond popular narratives.

Dara Shikoh had been on Danish's mind for some years. In him, he found an excellent scholar and an individual who seriously pursued the study of common practices between Hinduism and Islam. "He made an earnest effort to find the middle ground between Islamic and Hindu practices," Danish says between rehearsals.

A large part of Dara Shikoh's research was devoted to studying the mystical and pluralistic characteristics of various religious sects during the Mughal era.

An excellent scholar of Arabic and Persian, Dara appointed a team of Sanskrit

Romanticised in popular narratives, Danish Husain's is a more humanistic portrayal of the man

scholars and had them translate the *'Upanishads'* into Persian. French scholar Abraham Hyacinthe Anquetil-Duperron further translated this Persian edition into Latin. Eventually, it reached Europe, where several philosophers, including the German Arthur Schopenhauer, recognised its eminence. In a way, Dara Shikoh contributed to introducing the *'Upanishads'* to the western world. A library built by him still exists in Delhi and is housed at the Dr BR Ambedkar University.

In the play, we find Dara tracing ideas of monotheism in Hinduism and drawing parallels between the Islamic concept of *'tawheed'* and the Hindu concept of *'advaita'*, the idea of the unity of God. "He was searching for the mother of all spiritual texts and this search led him to study the *'Vedas'* and the *'Upanishads'*," says Danish.

He initially wanted to do a lavish full-length play on Dara last year but could not garner the resources. Then, last July, during a workshop on storytelling for *Qissebaazi* — a project run by The Hoshrubha Repertory, a company Danish founded in 2016 — co-workers Ali Mohammed Yusuf and Sohail Patel expressed their desire to perform Dara's story. The two went on to script the *qissebaazi* as well, offering a less black and

white profile of Dara Shikoh, while capturing the realities of two ambitious Mughal princes battling for the throne of India.

Dara, the elder son of Emperor Shah Jahan and the potential inheritor of the throne, was considered a heretic by Aurangzeb. To Aurangzeb, Dara was a manipulator who influenced his father against him. Danish's play puts their rivalry into perspective: when Shah Jahan fell seriously ill, it was Dara who first unofficially put the emperor under house arrest, ensuring his brothers didn't have access to him.

While directing such performances, Danish is concerned about the authenticity of the language — its purism and refinement. He believes that while several Indian states have a better grip on their vernaculars and are therefore closer to purer forms of the languages, in large parts of North India, there is mostly a mish-mash of regional dialects or languages like Hindi and English (which he insists is more "pidgin").

As a director, his effort is to present a communicative yet refined form of Hindi and Urdu. Equally challenging is how to present a text that does not appear like propaganda, yet manages to bring the audience closer to the subject.

The show, scheduled to be performed at Rangshila Theatre in Mumbai on August 30, will also include an adaptation of Patras Bukhari's classic short story *'Marhoon Ki Yaad Mein'* as *'Qissa Bicycle Khatar-Patar Ka'*, adapted by Devendra Singh Kushwah and Prashant Sharma.

For Danish, showcasing the richness of the complexity of human existence makes for the best stories, and better theatre.

— The writer is a Delhi-based freelancer



Danish Husain's protagonists are not conventional heroes, but humane characters. PHOTO COURTESY: THE HOSHURUBHA REPERTORY

BOOKS

A mirror, an indictment, a summons

MEGHNA PANT

WHEN you look at Manu Joseph — tall, dark and handsome, hair balding like an unresolved argument — you don't immediately think of him as dangerous. He has the air of a man who has stayed up too late with his own thoughts, someone who knows the burden of irony but wears it lightly.

His home, I imagine, reflects this same blend of nihilism and quiet misanthropy — the sort of place that insists on its own seriousness. A low bookshelf bending under the weight of books that mock him as much as they sustain him. A desk with coffee rings that speak of long nights and longer thoughts. Curtains that do not quite meet in the middle. A sofa that has never known indulgence. The decor of someone who has never cared to perform wealth, only irony.

It's important to mention this because in Joseph's world, the stage is as revealing as the script. Not operatic, not indulgent, but sharp — like a quiet cough in a library. You hear this timbre in every page of 'Why the Poor Don't Kill Us', his first full-length work of non-fiction. The book is less a polemic than an anatomy, a scalpel cutting into the membrane that separates the rich from the poor, privilege from precarity. The book lays bare, with pitiless precision, the absurd, obvious and counterintuitive reasons why we are safe. *So far*. That italicised



WHY THE POOR DON'T KILL US: THE PSYCHOLOGY OF INDIANS
by Manu Joseph.
Aleph.
Pages 280.
₹599

so far is the shiver under the blanket, the whispered warning in the stillness.

Joseph refuses to indulge in easy binaries. He does not canonise the poor or demonise the rich. His is a more sorrowful proposition: that society survives because inequality is not absolute but managed. The poor don't kill us, he suggests, because the system is cunning enough to hand them crumbs of aspiration — a festival wage, a tenuous job, the hope of climbing a ladder that never quite ends. It is this cruel choreography of Indian society that sustains the so-called peace.

And what is peace, if not decor? A living room arranged so that the cracks don't show. Joseph turns these metaphors into indictments. The truth is brutal: we, the

readers, are the reason the system holds. Our inertia is its foundation. His humour — dry, serrated — could only come from someone who has looked out from a balcony at the chaos below, half-amused, half-appalled, his hand resting absently on a railing he knows is rusting.

One cannot help but notice the play of expressions in Joseph's writing. The half-smile of irony. The tightening of the jaw when the rage bubbles up. His wit is raw: a restrained fury, never screeched, always measured, as though he knows that anger must be dressed well if it is to be heard.

This is not a book of solutions. It does not propose policy or soothe with platitudes. Instead, it reflects Joseph himself: unwilling to flatter, unable to look away. What is left is the essential furniture of critique, which can feel stark, even cold, but also impossible to ignore.

It is worth noting the irony that one of India's finest writers — of greats like 'Serious Men' and 'The Illicit Happiness of Other People', both of which kept me up all night — is compelled to ask for reader donations on his website, a damning reflection not of him but of a society that leaves its best minds unsupported. The sadness of that image — the writer as supplicant, the intellectual as hustler — should shame us. Yet Joseph never begs on the page. His prose does not merely command. It summons.

'Why the Poor Don't Kill Us' reminds us that the fragile safety of the privileged is not

built on justice but on compromise. Unless we confront this fiction, it will not hold. Reading the book, one wonders: will empathy ever outlast comfort? And what happens when the illusion finally breaks?

The poor do not kill us because we, collectively, have built an elaborate stage where illusions of order play endlessly. We are complicit.

But what if the performance ends? What if "so far" runs out of time? Joseph does not soothe us with answers. He leaves us with silence, like an undecorated wall staring back.

To review Joseph's book by dwelling on his hairline, the fire in his eyes, or the probable decor of his home, is of course to parody the way female authors are often reviewed — especially by male reviewers: reduced to decor, body, timbre. The art sublimated to the artist. But that is the point. Joseph, ever attuned to hypocrisy, would appreciate this irony.

