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• DIPLOMACY

After Op Sindoor freeze, a thaw in India-Turkey ties

Divyva A
New Delhi, June 24

INDIA AND Turkey’s bilateral ties have often been overshadowed by one external factor: Pakistan. Last year, the relationship hit rock-bottom when following the Pahalgam terrorist attack in April, Turkey was Islamabad’s only ally in West Asia to explicitly condemn Operation Sindoor, India’s military response in May 2025. It was no surprise that ties went into cold storage for much of 2025. This year, however, both countries are showing signs of a rapprochement. In April, foreign office consultations resumed after being kept in abeyance for four years. The same month, the two sides also cooperated on the security front, with New Delhi extraditing fugitive narcotics trafficker Salim Dola from Turkey — with more to come.

Strategic mistrust

After Recep Tayyip Erdogan came to power in Turkey in 2002, bilateral relations saw frequent high-level visits, exchange of business and cultural delegations, and people-to-people interactions. Bilateral trade grew from \$700 million in 2002 to \$13.82 billion in 2022. Bilateral ties began to plummet, however, after Erdogan criticised the 2019 revocation of Article 370 at the UN. The years until late 2025 saw a massive diplomatic rift driven by the Kashmir issue and Ankara’s supply of military hardware to Pakistan, which heightened mistrust in New Delhi.

Post-Sindoor fallout

The friction, however, reached its peak during Operation Sindoor, which Turkey labelled as “unprovoked aggression” killing “innocent civilians”. Reports of Pakistan utilising Turkish-supplied drones during the four-day conflict prompted severe diplomatic and economic

backlash in India. Meanwhile, New Delhi moved to deepen its engagement with Cyprus, the Mediterranean island nation which both Turkey and Greece claim. Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s first international visit following Sindoor was to Cyprus’s capital, Nicosia.

Air India cancelled its multibillion dollar aircraft maintenance contract with a Turkish firm, while major Indian universities

STRATEGIC GATEWAY

- A working relationship with Turkey offers India geopolitical leverage in the Islamic world, a gateway to European and Central Asian markets, and trade and infrastructure partnerships.
- Ankara imports \$6 billion in goods, mostly raw materials and intermediate products including textiles, chemicals, and auto and machinery components.

suspended memorandums of understanding with Turkish institutions. Bilateral merchandise trade shrank, and Indian tourist arrivals in Turkey dropped by nearly 37%. India also revoked the security clearance of a Turkish company that handled operations at nine airports.

The thaw

In April, India invited Turkey for the 12th round of bilateral consultations. This came four years after foreign office consultations were held in Turkey. “We believe dialogue is better than not talking and deepening disagreements and misunderstandings. The conversations have been satisfactory,” India’s Ambassador to Turkey Muktesh Pardeshi told *The Indian Express*. Ankara has also shown willingness to cooperate on law enforcement, as in Dola’s extradition.

A win-win for both

Those in the know said that after the backlash, Turkey began to insulate its economic interests in Asia from its Pakistan alliance. Turkey stands to gain substantially with India — a bilateral trade exceeding \$10 billion annually, potential infrastructure expertise and a strategic hedge in its foreign policy. India is a major market for Turkish exports such as marble, machinery and agri products, while Turkey benefits from Indian machinery, auto components and chemicals, besides tourism and capital.

Sources said Turkey also cleared the air on military support to Pakistan, maintaining that it did not send any additional assistance, but as part of the long-standing defence ties between the two countries.

A senior diplomat told *The Indian Express*: “If we accept that Turkey has brotherly relations with Pakistan and that perhaps can’t be changed, we can still see merit in having our own friendly relations with them.” Indian interlocutors said if Turkey adopts a more nuanced position on the Kashmir issue, it could help solidify relations.

• CLIMATE

In dry monsoon, a test of resilience

This season’s rainfall is predicted to be the lowest in a decade. But India may be better prepared to absorb the stress this time



AMITABH SINHA

AFTER REMAINING largely inactive for more than a week, the monsoon finally picked some strength and momentum beginning Monday. Maharashtra, for instance, received its first good rainfall of the season on Tuesday. But the monsoon’s behaviour so far in June has raised concerns that the season might be even drier than predicted.

June was supposed to be among the relatively better rainfall months. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) forecast that while rainfall over India during the entire monsoon season was likely to be 90% of the long-period average, June was expected to get at least 92% of its normal rain.

This was because it was expected to be least affected by the El Niño phenomenon in the equatorial Pacific Ocean, which has a tendency to suppress rainfall over the Indian region. But with barely a week remaining, the June rainfall deficit is more than 40% and appears unlikely to be bridged.

An IMD bulletin on Wednesday forecast low to moderate rainfall activity in the areas covered by the monsoon — which is only around half of the country’s landmass. Around this time in June, the monsoon normally covers almost the entire country.

Not El Niño yet

Though the El Niño phase of the equatorial Pacific Ocean, off the northwestern coast of South America, has been declared to have emerged, this has not been the reason for the large rainfall deficit in June so far. This is because the effects of El Niño, or the opposite La Niña phase, on the Indian monsoon comes with a lag. It usually takes more than a month for the complete effects of El Niño to become evident over the Indian region.

IMD director general Mrutyunjay Mohapatra said the El Niño phenomenon had a very small role to play in the monsoon performance in June. “El Niño emerged around the first week of June. We are now beginning to see its impact on the monsoon. It is not that there is no impact. But it is not the main reason for the rainfall deficit in June,” Mohapatra said.

He identified other reasons — low pressure systems of inadequate strength; weak monsoon currents; and the unfavourable phase of a moving wind and cloud system called Madden Julian Oscillation, or MJO.

Like El Niño, MJO is an ocean-atmosphere interaction that influences weather events across the world, though only over a short term. But while the El Niño phenomenon plays out in the Pacific Ocean, MJO is a moving system of winds and clouds. The system engulfs the entire equatorial region like a ring but moves in an eastward direction. It helps bring rain in some regions but suppresses it in others. As it keeps moving, the areas where it brings rainfall keep changing.

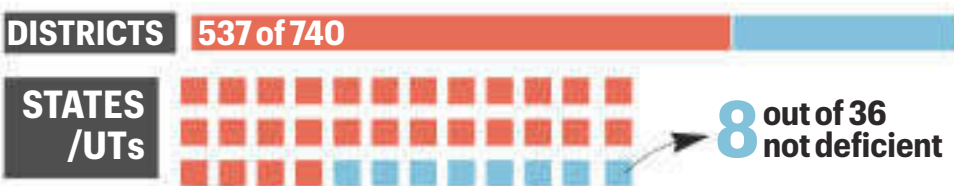
During June, the rain-bearing part of MJO was located far from the Indian region. The part of the MJO system that was around the Indian region was suppressing rainfall. But that is changing now.

“Through most of June, the MJO was in an unfavourable state for us. But it is moving and it is expected that the favourable part of MJO would be over the Indian region around the first week of July. We can expect some good rainfall around that time,” Mohapatra said.

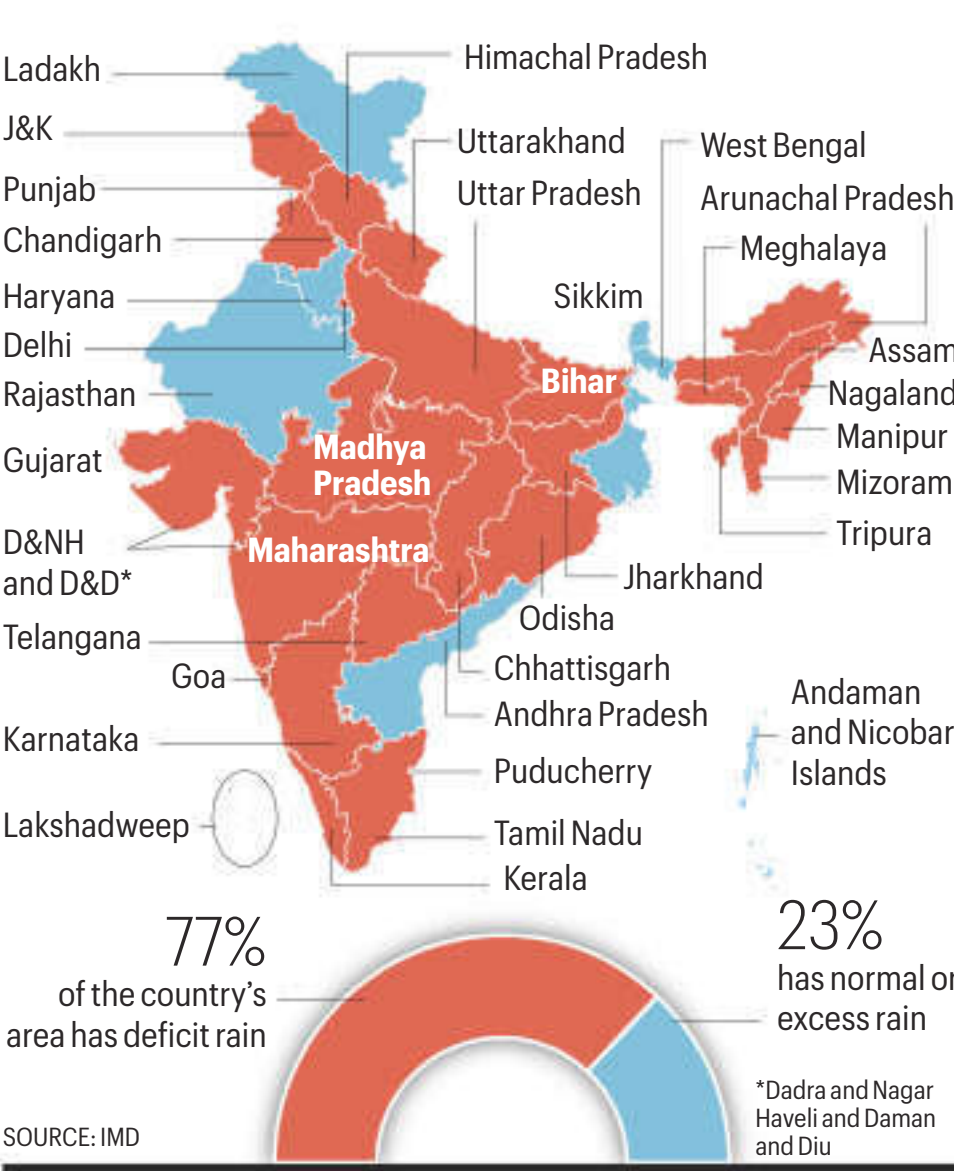
As of now, the monsoon getting active again is a big relief, but the effects of El Niño will also become progressively stronger. As

• LOOKING TO THE SKIES

Areas with more than 20% rain deficit, as on June 24:



The states/UTs with deficit rainfall



of now, almost 75% of the country’s land area has more than 20% rainfall deficiency.

Reducing monsoon dependence

Historically, India’s dependence on the monsoon rainfall has been very high. The four-month long rainy season accounts for about 75% of India’s annual rainfall.

This water is critical for irrigation, recharging groundwater, replenishing natural water bodies such as rivers and lakes, generating hydropower, and maintaining reserves in reservoirs. A bad monsoon would lower agricultural productivity, affect power generation, threaten food security, reduce farm incomes, suppress rural demand and dampen overall economic growth. The last time when India faced a particularly bad monsoon, trains had to be engaged to transport drinking water to extremely dry regions.

Over the years, however, efforts have been made to reduce India’s dependence on the monsoon. Though the land under irrigation has not changed substantially, there have been improvements on other fronts. A bulk of the work under the rural employment scheme has been aimed at developing infrastructure related to rainwater harvesting, water storage and conservation. Official reports show an improvement in groundwater situation in the last few years. The emergence of solar and wind electricity has reduced reliance on hydropower.

“We would still need to plan and intervene effectively, but our ability to absorb and deal with the stress has certainly improved. The impact of a bad monsoon should be lesser than what it used to be, let’s say, ten years ago,” said K J Ramesh, former Director General of Meteorology at IMD.

With the rainfall this season expected to be the lowest in at least a decade, India’s resilience will be tested. Thanks to the abundant rainfall in the last two years, the major reservoirs are running at relatively good storage levels. The rapid increase in renewables capacity is reducing the reliance on hydropower, and preserving storage levels in reservoirs. And there are indications that timely forecasts of a potentially bad monsoon prompted farmers to sow kharif crops amid pre-monsoon showers.

“Under climate change scenarios, it is going to get even more unpredictable. Even when we get quantitatively good rainfall, regional and local variations are huge. Developing greater resilience is the only way forward,” said M Rajeevan, former Secretary of the Ministry of Earth Sciences.

Stronger safeguards

Major reservoirs are functioning at relatively good storage levels thanks to good rain in previous years.

The emergence of solar and wind electricity has reduced the reliance on hydropower, preserving storage levels in reservoirs.

Official reports show a steady improvement in groundwater situation in the last few years.

A bulk of the work under the rural jobs scheme have been about developing water storage and conservation infrastructure.

What’s driving Europe heatwave, and why is it struggling to cope?



People cool off at a canal in Paris as France reels under a heat wave. AP



YASHEE

AROUND 50 people dead. Schools shut, public transport interrupted, air-conditioned cinema halls and museums asked to shelter the young and the elderly for free, farmers harvesting their crop at night. Western Europe is reeling under a severe heatwave, with countries from Netherlands to UK to Italy to France affected.

In France, 40 people drowned over the past week because they went swimming in unsupervised waters. The country recorded its hottest day (since record-keeping began in 1947) on Tuesday, recording a maximum temperature of 44.3 degrees Celsius. Italy and the UK have also issued extreme heat alerts.

Why is Europe so hot at present?

UK’s Met office said: “The developing heatwave is being driven by a strong area of high pressure building over continental Europe. This high pressure is promoting widespread sinking air, which suppresses cloud formation, allows for prolonged sunshine and leads to increasing temperatures through compressional heating.”

This phenomenon is also called the Omega Block or the heat dome effect.

An Omega Block, so named because it is shaped like the Greek letter Ω, is an area of high pressure between two zones of lower pressure. The heat dome also refers to an area of high pressure high above a landmass. Because of this high pressure zone, warm air rising from the ground is not able to escape into the atmosphere and is trapped close to the surface, further heating up the surroundings.

Generally, winds known as jet streams blow from the west to east over Europe, moving weather systems. This steady flow has now been disrupted, leading to the omega-shaped air flow.

This specific weather pattern aside, Europe has in general been warming up very fast, thanks to the effects of climate change. The 2025 edition of the European State of the Climate, an annual report published by the Copernicus Climate Change Service and the World Meteorological Organization, says: “Since the 1980s, Europe has been warming twice as fast as the global average, making it the fastest-warming continent. Heatwaves are becoming more frequent and severe, while extreme rainfall is leading to cata-

strophic floods. Glaciers continue to melt. Climate change is also affecting biodiversity, which is vital for a sustainable future.”

Apart from a high rate of industrialisation, urban heat islands (where highly concretised urban areas heat up faster), fracking for oil and gas, and other human activities, Europe is also suffering from something called the albedo effect, which refers to how surfaces reflect sunlight. The only area in the world heating up faster than Europe is the Arctic, where glaciers are melting rapidly. While the bright, white ice would have reflected heat back, the darker Arctic waters are absorbing it, heating up neighbouring Europe further.

But why is Europe suffering so badly from the heat?

Many parts of the world routinely see temperatures crossing 40 degrees Celsius and continue functioning normally. Why have the same temperatures proved so debilitating for Europe?

“Europe’s struggle with increasingly intense heatwaves reflects a deeper mismatch between rapidly evolving climate realities and systems designed for a different era. Much of Europe’s infrastructure, urban planning, and public health architecture developed under historically temperate climatic conditions, where resilience was built primarily around colder weather patterns. However, climate change is fundamentally altering this baseline. Heatwaves are becoming more frequent, longer, and more severe, exposing structural vulnerabilities that existing adaptation measures have not fully addressed. Urban heat retention, ageing populations, and uneven preparedness capacities across states further amplify these risks,” Zerín Osho, director of the India Program of the think tank Institute for Governance & Sustainable Development, told *The Indian Express*.

In much of western Europe, air conditioners are far from the norm. Homes are built to keep heat in, using insulated materials with high thermal mass like thick stone, brick and concrete. In winter, they absorb heat from radiators and slowly release it into the room. They do the same during a heatwave.

Then there is the fact that western Europe gets more hours of sunlight than say a place like India. This gives homes very little time to cool down at night, specially when nights are not much cooler than the day. “While Europe has strengthened heat action plans and early-warning mechanisms over recent years, current events suggest that adaptation continues to lag behind the pace at which climate risks are unfolding,” Osho said.

• POLICY

How government’s overhaul of FCRA rules puts focus on religious conversion

Deeptiman Tiwary
New Delhi, June 24

THE UNION Home Ministry has tightened the foreign funding framework for NGOs and associations under the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA). It has issued two notifications that revise penalties and specify purpose-based, geography-linked registration while explicitly keeping foreign money out of proselytising activities.

The two new notifications

The first notification amends the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Rules, 2011, requiring every FCRA registration to specify both the purposes for which foreign funds can be used and the states or Union Territories where such activities can be undertaken. Organisations must now select their activities from a government-prescribed Schedule of 105 permissible purposes.

Existing FCRA-registered associations have been given one year to indicate the purposes and geographical areas they wish to re-

tain in their registration. Any subsequent expansion in scope will require fresh approval.

The notification also broadens the definition of “key functionary”, restricts organisations with foreign nationals in key management positions from ordinarily receiving registration or prior permission, introduces a minimum utilisation requirement for renewal and cancellation decisions, tightens conditions for release of subsequent instalments of foreign funds, and mandates more extensive disclosures in annual returns, including activity reports, social media account details and information on ultimate donors.

The second notification revises compounding penalties for violations such as excess administrative spending, speculative investments, diversion of foreign funds and use of foreign contributions outside approved purposes or areas. It raises the cost of non-compliance while providing organisations with a structured mechanism to settle violations through compounding instead of facing full criminal prosecution.

Change from 2011 Rules

The changes mark a shift from a relatively broad, programme-based framework to a far more prescriptive regulatory regime. Under the 2011 Rules, organisations broadly identified themselves as undertaking religious, cultural, educational, economic or social activities and described their programmes. The new Rules require them to choose from a government-notified list of approved activities, with registrations tied to those specific purposes.

A second major change is geographical restriction. While organisations earlier disclosed their areas of operation, registration itself was not linked to specific states or Union Territories. The new framework makes geography part of the licence.

The 2011 Rules referred mostly to “Members of the Executive Committee or Governing Council” and “Chief Functionary”, without defining “key functionary” which have now been specified as directors of companies, partners in firms, trustees of trusts, the *karta* of a Hindu Undivided

Family, office bearers and members of governing bodies, and “any other officer or person... who has control over, or responsibility for the management” of the association.

The Rules also explicitly exclude “proselytisation” from permitted religious activities, define “key functionary” more broadly, place new restrictions on organisations with foreign nationals in leadership positions, introduce a minimum utilisation threshold for foreign funds, and tighten scrutiny of organisations receiving funds through prior permission.

The changes significantly increase government oversight over how and where foreign contributions can be used.

Focus on proselytisation

One of the most notable features of the new Schedule is the repeated use of the phrase “excluding proselytisation” in relation to religious activities. While the 2011 Rules recognised a range of religious activities, they did not expressly refer to proselytisation. The new framework allows faith-

based activities such as religious education, theological study, preservation of religious traditions and religious gatherings, but explicitly excludes conversion-oriented work.

The Constitutional backdrop is significant. Article 25 guarantees the right to profess, practise and propagate religion, but the Supreme Court in *Rev. Stainislaus vs State of Madhya Pradesh* (1977) held that the right to propagate religion does not include a right to convert another person.

By expressly excluding proselytisation, the Centre is signalling that foreign contributions can support religious activities but not conversion-oriented work. The move is in line with the long-standing concern within the Sangh Parivar that foreign-funded organisations are involved in religious conversion.

Since coming to power, the Narendra Modi government has faced allegations of targeting Christian organisations under the FCRA regime over suspicions of conversion. Several Christian institutions, including Missionaries of Charity and Church of North India-linked entities, have faced

FCRA action. The government has maintained that these actions were based on specific violations of FCRA provisions.

The penalty framework

The second notification, under Section 41(1) of the FCRA, revises compounding penalties for several violations relating to the receipt and utilisation of foreign contributions. Among the key changes:

- Spending foreign contribution beyond the 20% cap on administrative expenses will attract a penalty of Rs 1 lakh or 5% of the excess expenditure, whichever is higher.
- Utilising it in speculative activities will attract a penalty of Rs 1 lakh or 30% of the amount invested, whichever is higher.
- Using it for purposes other than those for which it was received will attract a penalty of Rs 1 lakh or 30% of the amount involved, whichever is higher.
- Accepting or utilising foreign contribution for purposes or in states and Union Territories not covered by registration will invite similar penalties.



The Ideas Page

Five decades after Emergency, difficult questions, unheeded warnings



COOMII KAPOOR

IT'S A question I am often asked and my reply pleases neither side of the political spectrum in these polarised times. Having witnessed firsthand Indira Gandhi's 1975 Emergency, I am frequently quizzed whether the situation in the country is really better 50 years down the line. If I suggest that today's restrictions on the media are not as draconian as the ones between 1975 and 1977, those left aghast by the creeping authoritarianism of Narendra Modi's rule view me as someone who has sold out to the government. But can sledgehammer legislation that upheld prior censorship, putting dissidents behind bars indefinitely without even the farce of a trial, temporarily suspending the sacred constitutional right of *habeas corpus*, etc. be better than whatever is happening in the country today? The government's cheerleaders are equally unhappy with my response. The Emergency may have been worse, but are we insidiously and slowly heading in the very same direction?

India today is not a shining example of the democracy that the framers of our Constitution envisaged. Recently, the Delhi High Court pulled up the Delhi Police's Economic Offences Wing for high-handedly shutting down the portal *News-Click* six years ago, arresting the editor and invoking anti-terror laws against him. Television channels devote far too much time to propagating government narratives through BJP spokespersons or fellow travellers, even if this is couched as debate. This format generates more sound than light. Journalists would be better employed following their true calling — investigating and reporting the news on the ground. Media correspondents increasingly resort to self-censorship and soft-peddle uncomfortable truths for fear of offending people in power and being cut off from news sources essential for their livelihoods. US President Donald Trump last

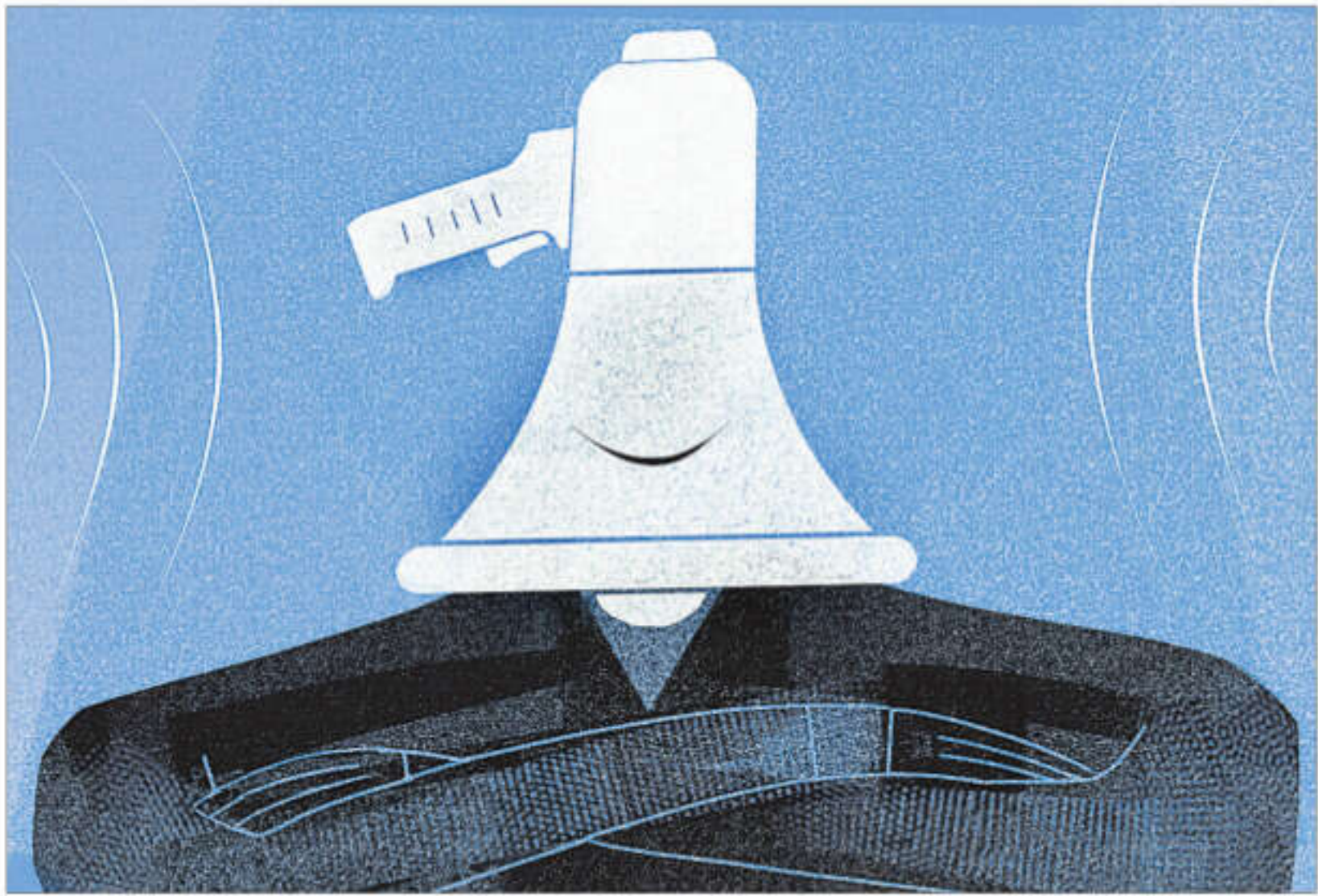


ILLUSTRATION: C R SASIKUMAR

week unwittingly affirmed the suspicion that Indian journalists nowadays shy away from asking uncomfortable questions, remarking approvingly to Prime Minister Modi at a joint press conference in France, "Your reporters are much nicer than mine."

Today's nomenclature for yesteryear's censor is media adviser, embedded in the party or the government. They are usually professional communication experts who have little connect with the John Stuart Mill school of a free marketplace of ideas. Callow media consultants strive simply to choreograph a narrative as if media management is a marketing ad or a public-relations exercise. Unnecessarily toxic trolling of contrary viewpoints on social media and the harassment of media dissenters and political opponents by utilising government investigative agencies are today's tools of censorship. The justification for violating citizens' rights is the all-encompassing "national security"

In a country as diverse as India, with a culture of outspokenness, debate and argument, truth cannot be suppressed for long, particularly in the days of social media. So why make the mistake that Indira Gandhi made 50 years back?

bogey, which has been cited to amend IT rules so that the government can even access alleged "unlawful" internet chatter.

Today's media managers need to learn a lesson in pragmatism and politeness from successful past media advisers, in party and government, such as V N Gadgil, J P Mathur, Sharada Prasad, B G Verghese, Govindacharya, Ashok Tandon, Harish Khare and Arun Jaitley. They managed better outcomes by befriending journalists through easy access, tolerance and a polite exchange of differing viewpoints,

rather than cutting off sources of information when opposing views were expressed. In a country as diverse as India, with a culture of outspokenness, debate and argument, truth cannot be suppressed for long, particularly in the days of social media. So why make the mistake that Indira Gandhi made 50 years back in assuming that opposing viewpoints can be wished away?

Increasingly, those in power believe they are not directly

answerable to the people. The government's radio silence over major mess-ups in the NEET and CBSE examinations, affecting lakhs of students, is a telling example. To respond to public complaints is perceived as a weakness by today's regime. The lack of internal debate in the ruling party, too, is perturbing. The BJP parliamentary board rarely meets and when it does, it merely rubber stamps decisions taken elsewhere. The surprise elevation of inexperienced junior party persons as chief ministers, without any prior consultations, is yet another instance of the absence of inner-party democracy. No less concerning is the falling standard of independence and probity of constitutional bodies meant to uphold democratic values. The Election Commission's blatant exclusion of over 90 lakh names from the West Bengal SIR rolls unnecessarily put a question mark over an election where the public mood was clearly against Mamata Banerjee. Recently, the way TMC and Shiv Sena (UBT) MPs have jumped ship overnight reinforces the cynical belief that most Indian politicians have a price. The crux of a true democracy is securing a majority in Parliament through an ethical recourse to the ballot box, not by winning over opposition legislators by whatever means, fair or foul, post elections. In the ongoing ruthless mission to secure a two-thirds majority, one recalls uneasily just how Indira Gandhi utilised her brute two-thirds majority to subvert our Constitution and push through Emergency rule.

As the country marks the half-century anniversary of the Emergency, many ruling party supporters wax eloquent on Indira Gandhi's Emergency excesses as a warning to future generations not to go down that discredited path and derail democracy. Ironically, many of the practices of the Emergency are actually being emulated today. Even the unnecessary sycophancy of rulers in advertisements, bill boards and at public events seems ominously reminiscent of that black period and recalls Congress President D K Barooah's fawning slogan, "Indira is India and India is Indira."

The writer is contributing editor, The Indian Express

When Bihar led the resistance to authoritarianism



SAMRAT CHOUDHARY

JUNE 25, 1975, stands as one of the darkest chapters in the history of Indian democracy. It is a date that evokes pain and concern in the minds of all those who cherish democratic values. The Emergency was not merely a political episode. It was an unprecedented assault on India's Constitution, democratic institutions, freedom of expression, and civil liberties. It reflected a dangerous mindset that was willing to sacrifice democracy to preserve political power.

The younger generation must understand that there was a period in India's history when the spirit of the Constitution was suppressed, the judiciary came under pressure, the press was censored, and political opponents were imprisoned without due process. Significantly, these actions were not imposed by an external force but by a Congress-led government.

The catalyst for this crisis occurred on June 12, 1975, when the Allahabad High Court declared the election of then-Prime Minister Indira Gandhi invalid. In a healthy democracy, the moral course of action would have been to respect the verdict and step down. Instead, Congress chose to protect power. Fundamental rights were curtailed, civil liberties suspended, and millions of citizens deprived of their freedoms. An atmosphere of fear, repression, and uncertainty engulfed the nation.

Yet, if the Emergency symbolised authoritarianism, Bihar became the strongest centre of democratic resistance. This is the land that gave the nation Loknayak Jayaprakash Narayan, one of the most respected champions of democracy. The call for "Sampoorna Kranti" (Total Revolution) that arose from Patna's Gandhi Maidan shook the very foundations of authoritarian rule. The JP Movement was not merely an agitation against a government; it was a movement for systemic reform and democratic renewal, challenging corruption, dynastic politics, appeasement, and the arrogance of power.

Thousands of students, youth, farmers, teachers, and ordinary citizens from Bihar joined the struggle to defend democratic values. Many were imprisoned and subjected to severe hardship, yet they refused to surrender their commitment to democracy. Bihar's contribution to this national movement re-

mains a matter of immense pride; without JP's leadership and the courage of the people of Bihar, the struggle against authoritarianism would not have acquired the historic strength it ultimately did.

Today, Congress often speaks about freedom of expression, but the nation has not forgotten that it was during the Emergency that press censorship was imposed on an unprecedented scale. Newspapers were required to obtain official clearance before publishing sensitive reports. Critical voices were silenced, journalists were intimidated, and media institutions faced immense pressure. Narayan, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Lal Krishna Advani, George Fernandes, Nanaji Deshmukh, and thousands of political workers and activists were imprisoned. Their only offence was their unwavering commitment to democracy, constitutional governance, and the rights of the people. Dissent was treated as a crime.



ILLUSTRATION: TANUSHRI MITRA

The Emergency serves as a stark reminder that the excessive concentration of power weakens democratic institutions. When authority becomes confined to a few individuals, institutional checks and balances begin to erode, placing constitutional values at grave risk. Ultimately, it stands as a warning against the dangers of dynastic politics and unchecked political power.

In sharp contrast, under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India has entered an era of greater transparency, public participation, and inclusive development. The guiding principle of governance today is: "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas, Sabka Prayas." The poor, women, youth, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, backward classes, and marginalised communities have become central stakeholders in India's development journey.

The Emergency is a lesson about the importance of safeguarding our democratic institutions. On this anniversary, I pay heartfelt tribute to all those who stood firm in defence of democracy and refused to yield before authoritarian rule. I offer my special respect to the people of Bihar, who, under the leadership of Loknayak Jayaprakash Narayan, played a historic role in safeguarding democratic values. Let us renew our commitment to protecting the Constitution, strengthening democratic institutions, and preserving the rights and freedoms of every citizen. Democracy is not merely a system of governance; it is the very soul of India, and the contribution of Bihar in defending that soul will forever remain etched in the nation's history.

The writer is Chief Minister of Bihar

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Lucknow tragedy

THE INFERNO at the Lucknow coaching centre is more than a tragedy; it is a systemic failure of governance, regulation, corruption, and civic conscience ('A recurring, preventable tragedy in Lucknow', *IE*, June 24). Fifteen young lives were lost in a death trap where narrow staircases, inadequate ventilation, and ignored fire audits exposed a lethal cocktail of negligence and complicity. Had there been a tech-driven, AI-powered compliance audit and an IoT-enabled fire-safety mechanism in place across our urban centres, the outcome might have been different. Whether in Malviya Nagar, Rajkot, or now Lucknow, unless citizens demand accountability, the troubling question remains: How long will India continue to mourn the avoidable deaths of its youth?

Abhinav Shah, Lucknow

THE LUCKNOW building fire follows a pattern seen across Indian cities — commercial establishments operating without effective fire-safety compliance ('A recurring, preventable tragedy in Lucknow', *IE*, June 24). The National Building Code exists, but enforcement remains inconsistent. Mandatory third-party fire audits, personal liability for building owners, and publicly accessible compliance records would create more effective deterrents than reactive inspections.

S M Jeeva, Chennai

Innovation race

TECHNOLOGICAL SOVEREIGNTY is not built by policy announcements alone ('Will a nation grow, stagnate, decline? Technology will tell', *IE*, June 24). It requires sustained investment in foundational research, manufacturing capability, and talent that can design and deploy technology, not merely operate it. India has the demographic base. Converting that into technological capacity demands consistency in funding, institutional autonomy, and a long-term commitment that outlasts electoral cycles.

K Sakunthala, Coimbatore



BIMAL N PATEL AND ANKIT K

INDIA'S PERMANENT membership of the UN Security Council is no longer a question of aspiration. It has become a test of whether the world can adapt to the current geopolitical flux. Since World War II, the world has fundamentally changed, overseen by an institution that largely has not. India, as the world's largest democracy, represents one-sixth of its total population. Recognising its rightful place will ensure the UNSC's credibility in addressing global challenges.

India ranks among the top three in purchasing power parity, with estimates placing its 2026 GDP PPP above \$20 trillion. It influences global trade flows, technology supply chains, energy markets, and developmental finance. India's armed forces are among the world's largest and it is among the top defence spenders, with its 2026 defence budget reaching a record \$86 billion. India is currently among the few countries with a credible nuclear triad, yet its strategic culture has remained oriented toward deterrence and stability, rather than revising the international order.

Beyond material capabilities, India's normative and functional contribution to international peace and security is noteworthy. Its troop contribution has been one of the largest since 1948 despite suffering one of the highest numbers of fatalities among UN peacekeeping contributors. This reflects India's com-

Beyond material capabilities, India's normative and functional contribution to international peace and security is noteworthy

India's rise merits a seat at the UNSC

mitment to multilateralism and its willingness to support UN mandates at all costs.

On several crucial international agendas, India is one of the major stakeholders, shaping outcomes in energy transitions, green finance, and technological innovation. Cutting across the North-South divide, India demonstrated its leadership in the International Solar Alliance and the recent G20 presidency under the theme "vasudhaiva kutumbakam". It is emerging as a hub in technology governance. On maritime security, its role in the Indian Ocean shows strong commitment to freedom of navigation and adherence to the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea and its institutions such as the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea.

Equitable representation is one of the most important challenges the UNSC faces. Despite Asia accounting for 60 per cent of the world's population, only one Asian state holds a permanent seat. UNSC expansion can also address challenges that directly affect Asian countries but often receive inadequate attention, while preventing the pursuit of any single country's narrow agenda.

The G4 initiative, by India, Japan, Brazil and Germany, aims at increasing UNSC membership, with six new permanent seats, including two each for Asia and Africa.