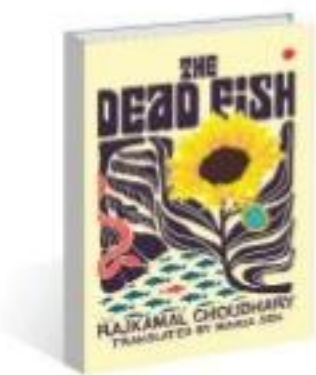
So here is where the book leaves us: staring at the relentless irony of its author, and through him, at our own reflection. Will we continue to live in the false lull of being "safe" or will we lean into the jagged edges of revolt?

'Why the Poor Don't Kill Us' is more than a book. It is a mirror, an indictment and a summons. And like its author — sharp, unsentimental, oddly tender — it refuses to let you look away. And perhaps that is why it matters. A lot.

— The reviewer is an acclaimed author



BACKFLAP



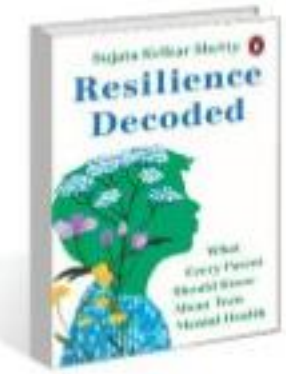
THE DEAD FISH
by Rajkamal Choudhary.
Rupa.
Pages 200. ₹495

When Rajkamal Choudhary's 'Machali Mari Hui' released in the 1960s, it garnered instant fame because of its controversial topic. It went on to become a seminal masterpiece of Hindi literature and the author's most acclaimed work. A fearless anatomy of sexual orientation, identity and emotional tumult set in mid-20th century Kolkata, it explores the psychological depths of Nirmal Padmavat, a ruthless businessman whose personal life is marked by emotional volatility and contradictory sexuality.



THE WILD
by Mahendra Jakhar.
Rupa.
Pages 256. ₹395

From the author of 'The Butcher of Benares', which has been adapted into the Netflix series 'Mandala Murders', comes another thriller. It tells the story of Aakash and Shweta — the perfect couple to the outside world, but strangers, enemies even, behind closed doors. Their fractured marriage is the least of their worries when they wake up in an unrecognisable, merciless wilderness with no memory of how they got there. Now, survival means trusting the one person they despise the most.



RESILIENCE DECODED
by Sujata Kelkar Shetty.
Penguin Random House.
Pages 173. ₹399

A synthesis of interviews with psychologists, educators and teens, combined with cutting-edge research and hard-earned personal truths, 'Resilience Decoded' aims to be a roadmap to navigating the adolescence of your children. While adolescence has always been turbulent, today's teens face a perfect storm: a rewired digital world, mounting academic pressures and the lingering effects of a global pandemic. Anxiety and depression are soaring and parents are left wondering how to protect their children.

Family's kitchen legacy

TARANA HUSAIN KHAN

RECIPES evolve and proliferate as they traverse timelines and borders. Every hand leaves an imprint, even as the actual creators of recipes remain shrouded in anonymity. It is therefore worth applauding that Pernia Qureshi has decided to share the recipes of her grandmother, the indomitable Musharraf Begum, a generosity that stems from the matriarch's desire to teach her specialties to members of her family and house help.

Like all women of her generation, married and sent off to a new home, Musharraf Begum was transposed from the small town of Chandausi to the erstwhile princely state of Rampur. One can only imagine how daunting it must have been for the young girl to take the place of the fourth, and the only living, wife of an older and rich Abdul Majeed Qureshi, with stories of her earlier wives lurking in every corner. Yet, she created space for herself by marrying the flavours of her hometown to that of the culinary tradition of Rampur. Being a Rampuri, I know how protective we are of our cuisine. The tempering of *daals* and the *masala* mixes are almost cast in stone. An erring element in a dish is enough to seal the culinary reputation of a daughter-in-law. Yet, going by the recipes Pernia describes, Musharraf Begum dared to edge in tomatoes and *chaat masala* into curries, *kebabs* and roasts.

We food writers and historians believe that authenticity is a fraught term, as recipes are reimagined and amalgamate varying influences in kitchens. Having said that, I was surprised to see scrambled eggs in *chapli kebabs* and tomatoes in *qorma* — two instances in which I can hear loud protests from the Rampuris! Can there ever be a *seekh kebab* without golden fried onions? Or a '*chicken nihari*', when *nihari* is supposed to be cooked through the night?

Still, Pernia presents the recipe of a *nihari masala* that promises to elevate chicken curry to the grandeur of a *nihari* and advises us to sprinkle *chaat masala* over '*nargisi kofta*' and '*ishtew*'. I can see the bold, adventurous spirit of Musharraf Begum, which was instrumental in setting up Rampur Kitchen in Delhi's Khan Market and a catering business during the Covid lockdown.

The recipes are simple and easy to follow, and someday I hope to try them out. After explaining the *masala* mixes — *garam masala*, *chaat masala*, *nihari masala* — at the beginning, it is disappointing that some recipes still call for store-bought *qorma* and *kebab masalas*. It is heartening to find some Rampuri dishes in the collection, though the hallowed Rampuri *urad daal khichdi* goes by the name of '*bina happa*'. We also encounter '*urad gosht*', '*Rampuri daal*', '*chana daal karela*', '*yakhni pulao*', '*taar qorma*' and '*saag gosht*'. Though the recipes differ from Rampuri recipes, the contours are familiar. Someone looking for true blue Rampuri fare might come away disappointed, but others might find delight in these interpretations.

The beautiful outlay and photographs of dishes and Pernia's ancestral Rampur house enhance the cookbook. One cannot but feel touched by her labour of love in collecting and preserving the recipes wrought by her grandmother through hours of cooking with her faithful sidekick in her kitchen.

The enduring image is of a feisty lady organising a catering business at 90 and sleeping with the day's earnings under her pillow.

— The reviewer is a food historian

Legend from a forgotten era

SHAILAJA KHANNA

THE Story of an Imperfect Musician' by Ustad Baba Allauddin Khan (1862-1972), the founder of Maihar *gharana*, is based on two talks that took place at Santiniketan in 1952. The book, originally written in Bengali by Shubhomay Ghosh and published in 1957, has now been translated into English by Hemasri Chaudhuri.

A quick read, the book comprises only 79 pages of text, with an additional 30 pages devoted to rare black and white photographs.

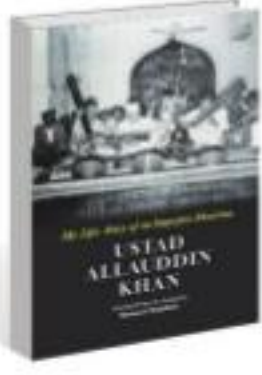
It is an invaluable compilation of the thoughts of a remarkable musician who, to this day, continues to influence the musicality of instrumentalists. Baba represented a world of music that no longer exists — a world where only the families of musicians were taught music, and where musicians flourished only in the courts of nobles or princes who supported them.

Baba's struggle to acquire musical training as an outsider from Tripura, and his eventual success in finding a place in the world of performers, makes for fascinating reading.

Hemasri has included an introduction by Pt Ravi Shankar, written in 1981. Unsurprisingly, this too is now of historical interest, offering insight into the maestro's mind regarding his *guru* — who was also his father-in-law. When the introduction was written, Baba had been gone for a decade, but Ravi Shankar was still married to Baba's daughter, Annapurna Devi, though they had been estranged for decades.