Since permanent membership comes with veto power, restricting it to only five countries has resulted

in structural and functional challenges. In the 1960s, the UNSC expanded the number of non-permanent members to 10 without making any changes to the P5. Thus, the influence of the permanent members increased over time. The growing practice of consensus-based decision-making has given rise to de facto vetoes. Outcomes such as presidential and press statements, or the decisions of sanctions committees, require unanimity, allowing any member, permanent or elected, to block or delay action. As the Council expands, achieving consensus becomes more difficult, thereby increasing opportunities for individual states to exercise this informal veto in pursuit of narrow national interests. Equitable reform requires expanding permanent membership with veto power to ensure fair representation.

A permanent seat for India at the Council would strengthen stability in Asia and beyond. It would closely align the institution with changing geopolitical realities and establish the legitimacy of its decisions, offering the UNSC a chance to revamp itself. The India of today, envisioned as vishwamitra, is well positioned to address the evolving challenges of the UNSC.

Patel is V-C of Rashtriya Raksha University, and a member of National Security Advisory Board and UN International Law Commission. Ankit K is assistant professor at Rashtriya Raksha University

Who killed the radical artist?

holders — galleries, universities, museums, art fairs, etc. — accept neither risk nor responsibility. Without institutional solidarity, it is unfair to expect artists to be brave. Kapoor flourished at a time when the artist was driving the market. Now, dissent seems a luxury few can afford.

Remember art student Kundan Kumar Mahato, who, in 2022, was rusticated following his internal project at MSU Baroda? He questioned Indian society's treatment of women by filling silhouettes of Hindu goddesses with newspaper clippings detailing crimes against women — exactly what art is meant to do, provoke, reflect, challenge. Yet, when the university faced attacks from fringe right-wing elements, it abandoned him. Although Mahato was later allowed to resume his course by the court, his incarceration became a cautionary tale.

There are also enough incidents of both mid-career and established artists' voices being stifled. Amol Palekar's speech at the opening of Prabhakar Barwe's retrospective at NGMA, Mumbai, comes to mind. When Palekar criticised the abolition of the local artists advisory board at NGMA, he was asked by the curators and other authorities to limit his speech to the artist's practice. Ironically, Barwe was among the pioneering Indian modernists who challenged traditional teachings.

I was convinced of a systemic rupture

Global capitalism has not robbed art of its radical edge; rather, it has robbed its custodians of the courage to stand by it

about two years ago during a conversation with a prominent New Delhi-based gallerist. She explained why she chose to keep her gallery open while her peers went on a day-long strike in solidarity with Gaza, following the Israeli bombing of Rafah. "I can't do that. I also have Israeli clients," she said, adding, "Our artists are free to share their own political opinions. We will never officially amplify them."

This is the loss Kapoor was talking about, where art is perceived solely as a commercial asset. Now imagine being a provocative artist with this gallerist. You either quit or self-censor. Inevitably, artists choose to survive.

In May, Finland's Espoo Museum of Modern Art (EMMA) announced a new support model for artists. Acknowledging that artists today are working in "survival mode",

EMMA's new director, Krist Gruijthuisen, said this model would not just provide artists with financial aid beyond the customary token fee, but also reinvent the support system to encourage them to take risks. Perhaps institutions across India, and the world, can take a leaf out of EMMA's playbook.

The aim is not to dissociate art from the market, but to decouple creative purpose from survival so the market can complement thoughtful, radical, meaningful art. To rephrase Kapoor's argument: Global capitalism has not robbed art of its radical edge; rather, it has robbed its custodians of the courage to stand by it. A snub from one of the world's wealthiest artists may just be the wake-up call the art world needs.

The writer is associate editor, The Indian Express. trisha.mukherjee@expressindia.com



Viksit and Surakshit

The cost of inaction on safety issues is more than that of enforcement

The Lucknow fire, which killed 15 people, mostly students, and injured five others, captures both the promise and the perils of aspirational India. It reflects a booming education economy built around a growing services sector, but also the unplanned urban growth and regulatory failures that often accompany it. India’s young population, eager to acquire skills and improve economic prospects, has fuelled an ecosystem of coaching centres and training institutes, many of which operate outside formal regulatory frameworks, require low capital investment and generate high profits. As advances in artificial intelligence threaten to reshape employment patterns and formal educational institutions struggle to keep pace with skill requirements, such centres are likely to proliferate. The three-storey building where the fire occurred was reportedly not authorised for commercial use, yet it escaped demolition despite repeated notices. According to the FIR by the civic authorities, neither the owners nor the businesses operating there had made adequate provisions for fire safety. Such violations are common across India, where commercial and educational establishments have little regard for basic safety norms.

The Lucknow incident is also part of a disturbing pattern. This summer has witnessed a succession of major fire accidents across the country. Public attention usually focuses on administrative negligence, and official explanations frequently end with the phrase “electrical fire” – a description that often conceals more than it reveals. Electrical fires can arise from several identifiable causes, including overloaded circuits caused by growing use of appliances, harmonic currents generated by sophisticated equipment that create localised hotspots, poor-quality wiring, and the absence of arc-fault protection devices. Understanding these causes is key to preventing similar tragedies. This requires a stronger culture of investigation. India suffers from inadequate firefighting infrastructure and a shortage of trained fire-forensics experts capable of conducting rigorous root-cause analyses and recommending systemic remedies. Without such expertise, lessons from each disaster remain limited. The challenge therefore demands a national response. India’s ambition of becoming a developed nation cannot be separated from the imperative of ensuring public safety. Yet, many buildings lack mandatory fire detection and suppression systems that are standard in developed countries. A Viksit Bharat must also be a Surakshit Bharat. A nationwide assessment of building safety, even through a scientifically designed sample survey, would provide valuable data for reform. The task may be large, but the human and economic costs of inaction are far greater.

Razor’s edge

High heat and low rainfall is threatening agricultural produce

The southwest monsoon deficit nationwide has increased from 35% to 43%; the winds’ northward advance was stalled near Mumbai; and both the U.S. NOAA and the India Meteorological Department (IMD) expect a moderate-to-strong El Niño this year. The El Niño suppresses the vertical air movement needed for rainclouds to form while a warming Pacific is weakening the trade winds that bring moisture to the subcontinent. The Madden-Julian Oscillation is also in an unfavourable phase and the Indian Ocean Dipole currently cannot offer a buffer. Further, while northwest India has received 5% more rain than normal, central India and the northeast face deficits of 63% and 43%, respectively. But with two-thirds of the seasonal rainfall historically arriving in July and August, the monsoon may still recover and salvage the season. Together with reservoir storage at 30.4% of capacity, compared with 25.1% during previous El Niño years, there is no reason for alarm yet. However, the effects for agriculture are more concerning. The Agriculture Ministry has already prioritised 111 districts out of 315 vulnerable ones based on their irrigation coverage. Extreme heat has been reducing farm labour productivity. High heat and rain shortfall have sown anxiety over the cardamom harvest in Idukki, a fate that bodes ill for other plantation crops in the Western Ghats.

Both the *kharif* sowing window for rice, pulses, and oilseeds and the availability of fertilizers could come under pressure, the latter due to Chinese export curbs and tensions in West Asia, heightening the risks of lower soil moisture and higher input stress. Retail food inflation was 4.2% in April; further deficits will especially threaten vegetables and pulses, complicating the monetary policy. The fundamental problem is the way India has built its rural economy around the assumption of reliable rainfall delivery. No adaptation strategy can indefinitely outpace unchecked warming, so limiting future warming should amount to reducing the extent of exposure. The ideal sustainable strategies are to switch from rain-centric to water-centric organisation, reduce dependence on water-intensive crops, and improve resilience. Pathways for the first two have already been outlined. On the last, while the Agriculture Ministry’s extant contingency plans reflect the need for adjustable sowing windows and alternative seed varieties, the principal variable remains implementation at scale. Second, the government should consider a new authority to coordinate inter-State water use and cropping changes based on extended El Niño forecasts, eliminating the cropping governance currently fragmented between the Agriculture and Jal Shakti Ministries, and the IMD.

The decision by the United States military to change the name of its naval command in the region from “US INDOPACOM” to “US PACOM” – United States Indo-Pacific Command to United States Pacific Command – reverting to its original name that was changed in 2018 can be dismissed as superficial, even trivial. Many have already responded with the Shakespearean “What’s in a name?”, even as the U.S. Department of War pointed out that US PACOM’s area of responsibility, from “the waters off the West Coast of the United States to the western border of India” or what had once been described as “Hollywood to Bollywood, from polar bears to penguins”, has never changed. In 2018, U.S. Defence Secretary Jim Mattis said that the name INDOPACOM was a recognition of the “growing significance” of the Indian Ocean, the Indian subcontinent, and India itself, and the U.S. dropped the term “Asia-Pacific” to “Indo-Pacific”. Current U.S. Secretary of War Pete Hegseth gave the signal, on May 30, that this understanding has now changed, at his speech at the annual Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore – compared to more than 30 references to the “Indo-Pacific” in his speech in 2025, his speech this year contained not a single reference to the Indo-Pacific region or strategy.

Given the centre stage that the U.S.’s Indo-Pacific policy has had in India’s strategic calculus since 2018, it is necessary, therefore, to go beyond the superficial to the subterranean or submarine, in this case. New Delhi must study how broader trends in U.S. policy are attempting to recast both the region and India’s position within it in terms of three broader geographies.

U.S.-China ties and the Quad

The first, is the U.S.’s outreach to China, and concurrently diminishing salience of the Quad (India, Japan Australia, the U.S.), which Beijing has always protested as an “exclusive clique” or derisively as “ocean foam”. In the long term, the U.S. and China cannot shy away from the fierce rivalry between them, but it is clear that in the immediate term, Trump 2.0 has decided to play nice.

U.S. President Donald Trump’s visit to Beijing in May 2026 and Chinese President Xi Jinping’s upcoming visit to the U.S. on September 24, indicate that the two sides do not want their differences to overcome the relationship, and the U.S. is tiptoeing around the Taiwan issue. Mr. Trump’s references to a “G-2”, including during a press availability with Mr. Modi on the sidelines of the 52nd G-7 summit in France (June 15 to 17), are an early warning of a plan to recast the world into “spheres of influence”, where China would be the predominant power in the continent, not as one pole in a multipolar Asia, as India envisions.

As a result, the Quad, rebuilt in Trump 1.0 as a



Suhasini Haidar

counter to China in the region, appears to be floundering. The U.S.’s National Defense Strategy released in January 2026 does not mention the Quad even once. In terms of substance, the Quad’s combined agenda has been pared down to four areas of cooperation – maritime security, economic prosperity, critical and emerging minerals technology and disaster responses. Even within these limited objectives, there have been setbacks, such as over Artificial Intelligence cooperation. Despite Quad countries signing on to Pax Silica, and Critical Minerals Initiative Framework with the U.S., the Trump administration ordered Anthropic to end access to its latest models for all non-Americans.

Another question concerns the Quad Summit, which India has unsuccessfully sought to host since January 2024. During U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio’s visit to Delhi in May 2026, he offered no firm commitment that Mr. Trump would visit Delhi this year, amid indications that the Quad may be relegated to a Foreign Ministers’ level grouping. The U.S. Navy’s reported actions involving Iranian ship *IRIS Dena* (March 2006) and recent attacks on three ships in which three Indians were killed underscore maritime security and domain awareness concerns within the Quad framework. In July, when he hosts Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi and travels to Indonesia, Australia and New Zealand, Prime Minister Narendra Modi must discuss alternative maritime coalitions and revive the Australia-India-Japan trilateral.

The U.S.-Iran MoU and West Asia

The second geography of concern is West Asia. The U.S. ceasefire with Iran, after just a few months of a surprisingly badly planned war, is indicative of a general fatigue in Trump 2.0 with U.S. friends and allies in the region. The situation is even more volatile today than it was prior to February 28, especially given the short shrift Israel has received in negotiations with Iran, and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s defiance over the ceasefire for Lebanon.

A closer look at the 14-paragraph “Islamabad MoU” released by Iran reveals several signals for the region. Paragraph four states that the U.S. commits to “remove its forces from the proximity of the Islamic Republic of Iran” within 30 days after the final deal. Paragraph five says that, after the Hormuz Strait is demined, Iran and Oman will define the Strait’s future administration in consultation with Persian Gulf littoral states.

Paragraph 6 stipulates that the U.S., along with regional allies, will provide at least \$300 billion for Iran’s reconstruction. These provisions imply commitments on behalf of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC) states while giving Iran leverage on key issues – military, connectivity, and economic security. Oman and Qatar are now closer to Iran than

The U.S.’s reversion from INDOPACOM to PACOM suggests that its regional shifts run deeper than a simple name change

Clearing the road to timely trauma care in India

On May 26, 2026, the Supreme Court of India delivered a landmark judgment with implications for public health policy. Hearing a writ petition filed by SaveLIFE Foundation in October 2024, a Bench of Justices J.K. Maheshwari and Atul S. Chandurkar, in *SaveLIFE Foundation & Anr. vs Union of India & Ors.*, held that the right to trauma care is an integral part of the right to life under Article 21 of the Constitution. The Court ruled that this right extends from the site of injury to definitive hospital treatment and issued nine binding directions to the Union, States and Union Territories, with implementation timelines ranging from three to six months.

Around 4.67 lakh Indians die every year from injuries such as road crashes, falls, burns, drowning, industrial mishaps, fires and disasters, according to National Crime Records Bureau data. Road crashes alone account for nearly 1.77 lakh deaths. Trauma is the leading cause of death among Indians aged 18-45. The Law Commission (201st Report) has estimated that half of road-crash fatalities could be prevented with timely care, while a 2021 NITI Aayog-AIIMS Emergency and Injury Care Report found that at least 30% of deaths are linked to delays in emergency response. India does not lack policies or guidelines; what it has lacked is a uniform, enforceable trauma-care framework.

What the top court has held

The Bench built on earlier jurisprudence. In *Parmanand Katara vs Union of India* (1989), the Court recognised the duty of doctors to render emergency aid. In *Paschim Banga Khet Mazdoor Samiti vs State of West Bengal* (1996), it read access to emergency care into Article 21. In the present order, Article 21, the Court held, covers the entire chain that connects an injured person to medical care: the bystander, the emergency call, the ambulance, the paramedic, the receiving facility.



Piyush Tewari
The Founder and the CEO of SaveLIFE Foundation, a non-profit committed to saving lives through road safety and trauma care

Judicial oversight may finally realise the constitutional right to trauma care

The framing imposes a positive obligation on the state to build and sustain an integrated trauma response system.

This matters because survival in trauma depends on systems rather than on individual institutions. A well-equipped hospital cannot compensate for a delayed ambulance. An ambulance cannot help if the bystander is afraid to call. A trauma surgeon cannot save a patient who never reaches the hospital in time.

A cooperative federalism approach

Public health, hospitals and ambulance services fall under the State List in the Seventh Schedule, making cooperation between the Union and the States essential for a uniform trauma-care framework. Compliance affidavits and information notes filed by 34 States and Union Territories indicate a willingness to implement Union policies and standardise trauma care. Accepting the Attorney General’s submission that the Union should act as an enabler, the Bench called for “sustained and concerted efforts” by both levels of government. The directions do not alter the constitutional division of powers; they provide judicial backing to existing frameworks such as Prime Minister - Road Accident Victims’ Hospitalisation and Assured Treatment (PM RAHAT), the National Ambulance Code AIS-125, Emergency Response Support System (ERSS)-112, the emergency medical technician (EMT) curriculum, the Good Samaritan Rules and the Health Ministry’s trauma-care guidelines.

The directions fall into five clusters. On communications, all emergency numbers (100, 101, 102, 108, 1033, 1091 and their State variants) must be integrated into helpline 112 within three months, with mass media publicity. On bystander protection, every State must set up physical and digital grievance-redress systems for Good Samaritans, with nodal authorities at the State and district levels. On pre-hospital response, all

before and have been part of the Pakistan-led mediation process, while countries such as Saudi Arabia are seeking new security arrangements with Türkiye, Pakistan, and Ukraine.

India’s policy towards the region requires a rapid revision in light of the post-war, post-deal power structure. What was once a finely balanced approach now appears tilted towards Israel and the United Arab Emirates. New Delhi must also urgently reconsider its compliance with U.S. sanctions on Iranian oil and the Chabahar port, given Washington’s shifting positions.

The U.S. and South Asia

Finally, India must study the implications of U.S. foreign policy decisions in its neighbourhood. The appointment of Sergio Gor as both U.S. Ambassador to India and Special Envoy for South and Central Asia signals Washington’s growing regional ambitions. New Delhi has pushed back on attempts by the U.S. to become a supra entity in South Asia, as well as its efforts to resolve intra-regional conflicts between India and Pakistan. This ambition was hinted at during Operation Sindoor (May 2025), and repeated by Mr. Trump over the past year, especially as he met the Pakistani leadership many times in this period.

Mr. Gor’s recent travels to Kathmandu, Thimphu, Dhaka and Colombo indicate that the U.S. is keen to broaden its efforts across the region. In the absence of effective pan-regional frameworks such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) – both are constrained by New Delhi’s political tensions with Islamabad and Dhaka – it is clear that the U.S. is entering into competition with China for influence in South Asia.

Beijing has already built several mechanisms for cooperation with South Asia, and both powers side-stepping India. India, as chair of the Indian Ocean Rim Association, and with Mr. Modi due to attend the planned BIMSTEC summit in Bangladesh and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit in Pakistan next year, has an opportunity to reassert its regional leadership. Given the opportunities, a revival of the SAARC grouping and other pan-regional initiatives must be considered.

Concerns over the U.S.’s moves across India’s geographies may seem contrary to the bonhomie at the Modi-Trump meeting at the G-7 meet in France, and the red carpet for Mr. Rubio’s India visit. Shorn of the rhetoric, however, the trends in U.S. policy are clear, and New Delhi must plan accordingly, acknowledging that the shifts run far deeper than the ripples on the surface caused by a dropped prefix.

suhasini.h@thehindu.co.in

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Chief Minister’s speech

It is clear from Tamil Nadu Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay’s maiden speech, laced with ‘punch dialogues’, in the Tamil Nadu Assembly that he has not yet fully outgrown his passion for acting. His dramatic ‘hand movement’ may have delighted his fans, but they were out of place on the floor of the august House. A substantial

portion of his speech was devoted to self-praise and DMK-bashing. Mr. Vijay cannot shirk responsibility by claiming that he has inherited long-standing problems and that addressing them will take time. His foremost priorities should be preventing crimes against women and curbing the drug menace in the State. His reference to

the electoral defeat of DMK president M.K. Stalin through a “short story” was also unnecessary. That said, Mr. Vijay deserves credit for giving greater representation to Dalits and women in his Ministry, and for reaffirming his commitment to secularism, social justice and ending illegal mining. **G. David Milton,** Maruthancode, Tamil Nadu

The Chief Minister’s gestures and dramatic flourishes, accompanied by gleeful clapping and hooting from the Treasury benches to score political points over the Opposition, resembled a scene from a masala potboiler rather than a legislative debate. Such conduct is an affront to the intelligence of the electorate. Our lawmakers would do well to restore

decorum to the House; only then can governance receive the attention it deserves. **S. Sanjeevi Rao,** Puducherry

Hand in the till

It is distressing that the Ram temple is in the limelight for all the wrong reasons, especially since the government has sought to derive political dividends

from its consecration. Reports of alleged embezzlement and pilferage of donations are deeply upsetting for devotees. The perpetrators must be brought to book at the earliest to restore public trust. **Aanya Singhal,** Noida, Uttar Pradesh

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

Sustaining India's low-fertility future

India is entering a new demographic phase. The latest Sample Registration System data puts the country's total fertility rate at 1.9 children per woman, below both the global average of 2.2 and the replacement level of 2.1 needed to keep a population stable. For a country that has long worried about population growth, this marks an important turn.

However, the decline is not uniform. Rural fertility is still around the replacement mark, while urban fertility has fallen to 1.5. The sharper divide is geographic. Delhi's fertility rate stands at an ultra-low of 1.2, while Kerala, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal are at 1.3. These levels are lower than those in the United States (1.6), Finland (1.4), and Japan (1.3). At the other end, Bihar remains at 2.9, followed by Uttar Pradesh (2.6), Madhya Pradesh (2.4), and Rajasthan (2.3).

The implication is that India has crossed into low fertility as a nation, but not as one demographic economy. While some States are already moving rapidly towards ageing, others still have large cohorts set to enter the labour force over the next two decades. India must create productive opportunities for young workers in poorer and younger States, while strengthening income, care, and health systems for older populations where fertility has already fallen very low.

A difficult shift

The transition could indeed be challenging. Western Europe and Japan aged after they had industrialised, brought a large share of workers into formal employment, widened their tax systems, and built welfare institutions with some capacity for risk-pooling. Even then, ageing strained public finances; Japan saw the burden push public debt above 200% of GDP.

India enters the same demographic passage on a weaker institutional and fiscal base. Its



Amarendu Nandy

Associate Professor, Economics & Public Policy Area, Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Ranchi. Views are personal

per-capita income is around \$2,800. Its direct tax base remains narrow, with net direct taxpayers accounting for only about 6% of the total population. State governments, tasked with much of the social-sector response, are already fiscally stretched.

The labour-market base is just as fragile. Since most workers spend their lives in informal or semi-formal work, old-age income security remains largely outside formal employment contracts. A contribution-based pension system works best when earnings are predictable, employment is formal, and workers can save regularly over decades. In India, that assumption holds for only a minority of the workforce.

Existing public safety nets acknowledge this vulnerability but do not provide meaningful income security. The Atal Pension Yojana assumes sustained contributions across one's working life, which is difficult for informal workers with volatile incomes. The old-age pension under the National Social Assistance Programme remains ₹200 a month for those aged 60 to 79 and ₹500 for those above 80. Such support does not protect the elderly from dependence.

Income security, however, is only one part of the problem. For generations, India's welfare state has been partly hidden inside the household. The joint family, co-resident children, and unpaid female care absorbed many of the costs of old age. That arrangement is weakening under the pressure of urbanisation, migration, nuclear households, and women's educational and work aspirations. Studies of left-behind elderly parents show that while children's migration improves monetary resources, it worsens loneliness and health vulnerability.

To be sure, India has about 150 million people aged 60 and above. By 2050, that number is projected to rise to 347 million, or nearly one-fifth of the population. Yet the income base of old age remains weak. NITI Aayog has noted that 70% of the elderly depend on

others while 78% have no pension cover. These numbers explain why India needs an inflation-indexed minimum pension floor, not as a substitute for contributory pensions, but as a basic layer of public risk-pooling for old age.

Ageing will also change the nature of healthcare demand. The pressure will come from the long-term management of hypertension, diabetes, dementia, disability, and palliative dependence. India has shown that sustained public investment can alter demographic outcomes. It did so for fertility, institutional deliveries, and child survival. The same mission-mode action will now be needed for embedding geriatric care into nursing practice, district health planning, and primary care.

The question of migration

The transition also has a federal dimension. The fastest-ageing States will increasingly need workers from younger States. This could be a source of national balance, but only if younger States invest aggressively in education, health, and skills, so that their workers do not merely move into low-wage informality elsewhere. It will also require older, richer, and more urbanised States to treat migrants not as temporary labour but as citizens who help sustain their economies and therefore deserve portable protection. A national labour market cannot rest on welfare systems tied narrowly to domicile. If workers move across State borders, their entitlements must move with them. Portability of welfare benefits must be one of the foundations of an ageing economy.

International evidence shows that low fertility can accompany prosperity. The difficulty is that India is entering mass ageing before completing the transitions that made ageing manageable elsewhere. India's low-fertility future will be sustainable only if stronger public systems gradually assume responsibilities that large families once carried quietly.

Furore over the Mekedatu project

Tamil Nadu may be waging a losing battle in its fight to get the project scrapped

STATE OF PLAY

T. Ramakrishnan

The row over the Meke-datu dam project, which has been a thorn in the relationship between Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, has resurfaced with the Tamil Nadu Assembly adopting a unanimous resolution against the Karnataka government's proposal for constructing a drinking water-cum-balancing reservoir across the Cauvery river at Mekedatu.

The reason for the resolution was apparently the preparation on the part of the upper riparian State to go ahead with the submission of a revised Detailed Project Report (DPR) on the Mekedatu proposal in light of the Supreme Court dismissing Tamil Nadu's petition to review a November 2025 decision; the court termed the State's challenge to Karnataka's proposed dam as "premature". The project envisages impounding 67.16 thousand million cubic ft (TMC ft) through a ₹9,000-crore drinking water-cum-balancing reservoir at Mekedatu, about 100 km from Bengaluru. It would have a 400 MW (megawatt) hydro power component but no irrigation component.

In the Supreme Court's 2018 judgment on the Cauvery dispute, Karnataka had been sanctioned an additional 4.75 TMC for Bengaluru's drinking water requirements.

On the face of it, the Meke-datu project, which is being proposed to cater to Bengaluru's requirements, should not even be a matter of concern to the lower riparian State. But what is complicating the issue is the trust deficit between the two riparian States, as a result of which Tamil Nadu views the



proposal with suspicion for legitimate reasons. The lower riparian State's basic point is that the Cauvery being deficit, no new project is permissible.

Karnataka Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar and his colleagues have said that the new dam will benefit Tamil Nadu too as it will serve as a balancing reservoir to regulate the flood flows from the upstream Krishnaraja Sagar and Kabini to the Mettur dam downstream in the lower riparian State.

A tense negotiation

In the last 10-odd years, the Tamil Nadu Assembly has passed, on several occasions, motions against the project.

However, a new element to the contentious matter is the lower riparian State's demand for a tribunal to examine the pros and cons of the project. Though the Tamil Nadu government sent a formal communication on March 4 to the Centre, this was kept under wraps till June 19, the day on which the House adopted the resolution.

The previous Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam government, which took the decision to seek a tribunal for the project, had, for inexplicable reasons, maintained silence and the present Tamilaga Vettri Kaha-gam government too followed suit till now.

However, the Leader of Opposition and former Deputy

Chief Minister Udhayanidhi Stalin disclosed it last week in the House and requested Chief Minister C. Joseph Vijay to include it in the resolution. Mr Vijay immediately agreed to the request but former Chief Minister and the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam general secretary Edappadi K. Palaniswami pointed out that there was a procedural lapse with regard to the way the amendment was incorporated in the resolution.

When Tamil Nadu had pursued the concept of a tribunal in the past to resolve the basic dispute over the sharing of Cauvery river water, it had done so after attending 23 bilateral or tripartite or multi-stakeholder meetings involving the governments of Karnataka, Kerala, and the Union Territory of Puducherry, besides the Central government. However, in the last 15 years, not even one meeting took place between the two principal States on the Mekedatu issue. Under such circumstances, it is not known whether the Union government will take a sympathetic view of Tamil Nadu's request, as the Inter-State River Water Disputes Act requires the Centre to accept the demand for a tribunal only when it is convinced that the dispute cannot be settled through negotiations.

Even if the idea is acceded to, there is no guarantee that Tamil Nadu will be able to succeed in its plan of scrapping the project.

To safeguard the interests of farmers and ensure that the drinking water requirements of Bengaluru be met, the two States can explore the possibility of building a dam in Rasimanal, which is in Tamil Nadu, for a similar capacity.

ramakrishnan.t@thehindu.co.in

Afghan women are increasingly turning to entrepreneurship

Female labour-force participation has fallen to around 5% while women's university enrolment has dropped from nearly 55,000 students in 2019 to zero

DATA POINT

Devvyanshi Bihani

The Taliban's draconian restrictions over the past five years have led to Afghan women facing an unprecedented rollback of rights and freedoms. As universities and many formal workplaces become inaccessible, a growing number of women are turning to small-scale entrepreneurship as one of the few remaining avenues to earn a livelihood. According to World Bank and ILO estimates, female labour-force participation declined from 14.6% in 2021 to 5.2% in 2022 and stood at approximately 5.1% in 2024 and 2025. Male participation remained close to 70% (Chart 1).

Data from Afghanistan's National Statistics and Information Authority shows the scale of the exclusion. In 2019, Afghan universities enrolled 54,861 female students. By 2023-24, that number had fallen to just 102, and by 2024-25 no female students were recorded in any universities. Female admissions followed a similar trajectory, dropping from 16,496 new entrants in 2019 to zero in both 2023-24 and 2024-25. Female graduates also disappeared from the system, falling from 9,937 in 2019 to 67 in 2023-24 and none in 2024-25 (Chart 2). Male enrolment also declined over the same period. UNICEF and UNESCO have attributed the deterioration in educational outcomes to a combination of restrictive policies, chronic underinvestment, recurring humanitarian crisis, widespread learning poverty, and teacher shortages.

These figures reflect the impact of Taliban policies that have barred women and girls from secondary and higher education. Additionally, more than 80% of female media workers lost their jobs when the Taliban returned.

As opportunities in education and formal employment narrowed, many women turned to bu-

sinesses. Data cited by the Afghan Women's Chamber of Commerce and Industry indicates that registered women-owned businesses increased from 2,421 before the restrictions to 9,162 afterward, while estimates of informal women-owned enterprises rose from 52,000 to 1,20,000 (Chart 3). Manufacturing (43%), services (30%) and trade (19%) were the largest sectors, including tailoring, handicrafts, carpet weaving and food processing.

As Afghanistan grapples with economic challenges and international isolation, Taliban officials have framed support for women-led businesses as part of a broader push for economic self-sufficiency. In a Reuters interview, acting commerce minister Haji Nooruddin Azizi said, "We always support women investors" and "We will support any item which can help us for self-sufficiency."

While the number of women-owned enterprises has grown, a 2024 UNDP survey of 3,122 women-led SMEs across 18 provinces highlights the challenges facing women entrepreneurs. Only 28% were formally registered and licensed, while nearly two-thirds operated without registration (Chart 4).

The lack of formal registration limits access to markets, finance and opportunities for growth. The strain is evident in the fact that 41% women entrepreneurs reported being in debt. However, only 5% had obtained loans from formal banks; for in order to secure a loan, you need to have a business background, a recommendation letter, and property documents which many Afghan women lack. So they primarily rely on family networks and personal savings to fund their businesses (Table 1).

As universities close their doors to women and their labour force participation remains among the lowest in the world, small businesses have become an economic lifeline for thousands of Afghan women seeking an income.

The last open door

The data for the charts were sourced from World Bank, Afghanistan's National Statistics and Information Authority, Afghan Women Chamber of Commerce and Industries and United Nations Development Programme

CHART 1: Gender-wise labour-force participation in Afghanistan before and after the Taliban's return to power in 2021

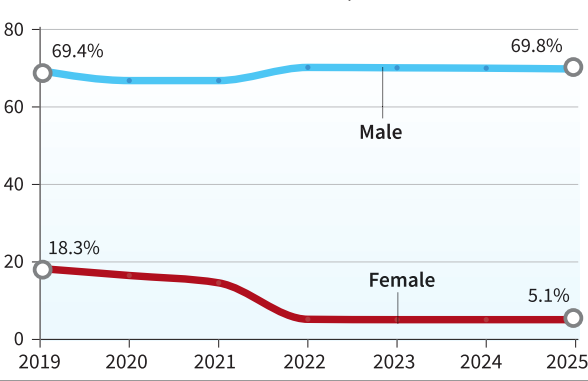


CHART 2: Female participation in Afghanistan's higher education system before and after the Taliban's return to power in 2021

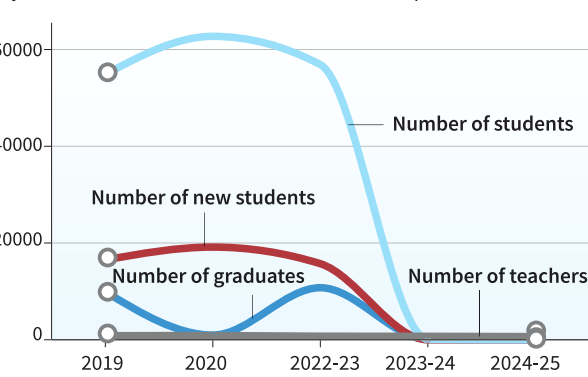


CHART 3: Number of registered and informal women-owned businesses in Afghanistan before and after the Taliban's return to power in 2021

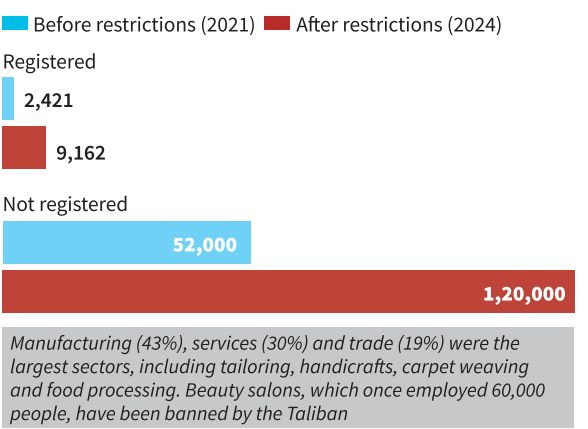


CHART 4: Registration status of women-led enterprises as of 2024, as per a UNDP survey

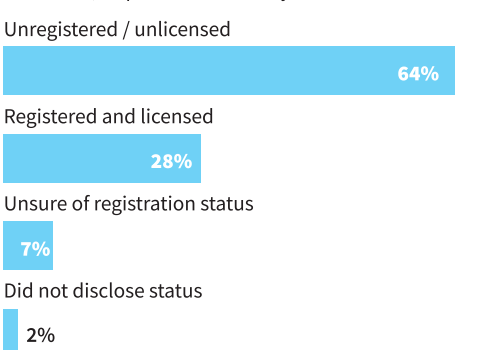


TABLE 1: Sources of financing for women-led small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Afghanistan as of 2024, as per a UNDP survey

Source of loan / financing	Percentage of women-led SMEs
Family	61%
Friends	45%
Other businesses	21%
Formal banks	5%
Remittances from abroad	5%
Microfinance institutions (MFIs)	2%
Community savings groups	2%
Money service providers/Hawalas	0.30%

Note: Survey respondents could select multiple options. Hence the percentages do not add up to 100%

FROM THE ARCHIVES

The Hindu.

FIFTY YEARS AGO JUNE 25, 1976

Heavy rain likely along west coast

Madras, June 24: The west coast is likely to receive heavy rain in the next two days. According to a special bulletin issued by the weather office here, a well-marked trough of low pressure has formed in the east Arabian Sea over Lakshadweep and off the Kerala, Karnataka, Goa coast.

A low pressure area also lies over the central and adjoining northwest Bay of Bengal off Andhra and Orissa coast.

The southwest monsoon will revive over Kerala and coastal Karnataka in the next 48 hours and widespread rain is expected over Lakshadweep and in Kerala and coastal Karnataka. Isolated heavy rain is likely in the extreme western parts of interior Karnataka during the same period. Squally weather will prevail over Lakshadweep and along and off the Kerala and Karnataka coast during the next two days.

Our Trivandrum correspondent reports: Conditions are now becoming favourable for the strengthening of the southwest monsoon over Kerala according to a special weather bulletin issued by the Meteorological Centre, Trivandrum.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JUNE 25, 1926

Jubilee of the telephone

Rugby, June 25: The jubilee of the telephone is being celebrated today.

At the institution of Electrical Engineers, Sir Oliver Lodge delivered a lecture, which was broadcast, on the history of the development of the telephone. Newspapers pay tributes to the memory of Professor Alexander Graham Bell, who is regarded as "the father of the telephone." The story is retold how Mr. Bell, a native of Edinburgh, married a girl who had the misfortune to be deaf and how he tried to invent an instrument that would enable her to hear. He chanced to discover the machine that enabled one to hear from a long distance. This he patented in America where he and his wife were living. He brought his invention to England in 1877 and England's first telephone company was registered in June of the following year. The first exchange was opened in August, 1879 at Coleman Street in the City of London with fewer than a dozen subscribers.

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

New tuberculosis cases found in Maharashtra in 35 days

6,111 Maharashtra has detected 6,111 new tuberculosis (TB) cases within the first 35 days of the Centre's 100-day TB-Free India campaign, while 11,091 villages in the State were identified as high-risk through an AI-based assessment system. Villages in Nagpur, Yavatmal, Amravati, Nashik and Raigad were among those identified. PTI

Children killed by Israel between October 2023-2025

20,000 An inquiry under the UN Human Rights Council called Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Occupied Palestinian Territory, said in its report on Tuesday that 30% of the Palestinians killed from October 2023 to October 2025, over 20,000 in total, were children. PTI

Number of persons who lost their food stamps in the U.S.

4.7 Over 4.7 million people have lost Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits, also known as food stamps, since U.S. President Donald Trump's signature tax and spending law took effect last July, as per data through March from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Changes to U.S.'s second-largest social safety-net programme took hold fastest in Arizona. PTI

Monthly transaction volumes on BHIM app in May

244 In million. The transaction volumes of the BHIM Payments App more than tripled between June 2025 and May 2026, according to NPCI BHIM Services Limited. Monthly transaction volumes on the app, developed by NPCI BHIM Services Limited, rose from 79.64 million in June 2025 to 244 million in May 2026, a release said on Wednesday. PTI

Number of Syrian convicts transferred home by Lebanon

128 Lebanon has transferred 128 Syrian convicts to their home country, a Lebanese security source said on Wednesday, marking the second batch of handovers under an agreement the two sides signed earlier this year. Overcrowded Lebanese prisons host around 2,000 Syrian nationals held on various charges. AFP

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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Why was the *NewsClick* case quashed?

Did *NewsClick* violate FDI rules or FEMA regulations? How did the absence of an FDI cap at the time affect the case? What role did the RBI's approval play in the ruling? What happened in the UAPA case against Prabir Purkayastha?

EXPLAINER

Aaratrika Bhaumik

The story so far:

The Delhi High Court has quashed the first information report (FIR) registered by the Economic Offences Wing (EOW) of the Delhi Police and the consequent money laundering proceedings initiated by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) against news portal *NewsClick* and its editor-in-chief, Prabir Purkayastha, over allegations of foreign funding. Holding the action to be a “mala fide and arbitrary” exercise of power, Justice Neena Bansal Krishna said it amounted to an abuse of the legal process and posed a threat to free and independent journalism.

What were the allegations against *NewsClick*?

The proceedings stemmed from two cases registered in 2020 by the EOW of the Delhi Police and the ED. The EOW case originated from a letter dated June 26, 2020, written by Sobhan Singh, who was an informant and not an aggrieved party, to the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, alleging that PPK NewsClick Studios Pvt. Ltd. had misappropriated funds and violated foreign direct investment (FDI) norms. The communication was subsequently forwarded by Vijay Kaushik, Under Secretary in the Ministry, following which the EOW registered an FIR.

The FIR alleged that *NewsClick* had received an investment of \$1.5 million from Worldwide Media Holdings LLC, a Delaware-based entity in the United States, at an inflated share valuation. The investigating agency claimed that the premium at which the shares were issued was intended to circumvent the 26% cap on foreign investment in digital news media. However, the investment agreement had been signed in March 2018, and the funds received in April 2018, more than a year before the 26% cap was introduced through a government press note on September 18, 2019.

The allegation that *NewsClick* had manipulated its share valuation also formed the basis of the alleged violations under the Foreign Exchange Management (Transfer or Issue of Security by a Person Resident Outside India) Regulations, 2017 (FEMA). The regulations require that shares issued by an Indian entity to a foreign investor be valued in accordance with an internationally accepted pricing methodology and not be transferred below fair value.

The record also showed that, before receiving the investment, *NewsClick* had written to the Information and Broadcasting Ministry in December 2017 seeking clarification on whether online news portals were subject to the FDI restrictions applicable to print media. In January 2018, the Ministry responded that “online publications on website/web portal do not fall under the ambit of print media”.

During the proceedings, reference was made to a status report dated July 26, 2021, signed by Assistant Commissioner of Police Anil Kumar of the EOW and supplied to *NewsClick*'s counsel. The report incorporated a response from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) stating that the foreign remittance had come through the automatic route and that no FEMA violation was disclosed.



Journalists protest police actions against news portal *NewsClick* at Press Club of India, New Delhi, in October, 2023. SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP

However, on July 29, 2021, the state sought to distance itself from the report and requested permission from the court to file a fresh status report. When a revised report was eventually filed on October 4, 2021, the RBI's observations were omitted. The EOW nevertheless maintained that *NewsClick*, despite being a loss-making entity, had received FDI at inflated valuations and alleged that the share valuation mechanism had been used to bypass regulatory restrictions. It further claimed that 45% of the foreign investment had been diverted.

Within a week of the FIR being registered, the ED initiated proceedings under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) by registering an Enforcement Case Information Report (ECIR), similar to an FIR, on the basis of the same allegations. The predicate offences cited in the FIR included criminal breach of trust, cheating and criminal conspiracy.

How did the UAPA case against *NewsClick* unfold?

Apart from the proceedings under FEMA and the PMLA, Mr. Purkayastha and *NewsClick*'s head of human resources, Amit Chakravarty, also faced prosecution under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA). In October 2023, the Special Cell of the Delhi Police arrested the duo following a report published by *The New York Times* alleging links between *NewsClick*'s funding and Chinese state-backed propaganda efforts. Mr. Chakravarty subsequently turned approver and was released from custody.

Mr. Purkayastha remained in Tihar Jail for nearly seven months before the Supreme Court, in May 2024, declared his arrest illegal and set aside the remand order. The court found that neither he nor his counsel had been furnished with the written grounds of arrest before he was remanded to custody.

A Bench comprising Justices B.R. Gavai and Sandeep Mehta held that communication of the grounds of arrest in writing by the investigating agency was “sacrosanct and cannot be breached under any situation”. The Bench observed that failure to furnish the grounds of arrest would violate the fundamental right guaranteed under Article 22(1) of the Constitution, which provides that no arrested person shall be detained without being informed of the grounds of arrest and shall not be denied

the right to consult and be defended by a legal practitioner of their choice.

Accordingly, Mr. Purkayastha was thereafter released on the grounds of not being provided a “communication of the grounds of arrest in written”, thus vitiating the arrest and subsequent remand.

What were the court's findings on the alleged FDI violations?

On the allegation of FDI violations, the court noted that the correspondence issued by the RBI approving the transaction between *NewsClick* and Worldwide Media Holdings LLC was sufficient to demonstrate that no violation had occurred. The court reasoned that the transaction had been cleared by the very regulator within whose domain the alleged offence fell. It also took note of the fact that no FDI cap on digital news media existed at the time the investment was made.

Justice Krishna also rejected the State's allegation that over 45% of the foreign investment had been siphoned off through salary payments, consultancy fees and rent. Referring to the company's financial records, the court noted that its expenditure exceeded its revenue during the relevant period.

“When a company is functioning, especially in the business of digital print media, such expenses are bound to occur. Even if it is accepted that there were overpayments and excessive expenditure incurred by the petitioner, it does not disclose any criminal offence. The allegation of siphoning is, therefore, not tenable,” the judge said.

Why did the court find that the offences of cheating and criminal breach of trust were not made out?

With regard to the offences of cheating under Section 415 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and criminal breach of trust under Section 406, the court pointed to the absence of any aggrieved party. It noted that Worldwide Media Holdings LLC, the entity that had invested funds in *NewsClick*, had never lodged any criminal complaint. The court further observed that the prosecution had failed to identify any person who could be said to have been deceived, cheated or otherwise suffered any grievance on account of the transaction.

The court also highlighted that Mr. Singh, on whose complaint the FIR was

registered, had no direct involvement in the transaction. It held that a commercial investment made in exchange for shares could not, by itself, amount to an entrustment of property so as to attract the offence of criminal breach of trust.

What did the court say about the money laundering charge?

The ED's money laundering case was primarily based on the allegation that Mr. Purkayastha and others had conspired to bring foreign funds into India through an investment in *NewsClick*. It is alleged that ₹9.59 crore (approximately \$1.5 million) was routed into the country under the guise of an investment in digital media, thereby attracting the offence of criminal conspiracy under Section 120B of the IPC. According to the agency, Mr. Purkayastha had colluded with Jason Pfletcher of Worldwide Media Holdings LLC and American businessman Neville Roy Singham in facilitating the inflow of funds.

The court, however, rejected the contention and pointed out that a charge of conspiracy requires material indicating an agreement to commit an illegal act or to achieve a lawful objective through unlawful means. Apart from what it described as “bald assertions”, the court found no material to suggest the existence of any such agreement or unlawful design. It further noted that despite the ED carrying out extensive investigations for nearly a year and a half, during which the petitioners and several employees were repeatedly summoned, no incriminating material had been placed on record.

“Aside from bald assertions of there being a criminal conspiracy, there is not a whisper of any incriminating allegation which would even remotely suggest the commission of the offence punishable under Section 4 of the PMLA (punishment for money laundering),” the court observed.

Having found the allegation of criminal conspiracy untenable, the court went on to hold that the ED's money laundering case could not survive once the underlying FIR was quashed. Relying on the Supreme Court's decision in *Vijay Madanlal Choudhary v. Union of India* (2022), it observed that where the predicate offence is set aside, money laundering proceedings founded on the same set of allegations cannot be sustained against the accused. Consequently, the ECIR was also quashed.

THE GIST

▼ The FIR alleged that *NewsClick* had received an investment of \$1.5 million from Worldwide Media Holdings LLC, a Delaware-based entity in the United States, at an inflated share valuation.

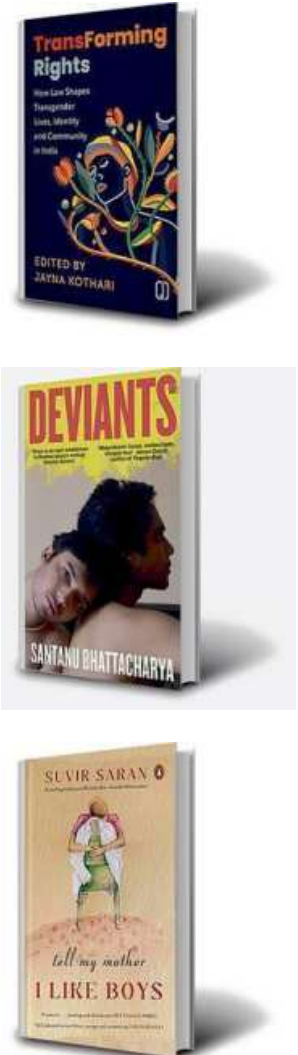
▼ The court noted that the correspondence issued by the RBI approving the transaction between *NewsClick* and Worldwide Media Holdings LLC was sufficient to demonstrate that no violation had occurred.

▼ The court held that in the absence of any aggrieved party, charges of cheating and criminal breach of trust could not be made out.

BIBLIOGRAPHY



People take part in the Karnataka Swabhimana Habba Pride March on June 21. SUDHAKARA JAIN



Mapping queer lives through books: identity, resistance and equality in India

A selection of fiction and non-fiction works offers a layered understanding of the evolving realities of queer life in India, spanning law, personal memory, family, and workplaces; they show how identities are shaped by legal frameworks, lived experiences, and intergenerational shifts

Soma Basu

Every June, the world observes Pride Month, which traces its origins to the 1969 Stonewall riots in New York City. In response to a police raid at the Stonewall Inn at Greenwich Village in the U.S., the LGBTQI+ began protests and demonstrations. This marked a pivotal turning point for the modern LGBTQI+ rights movement.

In India, the LGBTQI+ rights movement has been dynamic, securing significant legal protections for the community. However, the latest Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Amendment Act, 2026 – which removes the statutory recognition of self-perceived gender identity, introduces medical-board certification and bureaucratic verification requirements, and mandates inclusion in a National Transgender Registry – has brought the gap between legal recognition and lived reality into sharp focus once again.

One step forward, two steps back Medical gatekeeping is an infringement on dignity, autonomy, personal liberty, and privacy. So long as recognition remains conditional, equality remains incomplete. Advocate Jayna Kothari explains the relationship between law and the lived realities of transgender people in *Transforming Rights: How Law Shapes Transgender Lives, Identity and Community in India* (QD). The collection of essays examines India's transformation in transgender rights, from the recognition of gender self-determination and the decriminalisation of same-sex relations to the recent legislative rollback of self-identification rights.

Even as the courts have laid down a framework for equal protection under the

law, the trans community continues to face exclusion and discrimination, and remains engaged in a struggle for basic rights to education, healthcare, livelihood, and shelter. Kothari questions the contradiction in the compilation of voices of scholars, activists, lawyers, policy researchers, and community members, who have experience in working with the wider LGBTQI+ community. The chapters explore the constitutional trajectory of equality and protection in transgender rights cases, the implementation of reservations, questions of intimacy, the impact of increased surveillance and safety measures on trans lives, public attitudes, and structural exclusion. Drawing on legal, social, and community-based perspectives, the essays outline the progress made over the years, the continuing challenges, and the reforms still needed.

Lived experiences While the legal framework helps us understand the rights framework, it does not capture the lived realities of the community. It is in personal narratives, memoirs, and community storytelling that these experiences find expression. Existing outside traditional narratives is not easy for queer people, who are often compelled to create their own spaces. To write a memoir is to be deeply vulnerable with the reader. Michelin-starred chef Suvir Saran's *Tell My Mother I Like Boys* (Penguin Random House) is a deeply personal and hard-hitting memoir. It is a frank account of the abuse he endured and how he found sanctuary in the kitchen. For Saran, cooking was never just about taste, but about memory and survival. The story oscillates between the opening of Devi, the first Indian

restaurant in North America, and Saran's reckoning with identity and the loneliness that followed his success. He writes that he suffered enough heartbreak to stop being afraid of his own truth, and could therefore write an emotionally naked memoir without resorting to self-pity. He describes himself as an "unsummoned third child kept almost by accident," raised in Delhi in the 1970s, when plurality was an instinct rather than a slogan. Saran does not downplay the trauma of children who do not fit the mould; his accounts of teasing, shame, and internal panic are unflinching. The book also explores his life in Manhattan, marked by ambition, love, betrayal, infidelity, and loneliness. The honesty with which he lays bare his emotional interior strengthens the book. Saran is open about the relationships that shaped or broke him and talks about his mother who helped him heal when he returned to India. As Saran writes in the preface, "This book is not a chronicle. It is a monsoon. It pours, it pauses, it floods, it recedes, it returns."

Queerness across generations Saran's account opens up a broader question of how queer identity is also shaped within families and across generations. In *Deviants* (Fig Tree), Shantanu Bhattacharya writes a bold, multi-generational story of three gay men from the same family who, from the 1970s to the present day, fight against the tide for love and dignity. It is about Vivaan, a teenager, who discovers boundary-breaking love on his smartphone. His parents are aware of his gender identity, and Vivaan can count on their support. But Mambro, his uncle, born 30 years earlier, had it different when he fell in

love with a male classmate at a time when the persecution of gay people was rife under a colonial-era law criminalising homosexuality. And Mambro's uncle, Sukumar, a young man hopelessly in love with another young man, was forced by social taboos to keep their relationship a secret. Interweaving three distinct voices on queer life in India, the book provides insight into changing laws and attitudes towards homosexuality and offers a poignant account of how these shifts directly impact individuals. Apart from narratives of love and family, there are also books that explore queer identity in relation to institutions and workplaces. *Queeristan: LGBTQ Inclusion in the Indian Workplace* by Parmesh Shahani (Westland) is groundbreaking as a part memoir and part manifesto for HR professionals and executives on how to build safe, equitable, and profitable corporate environments in India. The author draws from his decade-long journey as a gay man in the corporate world in the post-Section 377 landscape to make a cogent case for LGBTQI+ inclusion and lay down guidelines for reshaping office culture in the country. The book traces the benefits reaped by industry giants such as Godrej, Tata Steel, IBM, Wipro, and the Lalit group of hotels, who have tapped into the power of diversity and revolutionised LGBTQI+-friendly workspaces. These books – memoir, fiction, and non-fiction trace the changing contours of queer life in India – its intimacies, its institutions, and the unfinished fight for equality. They reflect the ongoing struggle for acceptance in an unforgiving society, and help us understand how much has changed, and how much has remained the same.

THE DAILY QUIZ

As we enter the second half of 2026, here's a quiz on video games released so far. Identify the titles from the hints provided below

Mohammed Hidayat

QUESTION 1 A reimagining of James Bond from the studio behind the Hitman series.

QUESTION 2 The latest instalment of the long-running survival-horror franchise. You play as dual protagonists.

QUESTION 3 This new IP from Capcom follows an astronaut and an Android youngling as they fight their way through AI threats while trying to return to Earth.

QUESTION 4 A meditative yet tense mountain-climbing survival game with stunning landscapes.

QUESTION 5 From the makers of Returnal, this third-person roguelite shooter is set on a shape-shifting planet. Fast-paced combat and elements of cosmic horror elevate the gameplay. The main character is Arjun Devraj.

QUESTION 6 _____ is a 90s' coming-of-age narrative adventure game complete with stop-motion inspired animation and a loaded jukebox. It chronicles the last day of summer of three high-school friends. Fill in the blank.

QUESTION 7 This hard to play 2-D game with an anthropomorphic mouse evokes retro nostalgia with its pixel-art aesthetic and has generated constant Game of the Year buzz.



Visual Question: Unarguably the most awaited video game of the year. Pre-orders are expected to begin today. Identify the open-world video game title from the promotional still.

Questions and answers to the previous day's daily quiz:

- Who holds the record of scoring the most goals in a single World Cup match? **Ans: Oleg Salenko, Russia**
- Who holds the record of having played in most minutes in World Cup history? **Ans: Lionel Messi, Argentina – 2315 minutes till 2022 edition**
- Who is the only player to have won the Golden Ball and Golden Glove awards in the same World Cup tournament? **Ans: Oliver Kahn, Germany**
- Who won the Golden Boot and Golden Ball in the same World Cup and was part of the winning team? **Ans: Paolo Rossi of Italy**
- Who has won the World Cup as a player, coach/manager and also won the Best Young Player award? **Ans: Franz Beckenbauer, Germany**
- Which country withdrew from the 1950 World Cup because FIFA required players to wear boots, while they were accustomed to playing barefoot? **Ans: India**
- Visual: Who holds the records for youngest goal, hat-trick, and final goal in World Cup history? **Ans: Pele**

Early Birds
Tamal Biswas| Piyali Tuli| Sudhir Thapa| Suchit Narottam



FROM THE ARCHIVES

Know your English

S. Upendran

"Hi, Sorry, I'm late."
"I have been waiting for an hour. Where have you been?"
"I went to see my cousin Vishvanath at the nursing home. He is going to be operated tomorrow. His appendix is being removed."
"Doctors usually perform an operation on someone. They don't 'operate' someone, they 'operate on' someone. Your cousin is being operated on for appendicitis tomorrow."
"Operated on, eh? I see. How does this sound? The surgeon said that he planned to operate on the Principal some time next week."
"Why don't you leave your Principal out of your examples! Last week my best friend's mother was operated on. Tell me, who is the doctor who is going...."
"....I heard this morning that the doctor who is going to operate on my cousin isn't very good."
"Who told you that?"
"Madhu. He said that the last person that this doctor operated, died on the... I mean that the last person that the doctor operated on died on the operation table."
"That's terrible. Did you tell your cousin about this?"
"Yes, I did. But he is not at all worried. According to his opinion, if someone..."
"...you cannot say 'according to his opinion'. You can either say, 'according to him/her', or 'in his/her opinion'."
"I see. According to the doctors the operation is a minor one."
"In the doctors' opinion the operation is a minor one."
"According to my cousin, the operation is so minor that even a medical student could perform it with his eyes closed."
"Perform an operation with one's eyes closed! Good grief! In my opinion your cousin isn't taking things seriously."
"That's what my father thinks too! According to me, both of you....oops, sorry! You cannot say, 'according to me', right?"
"That's right! It's always 'according to someone else'. If you want to express an opinion, then you have to say..."
"....in my opinion. In my opinion you correct me too often."
"That's a good example. Or you could say, 'If you ask me, you correct me too often'."
"If you ask me, there is too much corruption our country."
"Let's not start talking about it please. People in this country only talk about it. They don't do anything about it."
"There's nothing we can do about it."
"Can I say the corruption in this country..."
"Why are you so fixated on corruption?"
"Fixated? What does it mean?... Wait let me guess. When you are fixated on something, you are always thinking about it. Am I right?"
"Excellent. You don't merely think about it, but you constantly talk about it as well."
"Like our friend Raja. He is constantly talking about cricket."
"Exactly! When you are fixated on something, it becomes your obsession. You are thinking about it excessively. You can be fixated on a person as well. My friend Janaki remains fixated on things which keep reminding her of her dead grandmother."
Published in *The Hindu* on January 30, 2001.

Word of the day

Estival:
of or occurring in summer

Synonyms: summery, aestival

Usage: *The clear blue sky had a distinct estival feel to it.*

Pronunciation: newsth.live/estival

International Phonetic Alphabet: /ˈɛs.tɪ.vəl/

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

Kingmakers: meet the insects that make India’s favourite mangoes

A study has found that allowing wild insects to access flowers dramatically increased mango yield by 350%, highlighting the importance of wild insects for mango pollination; yet, native bees that transfer pollen around orchards are under threat from the insecticides that protect the crop from pests

Kavitha Kannan

More than a thousand varieties of mangoes exist in India, the popular ones being Banganapalli, Dassheri, Alphonso, Badaami, Imaam Pasandh, and Malgoa. There is even a “Lalbagh” variety in Bengaluru. Many of us associate the fruit with a summer childhood memory, of eating it with our bare hands, the mango juice dripping on our clothes. More recently, the fruit has become popular on social media platforms, where users explain hundreds of ways to cook and eat it. This year, the fruit’s popularity reached a new height: the red carpet at the Met Gala in New York. Mangoes and Indian summers go hand-in-hand, yet do you know how this fruit comes to be? In other words, the mango tree gives out flowers... and then what happens?

Making a mango

Between December and March every year, mango trees across the country bloom and issue a sweet yet slightly fermented odour. Look closer at a mango tree in this time and you will find a branch with several bouquets of small, cream-coloured flowers. Each branch, which botanists call a panicle, contains a few hundred to up to 10,000 individual flowers. And a single mango tree can carry up to some 3,000 panicles, depending on its size and branching. Each one of these flowers is the start of a mango in the making. Some flowers carry only the male parts while others only the female parts, and sometimes there can be flowers with both (which are biologically called hermaphrodites). Regardless, for the mango to form, pollen must travel between these flowers.

This is where pollinators make their mark. There is a curious history here. Mango cultivars had once insisted that mango flowers are pollinated only by wind. But this theory could not explain why the flowers issued a sweet odour. It had to be to attract insects. To confirm that insects were indeed pollinators, researchers in Bengaluru teamed up with their peers from Germany to survey several Badami mango farms in the city’s urban and rural areas. Their findings, published in 2023, were striking: “We found that allowing flowers access to ants and flying visitors (bees, hoverflies, nonsyrphid flies), dramatically increased mango yield by 350%, highlighting the importance of wild insects for mango pollination,” the study paper read. These flying insects were found to include wild bees such as the dwarf honey bee (*Apis florea*), giant honey bee (*Apis dorsata*), and stingless bees (*Tetragonula sp.*). Other important flying visitors included hoverflies, which look like bees (*Syrphus sp.*), the common house fly (*Musca domestica*), and the blow fly (Calliphoridae family).

Effective pollination

The researchers also observed that the mango yields dropped when they barred crawling insects, such as ants, from the flowers. Soubadra Devy, a senior researcher at the Ashoka Trust for



Fruit test: Visitors at a stall during a three-day mango and jackfruit fest organised by Shivamogga HOPCOMS in Karnataka in the first week of June. Attaching a monetary value to the crops could nudge policy towards actively protecting pollinators, through changes at the farm and landscape levels. S.K. DINESH

Research in Ecology and the Environment, Bengaluru, and an author of the study, said ants are “messy pollinators” and that it is essential to investigate them as pollinators of mango in future studies. Dr. Devy also said she anticipates that the pollinator community is not any different for other Indian mango varieties since the “floral traits, i.e. the flower structure, pollen, and nectar are likely to be very similar”. Researchers have conducted similar studies in Mexico, on the ‘Ataulfo’ mango, and in Australia, on the ‘Kensington Pride’ variety – and have revealed similar findings. Both teams also took more steps to determine which insects were the pollinators. They calculated a ‘pollination effectiveness’ metric based on the abundance of pollinators, the number of visits to flowers (with a ‘legitimate’ visits quantified using video cameras on trees), and the number of pollen grains deposited. And both studies showed that wild and native insects were most efficient at pollination, producing a higher yield of fruits. Non-native bees to Mexico, such as European honey bees (*Apis mellifera*), were abundant and contributed to 80% of the pollination. Paradoxically, however, that did not result in a higher yield. The reason was that these non-native bees stayed around the same trees or in the same orchard and delivered the wrong

pollen, resulting in malformed fruits. On the other hand, the native bees transferred pollen between orchards, giving rise to more full and juicy fruits. **Farmers’ friends** Yet these native bees are under threat from the same insecticides that protect the mango crop from pests. Neonicotinoid insecticides, which are commonly sprayed on mango trees, are neurotoxic and affect cognitive functions in bees, such as navigation, learning, and memory, and eventually their survival. This ripples through the entire colony, as the insecticides travel to the pollen and nectar and are brought back to the hive by bees. The Bengaluru-based study observed that fewer bees visited the mango flowers, and the harvested fruits were lighter by almost 30%, resulting in a three-way loss for the farmer: expensive pesticides, loss of pollinators, and a loss in the fruit yield. Dr. Devy said monoculture farms that prevail in rural areas are more prone to pest attacks, and hence suffer higher pollinator loss as well. However, she also said she sees hope in bee-safe pesticides and in farmers timing their sprays to avoid peak pollinator activity – practices already in use in several western countries. “One recent welcome move”, in her words, was the Indian government recognising pollinators in the country’s new ‘environmental accounting’

framework. This framework recognised that India has more than 800 bee species, plus butterflies, moths, beetles, birds, bats and flies as pollinators and that they are ecologically important for agriculture. The government has also attached a monetary value equivalent to 8-10% of the total crop output value, amounting to ₹2.6 lakh crore in 2021-22, to pollinators. **Rights of pollinators** Attaching a monetary value could nudge policy towards actively protecting our pollinators, through changes at the farm and landscape levels. These could include, as the Mexico study suggested, increasing the spread of natural and semi-natural areas near orchards, such as native forest patches and wildflower strips, to attract more wild insects. Dr. Devy also pointed out that in May, stingless bees in Peru had become the first insects to win the legal rights to exist, thrive, and be represented in court. This is significant for the conservation of the species against insecticides, climate change, and competition from non-native insects. The question then arises: will India accord similar rights to its pollinators, which carry the weight of the country’s agriculture? As you relish this season’s mangoes, it could also be your food for thought. (Kavitha Kannan is a biologist and science writer. kavithakannan1994@gmail.com)



Artisanal gold miners work at a mining site in Mongbwalu, Ituri Province, DRC on June 16. AFP

Gold miners keep working despite Ebola crisis in DRC

Agence France-Presse

In the mines of Mongbwalu, the epicentre of an Ebola outbreak in the northeastern Democratic Republic Congo (DRC), gold prospectors have no choice but to overcome their fear of the virus and carry on their backbreaking work. “Ebola is real and it scares us. But if I stay at home, what are my children going to eat?” Justin Okame, an artisanal digger, asked. The DRC’s 17th Ebola outbreak was declared on May 15 after several unexplained deaths in Mongbwalu in the mineral-rich but volatile Ituri province. It has claimed more than 250 lives with 1,000 cases in the vast central African nation but the real extent of the crisis is difficult to assess. In total, 209 people have been infected in Mongbwalu, 89 of whom have died, according to official figures.

The DRC’s 17th Ebola outbreak was declared on May 15 after several unexplained deaths in Mongbwalu in the mineral-rich but volatile Ituri province

Several miners were among the victims, Richard Lokudu, the head of the local hospital, said. Behind one miner, greasy, sticky earth stretched as far as the eye could see. The ochre landscape was pockmarked with holes that dozens of artisanal miners tirelessly dug through. Men and women caked in mud broke up rocks that were then crushed to free the gold particles. They spend hours side by side, sweating and wearing themselves out in dire health and safety conditions. Some come from other provinces or neighbouring countries such as Uganda, hoping to earn a few hundred dollars a week, at best. Jeannette Akelo, a mother of seven and day labourer at the open-pit site, said that the diggers had no choice: they must continue to work “to survive”. The current outbreak is caused by the Bundibugyo strain for which there is no vaccine or specific treatment. Existing Ebola vaccines, developed between 2018 and 2019, are only effective against the Zaire strain, which has caused previous major outbreaks. In the hills of the rural commune, Red Cross workers in full protective suits have regularly intervened over the past few weeks to wrap bodies and prevent post-mortem transmission of the virus. In the DRC, most gold production comes from artisanal mining. After long hours, some stopped to eat a plate of rice with a gravy made from leaves. Others preferred not to waste time. With their bare hands, they mixed mercury into the brownish material extracted from the ground. The small greyish, heavy, shiny lump that formed will, once heated, turn into raw gold. “We don’t know who is infected or not, and after work everyone goes home,” Jean-Baptiste Liwawi said. The digger said he took ginger and some concoctions to ward off infection. Since the start of the outbreak, many patients have preferred to consult traditional healers rather than go to hospitals. Public mistrust runs deep in a region that has for years been ravaged by violence waged by various armed groups, which regularly carry out massacres. In Ituri, almost all gold deposits are controlled by community-based militias, who derive substantial income particularly through the imposition of taxes, according to UN experts. Most of the illegally mined gold is smuggled to Uganda, the experts said in a report on the DRC at the end of 2025.

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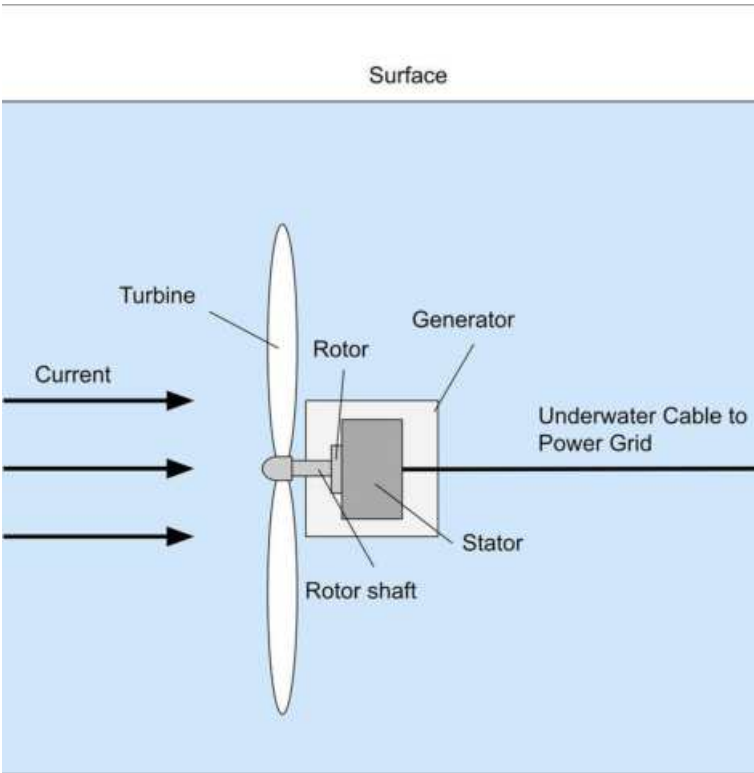
THE SCIENCE QUIZ

Unusual sources of energy

Vasudevan Mukunth

- QUESTION 1**
X uses a planet’s gravity to change a spacecraft’s speed and direction without using fuel. As the spacecraft swings by, it gains (or loses) momentum relative to the sun, borrowing a small bit of the planet’s orbital energy. The Voyager missions famously used this technique to get to the outer Solar System. Name X.
- QUESTION 2**
In 1969, the physicist Roger Penrose proposed that energy can be extracted from a rotating black hole. Within the _____ — the region just outside the event horizon — an object can be split in two, with one fragment spiralling into the black hole and the other escaping, carrying away more energy than it started with. Fill in the blank.
- QUESTION 3**
MHD generators produce electricity by passing an electrically conductive fluid, like an ionised gas, through a magnetic field. The

- moving charged particles induce a current, converting kinetic and thermal energy into electricity, no turbines needed. MHD generators are also highly efficient, but still experimental. What does MHD stand for?
- QUESTION 4**
A quantum physical phenomenon called the Y effect where two parallel, uncharged conducting plates placed really close together feel a force pulling them together. It arises because the plates restrict which virtual particles can exist between them versus outside, creating an unequal pressure from which a very small amount of energy can be extracted. Name Y.
- QUESTION 5**
Name the form of power that generates electricity from the difference in salt concentration between seawater and freshwater. As water flows across a semi-permeable membrane towards the saltier side, pressure builds between them and drives a turbine.



Visual: Name the turbine type described here. PUBLIC DOMAIN

- Answers to June 18 quiz:**
- When something you’ve just noticed seems to be everywhere – **Ans: Baader-Meinhof phenomenon**
 - Angle by which object flips in Dzhanibekov effect – **Ans: 180°**
 - Effect when a shampoo stream ‘leaps’ upwards – **Ans: Kaye effect**
 - When people respond to safety measures with more risk-taking – **Ans: Peltzman effect**
 - Star for whom information suppression backfiring effect is named – **Ans: Barbara Streisand**
- Visual: Magnus force**
- First contact:**
Tamal Biswas | K.N. Viswanathan | Anmol Agrawal | Pankaj Gharde | Prem Nath Tiwari

Meta transformation

Kunal Shah's appointment points to big India pivot

Meta's decision to appoint Kunal Shah as the global head of WhatsApp while simultaneously investing \$900 million in CRED is not just a leadership change; it is a signal of where the social media giant believes the future of its largest platform lies. With over three billion active users globally, WhatsApp is the world's dominant messaging platform and an indispensable utility for individuals, businesses, and governments alike. Yet, despite its extraordinary reach, WhatsApp remains under-monetised.

Meta has made some progress in getting businesses onto the platform. Millions of enterprises now use WhatsApp to communicate with customers, provide support, and showcase product catalogs. However, converting mass retail users into meaningful revenue streams has proved far more challenging. The platform's original promise of simple, private communication has also constrained the extent to which advertising and other traditional monetisation tools can be deployed. Payments were expected to be the next major growth engine. In India, WhatsApp enjoys unparalleled reach and operates in the world's largest real-time payments market. Yet, despite the explosive growth of UPI-based transactions, WhatsApp Pay has failed to emerge as a significant player. Consumers continue to prefer established platforms such as Google Pay, PhonePe, and banking applications.

This is where Shah's appointment becomes significant: unlike many Indian-origin technology executives who rose through the ranks at Silicon Valley firms, Shah built and scaled businesses in India. Through FreeCharge and CRED, he developed a deep understanding of consumer behaviour in one of the world's most complex digital markets. If he can convert even a fraction of WhatsApp's vast user base into active financial services users, he will have accomplished what previous leadership teams could not. Meta is increasingly seeking to position WhatsApp as the gateway to a broader ecosystem of commerce, services, and artificial intelligence. The launch of Meta AI within WhatsApp reflects this ambition, although the results so far have been mixed. OpenAI's ChatGPT, Anthropic's Claude, and Google's Gemini have established strong consumer recognition, particularly in markets such as India, where free versions are widely available.

India has long been WhatsApp's largest market and a testing ground for global technology products. Shah's elevation reflects India's growing importance not merely as a source of users but as a source of leadership and innovation. No doubt, Shah will face challenges. Running a hyper-growth, elite-focused startup like CRED is a world away from managing a piece of global infrastructure with three billion users. Shah will have to navigate a minefield of cross-border privacy laws, systemic fraud, digital safety, and varying AI regulations. If Shah succeeds, the significance will extend beyond WhatsApp. It would mean that the route to the top of Big Tech may no longer run exclusively through Silicon Valley.

POCKET



VISHNU VENUGOPALAN

There is a revealing moment in Aranya Sahay's critically acclaimed film *Humans in the Loop*, set among data-labelling workers in rural Jharkhand. Nehma, an Adivasi woman, is told to label caterpillars as pests so that a farming machine can learn to target them. She refuses. Having spent her life near the forest, she understands what the instruction overlooks: these caterpillars only eat the decaying parts of a plant. They save the crop, not destroy it. This scene captures a truth we often overlook: Artificial Intelligence does not understand or perceive the world on its own. It sees the world through the eyes of countless people like her, whose labour quietly shapes the intelligence we increasingly rely on.

This hidden human labour is an essential pillar of the AI economy, and India contributes more of it than almost any other country. The work has a plain name, data annotation, and a repetitive nature often involving drawing boxes around pedestrians in dashcam footage, transcribing speech, tagging tumours in medical images, hour after hour. Yet, this is the raw material from which every AI model is created. India is responsible for about 36 per cent of the world's image and video labelling, hosts the largest workforce on the planet, and supports the biggest tech firms. The work now also reaches small towns and villages, impacting the lives of people who had few other options.