Reverential and admiring of Baba's humility and honesty about his origins, Ravi Shankar adds an anecdote that is not easy to come to terms with. A disciple was unable to correctly grasp a musical phrase that Babawas trying to teach. And Baba, in his "unimaginable anger", threw a hammer at the boy's head, leading to six-month hospitalisation.

Baba's conversations — often rambling — have been transcribed word for word, making the book an unusual read. In his own words,



MY LIFE: STORY OF AN IMPERFECT MUSICIAN
USTAD ALLAUDDIN KHAN
Translated by Hemasri Chaudhuri.
Niyogi Books.
Pages 120. ₹499

having "descended from a line of dacoits", Baba ran away from home to Calcutta, where he faced extreme poverty and struggled to learn music, working as a domestic servant for musicians. His intense ambition is evident when he seeks to train under the musician considered the greatest of his time, the legendary Senia Ustad Wazir Khan (some-what inexplicably and confusingly referred to as 'Ujir' Khan throughout the book).

For someone who had to literally steal the music he learnt (in his words, "I come from a line of dacoits, after all. I stole money from my mother, of course I would steal knowledge"), this seemingly unachievable desire reflects his deep passion for music.

The book goes on to describe his later years, when he became the court musician of Maihar, a small state in Madhya Pradesh. Baba also travelled to Europe as part of Uday Shankar's dance troupe in 1935, before the outbreak of the war — an account of immense interest, offering a glimpse of Europe as it was then, through the eyes of an unsophisticated, but highly aesthetic, Indian.

Baba's advice to musicians remains strikingly relevant today: "Do not be desirous of winning the empty applause of the multitude, nor be touched by the titillations of a novelty-hungry audience."

This book is a must-read for anyone interested in Indian classical music.

— The reviewer writes on music

Muse is back, poetry flows again, and you'd know why

SHYAM SARAN

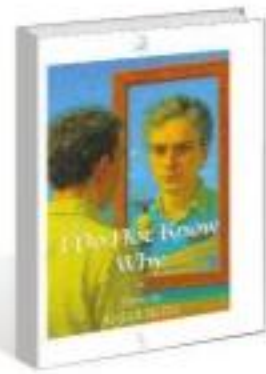
AFTAB SETH has had an enviable and varied life as a diplomat, as a theatre personality and, more recently, as an author. But many may not be aware of his talent as a poet. His first book of poems, 'Pillars of a Landscape', published in 1992, was praised for its lyrical quality. He has now returned to the genre with an anthology of poems which he composed on different occasions stretching from 1987 to 2021, but each reflective of his aesthetic sensibilities, evocative of changing moods and sometimes, just describing ordinary people going about their ordinary work.

There are altogether 26 poems and each is beautifully accompanied by some fine paintings chosen by his daughter, Priyanka. This is a book that one may read from cover to cover on a lazy afternoon, savouring the range of emotions and insights that the poet brings to us.

The title of the book is drawn from poem number 5. It is full of the pain of parting and the disjointed memories that fall into no neat patterns and carry no explanations. There is sorrow but also the glow of human togetherness. It is certainly one of the best poems in the anthology.

Aftab is one of our Japanese language experts and has spent considerable time in Japan. It should come as no surprise that some of the poems reflect that understated quality for which the Japanese are well known. The *haiku*, or the traditional three-line poem, for which Japanese literature is admired, is marked by its minimalism, conveying a deeply felt emotion, a spiritual insight or even a comforting glimpse of Nature. Here is Aftab's *haiku*:
Early autumn rain
Glistening leaves shine
Silent tear drops

Some of the poems are accounts of travel to distant places or encounters with different people. A fine example is 'The Pharaohs



I DO NOT KNOW WHY
by Aftab Seth.
Birch Books.
Pages 72.
₹857

Have Written on Your Leaves'. It was written in Egypt's capital, Cairo, where Aftab served as a diplomat between 1976 and 1979. The poem evokes the grandeur of ancient Egypt, its fabulous cities and its celebrated rulers. The river Nile has seen it all and has nurtured powerful rulers who filled their

coffers with unimaginable wealth that made possible the greatest building exercise of the ancient world. That has not ended. Nasser's gigantic dam at Aswan is a latter-day folly: *I see the pylons of Nasser*

Stride past the Colossi of Memnon
Across the Theban hills
To suck the sap of Aswan

Aftab was India's Consul-General in Karachi from 1988 to 1992. This was one of his favourite diplomatic assignments. His residence in the up-market Clifton Enclave became the gathering place of Pakistani politicians, scholars, writers, artists and musicians. Karachi was very different from the more edgy atmosphere of Islamabad and Aftab made the most of it. One can, therefore, appreciate his sense of loss and deep regret when he learnt about the brutal sacking of the Consul-General's residence by a violent and marauding mob, angered by the destruction of the Babri Masjid in December 1992.

His anguish is palpable in the poem, 'Bro-

ken Toys', which juxtaposes the spirit of friendship that stretched beyond borders with the utter and wanton destruction of a place that once resonated with the poetry of love and the strains of remembered music.

Poetry went into slumber after 2003 and to use the title of this book, 'I Do Not Know Why'. It is good that Aftab has recovered his muse, penning the final poem of the anthology, 'A Renewal'. He explains what led him to try his hand once again at poem writing: "A series that I saw with beautiful music and sensitive acting, called 'Bandish Bandits', impressed and moved me and inspired me after a long gap to write a poem." It is a fine poem, conjuring up the quaint splendour of Mehrangarh in Jodhpur and music rekindling a sense of togetherness and love, with a gentle touch which needs no words.

One hopes that poetry will once again flow because there is much more that Aftab has to tell.

— The reviewer is a former Foreign Secretary

REFLECTIONS

Chappell then, Gambhir now



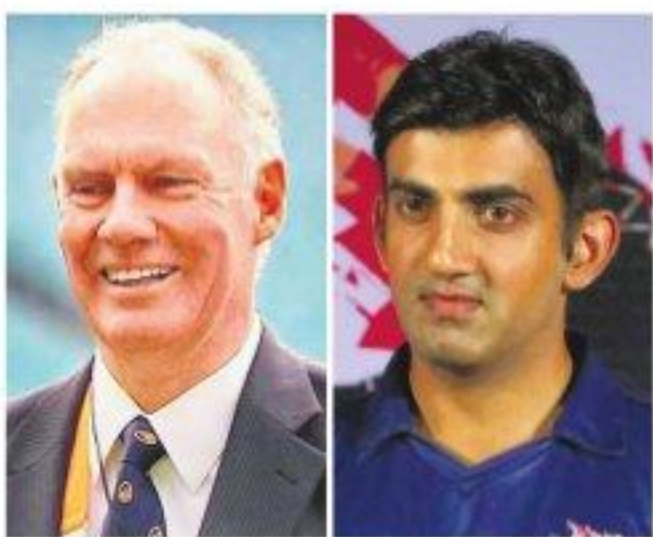
PRADEEP MAGAZINE

I START writing about the enigmatic Indian coach Gautam Gambhir and the image of Greg Chappell stalks me in the background. No two people can be as different in style, persona, image and achievements as these two, yet they are getting fused in my mind. The only apparent common thread is that like Gambhir is doing now, Greg too once coached the Indian team.