However, India is not the only player. China handles about a tenth of the global workload, treating it as a serious industrial infrastructure and organising it into dedicated labelling centres. Chinese analysts report a shortfall of tens of millions of workers. This work has also spread to the Philippines, Kenya, Rwanda, and Eastern Europe. Africa is the fastest-growing frontier, expected to create well over a million jobs. A further cluster has emerged in Latin America, notably in countries facing real challenges, such as Venezuela, Colombia, and Peru. The pattern is clear, this work goes where people are capable, available, and, most importantly, affordable. Here lies an uncomfortable truth that often goes unnoticed. Despite its scale, much of it goes through informal digital platforms, and it does not show up properly in trade statistics. Instead, it gets lumped under a vague "computer and related services" category, rather than being identified for what it is: one of the country's real, fast-growing exports.

How vulnerable the upper levels of the AI industry became evident when Anthropic's two most capable models, Mythos 5 and Fable 5, were suddenly cut off from international users for national-security reasons, just days after



GETTY IMAGES

The export India hasn't named yet

LEVERAGE POTENTIAL. A huge hidden workforce is involved in data annotation, the raw material for every AI model. They must be made visible, valued and supported

their launch. Models that received huge attention went dark within hours. This episode matters less than what it exposed: the prized components of the AI stack, namely, the frontier models, advanced chips, and associated regulations, can be disabled by decisions made far away. India recognises this predicament and is right to invest in its own models and chip industry. However, there is a third essential aspect, simpler and already in its possession, that deserves equal attention: the data that every model, whether domestic or foreign, must learn from. This layer resides here, shaped by the judgment of the country's own people, and no external order can turn it off.

Whether this becomes real bargaining power with technology giants depends on choices yet to be made. As long as the work remains informal and hidden, those who do it have little leverage and no incentive to step into the open. A traceable dataset, consented to and created by fairly treated workers, should not be bargained down to the last rupee. It is a premium product that the world lacks, and the country that labels the

India is responsible for about 36 per cent of the world's image and video labelling, hosts the largest workforce on the planet, and supports the biggest tech firms.

world's data carefully will find that it holds a quiet but significant asset. India has an opportunity to become not just the world's AI workshop, but also a model for fair digital work. The new labour codes, which extend minimum wage protections to all workers and bring gig and platform workers within the protection of the law, are an important step in that direction. Yet laws alone are not enough.

Many data annotators around the world still earn very low wages, and workers on pay-per-task platforms often fall below a living wage once unpaid training and idle time are considered. In India too, experiences vary widely, from stable salaried jobs to precarious microwork. Whether a job empowers someone or wears them down should not depend on the luck of the employer they find. Getting these right matters beyond wages. Data annotation can create flexible work opportunities for women, especially in smaller towns and rural areas where formal jobs are scarce. Supported by fair standards and opportunities to grow, this hidden workforce could become an engine of more inclusive growth and higher female labour force participation.

THE NEXT WAVE OF AI What lies ahead is even more consequential because the next wave of AI is physical. Robots learn by observing people, and the market for humanoid machines is forecast to grow from \$6.24 billion in 2026 to \$165.13 billion by 2034, according to Fortune Business

Insights, with Goldman Sachs projecting over 1.4 million units shipped by 2035. Each of those machines must be trained on human demonstrations. This is harder, more complex and better-paid work than simple tagging. Robotics data, unlike text, demand human reviewers with genuine physical intuition. It is precisely the kind of grounded, hands-on judgment in which India's annotation workforce already has depth. The country can supply it as anonymous, disposable labour, or as the work of a recognised, well-treated and skilled workforce. The difference is worth a great deal in both commercial and human terms.

Three steps can set India on this path. First, count the work. A national survey can tell us who these workers are, what they earn, and how their skills are evolving. Second, name it. Data services should be recognised as a distinct export category in trade negotiations and economic statistics, so that the sector is visible, valued, and actively supported. Third, protect those who do it. Working with industry, India can build a framework for fair pay, certification, and pathways into higher value work, building on the opening provided by the new labour codes. Done well, this opens a route into the middle class for hundreds of thousands who have few others offering a digital complement to the manufacturing jobs the country is working to create, and one that plays to India's strengths.

The writer is an IAS officer. Views are personal

Rocky start to US-Iran peace negotiations

Differences crop up over issues relating ceasefire in Lebanon, unfreezing of Iranian assets, nuke inspections

Sridhar Krishnaswami

Only the very naïve would have been under the impression that the meeting between the US and Iran to nail down the finer details of a peace deal in a 60-day time-frame is going to be easy. Or for that matter, that the two sides were not going to dispute what the other had said or implied in the course of negotiations. This is precisely what is taking place in Switzerland where even the first day got off to a rocky start with the Iranians supposedly walking out protesting the "bullying" of President Donald Trump in social media posts and in an interview to Fox News.

For a conflict of 100 days plus that started without clearly defined objectives, Lebanon has become one of the major sore points of contention. For quite some time Tehran has been maintaining that a total ceasefire in Lebanon should be adhered to if the deal with the US has to mean anything at all. But for all the talk of ceasefire and ongoing negotiations between the US, Israel and presumably even Iran in Washington, the government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu refuses to

take the heat off the Hezbollah.

The Hezbollah is perhaps the only standing proxy of Iran in the Middle East with the Hamas now virtually decimated. But Tel Aviv has said that it will not let up its offensive against the fighters or remove its presence from southern Lebanon.

The Hezbollah started firing rockets into northern Israel when the US started its bombing runs against Iran on February 28. In ways more than one, Lebanon plays a central role in any comprehensive deal materialising between Washington and Tehran; and in an election year it remains to be seen how much pressure President Trump is able to lay on Prime Minister Netanyahu, who, incidentally, also faces polls.

BUYING FROM THE US In Switzerland, differences have also cropped up on the subject of sanctions and unfreezing of Iranian assets and these go much beyond the question of timing.

According to reports, talks are under way to have frozen Iranian assets released, but with a caveat that Tehran could use these funds to buy food and



IRANIAN ASSETS. JD Vance dictating how the released funds must be spent

medical supplies only from the US. "If Iranian assets are ever unfrozen, they're going to make American farmers richer and feed the Iranian people," Vice President JD Vance has said. But Iran says it should have full freedom on how it spends the money, including in the purchase of non-sanctioned goods.

The real and major stumbling block is on the nuclear assets and programme of Iran with Washington insisting that Tehran has agreed to allow inspectors from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) back into the country. If Vice President Vance claimed on Monday that discussions with the IAEA

could be happening "as soon as today", Iranian foreign ministry insisted that "no new commitments" on nuclear inspections had been made. And President Trump added his bit saying that despite "protestations and false statements to the contrary", Tehran had "fully and completely agreed" to inspections. "If they did not agree to this, there would be no further negotiations," he wrote on social media.

In all the brave talk, there is a bottom line for President Trump and the clerics: the politicians need to act tough. If the regime in Iran is quite mindful of the backlash it is receiving from hardliners for even talking to Washington, President Trump has more on his plate than the upcoming Congressional elections.

The IAEA and its inspectors are nothing new to Iran, but President Trump knows that critics will invariably be comparing how this nuclear deal is "better" than what President Barack Obama put together in 2015 that was binned in 2018 on the pretext of being weak.

The writer is a senior journalist who has reported from Washington DC on North America and United Nations

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Digital agriculture push

This refers to 'Rural digital push' (June 24). The Centre's initiative on allocation of ₹150 crore for promoting digital agriculture is commendable. Of the key factors responsible for its proliferation, digital infrastructure, device affordability and digital literacy play vital roles. While there is no dearth of infrastructure as of now, which has reached almost every rural pocket, affordability of smartphones by all and possessing basic digital literacy among rural masses influence the plan of digital push. The Centre can plan in bringing out a low cost model of smartphones with basic features.

The Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan, which was discontinued by the Centre two years ago, has to be revived to help improve digital literacy among rural masses, especially among women.

RV Baskaran
Pune

Improving TN's finances

This refers to the editorial 'Troubled finances' (June 24). At a time when revenues from various sources are declining, the Tamil Nadu government is right in focussing on revenue reforms. However, fiscal prudence can be achieved only if unproductive expenditures are

contained. Most importantly, the government must prevent its debt burden from ballooning. By investing more aggressively in industrial infrastructure and creating a conducive environment for investment, the State government can stimulate growth, expand its revenue base, and gradually reduce the disproportionate burden of interest payments relative to capital expenditure. For the next five years, the biggest challenge will be to fulfil its poll promises while ensuring that its debt remains within sustainable limits.

S Lakshminarayanan
Ko-Puvanur, Vriddhachalam Taluk, TN

Margin trading

This refers to 'RBI's timely move on margin trade' (June 24). The concern is well-placed. Margin trading expanding to retail investors is not inherently problematic, but the risk concentrates quickly when the margin book grows faster than the quality of collateral backing it. Bank lending to capital markets crossing ₹2.81 lakh crore deserves regulatory attention, not reassurance. SEBI and RBI need better real-time coordination on broker exposure data before the next bout of market volatility tests the system seriously.

SM Jeeva
Chennai

El Nino contingency plans

Appropos 'Crops in 111 districts most vulnerable to monsoon deficit, says Govt' (June 24). Plantation crops need a specific and foolproof plan in view of its annual/biannual cropping culture. With reservoir levels at its lowest, groundwater depleted, water for human and livestock getting priority, the government must immediately implement plans to supply treated water from urban localities so as to save delicate plantation crops, which cannot be revived once they wither from water starvation.

Rajiv Magal
Halekere Village, Karnataka

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MSMEs: Time to step up

Scaling up MSMEs is vital for global competitiveness

Alok Mittal

India's MSMEs have long been defined by their resilience. The next phase of their journey must be defined by scale.

According to the Economic Survey 2025-26, MSMEs are a cornerstone of India's economy, contributing 31.1 per cent to GDP, accounting for 48.58 per cent of exports, and generating 35.4 per cent of manufacturing output. With over 7.47 crore enterprises employing nearly 32.8 crore people, the sector is India's second-largest source of employment after agriculture. Yet, despite their scale and importance, too few enterprises make the transition from micro businesses to sustainable, mid-sized companies. India's next phase of growth will depend on changing that.

While the country has millions of micro enterprises, relatively few grow into the mid-sized businesses that create quality jobs, strengthen exports and drive productivity.

Many enterprises struggle to survive their early years and never realise their full potential. Their journey can be strengthened through better access to advisory support, mentoring, formalisation pathways and growth capital. Seller financing, in particular, deserves greater attention. Access to timely liquidity often determines whether an enterprise can fulfil larger orders, navigate elongated payment cycles and scale sustainably.

The objective should not simply be to create more MSMEs, but to enable more MSMEs to become enduring institutions.

DIGITAL INFRASTRUCTURE

India's digital public infrastructure has transformed identity and payments. The next opportunity lies in extending the same spirit of innovation to commerce and credit. Platforms such as TReDS have improved invoice financing and brought greater transparency. But as the MSME ecosystem becomes more diverse and supply chains more fragmented, the need for complementary frameworks is becoming increasingly evident.

Seller financing deserves particular focus. While invoice financing has gained momentum, expanding access to working capital for sellers can help enterprises manage cash flows, fulfil larger orders and scale more sustainably. Specialised B2B ecosystems can further reduce



MSMEs. From resilience to scale
SIVA SARAVANAN S

friction and improve efficiency, complementing broad-based digital infrastructure and enabling businesses to transact and grow more seamlessly.

The next chapter of India's digital infrastructure story should focus on making commerce easier, strengthening market linkages and broadening access to capital.

Artificial intelligence has the potential to become a force multiplier for small businesses. From inventory management and forecasting to customer engagement and compliance, AI can help improve productivity without requiring large investments.

The real opportunity lies in making these capabilities affordable and accessible beyond metropolitan India. India's AI story will remain incomplete if productivity gains remain concentrated among a few.

Women-owned enterprises represent one of India's biggest untapped growth opportunities. According to government data, women account for over one-fifth of MSMEs registered on the Udyam platform. Yet access to capital, networks and markets remains uneven.

Expanding their participation is an economic imperative that can strengthen employment and local economies. A broader and more inclusive entrepreneurial base will ultimately make India's growth story more resilient.

As global supply chains continue to diversify, India has an opportunity to emerge as a stronger manufacturing and export hub. According to the Economic Survey 2025-26, India currently accounts for an estimated 2.9 per cent of global manufacturing value added and 1.8 per cent of global merchandise exports, highlighting the significant headroom available to deepen its participation in global value chains.

For India's MSME story the next decade must be about scale.

The writer is the Co-founder and CEO of Indifi Technologies

The energy intensity paradox

GUZZLER. Despite renewable energy push, energy use in manufacturing has risen due to price volatility, shifting fuel usage



SUNIL KUMAR SINHA

The US-Iran conflict has triggered a major global energy shock. As a result, a country like India, which relies heavily on imports to meet its crude oil demand, is facing a fuel price shock. This has had severe macroeconomic and social consequences such as spike in transportation/supply-chain costs, fuelling inflation, weakening currency, and shrinking household disposable income.

Energy shock in the past and even now is a grim reminder for the country to accelerate movement towards renewable energy to secure long-term energy independence.

India in the COP26 Summit at Glasgow had spelled out its commitment to energy transition based on five declarations — (i) a renewable energy capacity of 500GW by 2030, (ii) meeting 50 per cent of its energy requirements from renewable energy by 2030, (iii) a reduction of carbon emissions by one billion tonnes till 2030, (iv) a reduction of carbon intensity by 45 per cent from 2005 levels by 2030, and (v) become a net zero economy by 2071.

Since moving away from fossil fuel to renewable energy will be a long-drawn process, one of the critical components of achieving India's declaration at COP26 Summit has been the reduction of energy intensity — that is, energy used per unit of output/value addition in the production process.

The progress of energy transition critically hinges on the extent to which a robust and enabling environment backed by a policy framework for energy efficiency, energy access and renewable energy can be created. India, to a large extent, has been able to do it. Thus, the pace of thermal power plant expansion has slowed and expansion of renewable power has increased considerably. Beyond supply, the focus is also on improving energy efficiency/energy conservation and decarbonisation of key demand sectors.

While energy conservation in India began in the 1970s (triggered by the global oil crisis of 1973), it expanded in subsequent years to include other sources of energy. It culminated in the Energy Conservation Act (EC Act) of 2001 with the aim to reduce energy intensity of the Indian economy. The EC Act was amended in 2022 to include renewable energy mandates for large energy-intensive consumers and it proposed a carbon credits trading scheme.

A glance at KLEMS data provided by

Energy intensity* (% , energy/output) of manufacturing sector

	FY81- FY84	FY85- FY89	FY90- FY94	FY95- FY99	FY00- FY04	FY05- FY09	FY10- FY14	FY15- FY19	FY20- FY23
Manufacturing sector									
Food products, beverages and tobacco	1.7	1.7	1.9	2	2.3	2.3	1.6	1	1
Textiles, textile products, leather and footwear	4.3	4.7	4.2	5.8	5.9	4.9	4.5	3.9	3.9
Wood and products of wood	1.2	1.2	1.8	1.9	1.7	1.5	1.1	0.8	0.8
Pulp, paper, paper products, printing and publishing	6.1	6.4	6.8	7.7	6.8	5.1	6.1	7.2	7.7
Coke, refined petroleum products and nuclear fuel	1.2	1.7	2.1	2.3	1.5	1.3	1.3	1.7	1.7
Chemicals and chemical products	10.1	9.1	6.8	6.4	7.7	6.8	4.7	3	3
Rubber and plastic products	3.1	3.4	4.7	6	5.2	3.3	3.2	3.6	3.8
Other non-metallic mineral products	12.8	14.7	15.1	13.8	15.4	16.4	16.5	16.9	17.9
Basic metals and fabricated metal products	9	9.9	9.7	8.8	12.7	13.7	13.3	13.9	13.9
Machinery, nec.	2.2	2.6	3.8	4.7	3.9	2	1.4	1.4	1.5
Electrical and optical equipment	2.3	2.4	2.9	3.8	3.5	3	3	3.1	3.3
Transport equipment	3.2	3.6	4.9	6.6	5.6	5	6.2	6.8	7.2
Manufacturing, nec; recycling	1.9	2.2	3.2	3.2	1.7	1.2	1.8	2.2	2.2
Manufacturing sector	4.4	4.9	5.2	5.5	5.7	5.5	5.1	5.2	5.6

Source: KLEMS Data, RBI *measured as the value of energy consumed per unit of value of output (both in real terms)

the Reserve Bank of India shows that the energy intensity measured as the value of energy consumed per unit of value of output (both in real terms) after peaking in the first half of 2000, declined till the second half of 2000, remained flat till the second half of 2010 and increased thereafter.

SECTORAL PATTERN

The sectoral picture is, however, somewhat different. While the energy intensity of services almost mirrors the economy-wide trend, industry/manufacturing shows a sustained increase in energy intensity since early 1980 till the first half of 2000, and it remained nearly flat throughout 2010 and increased thereafter. The energy intensity of agriculture, though much lower, also showed a rising trend during the first half of 2010 and has remained flat thereafter.

Among the various sectors of the Indian economy, manufacturing is the biggest user of energy. It consumes a little more than half of the energy consumption after excluding the energy use by households.

The data show energy intensity is relatively high in manufacturing sectors such as 'other non-metallic mineral products' (this includes cement), 'basic metals and fabricated metal products'

Among the various sectors of the Indian economy, manufacturing is the biggest user of energy. It consumes a little more than half of the energy consumption after excluding the energy use by households

(this includes basic iron and steel and aluminium), 'pulp, paper, paper products, printing and publishing', 'chemical and chemical products', and 'textiles, textile products, leather and footwear'.

In fact, except the latter two industries there has been a rise in the level of energy intensity over the years. Some of the other manufacturing sectors where the energy intensity went up during FY00-FY04 and FY20-FY22 are 'manufacturing nec, recycling' (28.7 per cent), 'transport equipment' (28.1 per cent), and 'coke, refined petroleum products and nuclear fuel' (18.2 per cent). No doubt, the rise/stagnation in the energy intensity of the Indian economy in general and its different sectors in particular lately are a cause of worry but then how can it be reconciled with the other fact that the country not only achieved but surpassed some of the key COP26 commitments such as having non-fossil installed capacity at 50 per cent and reducing its GDP emissions intensity by around 36 per cent from 2005 levels by 2030. This seemingly contradictory outcomes need to be put in perspective lest we arrive at the wrong conclusion.

PRICE IMPACT

Since KLEMS data on energy consumed is in value terms, relative movement of energy prices to output prices can have a bearing on energy intensity. While the implicit price deflator of energy input in manufacturing declined by 3.3 per cent during FY13-FY18, the implicit price deflator of manufacturing output increased by 4.7 per cent.

It may be worthwhile to mention that global crude oil prices had crashed towards end-2014 and remained soft/moderate with intermittent and short-lived uptick till the Russia-Ukraine conflict erupted in

February 2022. The lowering of the real price of energy in manufacturing (energy price divided by output price) appears to be the reason for rise/stagnation in the energy intensity of manufacturing from the second-half of 2010 onwards. In other words, it appears that energy prices had a significant impact on the energy consumption and in turn energy intensity.

The second probable explanation could be the absence of one-to-one correspondence between output produced and energy consumption. It appears that in the period of growth in manufacturing sector output, there is downward pressure on energy intensity as output growth is higher than energy input growth. But it does not hold vice versa. Therefore, as the output growth in manufacturing slowed down during FY16-FY19 to FY20-FY22, the energy intensity did not decline commensurately.

The third probable explanation could be the substitution of coal/electricity in manufacturing by petroleum coke due to its soft/moderate prices. Bulk of the petroleum coke consumption in India took place in cement manufacturing followed by aluminium.

The aforesaid three probable reasons, highlight the ongoing structural and economic challenges. Fluctuating energy prices, slower industrial growth, and shifts in fuel usage have influenced energy intensity patterns. Therefore, alongside expanding production of renewable energy, strengthening energy efficiency measures and promoting cleaner industrial practices will have to remain a policy priority to ensure India's sustainable and energy-secure economic growth.

The writer is Professor of Economics at Institute of Development and Communications, Chandigarh. Views are personal

thehindubusinessline.

TWENTY YEARS AGO **TODAY.**

June 25, 2006

Aditya Birla group buys Canadian BPO firm

The Aditya Birla Group is acquiring a Canada-based BPO company for \$125 million (₹575 crore at ₹46 a dollar). TransWorks, a BPO provider and a subsidiary of Aditya Birla Nuvo, will buy the Toronto Stock Exchange listed company.

Salcomp of Finland to set up plant near Chennai

Salcomp Plc of Finland, a leading manufacturer of mobile phone chargers, will invest about ₹35 crore in a plant at Sriperumbudur, about 45 km west of Chennai. The plant will come up at the suppliers' park within the manufacturing facility of Nokia, the Finnish telecom equipment manufacturer.

Mukesh, Anil groups strike different notes

The fresh spat between Mukesh and Anil Ambani groups is now coming to centre around two issues: whether a power plant (or an airport) is incidental or not to the development of a Special Economic Zone; and whether the non-compete agreement of January 2006 that exists be tween the two groups was executed by the Mukesh Ambani group "unilaterally", as claimed by the Anil Ambani group.

Europe heat wave strains power supply

Eva Brendel
Francois de Beaupty

Europe's electricity system is under mounting pressure from an intense heat wave, with extreme swings in power prices as soaring temperatures drive up demand and curb output.

In France, several nuclear reactors are unable to operate at full capacity, while wind power generation is weak across much of Europe as the high pressure system stills air currents. Record-breaking temperatures are also causing grid equipment to fail.

Meanwhile, sweltering households and businesses are ramping up the use of air-conditioning, pushing prices to

multiyear seasonal highs. Average electricity prices in Germany and the UK this month are on track for their highest June level since the 2022 energy crisis. In France, the cost of electricity is heading for the highest June average since 2023, according to EPEX Spot data. High power prices do not necessarily indicate lack of supply. Rather, they signal that the power system is becoming tighter and give an incentive to bring more expensive sources of electricity online.

In France and Germany, costlier fossil-fuel power plants have been playing a larger role since the heat wave began. These countries have seen increasingly sharp evening price spikes as cooling demand rises and solar



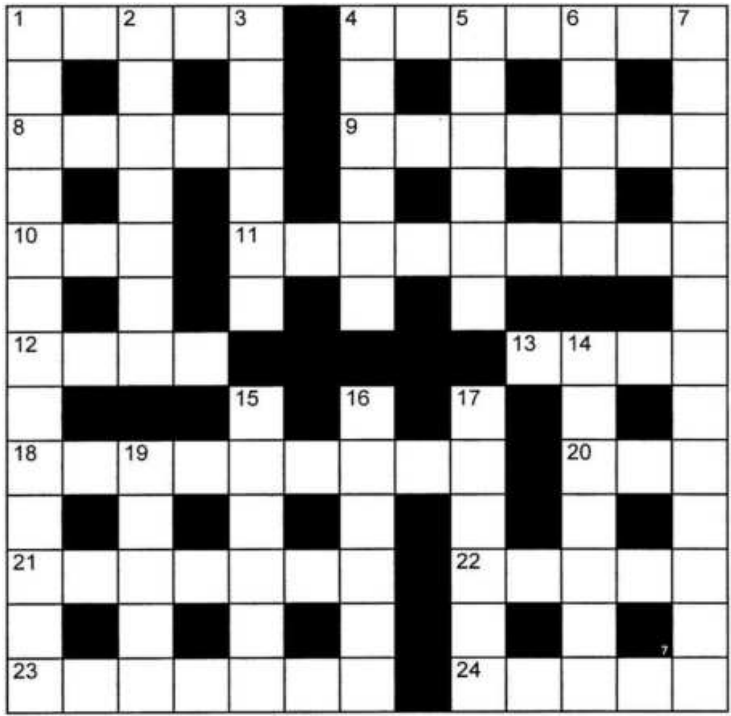
EUROPE. Soaring temperatures REUTERS

generation fades. In the UK, grid operator National Energy System Operator issued a rare summer electricity margin notice for Wednesday evening, warning of a potential supply shortfall of 1.4 gigawatts and asking generators to make any additional capacity available.

In France, several nuclear reactors are not operating at full capacity because warmer river water limits cooling operations in order to protect the waterways' ecosystems.

In Switzerland, the Beznau nuclear power plant has also reduced output until Thursday due to high water temperatures in the Aare river, operator Axpo said. Small outages have been reported at Germany's Niehl 3 gas-fired power plant, which has reduced output. It's possible that other gas-fired units are facing similar constraints, as high outdoor temperatures can force such plants to reduce output during the hottest hours of the day, said Sabrina Kernbichler, an analyst at Energy Aspects Ltd. BLOOMBERG

BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2679



EASY

ACROSS

- Diets, loses weight (5)
- Support for rider's foot (7)
- Body of flowing water (5)
- Answers (7)
- Commercial vehicle (3)
- Sorrow for sin (9)
- Chore (4)
- Itemise out (4)
- One with managerial job (9)
- Chop down (3)
- Makes one lose time (7)
- Farewell (5)
- Longed for (7)
- Pull and twist (5)

DOWN

- Day preceding Ash Wednesday (6,7)
- Makes something up (7)
- Awkward predicament (6)
- Season (6)
- Ascribe (6)
- Be the ruler (5)
- Refused to take responsibility (6,3,4)
- Think how it could be (7)
- A melting together (6)
- Failed to meet (6)
- A meal (6)
- Supernumerary (5)

NOT SO EASY

ACROSS

- In craft I'm after the pounds one loses in weight (5)
- Agitation Rupert half used to put his foot in it (7)
- Test, perhaps, the water (5)
- Answers commercial traveller with untruths (7)
- Vehicle at the front of the troops (3)
- It has two ways among coppers to show sorrow for sin (9)
- What's undertaken by host finally on demand (4)
- Go over at sea a strip from the border (4)
- About four put to death a man in managerial job (9)
- School test unendingly set back by cutting implement (3)
- Instead of adjustment, keeps one back (7)
- Perish in Austrian and Uruguay capitals, one says on going (5)
- Longed for a time to get a donkey (7)
- Take a different form around the West to pull one's nose (5)

DOWN

- Hovers around for twenty-four hours when pancakes are made (6,7)
- At home, archdeacon has the street up and makes it up (7)
- Awkward situation – not much to spread! (6)
- It is bound to supply water at one time of the year (6)
- One sees me about to place it and ascribe it (6)
- To sit on the throne but not remain dry, one is told (5)
- Handed over 100 cents but wouldn't accept responsibility (6,3,4)
- In the East, wise men are taken in – just think! (7)
- Melting is fun? Nothing so difficult! (6)
- Failed to make contact and was aware of absence (6)
- Meal that's concerned with history (6)
- Something else for former spouse to give up: painting! (5)

SOLUTION: BL TWO-WAY CROSSWORD 2678

ACROSS 1. Down payment 8. Write 9. Console 10. Imprest 11. Blush 12. Garish 14. Fester 18. Pilau 19. Caution 21. Clatter 23. Truce 24. Shepherdess

DOWN 1. Dowsing 2. Whisper 3. Piece 4. Yachts 5. Ennoble 6. Two 7. Teeth 13. Scuttle 15. Tribute 16. Runners 17. Scorch 18. Picks 20. Utter 22. Ass



A thought for today
The sound of a kiss is not so loud as that of a cannon, but its echo lasts a great deal longer
OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES, SR

Landing It Rich

Be it Trump, Indian bureaucrats, or ministers, using privileged info for private gain is unethical, even if legal

Trump bought shares of a major computer maker in Feb. In May, his govt gave the company a \$10bn defence contract, making its share price jump. Within weeks, Trump's stake had more than doubled in value. Would you consider his investment aboveboard? While it might be defensible legally, does it pass on ethics? That's also the question at the heart of the Ujjain controversy, involving MP's CM Mohan Yadav, his family, and their real estate firms.

It's been alleged that they bought 137 plots – a total area of 168 acres – in locations that were later marked for infra projects. This change of land use raised property value sharply, in what might be called a windfall for the new owners. Legal? Perhaps. But ethical? Be it business, politics or sport, the rules of fair play have no room for 'insider trading' – exploiting privileged information for gain. In horse racing, for example, if the crowd favourite is lame, and its owner and trainer put their money on the second-best horse, is it a game of chance anymore?

When it comes to land for urbanisation, the scope for price rigging is immense, because price is seldom a function of the land's own attributes. It varies with where you drop a highway, or a business park, or a university. Just last month, a newspaper exposed another possible case of bureaucratic connivance in MP. It found that 50-odd people, including IAS and IPS officers from Delhi, Haryana, Telangana, Maharashtra, etc, bought land in Guradi Ghat village, *on the same day* in 2022. Sixteen months later, govt approved a highway 500m away from this site, and then the purpose of the land was changed from agricultural to residential. The value of the land rose from ₹81.7/sq ft to ₹557/sq ft within two years, and is now said to be close to ₹3,000/sq ft.

Such cases happen in every state that's urbanising rapidly, and politicians and bureaucrats – because they are the planners and decision-makers – have all the inside information to buy the most lucrative plots cheaply, before plans are published. If all land were equal, they would have no incentive to do so, but as we said, it's their decisions – where schools, parks, markets, airports and garbage dumps will be placed – that create a premium. Conflict of interest is obvious. Such actions are indefensible ethically.

Sound Sense Of Silence

How much loss of hearing will it take for India to wake up to its noise? Bring in the town crier

A town crier? In 2026? That was the first question, when Canberra's official town crier won the Guinness Record for world's loudest voice. Joseph McGrail-Bateup bellowed 'NOW' at 122.4dB. Duck. That can cause permanent hearing loss. Louder than Indian traffic (constant 100dB). But, first, what does a town crier even do? McGrail-Bateup is a professional AC cleaner, his town crier position since 2017 is a "part-time role" for Canberra events. His award – membership to a heritage club of Australian Town Criers that preserves "historic & ceremonial roles". Never knock the powerful tug of history-meets-nostalgia.

McGrail-Bateup beat the record of an Irish schoolteacher – no mean task – who had, unsurprisingly, yelled the word 'QUIET', at 121.7dB, in 1994. Spare a thought for her class, for all those whose eardrums were all trembling and aquiver, from a young age. The silence in her class is, perhaps, what Guinness Records could start a record for. But that isn't possible.

Because, noise is defined, but there's no one definition for silence. While noise is a physical measure, silence is, largely, human experience. Natural sounds (rustling leaves) or unobtrusive sounds, (fan's whirr), aren't considered noise. Listening to birdsong is silence, right? So, measures are much about how the average human ear perceives sound. Say, a waterfall and diesel generator can have similar decibel levels, and yet...

What makes noise a public health crisis in India is that neither policy wonks nor public give a damn about long exposure to human-created din – traffic, construction, festivals, city clatter. Could this be because desi fundas put such a premium on 'silence within'? But, and conversely, exactly for this, given over 6.3cr people in India are hard of hearing, per WHO, it makes sound sense to join the dots. Outside noise is so damaging that the silence within is in perpetual retreat. Maybe we will sit up, and shut up, if an Irish teacher yells QUIET, and a town crier bellows NOW.

Netting netas

Parties are breaking up filmi style. Titles and all

Bachi Karkaria

 Now on screens, rebel-blocbusters. The record-breaking Bengali and its Maha copy are live-streaming simultaneously, plots thickening faster than a middle-age waistline. Like all great drama, this 'netanki' too requires a suspension of disbelief. Though, no sign of suspended dissidents. Updated idiom: Deserting rats are sinking the Mamata/Uddhav ship. Like SRK in *Happy New Year*, Maharashtra's Shiv Sena DCM declared last week that this was 'only the trailer. Picture *abhi baaki hai*.' Eknath Shinde hinted that the queue of those wanting to decimate the Thackerays rivals that for a Lalbaugha Raja darshan during Ganeshotsav or at least the daily one outside Mumbai's two newly anointed *benne dosa* deities. Let's see which film titles are a perfect fit.

We'll start with the current Hollywood blockbuster since money is the alleged lure but power is the politicians' basic *Obsession*, like in the film, their 'one-wish willow'. However, here the horror is being felt by their 'hate-interest', the mother party, Shinde – the OG Shiv Sena breaker – named his current hijack *Operation Tiger*. While Balasaheb's biological heir is desperately crying (*Amcha*) *Tiger Zinda Hai*, his breed is the most poached beast of the Maha political jungle.

On an IMAX scale, the reigning *Obsession* is that of Om-nipotent BJP. It's now driven by the hegemonic ambition of an 'Opposition-mukt Bharat'. To that end, Kakoli Ghosh Dastidar, who spearheaded Total Mamata Collapse, handed her 20-MP clout to Nationalist Citizens Party of India. Thus overnight turning this hitherto unheard of, congenitally loser outfit into the biggest partner of NDA, read 'BJP'.

The political suspense thriller genre *per se* is marked by *One Battle After Another*. The current crop, mirroring this Oscar-sweeper, also features those who've been branded as 'illegals'. Or, even *Sinners*. *Backrooms* have been action-packed.

Reflecting *Apun Ka Bollywood*, the ongoing drama could as well be titled *Cocktail 2* (States), and be quite *Toxic* for the shaken mother party. Both rebel groups fancy themselves as *Dhurandhar/Dhurondhor*, without daring to challenge the undisputed No. 1, Bahut Jeeta Party. Will 'partees' remain parted? In politics especially *Kabhi Alvida Naa Kehna*.

Alec Smart said: "Mumbai monsoon arrives bringing relief and woes."

Trump's Smart Iran Exit

It wasn't getting better for POTUS, so he was right to end the war. Plus, Americans have grown tired of US's West Asian conflicts. This has implications for US-Israel ties. Tehran is emboldened, but managing the new regional architecture will require India's involvement

Jon B Alterman

 "When you find yourself in a hole, the first thing is to stop digging." That's what Trump did last week, after months of promising just how completely US would defeat Iran. Trump was right to end the war, and the terms on which he did so were not getting better. He decided to cut his losses and move on.

Since signing a 14-point agreement with Iran last week that was extremely favourable to the Iranians, most of the analysis has been focused on how little US got after months of predicting an Iranian surrender. Plus, after the first round of negotiations between the two sides in Bürgenstock, Switzerland, there are conflicting accounts about financial incentives for Iran, control over Hormuz, and Israel's military operations in Lebanon. But what is more important, though, is drawing the right lessons from the encounter, understanding their strategic implications, and properly assessing next steps.

Both US and Israel were convinced that dropping something on the order of 20,000 bombs and missiles on Iran, badly outmatching the Iranian military at every turn, and maintaining a largely effective trade blockade would surely result in victory. As we know, it didn't turn out that way.

What the Trump administration and Netanyahu govt got wrong was not appreciating the ability of the Iranian govt to create a cocktail mixing nationalism, ideology, and repression to remain in power. On a broad level, it is hard for any foreign power to seem more patriotic than even a despotic govt. More narrowly, elites in the system saw this as a threat to everything they've held dear for almost a half-century, and to the livelihoods of their children and grandchildren. And fundamentally, govt of Iran has massive repressive power, and it showed in Jan it was willing to use it. That power did not diminish in the face of the US and Israeli assault.

There is a larger lesson here, and arguably one that should have been learned in Vietnam, Iraq and



knowledge will never go away. Countries that depend on Gulf energy, from Japan to India to Europe, now have to factor Iranian willingness to weaponise that chokepoint into their long-term planning. The Iranian govt has also demonstrated its willingness to inflict pain and absorb punishment, a lesson that the states around Iran will not forget.

For US, after fighting wars in West Asia for 35 years, this is likely to be the last. The American public is turning more sharply away from the region, believing it both irredeemably hostile and

hopelessly absorbed in ancient feuds.

The most profound consequence may be a fundamental reordering of the US-Israel relationship. A decades-long partnership that had been growing ever-closer, is now being pulled apart by Americans on all sides of the political spectrum. Even apolitical Americans have felt that the joint war has been extremely costly to them, for no benefit at all. If a new Israeli prime minister is elected in the fall, that may slow Israel's decline among the American public. But it is hard to see a way that the decline will be reversed any time soon.

That could, in turn, shape how an Israel less protected by US embraces friends and seeks to punish adversaries around the world. Israel could lean, even more heavily, into its newer relationships with countries like India, and it could seek to push them more to protect Israeli interests.

Perhaps the most important question of all is what to do now. The Iranian leadership is feeling triumphant, having survived an onslaught by the region's strongest power, and the world's strongest power. Its threat to block Hormuz once again, in response to Israeli actions in Lebanon, is a signal that it is unbowed.

The answer is not more force. It is a broad international coalition that makes Iranian restraint worth practicing, and Iranian provocation genuinely costly. The 2015 nuclear deal showed this was achievable. It brought in China and Russia, alongside the Western powers. Rebuilding that architecture isn't possible right now, but having something similar is the only path that doesn't lead back to war.