Remember the star-saturated Indian team of 2004-05, the days of Sachin Tendulkar, Sourav Ganguly, Rahul Dravid, Virender Sehwag, VVS Laxman, Anil Kumble and the appointment of the legendary Greg as the Indian coach. The grace and elegance with which the Australian batted matched his eloquence, technical knowledge of the game and the mesmerizing attention he got from people he spoke to.

That euphoric beginning of his coaching stint ended a couple of years later in anguish and a divided team, insecure and suspicious of even their own shadows they once may have been in love with. Greg had joined the team with the intention of getting it purged of star culture; all he finally achieved was a humiliated team in the 2007 World Cup in the West Indies and widespread confusion and chaos that hurt Indian cricket badly. Greg was firm in his belief till the end that India's problem was not lack of talent, but the star culture that stymied the growth of newcomers and established a hierarchy that harmed team spirit and harmony.

Greg may have diagnosed the problem, but his methods to solve them lacked sensitivity and a proper understanding of the Indian psyche that confuses servility as being respectful. His was an "outsider's" construct of a culture that loathes change, especially if it is sudden and swift. What probably let him down was the pulpit of a higher moral ground that he took, which blinded him to a world he could barely grasp and made no effort to understand. He did not have



Greg Chappell (L) and Gautam Gambhir.

No two people can be as different as these Indian cricket team coaches, yet there are underlying similarities

the instincts of the man he replaced, the New Zealander John Wright, who ushered in progressive changes without disturbing the status quo.

It took the sagacity of Garry Kirsten to calm the turbulence caused by Greg's ham-handed methods and the Indian team went on to win the 2011 World Cup. The last of foreign coaches was the Englishman Duncan Fletcher, who made no effort to hide the fact that he was an outsider and disinterested in following any method, Indian or foreign.

Finally, the experienced Ravi Shastri reintroduced the team to the "Indian way", where cricketing acumen forges with native wisdom to sustain a culture of continuity with only those repairs done that don't threaten its foundations.

In this culture of continuity and entrenched hierarchy, which gives primacy to stardom regardless of the strength of the team, Gambhir's stint as coach coincided with the declining prowess of its major stars, Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma. At 44 years of age and a history of behaviour that does not always conform to societal norms of being civil, Gambhir is an interesting case study. In a candid interview to ESPN-cricinfo's Sidharth Monga in 2009, when he was

an important member of the Indian team, Gambhir bared his heart out, including his insecurities and impatient ways to deal with them.

He said he was built that way, where he always felt he was not given his due despite having done very well. He had performed exceptionally well in under-14, under-19 and even in the Ranji Trophy, yet was not picked to play World Cups for India. His not being part of the 2007 World Cup shocked him. But he did not let his angry and impatient temperament interfere with his training and finally made it back to the team, playing a major role in India winning the 2007 T-20 and the 2011 one-day World Cups.

Gambhir understands the value of hard work and the despair of rejection while transforming his anger into a passion for doing well. Which he did, even if with moderate success, while playing for India and capping it up with leading the Kolkata Knight Riders to three IPL trophies, two as captain and the third as its mentor. Even then, it is hard to imagine him becoming the coach of the Indian team without his being a former BJP MP and the fact that the supreme leader of the Indian cricket administration is Home Minister Amit Shah's son, Jay Shah.

These political connections give Gambhir power that would be the envy of past coaches. It is obvious that he wanted to shatter the star culture in the team, much like Chappell attempted in his two-year stint two decades ago. His discomfort with Virat, Rohit and Ashwin was often reported in the media and the outstanding success of a new, young team in England gives him the legitimacy that he lacked so far.

Unlike Greg, he is now in control of a new, young team that is still finding its feet and except for possibly Shubman Gill, none of them are anywhere near the stardom that Kohli or Rohit achieved. In his ESPN interview, Gambhir's honest confessions revealed a man aware of his weaknesses and how to work around them. Will he be a guide and mentor to restless, insecure, talented youngsters, scanning them with an unbiased eye so that they could achieve their maximum potential? Or will he turn into another Greg Chappell and stifle the desires of any emerging star that could destabilise the team? The next chapter of this story is teaming with possibilities.

—The writer is the author of 'Not Quite Cricket' and 'Not Just Cricket'

The mystery of Indian citizenship



AVAY SHUKLA

SO you think the issues uppermost in the minds of those who rule would be the landslides in the Himalayas or Trump's tariffs, or our global isolation? Well, you would be wrong, but you can be forgiven for thinking so, for that is how a rational, logic-driven nation should think. But we have lost that status for a decade now and have become a Blunderland of nonsense. We are now firmly in the position of Lewis Carroll's Alice:

"If I had a world of my own, everything would be nonsense. Nothing would be what it is, because everything would be what it isn't. And contrary wise, what is, it wouldn't be. And what it wouldn't be, it would. You see?"

You probably don't, so let me explain. The flavour of the season is none of the issues mentioned above: it is citizenship, something we thought had been decided 75 years ago by a liberal Constitution which allowed citizenship on grounds of birth (*jus soli*), descent (*jus sanguinis*), naturalisation and registration. But, as Ambedkar said, any Constitution is only as good as those who are charged with implementing it — and that is why we are a Blunderland.

For, the Constitution, though unamended in this respect, is being spray-painted in many parts of the country to ensure that certain sections of our vast population are denied citizenship. An attempt to do so through legislation some years back (the Citizenship Amendment Act) hangs in limbo, or the deep freeze which is the Registry of the Supreme Court. So now it is being done through a game of smoke and mirrors — a Bangladeshi here, a Rohingya there, an encroacher here, a Bengali-speaking person there. But the message is loud and clear — we are the new India, we no longer brush a problem under the carpet, we now push it into Bangladesh in the dead of night, or into a detention centre under the gavel of a Foreigners' Tribunal.

But there's a problem: the Constitution has been shoved into the background, and a new set of (con)founding fathers have replaced it with their version of what constitutes citizenship. The ball was set rolling in 2019 through the CAA, implicitly propounding the theory that only a Hindu was entitled to citizenship of India. This doctrine has come in handy in Assam to include the few lakh Hindus excluded from the NRC there.

The RSS, not one to be left behind in the Hindutva sweepstakes, proclaimed that Hindustan was for Hindus alone, that an Indian citizen should possess both "*Bharatiyata*" and "*Bharati swabhav*" (no prizes for guessing who would define these terms!). The BJP's *eminence grise*, Ram Madhav, went a step further and demanded that India should have not a democracy, but a "*dharmocracy*".

That would in effect transform us into a twin of a country like Iran, presumably with a different religion at the helm, of course. Believers of other religions could lump it, as second class citizens. In short, Indianness would be defined by faith and belief, notwithstanding the Constitution.

Enter the Deletion Commission of India (formerly the Election Commission of India), which finds conducting elections a boring job and so has now decided to identify citizens instead, something it is neither qualified nor mandated to do. Not knowing which document to rely on for proving citizenship, it has prescribed an *a la carte* menu of 11 documents to choose from.

It is another matter that 90 per cent of Indians do not possess these certificates. Many experts estimate that this could result in the disenfranchisement of as many as 20 per cent of voters in Bihar. This shortfall will, presumably, be made up by importing voters from Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, as a recent report by the Reporters Collective seems to indicate.

As if these versions of citizenship were not enough, the Supreme Court, too, has entered the fray by prescribing a test for a "true citizen" or "Indian" — not questioning the government on any matter relating to defence. This novel definition has been provided in a defamation case against Rahul Gandhi. The Bombay High Court has also pitched in by ruling that Aadhaar and EPIC (electoral photo identity card) do not prove citizenship. It has also added that any protest relating to matters of any other country — such as the genocide in Gaza by Israel — does not behave any patriotic Indian citizen, who should be protesting on domestic shortcomings such as piling up of garbage, etc. In other words, any dissent disqualifies one from claiming citizenship.

So here's what all this pontificating boils down to: although there appears to be no dearth of definitions as to what constitutes citizenship, there is no official single document which can prove one's citizenship! [The government conceded as much recently in Parliament when, in response to a question as to which document establishes citizenship, the MoS (Home) evaded any answer on this specific point]. We now need a bouquet of documents, with the lotus being the centrepiece of this flowery arrangement.

And so, while you and I shuttle between the RSS, judiciary, Election Commission and Ram Madhav, it is no wonder that more than 18 lakh Indians have decided that they have had enough and have surrendered their notional citizenship and migrated to other countries in the last 13 years.

They have obviously decided that a PIO card in hand is worth two citizenships in the bush. And more will continue to depart our eroding shores, unless the new "Demography Mission" isolates that particular Indian DNA which defines *Bharatiyata* once and for all.

Meanwhile, don't give up on your dreams: keep sleeping, for did the Bard not insist that "sleep keeps the ravelled sleeve of care"?

—The writer is a former IAS officer

Decoding invisible hunger and fear

A PRINCE named Siddhartha was told that wisdom comes by fasting. So he fasted until he fainted. Then a milkmaid called Sujata gave him some milk. He recovered and began meditating, contemplating on what transpired. He eventually understood how the world functioned, and was aware of what causes suffering. Food was the key. Hunger was the lock. This awareness played a key role in his transformation into the Buddha.

Buddha revealed: where there is life, there is desire, and where there is desire, there is suffering. He did not actually use the word 'desire'. That is an English translation. He used the Prakrit word for thirst (*tanha*). He used a physical feeling as a metaphor to explain a psychological state. He remembered how starvation, rather than granting knowledge, had caused him to faint and how food had enabled him to meditate. He observed how the growth of plants and movement of animals was driven by their 'thirst' for food and security.

What separated objects from organisms was this thirst, this hunger. Where there is pursuit of food, there is hunger. Where there is hunger, there is competition, collaboration, success and failure. Underlying the visible and measurable (*sa-guna*) parts of plants was something invisible and not measurable (*nir-guna*). Plants and



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roots reveal cravings; they want to eat. Bark and thorns reveal fear; they do not want to be eaten. Flowers and fruit reveal the awareness of mortality; they want to outwit death, so a part of them can live through the next generation.

No plant wants its leaves and roots to be eaten, which is why it protects itself with bark and thorns. But plants do feed nectar to bees and fruits to birds, because they need the bees to pollinate and birds to disperse seeds. Plants collaborate with animals that help them and shun animals that consume them. Carnivores are allies of plants, as by eating herbivores, keeping the herbivorous population in check, they prevent overgrazing.

Every plant has a different strategy of survival, which is why different plants have different kinds of leaves. Some grow on earth, some turn into thorny bushes, some have bark on trunks, some have tall branches to keep their leaves far away from the reach of grazers. There are different kinds of flowers, and different kinds of fruits as every plant is competing for resources, for spaces to germinate, to access sunlight, water, and nutrients. Plants have rivals and allies too.

And the same is true of the animal kingdom. Why does a tiger have claws and fangs?

It is because it is hungry, and it needs to protect itself. Why does a deer or a buffalo have horns? To protect itself. Why do herbivorous animals form herds? Because as a group, they have a greater chance of survival from the predator. They keep the young in the centre of the herd. In response, the predators form packs, and collaborate during the hunt, which increases their chances of catching prey. Thus, we realise nature is a complex manifestation of invisible hunger and fear.

Where there is life, there is hunger, and where there is hunger, there is fear. Where there is hunger and fear, there is success and failure. In the case of humans, this is amplified infinitely, as we have imagination.

—The writer is an acclaimed mythologist

Footloose in the hills, with no strings attached



RAAJA BHASIN

A PART from being plain old footwear, shoes have several other uses. They can be used to garland wrongdoers, flung at perceived wrongdoers and dangling from a bumper, they may ward off the evil eye of potential wrongdoers. In the absence of the real thing, a strategically-placed painted shoe, preferably a *jutti*-style one with a long curvy front, may suffice to deflect intended malevolence to a hapless, shoeless vehicle.

In my wanderings over the hills and after visually dissecting the garbage that one sees blocking streams and rivulets, like bottles, *gutkha* pouches, packets of chips and other sundries, there are a sur-

prising number of shoes. No material, leather or plastic, is spared; in true democratic style, all styles and brands seem to be well represented. How they reach there, is a subject worthy of greater study. Does it suddenly come upon someone to take off his shoes and fling them down the closest *khud* — as if he were getting rid of his earthly walk? Or does he decide to empty the sacred space of his spouse's shoe drawer and liberate all the souls trapped in those soles?

Our small town, which has grown too big for its boots, has yet another shoe shop on its main thoroughfare. This, one assumes, is the result of the amount of walking we do, or are supposed to, and that our shoes wear out quickly. For emergencies, like a handy pharmacy, we also need shoe shops at every corner — foot-aid at your doorstep, if you will. The truth of the matter may be more mundane and each new shop is probably eyeing the tourist market — and for good reason. There is no shortage of tourists who have no idea what the hills entail and arrive in 6-inch stilettoes to wander about in a foot of snow.

Slipping, sliding and shivering, they provide good business to those that sell shoes and warm clothing. One popular international brand of sports shoes has created the ugliest signboard in town. This, perhaps, replicates the purpose of the bashed-up shoe that is suspended from a truck fender, and wards off the evil eye.

In days long gone and in a youth that was suitably ill-spent, one's friends had no shortage of a sense of humour. Going to

In my wanderings over the hills and after visually dissecting the garbage that one sees blocking streams and rivulets, there are a surprising number of shoes

buy his first pair of spectacles at a well-known optician, a friend reeled at the tag. When informed that 'these were Crookes lenses', he politely informed the salesperson that "given the price, he could well believe that". The pun seemed to have been lost. Moments later, he went to the grocer to ask for a "jar of toe-jam". He was told they did not have it in stock, but if he could let them know the name of the manufacturer, they would send for it.

Depending on the point of view, Arthur Wellesley, the first Duke of Wellington, did many good, bad or terrible things. He fought the wars against Tipu Sultan and the Marathas, and for better or (mostly) worse, expanded the British Empire in India. He fought Napoleon at Waterloo and helped defeat him. He became Prime Minister of Britain. Now, here, in the monsoons, we remember him for a far humbler reason. He told his shoemaker to create a boot that went on to be named after him.