India has an indispensable role to play. No major power has India's combination of relationships – with Iran, with Gulf states, with Israel, and with US. India has suffered the costs of this war without having shaped its course. That should change. As a major trading partner of Iran, and as a major beneficiary of Gulf security, India could demonstrate its willingness to engage more deeply with Iran, but to do so conditionally. India's role as a leader of the Global South, would make this role even more meaningful. The world needs countries like India, not just as stakeholders in stability, but as its architects.

The writer is a global security & geostrategy specialist

Imperialists Did It Once, Superpowers Do It Now

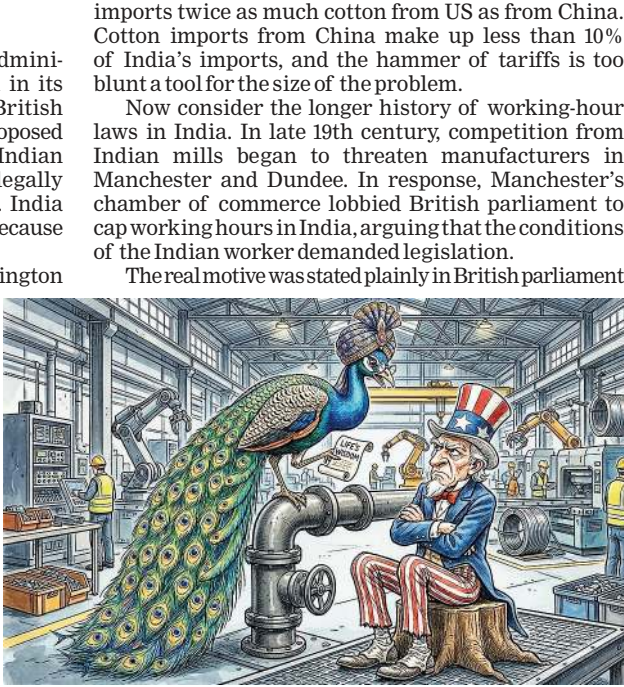
The Raj once used labour law to blunt Indian competition. US's proposed forced-labour tariff on Indian goods is a similar weapon. But today, India can contest such blatantly unfair policies

Pranjal Chandra

 You wouldn't think the Trump administration has much in common in its treatment of India, with the British colonialists. But it does. It has proposed an additional 12.5% tariff on Indian goods, citing India's failure to legally prohibit the imports made with forced labour. India should recognise the argument behind the tariff, because it has heard this before, almost word for word.

US's move follows an investigation by Washington in March, into the failure of many countries to enforce a prohibition on goods made with forced labour. US Trade Representative (USTR) notes that India is one of 54 countries that haven't imposed a legal prohibition on the import of goods made wholly or partly with forced labour. US deems this an "unreasonable" failure and a burden on American commerce, as producers in countries without such bans "derive an unfair cost advantage because they do not have to undertake due diligence".

- While India doesn't have an express prohibition on the import of goods made with forced labour, it has long recognised and fought the anathema. Indeed, it outlawed forced labour long before Washington raised the question. Article 23 of our Constitution expressly prohibits bonded labour.
- Moreover, India enacted the Bonded Labour System (Abolition) Act way back in 1976. It has also ratified both core ILO agreements on forced labour (Convention #29 and Convention #105), and has consistently met its international commitment to ILO to eliminate forced labour.
- Second, US may have exaggerated India's dependence on imports of goods produced with forced labour. One of USTR's prime examples is Chinese cotton, 93% of which is grown in Xinjiang, a region tied to forced labour. However, India is the world's largest cotton producer, spins most of its cotton, and



by an MP: Leaving Indian mills unrestricted gave "a very unfair advantage" to a rival that might soon undersell Britain "in Manchester itself". This was the real reason the Raj imposed labour restrictions on Indian factories starting in 1881. In 1911, the colonial govt introduced working-hour limits for adult males in Indian textile factories, 60 years before similar legislation was enacted in UK.

Historian Marc Jason Gilbert notes that Indian nationalists recognised labour legislation as a weapon of economic imperialism. For instance, Rao Bahadur RN Mudholkar, a social reformer and freedom fighter, gave a fiery speech in Patna, at the 12th session of

Indian National Congress, against the 1911 law, as coming "from persons who, not to mince words, are our rivals in manufacture and in trade".

A century ago, Britain wrote India's labour laws to blunt its competition. US is reaching for the same tool.

The cost of complying with Washington's demands would be considerable for Indian manufacturing, and in turn for India's fight against poverty. To run an American-style import ban, Indian firms would have to audit their supply chains for tainted inputs at real expense. For instance, US puts the due diligence burden of its own Uyghur Forced Labour Prevention Act at the equivalent of a 2.5% tariff on at-risk goods. Layer that cost onto a manufacturing base that runs on thin margins, often under 10%, and the burden is far from trivial.

Compliance with labour rules in India already raises the effective cost of formal labour by around a third. In already poor countries like India, tariffs may worsen labour conditions by increasing informality further. The faster India can uplift its citizens out of poverty, the sooner it can become a partner in furthering the cause of dignified labour.

Americans will also bear the cost. For American consumers, India is the pharmacy: Close to two-fifths of generic drugs dispensed in America are Indian. For American manufacturers, India is a supplier of industrial machinery, electrical machinery, organic chemicals, iron and steel articles, and plastics, which together account for nearly \$22bn in imports. A tariff on all these goods does not punish India alone.

The proposed tariff is open for written comment and a hearing through July, and a bilateral trade agreement is already under negotiation. In both forums, India should contest it. India should offer evidence-based cooperation on specific shipments or entities, and keep any domestic reform anchored in Indian law and Indian enforcement priorities.

The writer is with Prosperiti, an organisation advancing economic freedom in India



Road To Salvation: One Humanity, Zero Prejudice

Shri Shri Anandmurti

Human life is often compared to a journey of self-discovery, but according to spiritual philosophy, it is much more than that. It is a gradual process of purification through which the individual consciousness rediscovers its original divine nature.

Sadhana, spiritual practice, is an effort to remove the distortions and impurities that obscure the true Self. Just as raw gold must pass through fire to become pure and radiant, we must refine our minds through discipline, self-control, and devotion. The impurities that cloud the mind – such as fear, greed, pride, anger, and attachment – are not part of our essential nature. They arise due to influence of material and psychological forces. Through spiritual practice, these limitations can be transformed and ultimately dissolved.

Creation is a process of descent from the subtle to the crude. Cosmic Consciousness gradually manifests as mind and matter, eventually producing the physical universe. Spiritual evolution, therefore, is the reverse journey. The seeker moves from the gross to subtle, from the physical to mental, and from the mental to spiritual. This inward movement leads towards the realisation of the Supreme Consciousness that lies beyond all limitations of space, time, and individuality.

The Supreme Reality cannot be understood through the senses or even through the ordinary mind. The senses perceive only finite objects, while the mind itself is limited by its conditioning. The Infinite can be realised only through the awakening of the deeper self. As the mind becomes purified and absorbed in the thought of the Supreme, the barriers

separating the individual from the Cosmic gradually disappear.

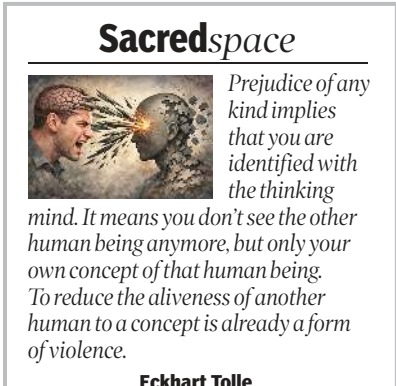
All forms of prejudice – whether based on caste, birth, nationality, or social status – are products of an incomplete understanding of reality. If the same Divine consciousness exists in every being, then no one can be considered inherently superior or inferior.

Human worth is determined not by birth but by character and conduct. A true spiritual person is one who sees the presence of the Divine in all beings and acts accordingly. Such a person rises above divisions and embraces universalism.

Another important message is that service to humanity is itself a form of spiritual practice. Since every individual and every part of creation is an expression of the Supreme Consciousness, serving society becomes equivalent to serving God.



THE SPEAKING TREE



Whether one works for the welfare of a village, a district, or humanity, such service acquires spiritual significance when performed with a spirit of universal love.

Knowledge and action are valuable, but they remain incomplete without love for the Supreme. Through sincere devotion, selfless service, and continuous spiritual effort, the individual mind merges into the Cosmic flow, transcending all limitations and suffering.

The message is both simple and profound: salvation is not achieved through rituals, social status, or intellectual arguments. It is attained by purifying the mind, overcoming ego and discrimination, and realising the Divine presence in every being. The path to liberation lies in expanding the self until it embraces the entire universe as one family. In that universal vision, all divisions vanish, and the individual discovers eternal freedom, peace, and oneness with the Infinite.

Currency questions

Incentives for NRIs must be reviewed

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Tuesday, through a set of frequently asked questions, clarified what banks could do while raising foreign currency non-resident (bank), or FCNR (B), deposits. While this will provide much-needed clarity to commercial banks, it raises several problematic questions. Banks, including their overseas branches, have been allowed to extend loans or issue standby letters of credit in favour of foreign lenders against FCNR (B) deposits raised under the swap facility announced by the RBI. The idea, of course, is to make such deposits attractive to non-resident Indians (NRIs). The underlying reason for starting the facility was the central bank's desire to attract foreign inflows to cover the potential deficit in the balance of payments (BoP). The BoP was in deficit in last financial year as well, and the RBI had to sell over \$50 billion worth of foreign exchange at a net level in the spot market. The Iran war led to a sharp increase in the prices of crude oil. Since India depends on imports for most of its crude-oil needs, the current account deficit (CAD) was expected to widen to about 2 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP) this financial year. India is also witnessing large capital outflows for various reasons, which was expected to put pressure on the BoP. This was reflected in the rupee's weakness in the currency market. Although India has large foreign-exchange reserves, the idea of incentivising foreign-currency mobilisation could have been justified as a precautionary measure. However, a lot has changed since then. Although there are still risks in West Asia, the situation has markedly improved, which is also reflected in about a 30 per cent decline in the prices of crude oil.

Thus, the question arises whether India still needs a higher level of costly foreign-currency borrowing, for which banks are being permitted to offer leverage to NRIs. The currency risk on such deposits will be borne by the RBI. As reported by this newspaper, State Bank of India is offering leverage of up to nine times on deposits of more than \$1 million. Calculations indicate that this could translate into returns of over 14 per cent. Other banks are likely to come up with similar schemes for NRIs. Bankers told this newspaper that a similar structure was offered in 2013 as well, when India witnessed nearly a currency crisis during the so-called taper tantrum episode. However, conditions are much better today and should have formed the basis for allowing banks to accept such deposits.

Given that banks have been allowed to offer leverage and other facilities to NRIs, there are several questions worth debating, and if such an exercise shows no justification for continuing the incentives, they should be reviewed. First, are the foreign-exchange reserves at the present level of over \$670 billion insufficient to meet obligations in the near to medium term? Second, how much does the central bank expect to mobilise through various concessions and incentives being provided to NRIs and other channels under the concessional route, and will that be sufficient? Third, will potentially large inflows not influence the currency market and impede the process of economic adjustment? Fourth, what steps will need to be taken to ensure that repayments happen smoothly? And finally, what would be the level of benefit/subsidy NRIs are expected to get? It would be useful to get the numbers for the entire corpus expected to be raised through the swap window. It is also worth noting here that tiding over the problem in the near term should not take Indian policymakers' eyes off the long-term measures needed to address the economic vulnerabilities exposed by the crisis in West Asia.

UK's 'Bregret' syndrome

10 years on, Brexit objectives have proved unworkable

The United Kingdom (UK) gets ready to witness a seventh occupant moving into 10 Downing Street in a decade, coinciding with the anniversary of the momentous \$1.9:48.1 vote to leave the European Union (EU), its largest trading partner. Though the final separation from the EU took place on December 31, 2020, the country is no closer to the Brexit objectives. The move to "take back control" has resulted in an economy that experts say is 4 per cent to 8 per cent smaller than it would have been had the UK stayed in the EU. The promised billions for public services, including the National Health Service, as promised by the Leave campaigners, have not materialised.

After four Conservative Prime Ministers failed to cope with the fallout, the Labour Party was voted back to power after 14 years. But if Liz Truss' unfunded tax cuts roiled the markets and forced her resignation after just 49 days in office, the Labour government's decision to raise taxes to fund critical public services such as housing, health care and defence has not had the expected salutary impact. Instead, the debt-to-gross domestic product ratio stands at 95 per cent, and economic growth remains at a snail-paced 1 per cent. Though the pandemic, the Ukraine war and the United States' attack on Iran have taken their toll on the economy, as they have done around the world, growing dissatisfaction with Labour's economic management was evident in the party's poor showing in local-government elections in May.

At the heart of the economic slowdown is the growing cost of doing business with the 27-nation EU, which accounts for 42 per cent of the UK's exports. Although there are no tariffs on UK goods entering the EU, non-tariff barriers have multiplied the compliance costs British businesses have to face, including inspections, paperwork and sanitary standards. An HSBC Global Investment Research shows border check alone has cost the UK nearly \$6 billion. Although the UK has signed a slew of trade agreements with other countries, including with India, these are yet to compensate for the sharp diminution of exports to the EU. At the same time, the pound is still to regain its pre-Brexit value, making imports expensive and pushing up prices for consumers. But the expected investment to balance the trade deficit has not materialised owing to trade barriers. Only the UK's services sector — accountancy, legal services and consultancy — has done well, with exports to the EU up 57 per cent over the last decade, though some economists argue that the nation could have done even better without Brexit.

Most ironic of all is the lack of appreciable change in immigration, the most viscerally nationalist issue on which the Leave lobby campaigned. Net migration by EU nationals has turned negative but net arrivals from non-EU countries surged. The numbers fell with tighter rules in 2025, but the government has been unable to contain illegal small-boat crossings of war-zone refugees, who are often housed at government cost, causing an explosion of popular anger. Recent polls suggest that "Bregret" has set in with 52 per cent of respondents voting to rejoin the EU. All of this suggests that it is unlikely that the next incumbent of Downing Street will fare much better than his six predecessors.

Rekindling FDI through FTAs

A combined approach of an FTA with an investment protection agreement will help India re-establish its position as an attractive destination for FDI



ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA

It is encouraging to note that the fundamental link between trade and investment in modern-day trade led by global value chains (GVCs) is beginning to be recognised by negotiators of India's free-trade agreements (FTAs). An explicit inclusion of investment-related provisions is evident in India's recent FTAs with developed economies of the European Free Trade Association (Efta) and New Zealand. However, it may be noted that in both the FTAs, the respective chapters on investment include provisions only on promotion, cooperation and facilitation. Critical aspects of investor protection and investment dispute settlement mechanism do not find place in these FTAs. Furthermore, the investment target of \$100 billion and \$20 billion in the FTAs with Efta and New Zealand, respectively, rely on "best endeavour" by the partner countries. Rebalancing mechanisms in the event of failure to achieve the foreign direct investment (FDI) target come into play only after 15 years and, even then, provide for a due process of consultation and consideration of possible reasons for falling short of targets. Effectively, therefore the investment commitment can extend over at least 15 years of the FTAs coming into force. More importantly, the relatively deeper FTAs with the United Kingdom (UK) and the European Union (EU) do not include an investment chapter or provisions on investment liberalisation and facilitation, and there is as yet no investment agreement/treaty with these countries.

This is important, given that India has, since the pandemic, registered a consistent fall in net inflows of FDI as a share of gross domestic product (GDP). The declining trend stands out in a global trade and investment context that, in the post-pandemic period, is increasingly being shaped by the restructuring and diversification of GVCs away from China. Comparator and competing developing economies have fared significantly better than India (see table). The neighbouring region of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) has remained resilient and continued to attract FDI even in the face of increasing geopolitical fragmentation and trade tensions in the global economy.

According to the Unctad's (United Nations Conference of Trade and Development) Asean Investment Report (2025), Asean has, since 2021, maintained its position as the top FDI recipient among developing regions with the manufacturing sector, especially supply chain-intensive industries, being a major driving force for it. Vietnam has been among the top recipients in the region with record-level FDI. Among the main sources, apart from East Asian economies and intra-Asean FDI, the EU figures prominently. In the case of Vietnam, the share of the EU has increased since 2019, when the bilateral FTA and Investment Protection Agreement (IPA) were signed with the EU and the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) entered into force. Following Vietnam, other Asean nations like Thailand, the Philippines and Malaysia are now negotiating FTAs with the EU. Indonesia finalised negotiations on both its FTA and IPA with the EU in 2025 while also having applied for membership in the CPTPP in 2024.

Asean, it may be noted, has accomplished almost 100 per cent tariff liberalisation under its regional trade in goods agreement. Since 2020, it has, in addition, placed particular emphasis on strengthening its investment climate through participation in deep mega-regional, regional and bilateral FTAs. Four Asean economies — Vietnam, Malaysia, Singapore and Brunei — are members of the mega-regional CPTPP. The CPTPP includes cumulation-based rules of origin, which are facilitative of attracting supply-chain intensive investment. At regional level, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), with common and cumulative rules of origin, is complemented by the implementation of the Asean Investment Agreement and Asean Investment Facilitation Framework. Among bilateral initiatives, Vietnam has signed several deep FTAs over the last decade. Apart from over 90 per cent tariff liberalisation, the depth of its FTAs in intellectual property-related provisions and technical standards has set in motion corresponding reforms to align its domestic regulatory framework to international benchmarks. The inclusion of investment lib-



STRAIGHT TALK
AMITA BATRA

members of the mega-regional CPTPP. The CPTPP includes cumulation-based rules of origin, which are facilitative of attracting supply-chain intensive investment. At regional level, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), with common and cumulative rules of origin, is complemented by the implementation of the Asean Investment Agreement and Asean Investment Facilitation Framework. Among bilateral initiatives, Vietnam has signed several deep FTAs over the last decade. Apart from over 90 per cent tariff liberalisation, the depth of its FTAs in intellectual property-related provisions and technical standards has set in motion corresponding reforms to align its domestic regulatory framework to international benchmarks. The inclusion of investment lib-

Institutional architecture for Viksit Bharat

India stands at a rare moment. For perhaps the next 10 to 15 years, it has a leapfrog opportunity to achieve sustainable prosperity and become a high-income country — a Viksit Bharat. Three windows are open, and each will close within a decade or two. The people window: Our working-age share and dependency ratio will be most favourable in the early to mid-2030s and then begin an inexorable decline. The energy window: Clean energy supply chains and investments are being set this decade. The technology window: Artificial intelligence has moved to the centre of the global economy, and the rules of the AI age are being fixed now. We must take advantage of all three windows while they are open.

The arithmetic is clear. India's income per person is about \$2,700; the high-income threshold is roughly \$14,000. The World Bank counts only 34 economies that have made this jump since 1990, most of them small or resource-rich. China, with 1.4 billion people, is on the edge of crossing this threshold in a single generation, so a country of our scale can do it. But we need around 7 per cent growth in income per person every year for a generation. Moreover, as the rich world restricts immigration, fewer of our talented young will find opportunities abroad, so we must build opportunities at home.

China reached this point through central planning, single-party continuity and command over capital, a path India cannot and should not follow. India is a federal democracy, with an independent judiciary, free elections, a free press and a Union that must work with the states. We must travel a different route.

We will not find this route through some comprehensive policy package or a new set of nation-building missions. India does not suffer from a shortage of pol-

icies or missions. It suffers from a shortage of dynamic institutions capable of making them durable, adaptive and accountable. Leaders, policies and missions are all necessary, but they are not sufficient. The real work is at the institutional level, in the rules of the game. Too much of our national debate misses the institutional forest for the policy trees. The task of the next 15 years is to build the institutional architecture through which key initiatives can outlast political cycles, attract talent, mobilise capital, and deliver at scale.

India knows how to build dynamic institutions.

The Indian Space Research Organisation reached Mars for less than a Hollywood film's budget, sustained by a culture that protects its technical autonomy. The Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council gives the Centre one third of the vote and the states two thirds and decides almost everything by consensus. The Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) created a time-bound, creditor-led process where none existed before, even though it has needed adjustment. Add the Indian Institutes of Technology, UPI, the Reserve

Bank of India and the Securities and Exchange Board of India, and the pattern is clear. These are islands of excellence, but they are not enough on their own.

A dynamic institution must pass three tests. It must be capable, lawful and accountable. A capable institution has continuous professional leadership, stable funding, technical autonomy and the ability to adapt, so it can deliver over long horizons. A lawful institution rests on durable law, a clear mandate and reviewable decisions, so citizens and investors can trust the rules. An accountable institution spreads power across multiple stakeholders, reports transparently and answers to elected representatives, the



JAYANT SINHA

Net foreign direct investment inflows

(% of GDP)

	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
India	2.4	1.4	1.5	0.8	0.7
Indonesia	1.8	1.8	1.9	1.6	1.7
Malaysia	1.2	5.4	3.7	2	3.7
Vietnam	4.6	4.3	4.3	4.3	4.2
Brazil	2.6	2.8	3.9	2.9	3.4
Mexico	2.8	2.7	2.7	1.7	2.4

Source: World Bank

eralisation and investor-protection provisions has, in addition, helped enhance Vietnam's attraction as a production and export base for several large corporations diversifying away from China.

In order to boost its FDI inflows in this competitive scenario, India needs to improve the depth of its FTAs. Towards this objective, first and foremost, it needs to accelerate the comprehensive review of tariffs announced in Budget 2025 and move swiftly towards the average MFN (most favoured nation) tariffs in the manufacturing sector in major Asean economies. A reduction in tariffs on critical imported inputs will assist India in enhancing its manufacturing competitiveness and attracting export-oriented FDI. Second, India needs to negotiate and finalise an IPA with the EU. Given that the ratification process of the IPA is a prolonged process done at the level of member states of the bloc, the aim should be to conclude the IPA negotiations at the earliest so that its ratification is initiated in parallel with that of the EU-India FTA. The objective should be to design the investment dispute settlement mechanism and investor-protection provisions in a way that they become the template for India's future negotiations on FTAs and IPAs. A judicious examination of the EU's investment agreements with those of Asian economies like Singapore, Vietnam and Indonesia could be a useful starting point for working on an appropriate combination of investor-protection and state-sovereignty provisions for India. This will be especially useful because India is in the process of negotiating comprehensive trade agreements with developed economies like Canada and Australia. Third, an announcement on India's intent to participate in the gold-standard CPTPP will be a very positive signal to enhance the confidence of international investors in the Indian economy and its ability to achieve the highest international regulatory standards, and trade and investment policy predictability and transparency.

At this juncture of its growth trajectory, India needs to attract FDI. While large corporations are diversifying supply-chain investments, the global scenario is becoming increasingly geopolitically motivated and competitive. India's FTAs, therefore, need to include investment chapters and/or be coupled with parallel IPAs with appropriate investor protection provisions and dispute resolution mechanism. A combined approach of an FTA with IPA will help India re-establish its position as an attractive destination for FDI.

The author is professor, School of International Studies, JNU, and author of *India's Trade Policy in the 21st Century*, Routledge: London, 2022. The views are personal

public and independent peers, so autonomy never hardens into capture. India needs a sufficient number of such institutions, across the state, the markets and society, working as an integrated architecture.

These tests are a report card, not a prescription. Any public institution can be asked three questions. Can it deliver? Is it lawful enough to be trusted? Is it accountable enough to endure? The payoff from getting this right is direct. When courts are slow, regulators unpredictable or contracts hard to enforce, investors demand a higher return for the risk, and the cost of capital rises across the economy. Credible institutions lower that risk premium, and over an investment programme measured in trillions of dollars, a few percentage points decide whether the transformation is financed or merely rationed.

Agreeing on the tests is the beginning, not the end. The pathway is familiar: Diagnose each institution against the three tests, sequence which to reform and which to build new, build consensus across parties and between the Union and the states, and legislate in iterative steps. This is how we built the GST and the IBC. Above all, we must move quickly, because the windows will close whether or not we are ready, and institutions take years to mature. The arithmetic is clear, and it is unforgiving of delay. Build enough capable, lawful and accountable institutions now, and India can turn its three windows of opportunity into a high-income transformation, a Viksit Bharat that is prosperous, just and green.

The author is president of the Everstone group and visiting professor of practice at the London School of Economics. He is a former Union minister of state for finance and civil aviation, and former member of the Lok Sabha, where he chaired the Standing Committee on Finance

Sane advice on India's startup ecosystem



AMBI PARAMESWARAN

Till a few decades ago, the term "startup" was not used to refer to enterprises or companies. It is said the first time the term was used to refer to new enterprise in the electronic data processing field was by *Forbes* magazine in 1976. *BusinessWeek* continued the practice in a 1977 article, and the term stuck. Startups were seen as companies that grew rapidly often aided by digital technology; their growth was fueled by venture capital or funds ready to take a

risk. The first firm to be listed publicly — even while making a loss — was Netscape. That was in 1995 and the book *The New Thing* by Michael Lewis gives a blow-by-blow description of what happened.

As startups caught on, many books were written to offer future founders tips on what to do and not to do. Some of the books this reviewer has read and enjoyed, include *The Art of the Start* by Guy Kawasaki, *The Lean Startup* by Eric Ries and *The Hard Thing About Hard Things* by Ben Horowitz. A few months ago, I reviewed *Starting a Startup* by James Sinclair for this paper. All these books speak about the startup ecosystem and startup ventures from the US. India is emerging as a hotbed for startups and it is only now we are getting books focused on the Indian ecosystem.

The Founder Manual by Utsav

Somani is very much a book about and for Indian startups. The author is the founder of Offline — an exclusive community of scaled-up Indian tech founders. He has invested in over 100 startups and has a ring side seat on the way Indian startups begin their journey, struggle to find the right product market fit and venture funds, scale up and exit.

The book is organised into eight sections that are almost in sequence of how a startup takes birth and flies. The first section is about building a strong foundation. An idea in a founder's head is not a success unless it is validated. And the startup has to dig deep to find out the minimum viable product and what the potential customer will pay for it. In this section you will also get introduced to the often touted terms in the startup ecosystem: total addressable market, serviceable available market and serviceable obtainable market.

The second section is about fundraising and its contours in India: What is the funding landscape, what are the different types of venture capital (VC) firms; when is the right time to raise funds; how to raise funds; maintaining the cap (or capitalisation) table. Often founders, in their anxiety, give away too much, or don't do their due diligence on what the VC brings to the table other than money.

The third section looks at finding the Product Market Fit (PMF). The first product that is launched may not find the PMF. How to understand buyer behaviour and orchestrate a pivot? Issues such as what kind of tech infrastructure needs to be built and what the go-to-market strategy should be are covered in this section.

The fourth section is about building a strong team. It was good to see Mr Somani recommending good human resource practices and not the "hire-

and-fire" approach that many startups employ. Building a system for talent acquisition and to making teams productive are covered in this section.

The fifth section is about building partnerships across the ecosystem, for growth and more. The sixth section is about expansion across geographies, even across continents. The seventh section is on navigating regulatory changes and crises. You get to learn about how startups in the Bitcoin and online betting space got affected by sudden regulatory changes. The last, the eighth section is about exit strategies. Again, Mr Somani says something this reviewer has heard from others: Don't start with the objective of selling.

It is possible that readers may have come across these eight guiding principles but what was refreshing in this book is the number of startup entrepre-



The Founder Manual: Insights From The Top Founders of India
by Utsav Somani
Published by Penguin
248 pages ₹599

neurs who have been quoted throughout. Startups such as Blue Tokai Coffee Roasters, Dr Vaidya, BharatPe, Fynd, GoBout, Hubilo, Kiddopia, Olx, Park+, Rebel Foods, Ship-Rocket, TBOtek and so many others are featured. Often, founders of these startups have been interviewed.

The book is a great manual for any founder who is looking for sane advice, not a motivational pep talk. The reality is presented without the smoke and mirrors. This is a valuable addition to books about the Indian startup ecosystem, and a must-read if you are in the

startup game, as an entrepreneur, an angel investor, a venture capitalist or a curious bystander.

The reviewer is an award-winning author. His latest book, *Marketing Mixology*, presents four essential skills for marketing success



Editor's
TAKE

Starmer’s fall and the game of British musical chairs

Starmer’s resignation marks yet another chapter in Britain’s political instability, underscoring how quickly power can evaporate in Westminster.

Keir Starmer’s resignation outside Downing Street this week landed less like a shock and more like a confirmation. In barely a decade, Britain has now watched six prime ministers walk out that same black door for the last time, with a seventh about to walk in. A man who won a commanding majority just two years ago has joined a list that increasingly looks less like a roll of national leaders and more like a casualty count.

The proximate cause was brutal but familiar: a battering in last month’s local elections, an internal Labour revolt that had been simmering for months, and approval ratings that had sunk to historic lows. Voters, polling suggested, simply didn’t feel the “change” Starmer promised after fourteen years of Conservative austerity.

A self-inflicted wound – appointing Peter Mandelson, a friend of the late Jeffrey Epstein, as ambassador to Washington – only deepened the sense of drift. Meanwhile ‘Reform UK’ kept climbing in the polls, eating into Labour’s traditional strongholds and rattling backbenchers who could see their own seats disappearing.

When Andy Burnham engineered his return to Parliament via a decisive by-election win in Makerfield, the question stopped being whether Starmer would face a challenge and became simply when. Starmer’s own account was almost clinical: his party had asked whether he was still the man to lead it into the next election, and he said he accepted their answer “with good grace.”

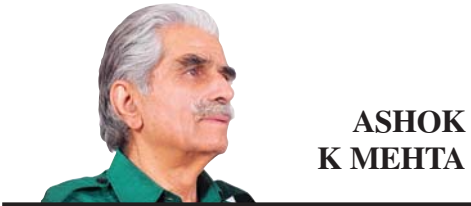
What follows is a curiously unhurried handover for a country famous for swift Westminster exits. Nominations open in early July, the contest is expected to wrap before Parliament breaks for summer, and Burnham – running effectively unopposed after a likely rival threw his support behind him – could be installed by late July. Opposition voices have already pounced on the gap, with Kemi Badenoch arguing the country can’t afford to go ungoverned through summer, and Nigel Farage renewing calls for an early general election the law doesn’t actually require until 2029.

That last point gets at why this keeps happening. Britain’s parliamentary system means a prime minister needs only the confidence of their own MPs, not a fresh mandate from voters, to be removed. Cameron fell to a referendum he called himself; May to the Brexit deadlock that followed; Johnson to scandal; Truss to a market revolt that lasted weeks; Sunak to an election Labour won decisively; now Starmer to his own backbenches. The common thread is a fracturing electorate, the rise of an insurgent right squeezing both major parties, and a parliamentary culture with few brakes on regicide once a leader looks like a liability. But it is just not politics but Britain’s economic woes that no prime minister has effectively addressed.

Can the new incumbent in the 10 Downing Street do it remains to be seen. Burnham, the self-styled “King of the North,” inherits a party desperate for stability and a country wondering if he’ll be different - or simply next.

India’s strategic slind spots

Deep fault lines within India’s security establishment—from the absence of a formal National Security Policy to concerns over defence modernisation and military politicisation—raise a critical question: Is India’s national security architecture equipped to meet the increasingly complex challenges posed by China, Pakistan and the new global order?



ASHOK
K MEHTA

At 92, Narendra Vohra is strapping fit in body and mind. He is the most experienced and versatile bureaucrat India has produced. What K Subrahmanyam, present Foreign Minister S Jaishankar’s father, was to strategic thought, Vohra is to defence and security. I got to know both of them fairly well during my stint with Defence Planning Staff. Vohra has been organising seminars serially on national security for many decades, the last of which was held recently at IIC Delhi and was probably the most engaging and unusual as speakers contradicted one another over fundamental issues at a time when liberal expression has become so rare. A Service Chief, an Army Commander, two Defence Secretaries, a Foreign Secretary, all retired, constituted the panel. Former Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran, not new to the theme, chaired the discussion.

Vohra began by enunciating the fraught state of civil-military relations, an unresolved malaise of growing intensity as civilian assertion of military control has become vital for the ruling establishment. Indian generalship has progressively allowed the diminution of its power, perks and prestige lately through the diversion of its intellectual resources towards shedding colonial legacy. Even the unprecedented politicisation of the military is being accomplished with the cooperation of higher military leadership principally by the Army. Compliance has become the pass word!

Vohra reminded ; that ‘defence of India and every part thereof’ is governed by Rules of Business 1961 under authority of MoD - inclusive of Defence Minister, Defence Secretary and lately Department of Military Affairs under CDS. Despite tinkering with the rules, the integrating armed forces still have separate Army, Navy and Air Force Acts. Further, CDS is not an appointment backed by legislation , neither is NSA’s, made in 2019 and 1991. Though India’s defence budget has grown 40 times since 1991 it is still below 2 per cent of GDP when targets for Nato and Indo Pacific are 3.5 per cent of GDP to be met by 2030. The recent resignation of UK Defence Secretary, John Healey was over ‘insufficient funding’ which had made Britain ‘less safe’.

For long , Vohra, along with former NSA Shivshankar Menon and Shyam Saran have emphasised the a necessity for a national security policy. They said that at least six drafts of NSP are gathering dust with NSA Ajit Doval. Vohra pointed out that Lt Gen Hooda who was a panelist had recently authored an NSP paper for the Congress party. Another panelist, former Defence Secretary Sanjay Mitra categorically rejected the



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The writer, a retired Major General, served as Commander, IPKF (South), Sri Lanka, and was a founder member of the Defence Planning Staff, now the Integrated Defence Staff

requirement for NSP saying that India had handled Doklam, Balakot, Galwan and Sindoor without one. This ‘chalta hai’ approach is supported by others too notably the retired CDS Gen Anil Chauhan who had publicly stated that an NSP was not required. The fiasco along the LAC in 2020 could have been avoided had we a documented national security strategy. Surprisingly the Integrated Defence Staff has produced several tri-service doctrines sans an NSP. Incidentally one of the issues raised by IAF opposing theatrisation is its ‘immaculate conception’. Adm Arun Prakash is a recognised voice of the military. He has not shied away from pointing to several anomalies in civil-military relations especially about progressive degradation of the military in civil services/police-military equation, the most glaring during periodic Pay revision Commissions. Here again, silence on the part of the Generals is key to diminution which is self-inflicted. Prakash noted how delayed decision-making in acquisition of platforms has made India less safe. He dismissed the phantom of ‘atma-nirbharta’ saying India is unable to produce a jet engine for aircraft and gas turbines engines for warships. These are being imported from US and Russia as the indigenous Kaveri jet engine programme begun in 1987 has failed to take off. The Kaveri engine unfit for combat aircraft is likely to be used in drones and some non-military projects.

The second point made by Prakash related to lack of interface, leave alone rapport, between political and higher military leadership. In the past Service Chiefs could access the Prime Minister as and when required though this route was rarely followed. After the inception of CDS though single service Chiefs technically still have access to PM by virtue of their remaining operational and administrative heads of their service, it has never been used. The CDS though not in the operational chain of command is the prin-

cipal military advisor to PM/RM. This has created an unarticulated anomaly. Nevertheless, PM Narendra Modi has not made it convenient for himself to periodically interact with his Service Chiefs. He has made Services shift their annual days and parades to other states and cancelled the traditional receptions held at residence of Service Chiefs when the President, the Supreme Commander of the Services, Cabinet ministers and other dignitaries would attend. It was a grand civil-military ceremonial occasion which cannot be replicated outside Delhi. The PM used to address and interact with Service Chiefs twice a year during single Service Commanders conference and combined Commanders’ conferences. He now officially meets them once in two years at the Combined Commanders’ Conference. Remote control of military leadership by political authority must be replaced with more frequent operational interactions.

Gen Hooda reinforced the issue of political leadership’s lack of familiarity with military operations especially during crises like Sindoor and Balakot. Unlike in the West, especially UK and US, where politicians have done stints in Iraq, Vietnam and Afghanistan their Indian counterparts have barely read military history. Hooda said military crises with Pakistan and China will occur and escalate more frequently and called for institutionalising crisis management. The response during Op Sindoor took 14 days whereas institutionalised contingency gaming would have compressed the time frame.

Former Defence Secretary Sanjay Mitra was not in sync with most of the ideas presented by other panelists, concluding that defence acquisition should be left to the military. The widely criticised Agniveer scheme prevails as neither CDS nor Service Chiefs have spoken out against it as it is the PM’s pet project. Generals must keep national interest above their own and not fear to rock the boat.

Rethinking how India fights addiction

tion as a moral failing instead of the medical and psychological crisis it actually is. Addiction rarely happens overnight. It begins as casual, recreational use, then slowly becomes a habit, then a physical dependence, where the body starts demanding the substance just to function normally. Tolerance builds, requiring larger doses for the same effect. Because most drugs are illegal, users are often pushed into crime to sustain their supply. Too many end up dying alone and in pain, having lost everything along the way.