The Wellington boot is better known to us as the 'gum boot'. Now, this, apart from trying to keep our feet dry (if not warm), also finds favour in muddy fields, auto

repair shops and even raises its head (if one can call it that), in haute couture. These are standard uses for the Wellington/Wellie/Rain Boot/Gum Boot.

While we stubbornly continue to refute that man's interventions have something to do with all the monsoon havoc that we are seeing around us, the gum boot stepped in to help in a minor crisis.

With repeated cloudbursts, our streams and rivers had been severely impacted and nothing was being pumped up to satiate Shimla that despite the pouring rain, was starved of water. We moved buckets to every rain-filled downpipe and shifted pots and pans to every fresh leakage in the house. So much so that we could have had our own water percussion — or genuine *jal tarang*. But then, brilliance came in the shape of a gum boot in the bazaar that was collecting water from an awning. One shoe filled, the next foot came. In a steady march, left-right, repeat, that pair of gum boots ferried water back to the shop it had originated from.

—The writer is an author based in Shimla

Even as NCERT justifies the deletions and additions, especially in Class 8 Social Science textbook, the changes are facing scrutiny

TEXTBOOK CASE OF SPARKING CONTROVERSY

AKSHEEV THAKUR

THE National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) textbooks have courted controversy yet again, with the incumbent government being accused of rewriting history with selective omissions and assertions.

It all began on December 28, 2021, when the NCERT announced the formation of expert committees to guide its textbook development process. The rationale that was given was that the exercise would reduce the burden on school students who were impacted due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Over a period of three years, new textbooks started hitting the market with rationalised content.

The most sweeping changes were the removal of references to Mahatma Gandhi's assassination, the demolition of Babri Masjid and the 2002 Gujarat riots. Sentences on Manipur's accession to India in 1949 were rephrased. Chapters on protests and social movements, including those spearheaded by the Namada Bachao Andolan, Dalit Panthers and Bharatiya Kisan Union, were removed.

More recently, a furor erupted over the portrayal of Mughals and the omission of historical figures, including Tipu Sultan, Raziya Sultan and Noor Jahan, from the Class 8 Social Science textbook which was released last month. Part 1 of the textbook, titled 'Exploring Society: India and Beyond', became a subject of intense debate after questions were raised over factual inaccuracies and omission of chapters.

Earlier, students learnt about the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughals in Class 7. The new textbook for Class 7 concludes before the 12th century. The portion dealing with the Sultanate and the Mughals is now in Part 1 of the Class 8 Social Science textbook.

The Class 8 Social Science book combines History, Geography, Civics and Economics into one. It also describes Akbar as a blend of "tolerance and cruelty" and Aurangzeb as someone who destroyed temples and gurdwaras. Likewise, the NCERT book describes the first Mughal emperor Babur as a "brutal and ruthless conqueror, slaughtering entire populations of cities, enslaving women and children, and taking pride in erecting towers of skulls made from the slaughtered people of plundered cities".

The earlier Class 7 book only described the emperor as having been forced to leave his ancestral throne, seizing Kabul, and then Delhi and Agra.

Referring to *jiziyah*, a tax that some sultans imposed on non-Muslims, the Class 8 book states that the discriminatory tax was a source of economic burden and public humiliation, and formed a financial and social incentive for subjects to convert to Islam. In the old textbook, *jiziyah* was described as tax paid by non-Muslims initially along with land tax.

Sharp criticism also came from unexpected quarters, when the erstwhile royal family of Jaisalmer objected to the map in the textbook that depicted Jaisalmer as being a part of the Maratha empire.

Chaitanya Raj Singh, a descendant of Jaisalmer's erstwhile royal family, urged the Ministry of Education to look into the issue after objecting to the map which he termed "an attempt to tarnish the sacrifices, sovereignty, and valourous saga of our ancestors".

"The map shown in the NCERT Social Science textbook depicts Jaisalmer as part of the then Maratha empire, which is historically misleading, factually baseless, and deeply objectionable. Such unverified and historically unsubstantiated information not only raises questions about the credibility of institutions like NCERT, but also hurts our glorious history and public sentiments. This issue is not merely a textbook error, but appears to be an attempt to tarnish the sacrifices, sovereignty, and valourous saga of our ancestors," Singh wrote.

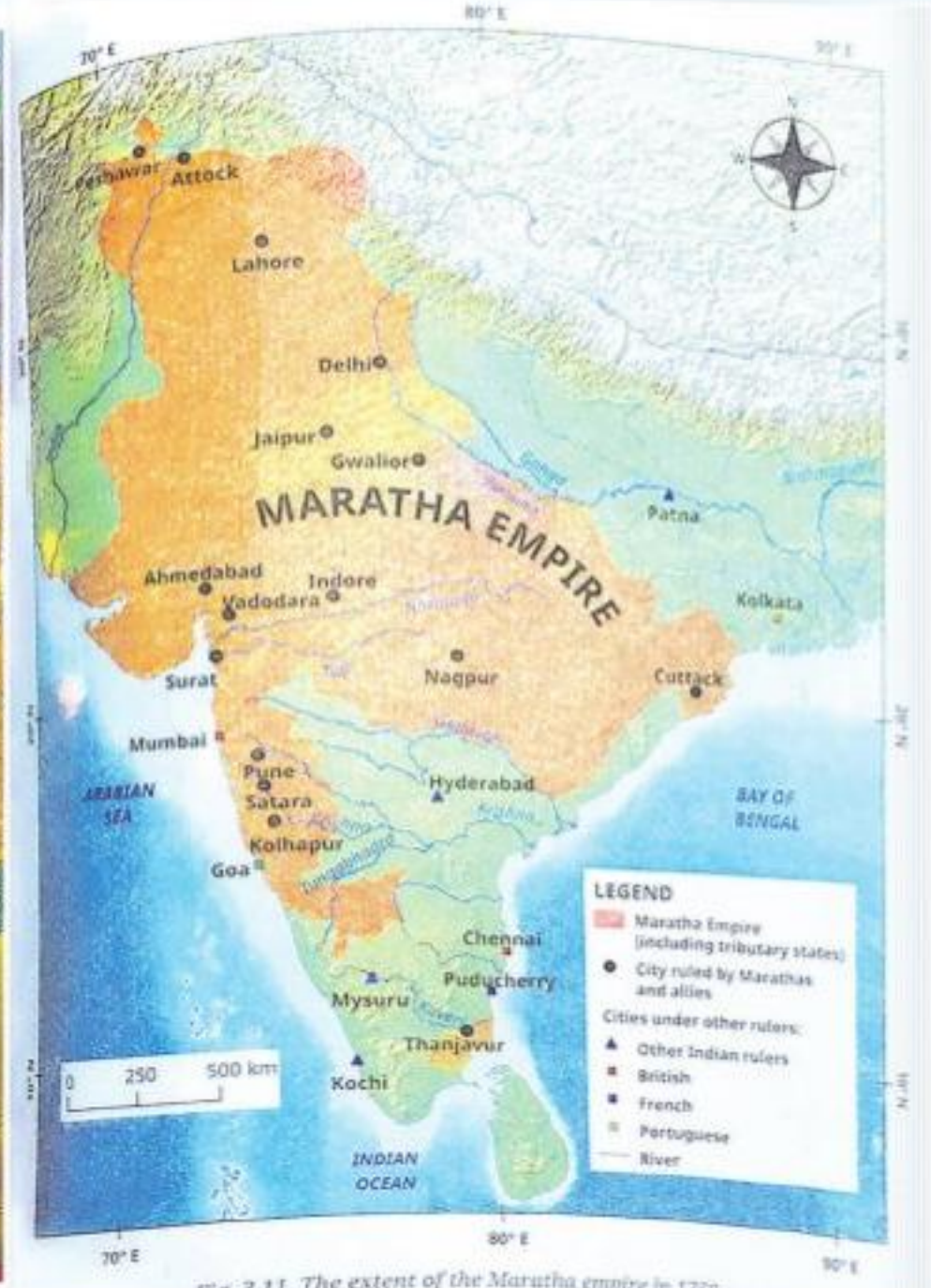
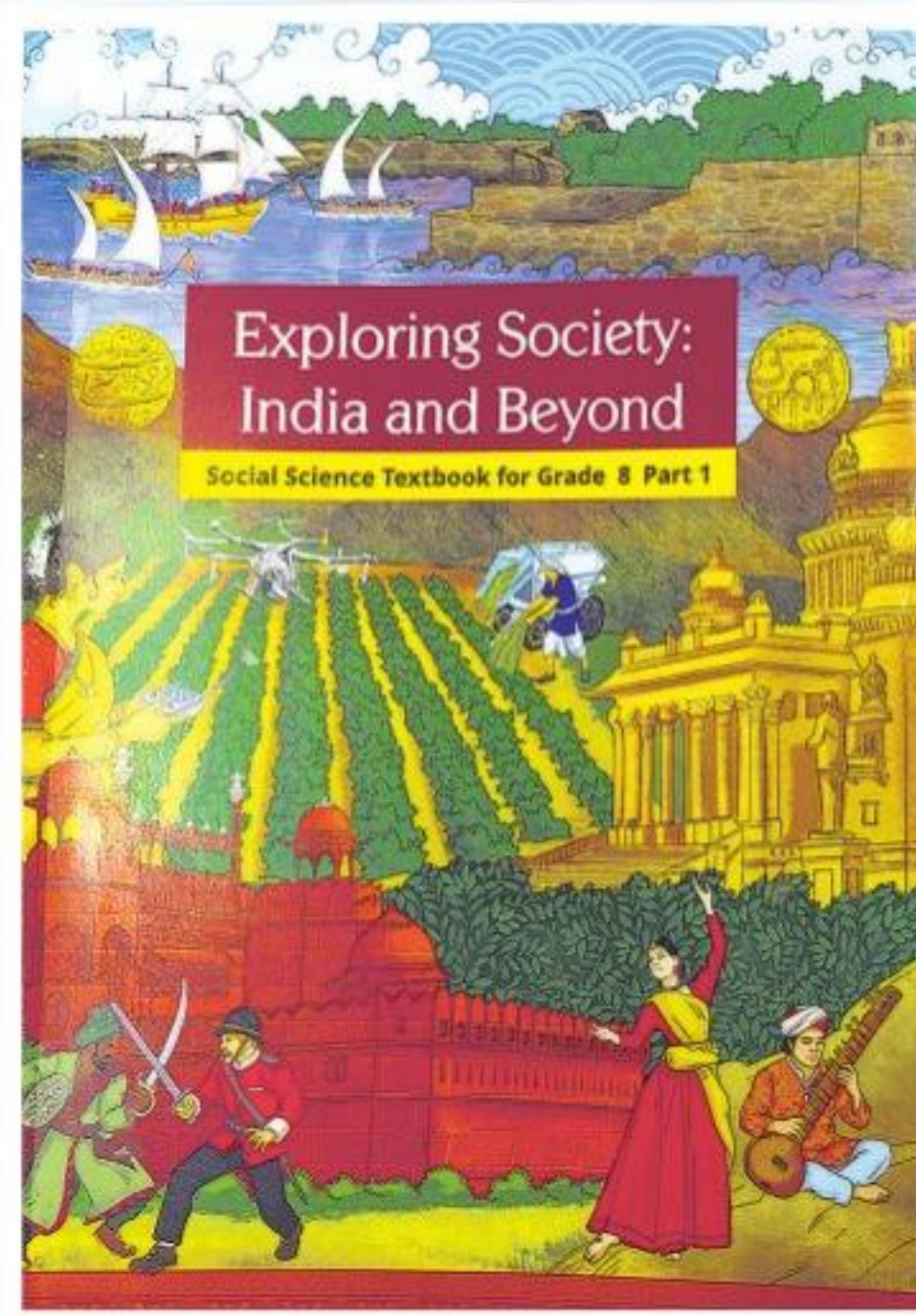
Prof Syed Ali Nadeem Rezavi, a historian who teaches at Aligarh Muslim University (AMU), says the attempt to rewrite history is basically "replacing history with myths".

"There is nothing wrong in rewriting history, but here there are attempts to create and build whatever one can do with the past. Even the special module on Partition is wishful thinking. Who has stopped anyone from giving an interpretation? Even the British did not do to history what is happening now. The attempts are to erase whatever has happened in the last 70-80 years," Rezavi says.

He disagrees with the assertions that post-Independence school history textbooks were dominated by "left historians".

Previously, India's school curriculum saw four revisions—in 1975, 1988, 2002 and 2005.

In 2002, the then Union Minister Murlu Manohar Joshi was accused of "saffronisation" of education. In the books, the medieval period was described as a gloomy era. The government at that time said history had been written from the "Marxist version" and demanded its revision.



Since 2021, when NCERT announced expert panels on textbook development, content in history books has been deleted or changed. The new textbook for Class 8 (above) has led to severe criticism, and even the map (right) has been objected to. TRIBUNE PHOTO: PRADEEP TEWARI

In 2004, soon after the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government came to power, steps were taken to undo the changes brought in by the BJP government.

Delhi-based historian Ruchika Sharma says the new book has misrepresented Mughals. "One is the misrepresentation of *jiziyah*. The book states that the tax was imposed on non-Hindus as a tool for conversion, which is absolutely incorrect. There is no historical evidence to the effect. Another inaccuracy is that Mughal emperor Akbar, who banned the tax during his reign, is regarded by the NCERT textbook as having done so in his later years, which is incorrect. Akbar was kept under the regency of his guardian Bairam Khan and truly assumed the throne only in 1560. He abolished the *jiziyah* in 1563-64, which was very quick."

Sharma points out that when it comes to temple destruction in Indian history, the Class 8 textbook only discusses it in the context of the Sultanate-Mughal period, even when numerous instances of temple destruction can be found in the preceding periods as well. "The destruction of temples in Kashmir by 11th century ruler Harsha was recorded in the Sanskrit history of Kashmir, Kalhana's 'Rajatarangini', or the destruction of multiple Jain shrines by followers of Virashivism in 12th-13th century Karnataka, or the burning and looting of multiple Buddhist *viharas* by rulers such as Kshemagupta, Mihirakula and Pushyami-tra Shunga are not found in NCERT's text-

books," she says. However, head of NCERT's Social Science textbook team Michel Danino says the Class 8 book has included texts of Rana Durgavati, Tarabai, Ahilyabai, Rani Abbaka, Rani Lakshmi Bai and Begum Hazrat Mahal.