Psychologists note that many people who become addicted carry insecurity and low confidence rooted in family or personal struggles. Strikingly, most know exactly what the drug is doing to their mind, memory, and relationships, yet knowing isn’t enough to break free.

This is addiction’s cruel paradox: the very thing destroying them is the thing they lean on to cope. Underneath, there is often deep shame. Many secretly want to quit but fear withdrawal, the emptiness it would leave behind, or losing the only social circle they have, other users.

This is where meditation deserves far more attention than it currently gets. Studies on incarcerated substance users found that those trained in meditation had lower relapse rates and better outcomes after release than those given only standard treatment. Meditation appears to rewire key brain pathways, building self-awareness and the mental space to pause before acting

on a craving, the difference between reaching for a cigarette and reaching for calm. Introducing meditation in schools as a regular subject, rather than an occasional workshop, could give children that tool early, before dependence ever takes root.

The government’s Nasha Mukta Bharat Abhiyaan has made real progress on visibility, reaching over 25 crore people, with more than 14 crore individuals and 4 lakh educational institutions formally enrolled.

That scale matters. But awareness campaigns alone do not treat dependence. They need to be paired with accessible de-addiction centers, school-level intervention, and sustained family engagement, support systems that catch a habit while it is still just a habit and not yet a dependency.

In the long run, a culture that values inner stillness over instant pleasure is our strongest defense against substance abuse. We have a choice: invest in the mental and emotional well-being of our youth now, or pay for it later in broken families and wasted potential. To every young person reading this: choose the harder, quieter path. The peace you are searching for in a high was never really there to begin with; it was always something you had to build within yourself. Say no to drugs, and yes to meditation.

The writer is a popular columnist and a spiritual teacher

RAJYOGI
BRAHMA
KUMAR
NIKUNJ JI

2ND OPINION

A recent case of a young boy, high on methamphetamine (“ice”), gouging out his own eyes in a hospital emergency room shocked people everywhere. It forces an uncomfortable question: what pushes young people toward such destructive substance use?

The numbers are sobering. AIIMS Delhi’s 2019 National Drug Dependence Treatment Centre survey, the most comprehensive of its kind in India, found that 14.6% of Indians use alcohol, with 19% of those users falling into dependence. Over 5.7 crore Indians use cannabis. Opioid use runs nearly three times the global average, and heroin has now overtaken opium as the country’s dominant opioid for the first time.

Yet our instinct as a society is often to shun these young people rather than help them, treating addic-

Lucknow fire, make surprise fire audits

Apologies of “A country still failing its fire safety test yet again” (June 24). The recent tragedies in Lucknow and Delhi are painful reminders of how little has changed despite repeated warnings. Young students lost their lives in places that should have been safe. What stands out is not just the immediate causes-uninspected buildings, flammable materials, narrow exits-but the larger pattern of official indifference that allows such risks to persist.

We have the laws and guidelines on paper. What we lack is consistent enforcement. Municipal bodies and fire departments remain understaffed and overburdened. Commercial spaces continue to operate without proper clearances because inspections are rare and accountability is weak.

A practical way forward would be to mandate surprise fire audits by independent teams, with clear timelines and public reporting. Officials who approve unsafe buildings must face real consequences, not just routine transfers. At the same time, building owners and managers need simpler, affordable compliance processes so that following rules becomes the easier choice.

Stronger implementation, rather than new committees, is what citizens expect. Our cities deserve better protection for the people who live and work in them.

S.M JEEVA | CHENNAI

Human rights abuse in Palestine

According to official figures, more than 9,600 Palestinians are currently being held in Israeli detention facilities. One of the most alarming aspects is that over 3,500 of them are being held under “administrative detention.” Administrative detention is a controversial legal measure that allows Israeli authorities to imprison individuals for years without formal charges or a court trial. The documentary research film “Bodies of Evidence: Israel’s Darkest Weapon,” produced by Al Jazeera, has sparked global debate. Former Palestinian detainees from Gaza and the West Bank have described alleged abuses they experienced while in Israeli custody.

One victim claimed that military dogs were trained to attack detainees and sexually abuse them on command from soldiers. Incidents have also been reported in places such as Hebron in the West Bank, where families were allegedly forced to remain naked under the threat of military dogs after soldiers entered their homes. The film raises serious questions about Israel’s administrative and detention systems. The Israeli human rights organisation BTselem, in its official report, has described the Israeli prison system as “torture camps.” In such conflicts, sexual violence is no longer merely an individual crime; it is used as a weapon of war to force the opposing side into complete submission. DATTAPRASAD SHIRODKAR| MUMBAI

Back to origin of colours

India’s ancient natural dyes have re-entered global discourse owing to the growing demand for sustainable and eco-friendly textiles.

Historically, these dyes shaped international trade and fashion. Indigo (Indikon), cultivated mainly in Bengal and Bihar, spread to Europe, Africa and the Americas, eventually lending its iconic shade to blue jeans.

Manjistha or Indian madder supplied a prized red dye and medicinal ingredient to West Asia and Europe. Lac dye, obtained from the Kerria lacca insect, coloured Kashmiri shawls and luxury fabrics. Turmeric imparted brilliant yellow hues to silk and cotton across Asia, besides its medicinal uses.

Chay root, grown along India’s southeastern coast, became a favourite red dye in European fashion. Today, concerns over pollution from synthetic dyes, coupled with government support for handlooms and khadi, have revived interest in these traditional colours.

Their resurgence is preserving India’s textile heritage, boosting artisan livelihoods and expanding export opportunities.

RS NARULA | PATIALA

THE UK GOVERNMENT IN A VORTEX AFTER KEIR STARMER’S RESIGNATION

The spectacle of six Prime Ministers in a decade reflects a deeper malaise within the United Kingdom’s political system—a governing structure caught in a vortex of fractured consensus. The first fault line is institutional. Britain’s parliamentary model allows a ruling party to replace its leader without seeking a fresh mandate from voters. While this flexibility enables swift action when a Prime Minister becomes an electoral liability, it also makes leadership changes relatively easy and increasingly frequent. The second fault line is political. Brexit splintered the Conservative Party into competing ideological camps, making stable leadership difficult to sustain. Disputes over immigration, trade, and Britain’s future relationship with Europe triggered repeated rebellions and leadership contests, weakening

successive governments and eroding party unity. The third fault line is economic. Years of sluggish growth, post-pandemic inflation, rising living costs, and mounting fiscal pressures steadily undermined public confidence. As economic challenges intensified, parliamentary patience wore thin, and leaders found themselves struggling to maintain authority. Cabinet stability depends not only on constitutional arrangements but also on cohesive political parties, economic credibility, and a clear governing purpose. In recent years, leadership changes have too often served as substitutes for genuine policy renewal. The result is a cycle of political instability in which new faces arrive in Downing Street, but the underlying challenges remain unresolved.

R NARAYANAN | MUMBAI

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PIC TALK



Women transplant paddy seedlings in a waterlogged field during the monsoon season, in Bastar district, Chhattisgarh PHOTO: PTI

DIGITAL EXPERIENCE



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Long live democracy: Why remembering freedom matters

Taken together, the components associated with the commemoration of Samvidhan Hatya Diwas remind us that democracy is not merely a political system; it is a living tradition. It is sustained by public participation, and protected by an informed and vigilant citizenry. Let us carry forward this spirit with renewed commitment!



GAJENDRA SINGH SHEKHAWAT

(Loktantra Amar Rahe) - is not merely to remember history, but to reflect on the enduring values that sustain our Republic. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar once remarked: *"The Constitution is not a mere lawyer's document; it is a vehicle of life, and its spirit is always the spirit of the age."* Few statements capture the essence of our constitutional journey more powerfully than these words. The Constitution is not simply a legal framework that governs the affairs of the State. It is a living covenant between citizens and institutions, between rights and responsibilities, between liberty and accountability.

Democracy must be preserved

India's democratic ethos is deeply rooted in our civilisational traditions. For centuries, our society nurtured institutions of consultation, collective deliberation, and public participation. It is essential to recall that Bharat did not inherit democracy - it nurtured it. From ancient sabhas and samitis to the post-independence parliamentary system, we have always believed in the collective will of the people.

The Constitution transformed these traditions into a modern democratic framework while preserving the values that had sustained them through generations. The Preamble remains our constitutional compass. Justice. Liberty. Equality. Fraternity.

These are not merely constitutional ideals. They are national aspirations. They guide public policy, shape institutions, and define the relationship between the State and the citizen. At the same time, history reminds us that democracy can never be taken for granted.

The Emergency of 1975-77 remains one of the most significant tests faced by independent India. It demonstrated how democratic institutions can come under strain when constitutional safeguards are weakened, and public freedoms are curtailed. The impact of that period extended beyond political life. It touched the everyday experiences of citizens across the country.

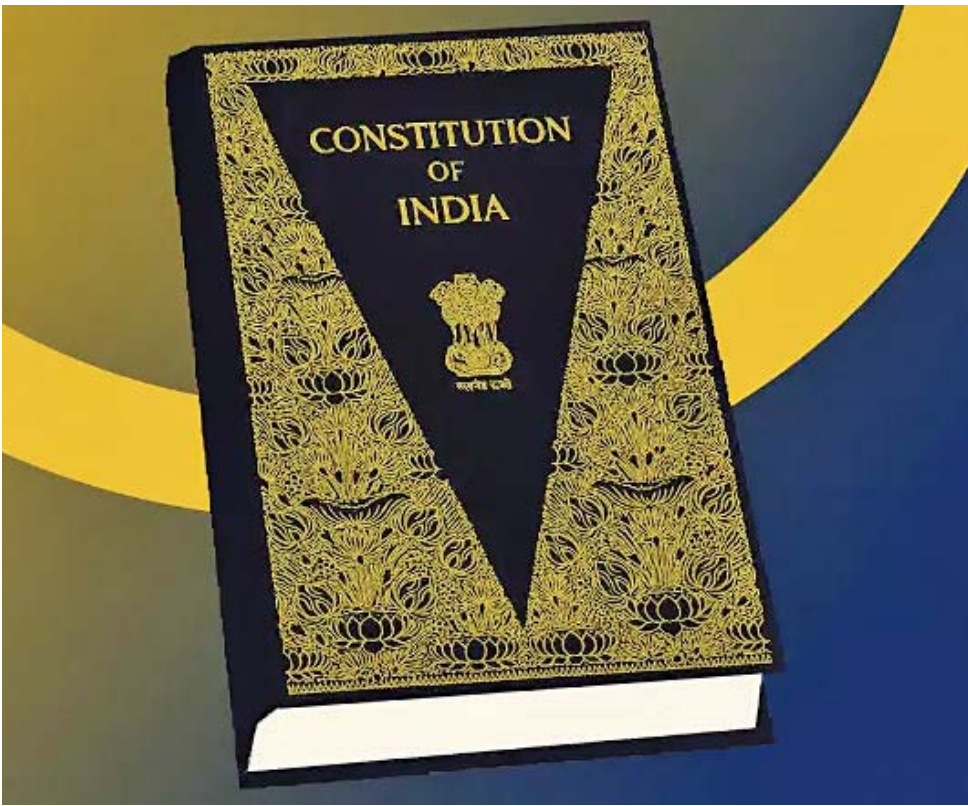
It carried a profound human cost. These experiences serve as a powerful reminder that constitutional rights are not abstract legal principles; they are safeguards that directly shape the dignity, liberty, and everyday lives of citizens. When these rights are curtailed, it is not merely institutions that suffer - it is ordinary people, families, and communities whose freedoms and aspirations are most deeply affected. Yet the enduring lesson of that period is one of democratic resilience.

The people of India demonstrated extraordinary faith in constitutional methods. Democratic processes ultimately corrected democratic distortions. Through peaceful participation and the ballot box, citizens reaffirmed the principle that sovereignty resides with the people. That remains one of the greatest strengths of Indian democracy - its ability to learn, adapt, self-correct, and emerge stronger from periods of challenge.

Marking this occasion, a curated exhibition forms an important segment of the commemoration. It serves as a visual journey through one of the most challenging times in Indian democracy - presenting archival material, stories of resistance, constitutional milestones and people's experiences during the Emergency. Another crucial element marking the occasion is a special memorial lecture by Padma Bhushan veteran journalist and author Shri Ram Bahadur Rai — one that lends contemporary relevance to the larger theme of constitutional vigilance and democratic renewal.

In contemporary times, nearly eight decades after

Fifty years since the imposition of the Emergency, the nation continues to reflect upon this period which is remembered as one of the darkest chapters in India's democratic history. The objective of observance of closing ceremony of the national commemoration of Samvidhan Hatya Diwas - Long Live Democracy



Independence, the meaning of democracy continues to evolve. Citizens increasingly seek not only representation, but participation. Not only rights, but responsive governance. Initiatives promoting financial inclusion, grassroots participation, and citizen-centric governance have widened the reach of democratic institutions.

At the same time, the responsibility of citizenship has become even more important. A strong democracy depends upon informed citizens. Today, when the world turns to India and calls her the "Mother of Democracy", it is a recognition of our long civilizational journey from the dharma of ancient kings to the will of modern voters.

The Living Legends of Freedom

The components comprising this closing ceremony reflect this broader understanding of democracy as a living and evolving national experience. The exhibition on Digital District Repository (DDR) — a pioneering initiative launched under the commemoration of Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav (AKAM) in the year 2021 — aims to bring to the forefront hundreds of lesser-known stories of sacrifice, courage, and public participation from every corner of the country.

The Ministry of Culture has also created 10 short films pertaining to these lesser-known narratives from our freedom struggle. Together, these initiatives remind us that democracy is strengthened when constitutional values are reinforced by cultural memory, historical awareness, and a deep sense of national belonging. So far DDR has more than 19,500 narratives on the dedicated website section.

Among the institutions and departments that have contributed to the DDR initiative, the Centre for Cultural Resources and Training (CCRT) - an autonomous organisation under the Ministry of Culture - has played an important role in documenting and curating a substantial number of stories that illuminate lesser-known dimensions of India's struggle for independence.

On this occasion, we are privileged to be joined by two living freedom fighters who stand before us as living embodiments of courage, sacrifice, and service - Shri Sheshrao Laxmanrao Khot of Maharashtra joined the Hyderabad Liberation Movement as a young student; and Shri Eddula Suryanarayana Reddy from Andhra Pradesh, who began supporting the freedom movement as a child and was

detained by the police at the age of eleven years. Their presence reminds us that freedom is not a distant history but a living memory.

Virasat and Cultural Continuity

Complementing this is 11th edition of Virasat - that celebrates the cultural traditions, artistic expressions, and shared heritage that have fostered dialogue, diversity, and social cohesion across generations. It honours the memory of Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay - freedom fighter, cultural visionary and institution-builder.

The classical presentations draw upon musical traditions that have evolved through centuries of dialogue between generations, regions, and schools of thought. Indian classical music itself is a testament to the values of continuity, diversity, discipline, and creative freedom - values that are equally essential to a vibrant democracy.

The presentation Enajori: Loknaad - Janjatiya Samrasta ka Swar-Sangam celebrates the rich cultural traditions of Assam and the North-East. Through its music and dance traditions representing diverse communities, it beautifully demonstrates the idea of unity in diversity, one of the foundational principles of our Republic. It reminds us that India's strength lies in its ability to accommodate multiple identities. Particularly meaningful is the special thematic presentation by the CCRT scholars, "From Silence to Voice, From Darkness to Dawn." Through the language of Indian classical music, it traces the journey from fear and suppression to courage, renewal, and democratic resurgence.

Another milestone in connection with the commemoration relates to the laying of the foundation stone for the Maharshi Dayanand Saraswati Kala Gurukul & Kalagram, which is designed to establish centres where India's artistic heritage can be studied and practiced. This is inspired from the age-old tradition of the Gurukul system.

Just as democratic values must be passed from one generation to the next, cultural traditions too require institutions that sustain and renew them. In line with this principle, Seva Parv shows that cultural expressions still have an impact on people's consciousness and civic sense.

The author is Union Minister for Culture & Tourism, Government of India

The Emergency and Chandrashekhar's defiance



HN SHARMA

The Emergency of 1975-77 remains one of the darkest chapters in the history of independent India. Civil liberties were suspended, political opponents were imprisoned, the press was censored, and democratic institutions came under unprecedented pressure. Yet, amid the silence of fear and conformity, a few voices refused to bend. Among them stood Chandrashekhar, a leader whose commitment to democratic values transcended political convenience and personal safety. Long before the Emergency was formally imposed on June 25, 1975, Chandrashekhar had sensed the dangers of concentrating excessive power in the hands of the executive. Though he belonged to the Congress Party at the time, he was known for speaking his mind and challenging authority whenever he believed democratic principles were at stake. He reportedly advised Prime Minister Indira Gandhi against taking any drastic and undemocratic step that could damage the Congress Party and leave a permanent scar on India's democratic legacy. His warning was prophetic. The Emergency would eventually become one of the most controversial decisions in modern Indian political history. The arrest of veteran socialist leader Jayaprakash Narayan, popularly known as JP, deeply disturbed Chandrashekhar. JP had emerged as the moral force behind a nationwide movement demanding accountability, transparency, and democratic reform. For Chandrashekhar, the imprisonment of such a towering national figure represented not merely the arrest of an individual but an assault on democratic dissent itself. When the crackdown began, Chandrashekhar openly protested. The Government attempted to soften his detention by offering special treatment. Haryana strongman Bansi Lal reportedly suggested that a Government guest house could be converted into a place of confinement for him. Chandrashekhar rejected the offer outright. He believed that accepting privileges while thousands of political workers and opposition leaders languished in ordinary prisons would amount to compromising his principles. Instead, he chose to be lodged in a regular jail in Punjab. His decision was both symbolic and courageous. It demonstrated that resistance to authoritarianism could not be selective. If democracy was under attack, the struggle had to be shared equally by leaders and ordinary citizens alike.

Before leaving for prison, Chandrashekhar informed his family of his conscious decision to oppose the Emergency. He understood the risks involved. The future was uncertain, and nobody knew how long the Emergency would last. In a poignant moment, he is remembered as telling his wife that he might not return soon. The statement reflected not fear but a realistic assessment of the political climate and the sacrifices that lay ahead.

His wife, Dooja Devi, responded with remarkable courage and patriotism. Rather than urging caution, she freed him of any concern for domestic obligations. Her message was clear: for the sake of the nation, he should consider himself released from family responsibilities and remain steadfast in defending democratic values. It was a powerful expression of sacrifice that mirrored the resolve of countless families whose loved ones were imprisoned during that turbulent period.

I vividly recall a deeply emotional telephonic conversation with Chandrashekhar ji while he was facing the heat of the administration, at that time, I was with his family members at Pinjore Gardens, Chandigarh. As he prepared for incarceration, he spoke about the uncertainty that awaited him and the need for someone to look after his family in his absence. The gravity of the moment was overwhelming. With tears in my eyes, I assured him that I would serve to the best of my capacity and stand by his family whenever needed. It was not merely a personal commitment; it was a tribute to a leader who had chosen principle over comfort and courage over compromise.

Throughout the Emergency, Chandrashekhar remained unwavering in his opposition to authoritarian rule. His imprisonment only strengthened his moral authority. Unlike many politicians who adjusted themselves to the prevailing winds of power, he stood firm in defence of constitutional freedoms, political pluralism, and the right to dissent. History eventually vindicated those who resisted. Public anger against the suspension of democratic rights grew steadily. When elections were finally held in 1977, the people of India delivered a decisive verdict.

The Emergency was withdrawn, and the Congress government suffered a historic defeat. Democracy, though bruised, emerged stronger. For Chandrashekhar, the struggle was never about personal ambition. It was about preserving the soul of the Republic. His conduct during the Emergency transformed him into one of the most respected democratic voices of his generation. The episode also demonstrated that genuine leadership is measured not by the offices one occupies but by the principles one refuses to surrender. The Emergency remains a cautionary tale for every generation of Indians. It reminds us that democracy survives not merely through institutions but through the courage of individuals willing to defend them. Chandrashekhar's resistance, sacrifice, and unwavering faith in democratic values ensured that when freedom was tested, he stood on the right side of history.

The Writer was political advisor to the former prime minister, Late Chandrashekhar



Development in transition: What NFHS-6 tells us about India



ANKITA GOYAL

SARTHI ACHARYA

India has committed itself to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which seek to improve the quality of life through progress across economic, social, demographic, environmental, and institutional dimensions. Achieving these goals requires more than economic expansion alone; it demands that growth be translated into improvements in health, education, nutrition, gender equality, and other indicators of human well-being. The National Family Health Survey (NFHS), while not capturing the entire spectrum of development, provides an important window into the extent to which economic growth has been accompanied by social and demographic progress. The four rounds of the NFHS, spanning the period from 2005-06 to 2023-24, allow an assessment of India's progress in select demographic and social indicators. The latest round,

released this week, suggests that the country has undoubtedly moved forward. However, the pace of improvement has been uneven across sectors and regions, and in several dimensions remains slower than might be expected after nearly three decades of economic growth of over 6% annually. The experience of East and Southeast Asian countries provides a useful benchmark, as many of them combined economic growth with rapid gains in human development within a relatively short period.

The data point to important achievements. Health insurance coverage expanded dramatically from about 5% to nearly 60% of the population. Female educational attainment also improved substantially, with nearly half of women now having completed ten or more years of schooling. Fertility has declined to replacement level on aggregate and below replacement in large parts of the country, marking an important demographic transition. However, there is an underbelly: The southern states, much of the Northeast, and parts of northern India report substantially better outcomes than the large states of the Indo-Gangetic plains. Moreover, the survey pro-



vides little information on the quality of health or educational services, limiting conclusions about the effectiveness of these achievements.

Progress in reducing child marriage has also been noteworthy. The proportion of women aged 20-24 who were married before the age of 18 declined from 47.4 per cent to 20.1 per cent. Yet, the prevalence remains high by inter-

body mass index declined until 2019-21 but has since shown a slight reversal. These trends suggest that nutritional deprivation remains deeply entrenched despite sustained economic growth. Here too, regional disparities persist, with states such as Bihar and Jharkhand continuing to perform poorly while much of southern and northeastern India fares considerably better.

national standards. Countries such as China and Thailand have reduced child marriage to negligible levels, suggesting that considerable progress remains possible. Once again, regional differences are striking. Bihar and Jharkhand continue to report rates exceeding 30%, whereas Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Mizoram have reduced the incidence to around 10% or lower.

The most serious concern emerges from nutrition-related indicators. Child stunting declined from about 48 per cent to 29.3 per cent, a substantial improvement but still one of the highest levels among major economies. The proportion of underweight children fell more modestly, from 42.5 per cent to 31.8 per cent. Similarly, the share of women with below-normal

A recent article in *Indian Express* (dt. June 2, 2026) finds that a number of indicators have been dropped in NFHS-6 compared to NFHS-5. This might not be a very serious issues as some of these variables do not change at short intervals. However, India's development record has been otherwise mixed. The country has made some progress in education, health insurance coverage, decline of child marriage, and TFR in some states, etc. Improvements in nutrition and other measures of human well-being, however, have been slower than expected, and large regional inequalities remain. Compared with the experience of East- and Southeast Asian economies during their periods of rapid growth, India's progress appears gradual rather than transformational.

Evidence from NFHS-6 suggests that while economic growth might have contributed to some social advancement, it has not consistently translated into equally rapid improvements in human development.

The challenge for the coming decades is therefore not merely to sustain growth, but to ensure that its benefits are converted more effectively into better health, nutrition, education, and quality of life for all sections of the population.

Dr. Ankita Goyal is an Assistant Professor at the Council for Social Development (CSD), New Delhi and Managing Editor, Social Change, Sage Publishing; Professor Sarthi Acharya is a Visiting Professor at the Council for Social Development (CSD), New Delhi and Managing Editor, Indian Journal of Labour Economics, Springer Publishing



OPINION

The
Hindustan Times
ESTABLISHED IN 1924

{ OUR TAKE }

Khalistan finally
worries Canada

Carney is shedding the Canadian establishment’s hesitation in dealing with Sikh extremism, but this is to assuage Canadians more than India

Canadian Prime Minister (PM) Mark Carney has been walking the tightrope of minority freedoms and the security threats immigrants carry from their native lands. Less than two months after the Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) acknowledged before parliament on May 1 the security threat posed by violent Khalistan-supporters, Carney has indicated the political will to be more vigilant about the challenge. The CSIS report made a clear distinction between political activism for the cause of Khalistan and violent activities carried out in its name. In a statement made on the National Day of Remembrance for Victims of Terrorism, Carney went further: “The legacy of Air India Flight 182 demands remembrance, but also vigilance,” he said. This takes forward the sentiment expressed in a 2005 report on the 1985 bombing of Air India Flight 182, by Bob Rae, independent advisor to the minister of public safety. The report was prepared at the behest of deputy PM and minister of public safety, Anne McLellan.

Put simply, Carney is shedding the traditional hesitation of the Canadian establishment in dealing with Sikh extremism.

While it may be tempting for India to read too much into Carney’s statement — he has been at pains to recalibrate India-Canada ties after they significantly dipped during the Justin Trudeau years — it aligns with Ottawa’s commitment to protect Canadians. Canada has institutionally responded to the bombing of the Air India flight with guilt and grief. On the 25th anniversary of the tragedy in 2010, then PM Stephen Harper apologised for the government’s failure in, first, protecting the victims and, then, bringing closure to the families. The bombing, while staged against India, is consistently lamented as “the deadliest terrorist attack in Canada’s history”.

In the investigation of the bombing, Canadian government has, through multiple enquiries and commissions, highlighted the lapses in terms of effective cooperation between government departments and agencies, including the CSIS and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. It is, therefore, a case of Canada failing Canadians.

There’s another reason for India to be circumspect: The Bob Rae report clearly mentioned that “the growth of Sikh radicalism also had a domestic, Canadian flavour,” but the CSIS report of May 2026, while acknowledging this as a serious threat, also counts India among countries carrying out espionage and threats against Canadian citizens on Canadian soil. The New Delhi-Ottawa reset remains a work in progress.

Get up, stand up...

Fifty-three years after Bob Marley and Peter Tosh first exhorted people to “Get up, stand up...”, and 44 years after Tom Peters and Robert Waterman extolled the benefits of “Management By Walking Around” or MBWA, a recent study in the *British Journal of Sports Medicine* seemed to borrow from both to recommend the optimal cure for the bane of white-collar jobs: sitting. Chairs, we’ve known for some time, can kill us, albeit much more slowly, than cigarettes can. Sitting, as they say, is (indeed) the new smoking, with the link between prolonged sedentary and adverse long-term health impact, well-established. The cure: walking around for five minutes every hour, which the study says offsets the ills of prolonged (11-12 hours daily) sitting. Even better: it is apparently good for the mind too.

The recommendation to get up and get about is apt for a country where the burden of non-communicable diseases, including lifestyle ones, has almost doubled over three decades, and which has a significant number of obese and “over-weight” people.

Employers, who will note with delight the study’s finding that five minutes of walking every hour doesn’t really disrupt work, would do well to address prolonged sitting through initiatives like mandatory breaks, walking meetings, localised walking, office gyms, and “step challenges”. But the bigger change has to come from people: They must understand that unless they are Rosa Parks, sitting put doesn’t help them or society.

{ OVER THE HORIZON }

Arunabha Ghosh



Redesign power markets
for sustainable AI future

The trilemma involving AI demand, grid fragility, and climate extremes is one of the most important design challenges for AI infrastructure that will drive future growth

“Should we choose Artificial Intelligence (AI) growth or climate stability” is the wrong question to ask. Both are imperatives for India’s future. However, the real trilemma is this — AI needs large amounts of electricity and water; meanwhile, grids are under stress from energy insecurities as well as extreme heat; and the climate crisis is making both sets of problems worse. We cannot solve any one without solving the other two.

Each hyperscale data centre draws as much electricity as an aluminium smelter and consumes millions of gallons of water daily for cooling — even as heatwaves and the worsening climate crisis turn those resources scarce. Global electricity demand hit a record 31,779 TWh in 2025, after crossing 30,000 TWh in 2024. Last month, India’s peak power demand hit an unprecedented 270.82 GW as heatwaves pushed cooling loads to never-before-seen levels.

Can we rethink where we set up

data-centres, design new power markets, and leverage digital infrastructure to enable rather than undermine sustainable economic development? The answer is yes, but only if we abandon 20th-century power grid thinking.

Consider India’s geography of exposure: 70% of its operational data centres are concentrated in Mumbai, Delhi-NCR, Chennai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad and Kolkata. More than half of these data centres already endure temperatures above 35°C for over 90 days a year, according to the Climate Resilience Analytics and Visualisation Intelligence System (CRAVIS.ai), developed by the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW). By 2040, nearly 90% will face similar heat stress. Globally, over 600 data centres sit in locations where average temperatures exceed the ideal operating bracket of 18-27°C. India could see 15-40 additional unusually hot days each year in the next two decades, and 20-40 more unusually warm nights annually. That means air-conditioning loads won’t ease even after sunset. For every data-centre investor, location determines exposure to heat and water stress, while market design sets power prices — all three directly affect operating costs and long-term viability.

Meanwhile, the world’s major economies are scrambling to fix their grids. But most are treating symptoms. The US will be spending a trillion dollars to replace ageing grid infrastructure. China is using coal plants as frequency stabilisers after a 13% wind speed drop last March, even as it races to build ultra-high voltage transmission lines.

These are necessary measures, but are also defensive or reactive. The proactive move is to redesign power markets for the age of flexible, concentrated, weather-sensitive loads.

That redesign rests on five shifts.

First, move from bundled electricity procurement to rewarding flexibility. Short-term markets must pay for ramping, storage, and demand response. Data centres — large, controllable loads — could become grid assets by shifting computation to times of renewable energy abundance. Utilities should open participation to aggregators and virtual power plants.

Second, site data centres with foresight. While electricity prices vary across time and location, developers must also account for renewable energy availability, transmission readiness, future heat exposure, and water security. These factors progressively determine both operating costs and infrastructure resilience over the asset’s lifetime. Today, only five of 15 states in the country have data-centre policies that consider climate risks. Platforms such as CRAVIS can be used to map temperature, rainfall, and water availability over the next several decades, so that hyperscalers are designed with appropriate cooling and water-efficient technologies.

Third, mandate transparent disclosures to drive resource efficiency and cost-effectiveness. Every new data centre must report verified power and water use and carbon intensity — just as we require energy labels for refrigerators. Also, replace rigid decadal power purchase agreements with a layered



Each hyperscale data centre draws as much electricity as an aluminium smelter and consumes millions of gallons of water daily for cooling. REUTERS

contract stack. Developers need long-term certainty to finance clean assets. Buyers want shorter terms because renewable costs keep falling and AI demand is uncertain. The International Energy Agency suggests that the tenor gap could be bridged with intermediaries or two-sided contracts-for-difference — arrangements where both the clean energy developer and the buyer share price-risk around an agreed benchmark — while preserving exposure to real-time price signals.

Fourth, leverage digital infrastructure to enable power markets of the future. Smart metering is the nervous system of the future grid. India must complete its smart-metering rollout by 2028, integrating them with other operational systems of the utilities, with due attention to consumer safeguards. We can build a Unified Energy Interface on that platform. With granular real-time information, energy data can feed into a digital public infrastructure (DPI) for electrons, just as India did with payments. Proprietary platforms will not deliver flexibility, common data protocols will. Utilities have been leveraging an estimated 2-4% of the data they collect. That is a design mismatch we can resolve.

Fifth, make energy and water efficiency core to AI viability. The revenue calculus for AI is unforgiving:

Globally, to sustain the \$500 billion annual capex that AI infrastructure will require by 2030, cloud and AI providers need \$2 trillion in annual revenue. This gap can be reduced by locating data centres where power is clean, cheap, and cool — and where markets send the right price signals while optimising for efficiency. By 2050, space cooling could account for 44% of India’s peak load, up from 11% today. Indonesia, the US, West Asia, and Brazil face similar trajectories. A data centre built without accounting for rising temperatures, humidity, and water stress is a stranded asset waiting to happen.

This trilemma — involving AI demand, grid fragility, climate extremes — is one of the most important design challenges for AI infrastructure that will drive future growth. India has shown how DPI can scale. Now we must show how climate-intelligent power markets can scale alongside AI. Our children deserve advanced technology and a sustainable planet, both of which must be responsibly nurtured.

Arunabha Ghosh is CEO at the Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW). He also served as Chair of the AI and Climate Expert Engagement Group for the AI Impact Summit 2026. The views expressed are personal

Bihar as the nerve centre of
resistance to Emergency

June 25, 1975 — the date the Emergency was imposed — stands as one of the darkest chapters in the history of Indian democracy. It is a date that evokes pain and concern in the minds of all those who cherish democratic values. The Emergency was not merely a political episode; it was an unprecedented assault on India’s Constitution, democratic institutions, freedom of expression, and civil liberties. It reflected a dangerous mindset that was willing to sacrifice democracy itself to preserve political power.

The younger generation must understand that there was a period in India’s history when the spirit of the Constitution was suppressed, the judiciary came under immense pressure from the political executive, the press was censored, and political opponents of the ruling dispensation were imprisoned without due process. Significantly, these actions were imposed by a Congress-led government elected to uphold the sanctity of democracy.

On June 12, 1975, the Allahabad High Court declared the election of then Prime Minister (PM) Indira Gandhi invalid. In a healthy democracy, the moral course of action would have been to respect the verdict and step down. Instead, the Congress chose to protect power rather than democratic principles.

On the night of June 25, the Emergency was imposed.

Fundamental rights were curtailed, civil liberties were suspended, and millions of citizens were deprived of basic freedoms. An atmosphere of fear, repression, and uncertainty engulfed the nation. The events of that period demonstrated that, for the Congress, the preservation of power had become more important than the preservation of democracy.

If the Emergency symbolised authoritarianism, Bihar became the strongest centre of democratic resistance. This is the land that gave the nation Loknayak Jayaprakash Narayan, one of the most respected champions of democracy.

The call for “*Sampoorna Kranti*” (Total Revolution) that arose from Patna’s Gandhi Maidan shook the foundations of authoritarian rule. The JP Movement was not merely an agitation against a government; it was a movement for systemic reform and democratic renewal. It challenged corruption, dynastic politics, appeasement, and the arrogance of power.

Thousands of students, youth, farmers, teachers, and ordinary citizens from Bihar joined the struggle to defend democratic values. Many were imprisoned and subjected to hardship, yet they refused to surrender their commitment to democracy.

Bihar’s contribution to this national movement remains a matter of immense pride. Without the leadership of Loknayak Jayaprakash Narayan and the courage of the people of Bihar, the struggle against authoritarianism would not have acquired the strength it ultimately did.

Today, the Congress often speaks about

freedom of expression. However, the nation has not forgotten that it was during the Emergency that press censorship was imposed on an unprecedented scale.

Newspapers were required to obtain official clearance before publishing sensitive reports. Critical voices were silenced, journalists were intimidated, and media institutions faced immense pressure.

The fourth pillar of democracy became one of the principal victims of political authoritarianism during that period.

Loknayak Jayaprakash Narayan, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Lal Krishna Advani, George Fernandes, Nanaji Deshmukh, and thousands of political workers and activists were imprisoned.

Their only offence was their commitment to democracy, constitutional governance, and the rights of the people.

Dissent was treated as a crime, and every effort was made to suppress opposing voices. This remains one of the most troubling episodes in India’s democratic journey.

The Emergency also serves as a reminder that excessive concentration of power weakens democratic institutions. When authority becomes confined to a few individuals, institutional checks and balances begin to erode, placing constitutional values at risk.

The Emergency stands as a warning against the dangers of dynastic politics and unchecked political power.

Under the leadership of PM Narendra Modi, India has entered an era of greater transparency, public participation, and inclusive development.

The guiding principle of governance today is: “*Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas, Sabka Prayas*.”

Poor, women, youth, Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, backward classes, and marginalised communities have become central stakeholders in India’s development journey. Democratic participation has expanded, governance has become more transparent, and India continues to strengthen its position as the world’s largest democracy.

The Emergency is not merely a historical event; it is an enduring lesson about the importance of safeguarding democratic institutions.

Young Indians must understand that democracy was preserved through sacrifice and struggle. Thousands of citizens endured imprisonment and hardship to protect the freedoms and rights that we enjoy today.

On the anniversary of the Emergency, I pay heartfelt tribute to all those who stood firm in defence of democracy and refused to yield before authoritarian rule. I offer special respect to the people of Bihar, who, under the leadership of Loknayak Jayaprakash Narayan, played a historic role in safeguarding democratic values.

Let us renew our commitment to protecting the Constitution, strengthening democratic institutions, and preserving the rights and freedoms of every citizen.

Democracy is not merely a system of governance; it is the very soul of India. The contribution of Bihar in defending that soul will forever remain etched in the nation’s history.



Samrat Choudhary

Samrat Choudhary is chief minister, Bihar. The views expressed are personal

{ ASADUDDIN OWAISI }

MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT, LOK SABHA

Every Indian citizen wants normal and peaceful ties with China, but these can't be solely on Chinese terms. Indian interests have to be paramount

On the normalisation of ties between India and China

Michael Jackson is a test of
engaging with complexity

The recent Netflix documentary on Michael Jackson — *Michael Jackson: The Verdict* — has reopened a debate that has been running for more than three decades. That, in itself, is not unusual. What is unusual is, after all this time, we still seem unable to decide what to do with Jackson, 17 years to date after his death.

In communications, reputations tend to settle with time. The details may remain contested, but the broader narrative usually becomes clearer. Heroes become more firmly established in public memory, while villains seep into cautionary tales. Jackson’s image has resisted that process. Thirty-three years after the child abuse allegations first entered public consciousness, every new documentary, interview, or investigation seems to generate more disagreement instead of enabling a consensus. The facts have been examined in courts of law and in the court of public opinion. Yet, the conversation remains unresolved.

Part of the reason may be that we have become increasingly uncomfortable with ambiguity. Contemporary public discourse rewards decisiveness. We are encouraged to form opinions quickly and express them with certainty. Complexity can appear evasive; nuance is often mistaken for moral hesitation.

Jackson does not fit easily into the categories we prefer. He was one of the most gifted performers of the modern era, reshaping music, dance and popular culture on a global scale. He was also one of its most controversial figures, attracting an extraordinary degree of scrutiny and speculation throughout his life. The contradictions are difficult to reconcile.

As someone who has spent much of her professional life helping organisations and individuals communicate clearly, I have often reflected on the importance of coherent narratives. People want to understand who someone is and what they stand for. Jackson presents the opposite challenge. The more material becomes available, the more complicated the picture appears.

As an opera singer, I am reminded of Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*. More than two centuries after the opera premiered, audiences continue to disagree about its central character. Don Giovanni is charismatic, manipulative, magnetic and morally reprehensible. Nobody leaves the theatre admiring his conduct; yet, neither is the discussion confined to condemnation alone. The character provokes because he resists simplification. The comparison with

Jackson is not one of circumstance but of cultural persistence. Some figures remain part of the public imagination precisely because they refuse to settle into a single, stable interpretation.

While reading reactions to the documentary, I found myself thinking about the *Mahabharata* — its characters resist easy moral categorisation. Karna is generous, loyal and deeply sympathetic. Yet, he remains aligned with an unjust cause. Bhishma is honourable and principled, but his silence in crucial moments carries devastating consequences. The epic does not ask us to suspend moral judgment; rather, it acknowledges that human beings are often a complicated mixture of virtue, weakness, loyalty and failure. Contemporary discourse, however, tends to prefer clarity. We are more comfortable with definitive conclusions and neatly drawn lines between heroes and villains. Jackson’s story has consistently frustrated that impulse. Every few years, a new documentary promises resolution, and audiences return hoping that thematter will finally be settled. However, the debate continues because the contradictions remain intact.

What increasingly fascinates me is that each new film seems to reveal less about Jackson than about the society watching him. Every generation revisits the same figure and arrives at different conclusions, informed by changing attitudes towards celebrity, power, victimhood, evidence and accountability. The discussion often tells us as much about contemporary values as it does about Jackson.

Jackson is no longer simply a musician, a celebrity, or even a controversy. He has become a test of how we engage with complexity in public life. Younger generations continue to grapple with his legacy long after many of his contemporaries have receded into nostalgia. They do not merely consume his music; they debate what it means to continue listening, celebrating or separating artistic achievement from personal conduct. The latest documentary is unlikely to settle the Michael Jackson question once and for all. It may simply remind us that human beings do not always fit neatly into a single story and that our desire for certainty can sometimes exceed our capacity to attain it. Perhaps that, more than Jackson himself, is the story worth paying attention to.



Sunanda Rao-Erdem

Sunanda Rao-Erdem is founder and CEO at Seraphim Communications LLP. The views expressed are personal

The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Weak monsoon

Agriculture sector faces a stern test

A weak southwest monsoon has exposed the fragility of India's agriculture sector, particularly in rainfed regions. With rainfall deficit hovering around 40-46 per cent and the Meteorological Department forecasting subdued monsoon activity till July 2, concerns over the kharif season are intensifying. The Centre's identification of 111 highly vulnerable districts across 12 states reflects the seriousness of the crisis. Agriculture remains heavily dependent on monsoon rains despite years of policy emphasis on irrigation expansion and climate resilience. A delayed or deficient monsoon directly impacts sowing activity, crop productivity, rural incomes and food inflation. If below-normal rainfall persists during the crucial July-August period, the consequences could be severe.

The government has drawn up state-wise and district-level contingency plans. It is also promoting drought-resistant crops and water conservation, besides making efforts to ensure an adequate supply of seeds and fertilisers. The focus on pulses, oilseeds and coarse cereals makes sense in view of their lower water requirements. The activation of the El Nino Monitoring Cell and real-time advisories through Krishi Vigyan Kendras are also positive steps. Preparedness is half the battle won, but it should go hand in hand with reform. India's recurring monsoon anxieties underline the urgent need to reduce dependence on rainfed agriculture. Expanding micro-irrigation, rejuvenating water bodies, improving groundwater management and incentivising climate-smart farming must become long-term national priorities rather than seasonal responses.

The urgency of protecting farmers from economic distress cannot be overemphasised. Crop insurance coverage remains uneven, and awareness of contingency measures is often limited at the grassroots level. India's food security may not face immediate danger due to healthy grain stocks and reservoir buffers, yet the livelihoods of millions of farmers remain at risk. Climate variability is no longer an occasional disruption but a recurring reality. The challenge for policymakers is to build a more climate-resilient agricultural system capable of withstanding future uncertainties.

Debt bondage

Those freed must be rehabilitated, supported

THE rescue of 28 Soliga tribals, including children, from a brick-kiln in Mysuru is grim evidence that bonded labour remains a reality in India despite being outlawed nearly five decades ago. Families were trapped by small advances, years of underpaid labour and a cycle of debt that effectively robbed them of their freedom. What makes the episode particularly troubling is that it involved a vulnerable tribal community. Poverty, illiteracy, landlessness and lack of access to formal credit often leave such groups at the mercy of labour contractors. A modest advance meant to tide a family over difficult times can quickly become an instrument of coercion.

The Mysuru case is not isolated. Similar rescues have been reported from Uttar Pradesh, Tamil Nadu and other states in recent months. Brick-kilns, construction sites and small factories rely on informal labour arrangements that frequently evade scrutiny. The persistence of such practices exposes a serious gap between legal protections and their implementation on the ground. India has a robust legal framework to combat bonded labour. Rescue operations are essential. But the deeper challenge lies in ensuring rehabilitation, livelihood support and access to social security so that vulnerable families are not forced back into the same conditions.

Equally important is stricter monitoring of high-risk industries and swift prosecution of offenders. Unless employers who profit from bonded labour face meaningful consequences, the practice will continue in new forms. The freedom of rescued workers must not end with their release. For a nation committed to *Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas* and aspiring to become Viksit Bharat, the continued existence of debt bondage is a stark contradiction. Inclusive development must be judged by how effectively the most vulnerable citizens are protected from exploitation.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

LAHORE, FRIDAY, JUNE 25, 1926

British liberalism

THE recent differences between Lord Oxford and Mr Lloyd George, undoubtedly the two most puissant personalities in the Liberal party, will be sincerely regretted by all who realise that Liberalism in England is already a dying creed. It is all the more regrettable that they should have been provoked not by the excitable Welshman who has never been noted for an excess of discretion, but by the veteran and cool-headed English statesman whom enmity itself cannot accuse of fidgetiness. His now famous letter to Mr George regarding the attitude taken up by the latter in connection with the strike was as harsh and intemperate in expression as it was supremely uncalled for. It brought two definite charges against Mr George. One was that he had failed to attend the "Shadow" Cabinet meeting of May 10 which had been expressly called to discuss the proper attitude of the Liberal party towards the strike. The other was that "at a time when it was above all things necessary to demonstrate the essential unity of the country" Mr George had contributed to the American Press an article containing "a despondent and highly coloured picture of the straits" to which England had been reduced, and "predicting a long duration of the conflict and the ultimate wearing down of the steadfastness of the British people." On Mr George's failure to attend the meeting of the 10th, Lord Oxford said that he "found it impossible to reconcile it with his conception of the obligations of political comradeship."

OPINION

India holds its ground on BRICS turf

New Delhi desists from choosing between Washington and Beijing



C UDAY BHASKAR
DIRECTOR, SOCIETY
FOR POLICY STUDIES

THE 16th BRICS National Security Advisers' (NSA) Meeting, hosted earlier this week by New Delhi and chaired by India's NSA Ajit Doval, brought together the 11 member nations. They exchanged views on security challenges such as terrorism, cyber threats and the impact of emerging technologies. No joint statement was issued — this was indicative of the sharp divergence among members on critical macro-security issues.

The grouping was formed in June 2009 in Yekaterinburg (Russia), initially as BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India and China); South Africa was admitted in 2011. The bloc currently has 11 full members: Brazil, China, Egypt, Ethiopia, India, Indonesia, Iran, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa and the United Arab Emirates. NSAs and other representatives from these countries attended the June 22-23 event; China was represented by Foreign Minister Wang Yi.

The fact that Delhi, as the current chair of BRICS, convened such a meeting amid two wars (Ukraine and Iran) and ensured the participation of regional rivals is testimony to the deft diplomatic acumen that India brings to the global table. This was a preparatory meeting in the run-up to the BRICS summit to be held in India in September.

The more significant outcomes of the deliberations can be reviewed along two symbiotic tracks — the multilateral relating to BRICS and the India-China bilateral. Since the bloc's inception, it has been evident that the relationship between the two



BALANCE : India's new approach is to engage with rivals multilaterally without conceding bilaterally. PTI

Asian giants has a bearing on the credibility and relevance of BRICS in global geopolitics.

Both the US and China are cognisant of this reality. Ever since India was admitted into the global nuclear order in late 2008 as an exceptional state, how Delhi has positioned itself in relation to the two major powers has impacted the geopolitical framework. In keeping with its traditional stance of non-alignment, now transmuted to strategic autonomy and multi-engagement, India has maintained this continuity.

The underlying message emerging from the BRICS forum was that Delhi would highlight security issues relevant to the Global South. At the same time, Delhi tempered US expectations that India would align against China and dampened Beijing's hope that BRICS would project anti-US/West unity. Clearly, a warming of US-China ties would alter the BRICS dynamic.

Specific to the Delhi deliberations, three tangible outcomes can be inferred, each with implications that go beyond BRICS. First, the NSAs agreed that the most urgent security challenges were no longer just tanks, ships, aircraft and missiles. The theme was "Non-traditional security

BRICS is becoming India's preferred platform to highlight issues relevant to the Global South without being seen as anti-West.

challenges", which include terrorism enabled by emerging technologies, cyberattacks on critical infrastructure, weaponisation of supply chains, food, fertilisers and energy insecurity and the abiding yet intractable climate-induced instability.

The NSAs reviewed the work of BRICS Joint Working Groups on Counter-Terrorism and ICT (information and communication technology) security. For Delhi, chairing BRICS in 2026 lends a subtle leverage. It shifts BRICS from a China-centric economic club to a security dialogue, where India's priorities such as cross-border terrorism, terror financing and cyber norms get equal billing. For the Global South, it signals that BRICS can produce policy lan-

guage the West cannot ignore, especially on supply chain resilience, digital governance and the impact on human security.

The second strand was the closely watched Doval-Wang Yi meeting, which may be summarised as a case of managing a complex and long-festering rivalry within the current framework of multilateralism. Both sides described the talks as "constructive and forward-looking", but the readouts diverged sharply.

India stressed "gradual normalisation" and "stable, predictable, constructive" ties. The subtext is that no reset would be possible until the LAC (Line of Actual Control) stabilises. Peace on the contested border remains the precondition for a broader engagement.

China pushed to "respect each other's core interests" and "place the China-India border issue in an appropriate position, so that it doesn't affect the overall situation". This translates into compartmentalising the border issue, resuming trade and flights and beginning technology transfer as the first step. The gap is one of sequencing — India wants trust to be established first and then ties to be normalised, while China is keen to delink the LAC and move

ahead without any consensual settlement. This would be undesirable, given that Beijing ramps up its claim on Arunachal Pradesh when relations are tense and uses the Pakistan card to stoke Indian anxiety.

Hosting Wang while sticking to its stand shows Delhi's new approach: engage with rivals multilaterally but do not concede bilaterally. In the run-up to the September BRICS summit, this gives India space to lead without letting border tensions derail its presidency theme: "Building for Resilience, Innovation, Cooperation and Sustainability".

The third strand was the manner in which India's plurilateral security diplomacy was burnished when Doval met his counterparts from Brazil, Ethiopia, South Africa and Iran's Deputy Secretary for Defence Affairs. The subtext: BRICS is not China-plus.

Delhi used this meeting to deepen ties with Africa and West Asia, discuss developmental cooperation and review the West Asia situation amid the tenuous US-Iran detente. It is evident that BRICS is becoming India's preferred platform to highlight issues relevant to the Global South without being seen as anti-West.

The Delhi NSAs' meeting did not address the India-China border dispute or create a standing BRICS army. It did something quieter: it proved that BRICS can function despite core rivalries and that India can chair it without choosing between Washington and Beijing.

For global geopolitics, that means a more fragmented and contradictory order — a contrapolar world. The US no longer sets the global security agenda and China cannot command BRICS loyalty. India has the potential to emerge as a swing state that can consensually manage emerging contradictions. Towards this end, Delhi must introspect objectively and course-correct, based on lessons learnt from the recent tilt with regard to West Asia. Is a new geopolitical grammar evolving?

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

India-China relations have returned to the track of recovery and improvement. — Wang Yi

A seat earned, a battle fought

SOHAN KUMAR

BACK in 1991, Punjab was going through dark times. Turmoil, uncertainty and a lingering sense of fear had woven themselves into the fabric of everyday life. College and university campuses were no exception to the unrest, which was exploited by opportunistic elements.

A university's MBA programme was highly coveted, with only 20 seats available. Initially, I was placed third on the waiting list. Fortune smiled on me when the two candidates ahead of me opted out, clearing my path to admission.

However, my joy was short-lived. A faction of influential students had set their sights on a candidate further down the list. Rumours were rife that deep pockets and political muscle were at play to secure his spot. By stepping up to claim what was rightfully mine, I had unwittingly disrupted a well-oiled machine.

The day I went to deposit my admission fee, a hostile crowd of nearly 70 students cornered me. I had only two friends by my side. At first, the instigators tried sweet-talking me into backing out. When I dug my heels in, they showed their true colours. Persuasion gave way to outright bullying, threats and intimidation. They demanded that I forfeit my seat, making it crystal clear that defiance would come at a heavy price. Facing such overwhelming numbers, panic set in. Fearing for my safety, my resolve cracked. With a heavy heart, I signed a withdrawal statement — even though I had already paid the fee.

For the next few days, that decision tore me apart. The more I reflected, the more the injustice stung. I had been bullied into surrendering something earned through sheer merit. Giving up meant throwing away years of sacrifice. I gathered a few trusted friends and took up my case with the Vice-Chancellor. He listened patiently and assured me that justice would prevail, advising me only to keep a low profile.

I quietly slipped back into classes. When the bullies caught wind of my return, they tried to corner me again. This time, I stood my ground. Respectfully yet firmly, I told them point-blank that I would not surrender a seat I had earned fair and square.

The weeks that followed were an emotional rollercoaster. Looking over my shoulder became second nature. I stayed in different hostel rooms every night, constantly on high alert. Yet, despite the knot of fear in my stomach, I refused to back down.

Realising that I wouldn't bend, the intimidation faded. Shortly afterwards, the Dean of Academic Affairs invited me to his office for a cup of tea, full of praise for my resilience.

I held on to my admission and successfully completed my MBA. Looking back, that wasn't just a battle for a seat; it was a defining fight for self-respect and the principle that merit should never bow to might. That ordeal taught me a lesson that has stayed with me for a lifetime: when you earn an opportunity through hard work, never lay it down at the feet of fear.

The writer works at All India Radio, Jalandhar

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Employable labour must adapt

Refer to 'Job guarantee is dead, not the degree'; AI is transforming the economics of routine cognitive work, reducing the default advantage once attached to conventional software degrees and management qualifications. However, the value of learning remains intact; what is changing is the nature of skills required in the labour market. In the era of AI, individuals must move towards holistic education, combining knowledge, creativity, ethics, communication skills and practical abilities. Degrees alone cannot ensure employability; updated skills and adaptability are becoming essential. India's demographic dividend can become a reality only when the market creates meaningful opportunities for skilled youth.

MM GOEL, KURUKSHETRA

Long-term upskilling important

Apropos of 'Job guarantee is dead, not the degree'; universities must integrate skill-based learning, internships, digital literacy, entrepreneurship and industry partnerships into their academic programmes. Equally important is the need to restore dignity to vocational education. India can reap its demographic dividend only by creating a workforce that values both academic excellence and practical expertise. The future belongs not to degree holders but to lifelong learners who continuously upgrade their skills and contribute meaningfully to society and the economy.

PARVINDER SINGH, MOHALI

Solution to fire tragedies

The loss of 15 young lives in a coaching centre fire in Lucknow is a stark reminder that safety cannot be compromised. A practical and sustainable solution already exists. Thousands of government and private schools with approved infrastructure, fire safety measures, spacious classrooms and open campuses remain largely unused after school hours. Selected schools located in uncongested areas could be permitted to host coaching classes during the evening under strict regulatory oversight. The focus must now shift from reactive enforcement to preventive, long-term reform. While the crackdown on non-compliant coaching centres is necessary, it addresses the symptom rather than the disease.

COL PS BINDRA (RETD), KARNAL

Why rules not implemented?

Refer to 'Death trap'; the Lucknow fire tragedy brings to the fore the "*chalta hai*" attitude prevalent in our country. If it was the Delhi guest house fire in the first week of this month, it is Lucknow now and tomorrow it may be somewhere else. There is a repetition of the same cycle — anger, suspension of officials, announcement of compensation and high-level inquiries. If all kinds of laws, rules and regulations are already in place in the country, then why do we fail to implement them in letter and spirit?

RAVINDER KUMAR JAIN, LUDHIANA

Robust network needed

Refer to 'Centre tightens FCRA rules, NGOs must specify purpose of funding'; this step alone is insufficient to completely stop foreign funding of NGOs. It doesn't eliminate all the channels including the banking platform. Shell companies, hawala, crypto or routing funds through relatives can bypass banking channels. New rules may cut casual misuse or easy tracking but stopping all unwanted foreign funding needs robust interconnected banking, tax, intelligence coordination networking system in place to nail the suspect NGOs or mull a blanket ban on foreign funding to such NGOs except domestic ones for genuine activities permitted under the new guidelines.

ANIL VINAYAK, AMRITSAR

Reduced tolerance to daily hassles

Refer to 'Power cuts and a lesson in resilience'; an electricity outage now unsettles us because we have become accustomed to uninterrupted comfort. Technology has undeniably improved life. Yet an uncomfortable question remains: are we happier, calmer and more resilient? Prosperity has reduced many hardships, but it has also lowered our tolerance for inconvenience. The ability to endure discomfort, adapt to adversity and find contentment without constant technological support remains a valuable life skill. Resilience, as the writer notes, cannot be purchased. It is cultivated through experience, patience and occasional encounters with discomfort.

HARSH PAWARIA, ROHTAK

Should children be banned from social media



A QUIET revolution is reshaping childhood policy across the world. Governments that once celebrated the Internet as history's great democratiser are now asking a question that would have seemed alarmist a decade ago: should children under 16 be allowed on social media at all?

In late 2025, Australia became the first country to answer with an unambiguous no, introducing a nationwide ban on social media accounts for children under 16. The move sent ripples across the globe. The UK, Indonesia, Malaysia and other countries have since announced similar measures. What began as a fringe concern among anxious parents has become a mainstream policy conversation.

The trigger is not hard to identify. Across the developed world, a generation that grew up with smartphones in their pockets is showing signs of distress — rising rates of anxiety, depression, self-harm and loneliness among adolescents. The question is no longer

whether social media poses risks to children. Most experts now agree that it does. The real argument is about what, if anything, governments should do about it.

When Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and TikTok arrived, they were greeted as marvels of connection — tools that collapsed distance, democratised communication and gave young people a voice. Teenagers embraced them enthusiastically, then obsessively. By the late 2010s, many children were spending several hours a day scrolling, posting and performing their lives for online audiences.

The pandemic poured petrol on the fire. Lockdowns pushed children indoors and online for longer. Screen time soared; adult supervision thinned. When schools reopened and the world exhaled, parents, teachers and health professionals were left with an uncomfortable question: had we handed an entire generation over to platforms whose primary interest was not their well-being but their attention?

A wave of research began to argue precisely that. Social media platforms, the argument went, were not neutral communication tools. They were precision-engineered attention machines, designed by teams of brilliant people whose job was to ensure that users, especially young ones, never quite want to stop scrolling. By the early 2020s, governments were no longer



FEAR : Sceptics warn that bans may push children towards less regulated, darker corners of the Internet.

willing to leave the matter to the discretion of parents and platforms alone.

Supporters of the ban say that social media should be treated like alcohol, tobacco or gambling — activities that society restricts until individuals reach an age at which they can navigate them responsibly. But not everyone is persuaded. Studies find correlations between heavy social media use and poor mental health — but correlation is not causation.

There is also the question of what children would lose. Social media is about how many young people learn, connect and find their people, particularly those who are isolated, marginalised or simply different from those around them. For a teenager in a small town who doesn't

The adults in the room are not behind their children by just a year or two. They are, in many cases, operating in a completely different world.

fit the local mould, an online community may be a lifeline rather than a hazard.

Sceptics also warn that bans may simply push children towards less regulated, darker corners of the Internet. The problem, they argue, is not technology itself but the absence of education, guidance and accountability around how it is used.

India faces a challenge of a different order. In most western contexts, the assumption behind arguments for parental oversight is that parents broadly understand the technology their children are using. India's situation is fundamentally different.

The country has undergone one of the most compressed digital transformations in history. Within a single generation, hundreds

of millions of families acquired smartphones and Internet access for the first time. The results have been extraordinary and the benefits real. But they have also produced a striking paradox: in countless Indian households, the child is the most technologically literate person in the family.

A 12-year-old today may fluently navigate privacy settings, run multiple accounts, use VPNs to bypass restrictions, understand how algorithmic recommendations work and switch between platforms with an ease that leaves her parents entirely at sea. The adults in the room are not behind by just a year or two. They are, in many cases, operating in a completely different world.

This is not a minor gap. It is a supervision vacuum. India's digital divide is no longer simply between the connected and the unconnected. That gap, while real, is closing rapidly. The more consequential divide now is between those who understand the digital environment and those who are merely in it. Millions of parents fall into the second category — aware that their children are spending significant time online, but unable to monitor what they are doing, recognise the risks they are encountering or distinguish between a relatively benign platform and a potentially harmful one.

The argument against government intervention holds that parents should decide what is appropriate for their

children. It is a reasonable principle. But it depends on parents having the knowledge to exercise meaningful oversight. In India, that assumption is, for a large section, not true.

It is a structural reality produced by the speed of technological change, and it demands a structural response. A blunt social media ban for under-16s would be difficult to enforce in India and would likely produce more heat than light. The country's sheer scale, the patchiness of digital infrastructure and the ease with which age restrictions can be circumvented make a simple prohibition an insufficient answer.

What India needs is a layered strategy — one that combines age-verification requirements on platforms and investment in digital literacy programmes aimed at both children and parents. School curricula must incorporate education about online risks. Legal protections for children in digital spaces need to be strengthened and enforced.

Above all, policymakers need to resist the temptation to treat parental supervision as the default solution when the supervision gap is itself part of the problem. For India, the stakes are high. The country's children are growing up in one of the world's largest and fastest-moving digital ecosystems, often several steps ahead of the adults responsible for guiding them. Getting this right is today's defining challenge.

The post-Agnipath options



AIR MARSHAL AMIT TIWARI (RETD)
FORMER AOC-IN-C,
CENTRAL AIR COMMAND

THE Agnipath scheme was implemented in 2022 as a major reform in the armed forces. Under the scheme, soldiers, sailors and airmen are recruited as Agniveers for a period of four years. After this period, 25% of the recruits are retained, while the rest return to civil life with a severance package and job assurance.

There is a catch-22 dilemma in the scheme. If attractive job opportunities are provided to exiting Agniveers, many may leave the rigours of military service and join the civilian workforce — as seen in large numbers of military pilots joining commercial aviation. Conversely, inadequate post-tenure opportunities may reduce the attraction of the Agnipath scheme.

As in any reform, Agnipath has thrown up new challenges as well as opportunities. After four years, there is a need to evaluate the scheme within the broader framework of military effectiveness. India has traditionally maintained common approaches to pay determination through Central Pay Commissions. A similar comprehensive approach towards pension liabilities across government services may generate better options for long-term pension reform.

Post-service career options must be attractive enough to encourage recruitment, but not so attractive that they incentivise the departure of the military's best talent.

development and retention of skilled manpower. It would also strengthen the NCO cadre, which forms the backbone of military effectiveness.

An option to reduce training duration could be to induct qualified recruits from Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs), polytechnics and other technical institutions. Such recruits, with prior technical knowledge, would help reduce both training duration and cost. This approach would also support broader national initiatives such as Skill India, vocational education programmes and the vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat.

To resolve this difficult situation, policymakers must strike a balance in post-service career options. They must be attractive enough to encourage recruitment, but not so attractive that they incentivise the departure of the military's best talent.

Agnipath was implemented as a part of defence reforms to decrease pension liabilities and make the forces younger and more agile. These are worthy objectives, provided military effectiveness is not compromised. As the first batch of Agniveers completes its tenure, India has the opportunity to assess the scheme based on evidence. The scheme must be judged by the financial savings it generates as also by its contribution to deterrence, warfighting capability and national security.

National security is too important for rigid positions. Rather than treating the scheme as either a complete success or failure, policymakers should be open to refinement. Future multi-domain warfare will demand physically fit soldiers and experienced leaders, skilled technicians and mature professionals.

Kids taking drugs need empathy



ACHINTYA ARORA
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR,
BITS LAW SCHOOL, MUMBAI

IT was disturbing to learn about the death of two young MBA students in Mumbai due to drug overdose at a music concert in April. Subsequently, some college students, among others, were arrested on charges of delivering and distributing drugs. Around the same time, the Supreme Court was dealing with a case where interim protection was granted to a fourth-year law student allegedly found in possession of a prohibited substance. The court observed that such instances can prove to be challenging for schools and colleges. Drug peddlers may be using students as mules to gain customers. These events bring to light deeper systemic issues related to the consumption and abuse of drugs.

Besides addiction, students also risk getting into trouble with law enforcement and derailing their career. The Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act, 1985 (NDPS Act) has a stringent punitive policy. Substance use can critically endanger a person's life and liberty.

Today, students face the ever-increasing pressure of career-related anxieties, exposure to social media and a crisis of social phobia. Substance use among youth can result from a number of associated risk fac-

tors, including adverse experiences, trauma, emotional problems, isolation, boredom, ease of accessibility, peer pressure and misinformation.

Adding to this, the portrayal of smoking and consumption of alcohol and drugs in popular media often arouses curiosity. The availability of illicit drugs has become relatively more common.

While law enforcement agencies should target drug peddlers and suppliers that misuse gullible students, ordinary citizens also need to take collective ownership of the problem. Family members and stakeholders in academic settings have a crucial role to play in preventing drug abuse.

The situation demands a compassionate approach. Rather than

stereotyping or attaching labels to children at home or students in an academic setting, it would be beneficial to make physical and mental well-being services available and accessible for their rehabilitation.

To facilitate timely intervention, parents and teachers should remain observant of any negative behavioural changes. Corrective measures should strike a balance between maintaining discipline and ensuring positive transformation.

Students should know that consuming harmful substances neither solves their troubles nor is it a "cool" thing to do in front of their peers. On the other hand, it can pose significant risk to their health. Ideally, a student ought to dedicate time to studies, skill development, sports and other meaningful activities. Responsible citizens should promote good lifestyle choices and discourage youngsters drifting towards drug use.

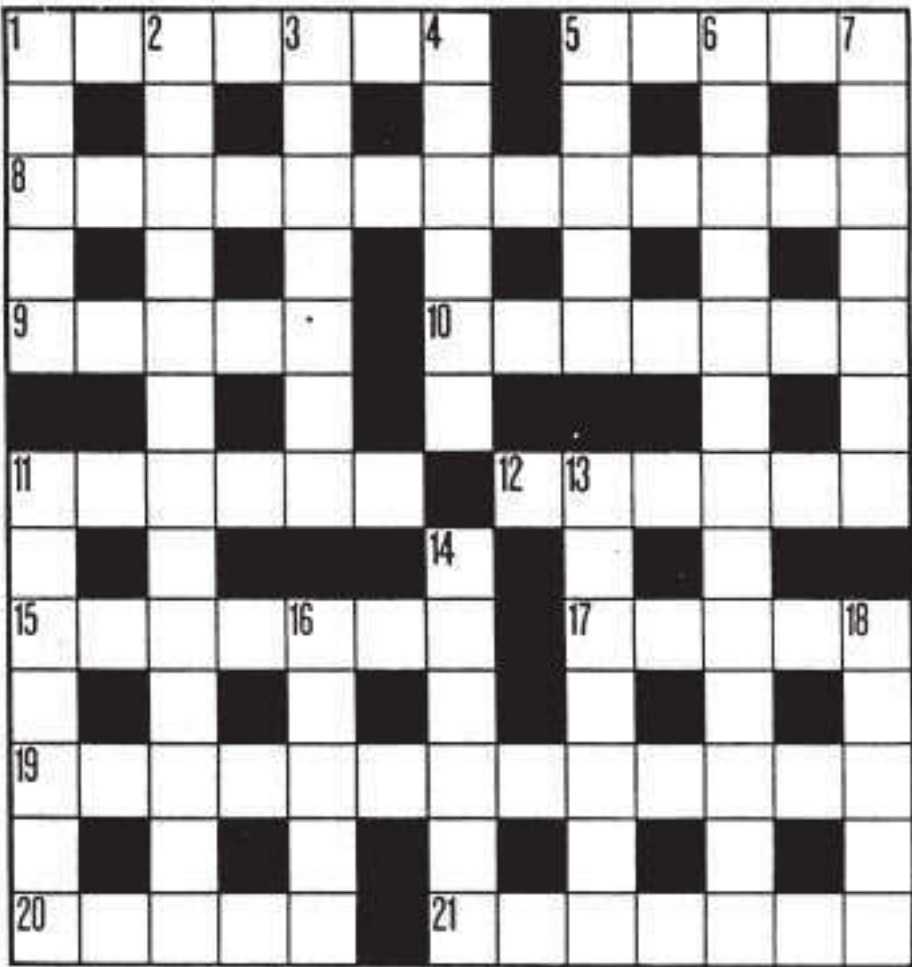
To deter underage consumption of lawful yet harmful addictive substances, including alcohol, it is crucial for businesses to develop a practice of checking IDs before sales.

At many educational institutions, efforts to counter the drug abuse situation are minimal and limited to a ceremonial observation of the International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking annually on June 26 — when most institutions are shut because of the semester break or summer vacation.

It is time to publicly address the pressing exigency. The battle is long. It would require sustained efforts on generating awareness, providing counselling, extending non-judgmental support and enabling reintegration. The battle can be won only with care and compassion.

Ordinary citizens need to take collective ownership of the problem. Family and stakeholders in academic settings have a crucial role to play in preventing drug abuse.

QUICK CROSSWORD



- ACROSS**
- 1 A deliberative assembly (7)
 - 5 Complete (5)
 - 8 Immeasurably small (13)
 - 9 A cotton fabric (5)
 - 10 Stare down (7)
 - 11 Carpentry tool (6)
 - 12 Rook in chess (6)
 - 15 Melodious (7)
 - 17 Unit of weight of gems (5)
 - 19 Equal facility with either hand (13)
 - 20 Velocity (5)
 - 21 Military withdrawal (7)
- DOWN**
- 1 Sensation of cold (5)
 - 2 Dated (13)
 - 3 To grant (7)
 - 4 Medicinal liquid for skin (6)
 - 5 Overturn (5)
 - 6 Repeatedly (4,5,4)
 - 7 Raise siege of (7)
 - 11 Curved one-edged sword (7)
 - 13 Dating from distant past (7)
 - 14 Panacea (6)
 - 16 Washed out (5)
 - 18 Rendezvous (5)
- Yesterday's Solution**
- Across:** 1 Hobby, 8 Cut no ice, 9 Denim, 10 Abstract, 11 Globe, 12 Few, 16 Cornea, 17 Iguana, 18 Net, 23 Filly, 24 Ethiopia, 25 Tippy, 26 Variance, 27 Sense.
- Down:** 2 Overlook, 3 Brisbane, 4 Jumble, 5 Unity, 6 Sisal, 7 Hefty, 12 Fan, 13 Wit, 14 Fugitive, 15 Analysis, 19 Evince, 20 Weave, 21 Shark, 22 Koran.

SU DO KU



YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION															
3	5	4	6	9	7	2	8	1							
9	6	2	8	1	5	3	7	4							
1	7	8	2	4	3	9	6	5							
4	9	1	7	6	2	5	3	8							
6	2	3	4	5	8	1	9	7							
5	8	7	9	3	1	6	4	2							
2	3	6	1	8	4	7	5	9							
8	1	9	5	7	6	4	2	3							
7	4	5	3	2	9	8	1	6							

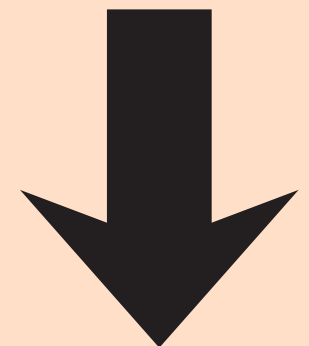
CALENDAR															
JUNE 25, 2026, THURSDAY															
■ Shaka Samvat														1948	
■ Ashadh Shaka														4	
■ Ashadh Parvishite														11	
■ Hijari														1448	
■ Shukla Paksha Tithi 11, up to 8:10 pm															
■ Shiva Yoga up to 10:54 am															
■ Swati Nakshatra up to 4:29 pm															
■ Moon in Libra sign															
■ Nirjala Ekadashi vart															

FORECAST

CITY	THURSDAY FRIDAY		19:28 HRS 05:23 HRS	
	MAX	MIN	MAX	MIN
Chandigarh	38	26		
New Delhi	39	27		
Amritsar	37	28		
Bathinda	40	25		
Jalandhar	39	27		
Ludhiana	39	26		
Bhiwani	37	26		
Hisar	37	26		
Sirsa	39	29		
Dharamsala	31	17		
Manali	26	16		
Shimla	22	17		
Srinagar	30	16		
Jammu	39	25		
Kargil	26	10		
Leh	22	08		
Dehradun	37	25		
Mussoorie	27	17		

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A warning for all times


ARJUN RAM MEGHWAL

The word 'emergency' evokes an intense sense of unease, often associated with the suspension of established norms and procedures in pursuit of a perceived larger objective. Different forms of emergencies command our attention in different ways. The emergency services of hospitals, for instance, are a lifeline that provide immediate medical assistance and save countless lives. At the global level, geopolitical conflicts, climate change, and the depletion of natural resources present another set of emergencies, calling for coordinated global actions that transcend narrow and binary perspectives.

Modern society, too, appears to be navigating an era of perpetual urgency. Driven by the desire for instant results, quick judgments, and immediate outcomes, many seem to be living through a state of undeclared and invisible emergency. In contrast, the recently observed International Day of Yoga underscored the importance of calmness, balance, stillness and mindfulness.

Indeed, throughout history, humanity has encountered one form of emergency or another as an inevitable part of life. Yet, for India as a civilised and democratic nation, no emergency has cast a deeper shadow on the national consciousness than the politically motivated "National Emergency" of 1975 - a chapter that continues to serve as a reminder to protect democratic freedoms.

The Nation is observing 'Samvidhan Hatya Divas' today. The imposition of the Emergency remains a permanent blot on the democratic history of the nation. Its impact continues to haunt the 'Mother of Democracy' even after half a century. It serves as a reminder for citizens to remain vigilant guardians of democracy and reinforces the value of our

hard-earned freedoms, as well as the price paid to secure them, by learning from one of the darkest periods in our history.