Addressing the criticism in a detailed note on social media, Danino said over the last two years, numerous public representatives and private individuals have made representations to the Ministry of Education or NCERT, asking for a particular past figure, group, clan or event to be included in the new textbooks.

"Were such requests (many of them possibly valid in theory) to be entertained, the textbooks would have to be twice as thick as they now are. No doubt, the new textbooks claim no perfection. Hoping to embody a new paradigm, they were prepared in a relatively short time. They can be refined and further improved from year to year. The NCERT textbooks are designed at the national level; however inclusive they may try to be, they cannot possibly reflect India's diversity. SCERTs (State Councils of Educational Research and Training), on the other hand, have some latitude to create more regionalised content, adapting the national textbook to their specific context and requirement," he said.

After objections were raised over the revised content, the NCERT constituted a committee to "examine the feedback" it received on the textbook's content.

Recently, NCERT also faced backlash

from political parties in Kerala and Tamil Nadu for using Hindi names for English textbooks. The Class 6 English textbook, 'Honeycomb', was renamed as 'Pooarvi' and the Class 3 textbook is titled 'Santoor'.

Moreover, there were deletions in the Class 10 and 12 revised syllabus of English textbooks.

Reacting to the changes, Rajan Sharma, Senior Master Trainer and Educator, Birla School, Plani, says, "As an educator and teacher trainer, I see the rationalisation of the NCERT syllabus in English as a joy that is both sweet and bitter. On the brighter side, a lighter syllabus reduces pressure and gives students more room to polish indispensable skills like communication, comprehension and creative writing. Yet, I feel the removal of too many literary pieces in senior classes takes away the soul of the subject. Literature is not just text—it is imagination, expression, empathy, and culture woven into words."

Sharma feels that rationalisation should simplify and not dilute. "If we cut too much, English risks becoming mechanical, dull and dreary. Rationalisation should simplify, not dilute. A balanced approach can truly raise both the heart and mind of the learners," he says.

Part 2 of the Class 8 Social Science textbook, which will be released in a couple of months, will deal with India's freedom movement from 1857-1947. It remains to be seen how that is received.

How brands fool customers on quantity in packs

Pack-size manipulations and opacity in pricing make it difficult to compare and make informed purchases

PUSHPA GIRIMAJI

IT is not even two years since the government removed size restrictions on packed goods, mandated under the Legal Metrology (Packaged Commodities or PC) Rules. But already, pack size manipulations and price opacity in some sectors have distorted price comparison and made informed purchases extremely difficult for consumers.

Nowhere is this distortion in the quantity and price of pre-packed goods as pervasive as in the edible oil industry. For example, I looked at identical-sized 1-kg capacity pouches of eight oil brands and was horrified to find how they were short-changing on quantity, and thereby the price too. While one pouch had only 750 gm of oil, others had varying amounts such as 800 gm, 810 gm, 825 gm, 840 gm, 850 gm, 870 gm and 910 gm. Most consumers generally assume from the pouch sizes that they all contain the same quantity. As the net quantity is not always prominently displayed, there is every likelihood of consumers buying the most expensive brand selling the lowest quantity (750 gm) among them.

There is more. Since the PC Rules allow edible oil companies to declare the quantity either by weight or volume, many packages indicate the volume, but here again, there are pouches and bottles that look like 1-litre packages, but contain only 855 ml, 833 ml and so on, thereby hoodwinking consumers, who usually go by the package size. Under the PC Rules, if you are showing the content in volume, you must also indicate the weight, but while some brands do it, others do not.

If you are buying edible oil online, it can be even more confusing because you do not see the displayed weight on the package and the website describes the weight as "870 gm/800 gm" and says in brackets that the "weight may vary". For another oil, it shows the weight as "900 gm/825 gm".

Manufacturers ought to know that by law, consumers should be told the exact quantity in the packet. Besides, manufacturers cannot manipulate the quantity by



Unit sale price can bring about transparency if displayed accurately and prominently, but most manufacturers hide it. ISTOCK

exploiting the oil's sensitivity to temperature. They must indicate the correct quantity measured only at standardised temperature for that particular oil.

The concept of standard pack sizes has its origin in the PC Rules of 1977. Following the opening up of the market in 1991, the government came under considerable pressure from multinational companies interested in doing business in India to remove these restrictions. Finally, in 1994, 20 products, including mineral water, were removed from the original list of 38. However, in 2001, the government re-introduced size restrictions on mineral water and added bottled and packaged drinking water to the list. Like the oil industry today, it was found that mineral water was being sold in packs such as 130 ml, 135 ml, 140 ml and 165 ml, distorting price comparison.

Subsequently, the PC Rules, 2011, that replaced the

earlier Rules, also made similar stipulations on pack sizes and covered 19 goods of common use. Manufacturers, however, were always opposed to it.

I must also mention that in those 45 years when the pack size restrictions existed, businesses constantly pressured the government to introduce more pack sizes. Edible oil, for example, was to be packed in standard quantities of 50 gm, 100 gm, 200 gm, 250 gm, 500 gm, 1 kg, 2 kg, 3 kg, and multiples of 5 kg (and volumes of similar sizes), but three more pack sizes of 550 gm, 600 gm and 650 gm were introduced, thereby reducing the gap between sizes.

But still, it did protect consumers from the kind of weight manipulations that we see today. Cut to the present. Now, unit sale price is considered a more scientific and accurate method of facilitating price comparison and increasing price transparency. So, in

2022, the government removed pack restrictions and made the declaration of unit sale price mandatory on all pre-packed goods. The changes came into effect from January 2024.

But obviously, an industry out to make the best of the opacity in the pricing of pre-packed goods sees no reason to promote the unit sale price (USP). This can be seen in the way the USP is hidden on the package, defeating its very purpose.

Here again, I found that while one pouch of oil mentioned the unit sale price per 100 gm of the oil, others mentioned the USP per 100 ml, even though the rules mandate that the USP be mentioned by weight.

A consumer showed me a pouch that she had bought, assuming it contained a litre of oil. When she poured it into a 1-litre bottle, it filled only 75 per cent of it. That's when she realised that the bottle contained only 850 ml of the oil. The USP declared on the package was undecipherable. It said: "0.214".

The Union Ministry of Consumer Affairs, which has been keeping a close watch on the developments post the abolition of standard pack sizes, recently called a meeting of all stakeholders to discuss the manipulations in the pricing of edible oil. It warned the industry leaders that if they did not mend their ways, the government will take whatever steps needed to protect consumer interest.

Ironically, the edible oil industry, which fought against pack size standardisation, is today urging the ministry to re-introduce it on the ground that odd pack sizes are distorting competition!

Unit pricing can surely bring about price transparency, if only manufacturers displayed it accurately and prominently and also created consumer awareness about it. Till then, USP can only be an additional tool for consumer protection but cannot be a substitute for pack size restrictions, particularly in the oil industry. It is also important to ensure that edible oil packages indicate the content only by weight, measured accurately at standard temperature.

—The writer is a consumer affairs expert

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