A nation with a proud civilizational legacy of democratic traditions, nurtured through customs of debate, dialogue, and deliberation, has long upheld participatory governance as a way of life. Ancient institutions such as the Sabha and Samiti, and later the 12th-century Anubhav Mantapa, exemplified structured evolution of democratic institutions.

Our Constitution stands as a living document that embodies and upholds those timeless principles. Dr. Ambedkar expressed this sentiment by describing the Constitution as a vehicle of life, loaded with the spirit of the ages. The imposition of the Emergency, bypassing these intrinsic democratic values, was a systemic dent to that sacred vehicle.

The National Emergency of 1975 was not merely a political episode; it fundamentally altered the democratic discourse and the functioning of public life in India. The power-hungry and self-centric dispensation of Indra Gandhi brutally bypassed the constitutional spirit and eroded the delicate strand of ethical governance in a very abrasive manner. The election irregularities of the 1971 Lok Sabha election, the judgment of the Allahabad High Court, and the rising popular pressure to quit, were not an internal disturbance; rather, they were an 'internal disturbance' for Indira Gandhi herself, who had long enjoyed a political inheritance rooted in 'Parivarvaad' as a matter of entitlement. To manage this 'inner disturbance' of self, the adoption of measures meant for handling an 'internal disturbance' of the nation was a grave miscalculation.

The chain of events presents a clear picture of Indira Gandhi's anti-democratic mindset. During the election case pending before the Allahabad High Court, she became the first Indian Prime Minister to testify before a court on 19 March 1975. The judgment,

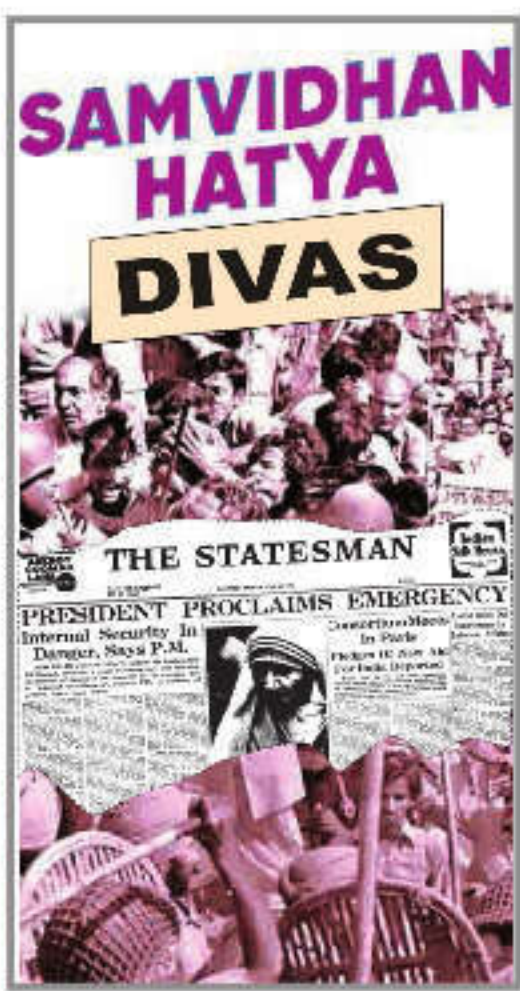
delivered on 12 June 1975, from Court No. 24 of the Allahabad High Court had far-reaching consequences. Her election was declared void, and she was disqualified from holding elected office for six years.

On June 24, the Supreme Court, while hearing her appeal, granted a conditional stay on the High Court verdict, permitting her to continue attending Parliament but denying her the right to vote or draw a salary until the matter was decided by a larger bench.

Meanwhile, the massive public rally at Delhi's Ramlila Maidan on 25 June 1975, led by Jayaprakash Narayan, intensified popular pressure, and demands for her resignation resonated across the political spectrum. Disturbed by the rulings of constitutional institutions - the Allahabad High Court and the Supreme Court - Indira Gandhi resorted to the proclamation of Emergency under Article 352.

On the midnight of 25 June, she advised President Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed to declare the Emergency without prior approval of the Union Cabinet, through a communication on plain paper. The Cabinet was convened only at 6 a.m. on June 26, merely as a post facto formality. Thus, she dealt a severe blow to the constitutional framework by sidelining the judiciary and undermining the collective responsibility of the Cabinet. The episode reflected a profound erosion of institutional integrity at the highest levels of governance and the use of authoritarian methods to preserve political power.

The curtailment of press freedom not only silenced journalists and opinion-makers but also deprived millions of citizens of access to truth, transparency, and accountability. It was a moment when the nation's conscience was shaken, and the sacrifices of freedom fighters, the deliberations of the Constituent Assembly, and the democratic ideals that shaped the Republic were pushed aside in favour of authoritarian



impulses emanating from an anti-democratic mindset.

In all spheres of governance, the principle of "Chair First" appeared to overshadow the principle of "Nation First." Fundamental rights of citizens were curbed, and the spirit of the ages was crushed. Freedoms of speech, association, and movement under Article 19 were suspended with a mere stroke of the pen. The protection of life and personal liberty under Article 21 became a nullity, and worst of all, citizens lost access to courts under Article 32, which was referred to as the "heart and soul" of the Constitution.

The draconian implementation of the Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA) and the Defence of India Rules (DIR) resulted in thousands of people being imprisoned. Ultimately, every citizen bore the scars of this dark and oppressive chapter. Ironically, today, the successors of the same Gandhi family continue to play a hollow and contradictory role, waving a red-coloured pocket Constitution for political gains.

Acknowledging the wounds of the past, the Modi Government, through a Gazette Notification dated 11 July 2024, declared June 25 as 'Samvidhaan Hatya Diwas.' It is a moment to remember and honour the contributions of all those who resisted the National Emergency and stood firm in protecting democracy. The time has passed when dissent was silenced and reasoned voices were crushed through the misuse of state machinery. The 21st-century outlook demonstrates that the best way forward is to discuss, debate, dialogue, and dispose issues through democratic means, so that no situation warranting an Emergency ever arises. This is how democratic institutions are nurtured and the democratic spirit flourishes.

Coming out of every 'emergency' situation brings a sense of relief, and reflecting upon such traumatic experiences invariably offers valuable lessons to course-correct our future actions. Wise are those who look back, reflect, introspect, and imbibe these learnings so that the mistakes of the past are not repeated. As we commemorate the darkest chapter remembered as 'Samvidhan Hatya Divas', let us resolve to strengthen constitutional and democratic values in every possible manner. It serves as an important reminder to instill the right values for defending democracy, so that future generations can carry forward collective responsibility towards the nation - an aspiration that Swami Vivekananda had envisioned: "Each nation has a destiny to fulfil, each nation has a message to deliver, each nation has a mission to accomplish."

Let Bharat's message of human dignity, pluralism, constitutionalism, and selfless service resonate louder and clearer in the 21st-century world. By remaining steadfast to these ideals, we can ensure that democracy not only endures but continues to flourish for generations to come.

The writer is Union Minister of State for Law and Justice (I/O) and Minister of State for Parliamentary Affairs, Government of India.



Front page of The Statesman dated 25 June 1926

OCCASIONAL NOTE

SOME remarkable figures are quoted in the last annual report of the Pasteur Institute at Shillong. Of the 1,176 cases treated only eleven developed hydrophobia and of these four died more than fifteen days after completion of the treatment, giving a failure rate of 0.34 per cent, a triumphant vindication of the methods employed. No Europeans developed hydrophobia, and the majority of the Indians whom the treatment failed to cure had been very badly bitten about the face and neck. We believe the nearer the wound is to the head the greater the necessity for immediate cauterization and speedy treatment. The fact that anti-rabic treatment can now be had in Calcutta should in the future greatly reduce the number of "failures" reported from the institute at Shillong, for this city as a result of the railway facilities it offers can be more easily and cheaply reached by the greater number of people in Bengal than the Assam hill station. It is obvious, however, that India still needs more centres where anti-rabic treatment can be obtained. A hospital in every provincial capital should be provided with the necessary staff and equipment for treating cases of bites from animals suspected of rabies.

News Items

MARITIME CONGRESS

PUNISHMENT FOR CRIME ON BOARD SHIP

GENEVA, JUNE

THE Maritime Conference adopted today the draft convention granting seamen the fullest guarantees in connexion with punishment for crimes committed on board ship, while leaving national legislatures the right of fixing penalties applicable to the different offences.

The Conference entrusted to the International Labour Office the task of examining the penalties obtaining in different countries for breaking sea-men's articles and agreements and requesting it to submit its results to a joint Maritime Committee with a view to preparing International solutions. —Reuter.

SOLDIERS IN INDIA

PROBLEM OF CHILDREN'S EDUCATION

LONDON, JUNE

IN the House of Commons to-day Mr. Robert Morrison (Lab, Tottenham N) asked if improvements in the standard of education of the children of British soldiers in India were being considered.

Earl Winterton replied that recent reports showed that some difficulty was experienced in maintaining the required standard. Lord Birkenhead was at present in communication with the Government of India and the War Office on the subject. —Reuter.

MECCA PILGRIMAGE FRACAS

EGYPTIANS FIRE ON WAHABIS

(FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT.)

LONDON, JUNE

The Cairo correspondent of the Westminster Gazette cables that there has been a grave encounter near Mecca in connexion with the Holy Carpet pilgrimage, as a result of which 25 Wahabis have been killed and many wounded.

Apparently the Wahabis objected to the music played by the Egyptian bands accompanying the pilgrims, and the Egyptian military escort is reported to have fired on the tribes—men in self-defence. At the time the pilgrims were returning from the ceremonies in connexion with the Bairam sacrifice on Mount Ararat with the Holy Carpet. Ibn Saud was hastily notified, and but for his intervention it is doubtful if any of the Egyptian troops would have returned alive.

Eventually the pilgrims were escorted to Mecca by Wahabi troops. —Copyright.

Bengal's elderly deserve policy interventions

SATYAKI DASGUPTA

Data from the recently published National Family Health Survey 6 (NFHS 6) shows that India is moving away from being a young country. The notion of demographic dividend probably does not hold for India anymore. The percentage of the population aged 60 and above has increased from 11.8 in 2019-21 (NFHS-5) to 12.9 in 2023-24 (NFHS-6). While Kerala typically dominates the conversation on ageing because of its high proportion of the elderly, West Bengal has quietly recorded the highest surge as its elderly population jumped from 10.9 to 14.1 per cent.

The percentage of elderly population in West Bengal was 7 per cent in 2005-06 and 8.7 per cent in 2015-16. An underexplored and under-reported aspect of Bengal is its advanced stage of demographic transition. This can be a major problem whereby the Total Fertility Rate (TFR) of West Bengal has remained constant at 1.6, whereas generally a TFR of 2.1 is considered a replacement rate for a stable population. If this demographic transition is not at

the centre of policy discussions in West Bengal, a crisis can quietly creep up and impact the quality of lives of the residents of the state.

A major reason driving the increase in elderly population is the outmigration of the working age population from West Bengal, leaving behind senior citizens. The Government of West Bengal has often tried to address the problem through welfare schemes which give Rs. 1,000 to citizens above the age of 60. However, the amount is much lower than is required for even basic subsistence, especially in the face of increasing cost of medicines and food. The unprecedented increase in the percentage of the elderly also implies that this would cause strain to the fiscal health of the state.

It would be incorrect to assume that the elderly population of West Bengal have all retired from the workforce. Some insights from the Periodic Labour Force Survey 2023-24 can be useful in describing the profile of the elderly of the state - 29.7 per cent of the elderly population is part of the workforce. Among these, 46.6 per cent of elderly males, and only 10.97 per cent of elderly

females are part of the workforce. This could be because the types of jobs available for elderly women are much lower than men.

Elderly women are also culturally expected to take care of the family, attend to domestic duties, and care for the children of the family. As working-age children enter the workforce themselves or migrate, elderly women are expected to provide child care and domestic labour. The current generation of elderly women are from a generation where employment was heavily restricted during their youth due to patriarchal social norms. They may have generally been out of the workforce through their life-cycle.

The majority of elderly workers find employment as Skilled Agricultural and Fishery Workers - 48.12 per cent of the elderly population is employed in this activity. Because of the unorganised nature of agricultural employment, there is no fixed retirement age. Further, agriculture often works as a safety net for workers. If workers lose their jobs in construction or retail due to older age, they can come back to work on their family farm. The elderly population continuing to work on agriculture can also be

an indicator of the lack of post-retirement savings among them.

The gendered stratification of the elderly labour market is starkly evident across both domestic and entrepreneurial domains. Specifically, elderly women exhibit a disproportionately higher concentration in the category of "unpaid household helper" who generally work without monetary compensation with 19.4 per cent engaged as unpaid domestic helpers compared to 5.49 per cent of their male counterparts.

While the majority of the elderly workforce is self-employed as own-account workers, access to independent enterprise remains heavily gendered: 72.16 per cent of elderly men but 57.96 per cent among elderly women. Illiteracy rates among older women in the workforce stand at 36.8 per cent, while the male illiteracy rate is 15.32 per cent. A concerning statistic for the elderly workforce is that about 90 per cent of the elderly workforce lack any type of social security benefits. This implies that most of them are concentrated in precarious forms of labour.

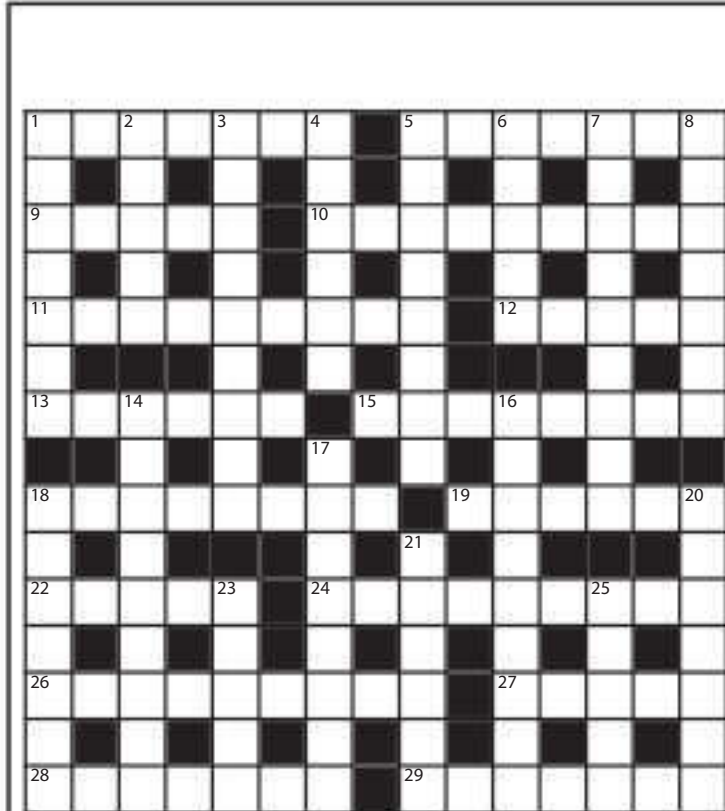
These statistics taken together imply that the elderly in West Bengal

are employed in low-skilled and precarious agriculture-based employment. The high concentration of own-account workers can be interpreted as a sign of self-employment done for the sake of survival rather than dynamic entrepreneurship. Lacking foundational education, older cohorts are often left with no choice but to rely on solo enterprises as a desperate safety net of last resort.

Retirement among the elderly may not be a natural life stage, but rather a luxury which can be accessed by only a few people. In West Bengal, where there is a significant out-migration of the younger generation, the elderly are compelled to depend on remittances from their children who in turn may be in some form of precarious employment elsewhere. The problem requires a solution in the form of social security entitlements which can mitigate the precarity of the elderly of the state, with more attention and recognition given to elderly women of the state.

The writer is an Assistant Professor in the department of Economics, Christ University, Bengaluru.

Crossword | No. 293501



Yesterday's Solution

ALEXANDER ANTIMA
FISHERMAN
DOTTY AGAMEMNON
TORTURED AND ABEL
PINUP POE STRUTH
CHARLES AVERAGE
SCHILLING DACHA
O E A L U O H C
HARRY LASER BEAM
O D S E T F R E

ACROSS

- 1 Bovine expert a good many finally dismissed (7)
- 5 'Singular veteran' increasingly encompasses one? (7)
- 9 After reflection, one really enjoyed eating old cheese (5)
- 10 Car not entirely unfashionable? Wrong in green (9)
- 11 Famous Russian, as presented in Disney film, avoiding capital of France (9)
- 12 Result still adrift, ultimately (5)

DOWN

- 13 See about one small amount of liquid cocktail (6)
- 15 People in authority apprehending girl back in part of Greece (8)
- 18 Everyone yet to reach port will be confused (3,2,3)
- 19 Quote work recalled with a lyrical style (6)
- 22 Additional clause, article ignored by stock market speculator (5)
- 24 Minister turned amidst various altars, making motion to cross (9)

ACROSS

- 26 Ignore written notes - this is the place to stop tucking into fruit (4,2,3)
- 27 African resident agreed to be followed by a detective (5)
- 28 Red 10 possibly left in position (7)
- 29 Vegetable cutlet prepared with pea, essentially (7)

DOWN

- 1 Skill over pieces installed in suitable condo perhaps (9)
- 4 How is learner working to become wise? (6)
- 5 Starts to sneak your way into my compassion (8)
- 6 University publishers put in French article - item for jewellers (5)
- 7 Traveller that is carrying the can, getting harangue (9)
- 8 Inexperienced, not beginning to attempt part of space mission (2-5)
- 14 Master a mad role, performing in sensational play (9)

DOWN

- 16 Discovered donkey in studio I abandoned, unfortunately (6,3)
- 17 Conscious and excited about new obligation (8)
- 18 A rugby forward getting unusually large? That's pertinent (7)
- 20 Pass on story about Democrat clash (7)
- 21 Exactly right function, mainly - for a police officer? (6)
- 23 Revolutionary Bishop enthralled by rock (5)
- 25 United supporters turning up in a bad way (5)

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



THE ASIAN AGE

25 JUNE 2026

How far to go about ties with China is India’s call

It is a given in the world of diplomacy that talks with China will invariably stretch out and last longer while the pace of action will be slower than may be the case when it comes to talks leading to action after interaction with other powers. What could be derived from a recent meeting between India’s NSA Ajit Doval and China’s Wang Yi before the meeting in New Delhi of Brics NSAs is that China is keen on pushing India for speedier action regarding resumption of dialogue mechanisms at all levels and the promotion of exchanges in different fields.

The impression gained since ties saw a dramatic upsurge after an SCO interaction between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and China’s President Xi Jinping took place in August last year and border tensions declined noticeably afterwards was that China has been chafing at the reins a bit while India appears intent on proceeding more deliberately. This difference in pace of actions since a resetting of ties is a clear enough indicator that a degree of trust deficit still exists.

There is no denying that the work of normalising relations, which had hit a nadir after the Eastern Ladakh skirmish and standoff, is continuing. But China is unable to understand its reasoning that the border issue can be placed in “an appropriate position”, meaning it can be kept aside, while exchanges in trade, investment and media can be placed on a fast track. For it, this is not convincing enough for upscaling ties in every other field.

It would not have escaped attention that a lengthier Chinese readout of the Doval-Wang meeting sounded far more positive about the need for both countries to get moving and even contained reassuring words enunciating the principle that India, an important neighbour, and China are partners and not rivals.

Mr Wang may have expressed that well enough in saying “efforts should also be made to actively guide all sectors of society to form correct perceptions, building a solid foundation of public opinion and social support for the improvement of relations between the two countries”. Nothing could have been lost in translation in such direct messaging. However, a more prosaic and formulaic comment on “constructive and forward-looking” discussions having taken place came from the Indian side indicating a gap in intentions.

In an ideal world, the two most populous nations could find ways to assist each other’s development by cooperating while also being able to push the Global South to accelerate its modernisation process. But, in this regard, a few problems like a chokehold on rare earths and minerals and fertilisers exerted by China must be spoken about and resolved if the deficit of trust is to be bridged.

Both nations are proud of their links with the Global South whose voice they would like to be in more universal forums. But then the basics of the main India-China relationship, which is still very much a work in progress, must be attended to, perhaps at another Modi-Xi meeting during the Brics summit, if the desire for an active Indian role in conjunction with China’s is to fructify.

Nationwide fire safety audit must

The tragic fire at a graphics animation centre in Lucknow on June 22, which claimed 15 lives, mostly young men and women, is an unfortunate addition to India’s long history of avoidable disasters. This mishap, once again, highlights the systemic failure of fire safety compliance across the country.

Preliminary investigations indicate the fire originated in a ground floor air-conditioning unit before spreading through the entire building. The structural layout of the building, which was constructed in violation of basic fire safety regulations, functioned as a death trap.

The response from governments followed a familiar script: quick announcements of ex-gratia compensation by state and central governments, followed by promises of a thorough probe. Most probably, the blame will be pinned on negligence, and the case will be closed in a few months without any attempt to address the root causes of urban safety failures.

If one observes closely, the Lucknow fire accident has no new lessons to offer. It has all the toxic combination of old constructions, low capacity internal wiring, structural violations, official apathy, and regulatory blindness that defines every other fire mishap in India.

The three-storey commercial building at Aliganj was built over a 46-year-old residential house allotted in July 1980. As it was an unauthorised construction, the local body issued a demolition order in 2016, but it was revoked within two months without a reason.

An old building quite naturally will have a low capacity internal electrical wiring, which cannot bear the modern power demand contributed by multiple AC units and heavy internal lights at commercial complexes.

Apart from the owner of the building, prime culprits in most fire accidents that originated in AC units are the power official, who does not audit power demand, and AC equipment makers who sell their power guzzlers without a power supply audit. The government must, therefore, order a comprehensive nationwide audit of domestic power demand and the building’s internal power distribution systems.

An old building quite naturally will have a low capacity internal electrical wiring, which cannot bear the modern power demand contributed by multiple AC units and heavy internal lights at commercial complexes

THE ASIAN AGE

KAUSHIK MITTER
Editor

K. SUBHAKAR
Printer & Publisher

The Asian Age office is located at:
New Delhi: Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi-110002. Phone: (011) 23211124.

Published and Printed on behalf of and for
Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited, Jawaharlal Nehru National Youth Centre, 219 Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi: 110 002 at CLASSIC IMPRESSION, F-23 Sector-6, Noida: 201 301.
London: Quickmarsh Ltd, 8th Floor, Block 2, Elizabeth House, 39 York Road, London, SE1 7NQ.
RNI Registration number: 57290/94

Subhani



After stormy 100 days, can Tarique deliver in B’desh?



Manash Ghosh

The performance of Tarique Rahman’s BNP government, which recently completed its first 100 days, is best described as an extension of the monumental 18-month misgovernance under Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus, the interim leader. The American “Deep State” and the Bangladesh Army had parachuted Mr Yunus into power after Sheikh Hasina’s government was toppled in a “meticulously-designed conspiracy” hatched at home and abroad.

The Grameen Bank man, the new helmsman, had aroused great expectations that Bangladesh would finally turn the corner. But very soon Mr Yunus proved an utter disaster. If the corruption under Sheikh Hasina enraged people, Mr Yunus’ monumental corruption far overshadowed her regime’s delinquency.

Public disenchantment swelled to such an extent that soon after Mr Yunus took over, many — from rickshaw-pullers to some of Bangladesh’s top industrialists — were heard saying: “We were better off under Hasina. We want her back”. A jittery Yunus, to forestall that, arbitrarily decided to bar her Awami League from the Feb. 2026 general election and cracked down on it.

When the election was held, people voted overwhelmingly for the country’s second biggest party, the BNP, hoping its youthful leader Tarique would usher in better days. But they were in for a shock when they found Tarique following the same path as Mr Yunus. Tarique did nothing to stop the extortion racket, mob lynching and rape that thrived in the Yunus days. He has also been found wanting in establishing the rule of law. The biggest infamy Tarique has earned is his criminal negligence and administrative ineptitude that led to the death of a thousand Bangladesh children due to measles.

Government medical centres had no stocks of the required preventive vaccine despite being warned five times by Unicef to procure them. Mr Yunus too had stopped purchasing the vaccines even though WHO had urgently urged the government to stock up.

The BNP could sweep the February election largely because a large section of Awami League voters supported it to block radical Islamists led by the Jamaat-e-Islami from coming to power, even though they felt the BNP and Jamaat were almost birds of the same feather. But they hoped since the BNP said it was a party of “Muktijoddhas”, it would create conducive conditions facilitating the country’s biggest and oldest party which led the liberation war, the Awami League, return to open politics by lifting the ban. It was felt this would do away with the Yunus-induced political instability and restiveness that had imperilled the nation’s peace and progress that were hallmarks of his misgovernance.

Also, considerable consternation was caused by Tarique’s role in letting Mr Yunus sign trade and defence deals with America three days before he took over. Debapriya Bhattacharya, top Bangladesh economist, says the agreements are a total “sellout” making Bangladesh a US “vassal state”, totally compromising its national sovereignty. The trade and defence agreements have “humiliating and economically ruinous” clauses which, if implemented, would overnight turn Bangladesh’s highly favourable trade balance into an imbalance as it would be forced to buy 24 Boeing passenger planes and many high-value US goods, for which it has no need. Stationing of US warships at Bangladeshi ports is part of the defence deal. American officials have compromised Tarique and also Jamaat leaders by leaking that Mr Yunus got their “prior approval” before signing

Public sympathy and support for the Awami League and Sheikh Hasina are gradually gathering momentum, especially after her announcement that she will return home by the coming Victory Day (December 16) to face trial

those agreements.

Moreover, Awami League supporters who voted for the BNP were in for a rude shock when on the opening day of Parliament an obituary reference was passed in which several prominent Pakistan Army collaborators found mention, to the exclusion of many Muktijoddhas. Even more shocking was that Tarique converted Mr Yunus’ presidential ordinance which banned the Awami League’s political functioning into an incontestable Act of Parliament.

Tarique’s abhorrence for the Awami League, like Mr Yunus, also showed up in diverse ways. Tarique refused to accord a state funeral after the death of Tofael Ahmed, nine-time MP, political secretary to Mujib and a minister in Hasina’s Cabinet who was also a legendary freedom fighter and an architect of the student revolt that ousted then Pakistani President Ayub Khan from power in 1969. Tofael was a venerated national figure who commanded unquestionable respect from all quarters, and yet, because of political vendetta, he was treated disrespectfully by Tarique both before and after his death.

In Bangladesh such national figures are usually given a state funeral by holding a special “janaja” at the plaza adjoining the Louis Kahn-crafted iconic Parliament building and placing the body for public viewing at the historic Shahid Minar. But Tarique refused to extend such formalities and even ordered the police to lathi-charge a private janaja held at a small Dhaka mosque. While Tofael was battling for his life, he was served with an arrest warrant.

But this heavy-handed treatment unleashed a massive backlash when Tofael’s body was taken to his native Bhola for burial. Thousands

of locals attended his janaja to pay their last respects to the national hero and express their solidarity with the Awami League. Another former Hasina minister and freedom fighter Mosharraf Hossain’s janaja in Chittagong, who was persecuted in prison, turned into a massive anti-government protest. Hundreds and thousands of Awami League workers, supporters and ordinary mourners braved prohibitory orders and defiantly chanted anti-government slogans, thus throwing a challenge to the Tarique regime, which refused to confront them on the streets.

Public sympathy and support for the Awami League and Sheikh Hasina are gradually gathering momentum, especially after Hasina’s announcement that she will return home by the coming Victory Day (December 16) to face trial and a death sentence handed down by a “kangaroo court”. This has charged up her party workers and many ordinary Bangladeshis, a lot of whom are wondering whether Tarique will be able to complete his term or whether an inclusive mid-term election will be held in the not-too-distant future. Another index of the fast-changing public mood is the mounting hostility towards the student leaders who toppled Sk Hasina’s government. Angry crowds have pelted them with rotten eggs and shoes.

Also, India’s defiant border stand has led to the deportation of hundreds of Bangladeshi infiltrators, which has put the Tarique government on the backfoot, largely because the poor, landless labourers have admitted to the media they had illegally entered India but now want to go home, and not rot in Indian detention centres. Tarique has no option but to take them back as he knows they are victims of Dhaka’s lebensraum policy. Tough times lie ahead for Tarique Rahman. Only time will tell if he can manage to turn the tide.

Manash Ghosh is a veteran journalist who has covered the 1971 Bangladesh liberation war, and is the author of several books including, most recently, Mujib’s Blunders: The Power and the Plot Behind His Killing

LETTERS

AMERICA WORSE OFF

When US President Donald Trump realised that Iran had the upper hand in the war, he unilaterally announced a temporary ceasefire. On June 17, the two nations signed the Islamabad MoU in France. Under this, Iran reaffirmed its commitment to refrain from acquiring or developing nuclear weapons, while the US agreed to lift all sanctions and provide at least \$300 billion for reconstruction. Mr Trump had previously dumped the July 2015 nuclear deal with Iran, calling it “one of the worst and dumbest”. The deal sought to block Iran’s pathways to a nuclear weapon. Perhaps, the withdrawal was a precursor to this war. But as former President Obama noted, the current deal drags America back to where it was before they started the war, maybe even a little bit worse off.

Haridasan Rajan
Kozhikode

START SMALL

THE REVISED three-language formula appears driven by a worthy objective, but policy alone cannot create linguistic competence. Language learning succeeds when it becomes practical, enjoyable and part of everyday life. In an era of dubbed motion pictures with subtitles, streaming platforms, podcasts and language-learning apps such as Duolingo, students have far more opportunities to acquire languages organically than previous generations. Schools should encourage these tools instead of relying solely on classroom instruction. The key is to start small and remain consistent. One is rarely completely ready to learn a new language, but the first step often proves the most important.

Harsh Pawaria
Rohtak

ORIGINS OF COLOUR

INDIA’S ANCIENT natural dyes have re-entered global discourse owing to the growing demand for sustainable and eco-friendly textiles. Historically, these dyes shaped international trade and fashion. Indigo, cultivated mainly in Bengal and Bihar, spread to Europe, Africa and the Americas, eventually lending its iconic shade to blue jeans. Manjistha or Indian madder supplied a prized red dye and medicinal ingredient to West Asia and Europe. Lac dye, obtained from the Kerria lacca insect, coloured Kashmiri shawls and luxury fabrics. Turmeric imparted brilliant yellow hues to silk and cotton across Asia. Chay root, grown along India’s southeastern coast, became a favourite red dye in European fashion. Today, concerns over pollution, coupled with government support for handlooms, has revived interest in these traditional colours. Their resurgence is preserving India’s textile heritage.

R.S. Narula
Patiala

Kamal Davar



What’s in a name... Why ‘Indo-Pacific’ has reverted to US ‘Pacific’ command?

A historical question: “What’s in a name?” embellishes William Shakespeare’s magnum opus *Romeo and Juliet*, and this phrase has been utilised countless times both with seriousness and in jest, depending upon the user’s inclination to give it the colour or meaning as they warrant! Most people do employ this phrase lightly as they feel that, irrespective of the name or title given to an individual or institution, their true worth lies far beyond its mere name. Anyway, names do carry ample cultural and symbolic significance; and the above-mentioned phrase is followed in Shakespeare’s play by another famous line: “A rose by any other name would smell as sweet”.

Extending this expression to the recent geopolitical churn and the catastrophic wars taking place around the world, some changes in military and economic alliances between nations are currently underway. The renaming of the erstwhile US “Indo-Pacific Command” the other day is an example of the shifting geopolitical and strategic considerations. The current lack of warmth in India-US relations would perhaps also be the reason for this name change!

The Pentagon has officially announced that the name of the US Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM) has been restored to its legacy name, the US Pacific Command (US PACOM), which had been changed earlier in 2018 to include the word “Indo” to signify the growing strategic importance of the Indian Ocean and its linkages to the Pacific Ocean

and, importantly, India’s emerging geopolitical role. Additionally, the Pentagon has stated that the “reversion honours the command’s deep historical roots, fostering a sense of pride for the oldest and largest unified command”, which was established in 1947.

The question now engaging the minds of many Indian service members and strategic analysts is: What was the reason for this so-called name change? The Americans, not all though, would naturally ask the Indians: “What’s in a name?” Our reply could be a lot, and our fading, one-sided friendship, engineered by the mercurial US President Donald Trump, may be the reason!

The US has eleven combat commands, which include seven geographic commands. USPACOM was the designation for the oldest and largest geographic unified combatant command. Its operational boundaries are from the US West Coast to the western border of India. It’s manned by over 3,75,000 personnel from the US armed forces.

Though US officials insist that removing the word “Indo” does not dilute their established operational missions, including their commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific region, many strategic analysts argue that it unequivocally conveys a strategic message to the global community, especially to India.

It requires no emphasis to state that, since the last couple of years, especially in the Trump administration 2.0, relations between the so-called strategic allies, India and the US, have plummeted owing to US

President Trump’s policies of imposing very high tariffs against India and making the grant of US H1-B visas grossly unaffordable.

As we fathom the reason for this unwarranted change in name, the China factor positively has to be reckoned with. It is a well-known fact worldwide that the military and economic gap between the United States and China is narrowing by the year. The US, for reasons best known to Washington, even under an over-talkative and policy-shifting President, appears to be trying to keep China in good humour.

President Trump’s recent visit to China was a diplomatic setback for the US. Even during the US-Israel combined war with Iran, at the Strait of Hormuz water bottleneck, the US targeted no Russian or Chinese cargo-carrying ships. On the contrary, three Indian flag-bearing commercial ships were targeted by the US Navy, resulting in the death of three Indian soldiers. Surprisingly, no apology from the US establishment was forthcoming. Unfortunately, the Indian government did not take up this case forcefully with the US government.

Coming back to the Chinese angle in the renaming of the US Indo-Pacific Command, the US, since early this century and later, has encouraged the formation of the Japan-sponsored “Quad”, comprising India, the US, Japan and Australia, and of AUKUS — the latter being a trilateral military alliance comprising Australia, the UK and the US — for keeping the international waters of the Indian and Pacific Oceans free

for international maritime traffic as China is correctly seen as the maritime bully in this region. Though little headway has been made in further energising these alliances, there is merit in forging closer cooperation among the member nations, as China will remain a long-term strategic military and economic threat.

However, it is also a fact that, without the US taking strong enough measures, both these alliances will remain just talking shops, as China and Pakistan — America’s current favourite — would wish. US officials, however, continue to harp on the post-World War II maritime architecture being carried forward under its original name. Events in the foreseeable future will, however, make the exact reason for this change in nomenclature clear.

Overall, India’s current relations with the United States are on the downside, despite some flattering remarks from President Trump last week at the G-7 summit. India will be well advised to pursue its strategic autonomy policy sincerely and adopt a mature, yet self-respecting, approach in its handling of all major powers worldwide. We do need to tell the President Donald Trump, after his recent remarks about “helping India if attacked”, that India can very well look after its own interests!

The writer, a retired lieutenant-general, was the first head of India’s Defence Intelligence Agency, and is a strategic analyst

quick BITES

INDICATORS		%
Sensex	76,991.22	1.04
Nifty 50	24,021.65	0.83
S&P 500*	7,417.06	0.70
Dollar (₹)	94.69	-0.04
Pound Sterling (₹)	124.91	124.91
Euro (₹)	107.541	-0.52
Gold (10gm)* (₹)	141,900	4,629 -3.16
Brent crude (\$/bbl)*	73.46	-4.70
IN 10-Yr bond yield	6.787	-0.77
US 10-Yr T-bill yield*	4.438	-0.056

* As of 8:30 PM IST

Transactions on BHIM triple to 244 mn in a year

The transaction volumes of the BHIM Payments App more than tripled between June 2025 and May 2026, according to NPCI BHIM Services Limited. Monthly transaction volumes on the app, developed by NPCI BHIM Services Limited, rose from 79.64 million in June 2025 to 244 million in May 2026, a release said on Wednesday. The platform processed transactions worth Rs 26,952 crore in May 2026, it said.

Printed & Published by K. Sudhakar on behalf of Deccan Chronicle Holdings Limited. Printed at CLASSIC IMPRESSION, F-23, Sector-6, Noida - 201301. Published at 219, N D Tiwari Bhawan, Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi-110002. Editor: Kaushik Mitter, RNI Registration number 30074/09, Air surcharge Re 1. © All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without written permission of The Editor, Financial Chronicle ® is prohibited.

Crude oil prices to steer RBI action on rates: Gov

Rupee remains market-determined, RBI to act against excessive volatility

Mumbai, June 24: Reserve Bank of India governor Sanjay Malhotra pushed back against expectations for future interest-rate increases, saying it was “premature” to discuss the policy outlook given ongoing geopolitical uncertainties. “If it was so certain that we are going to hike in the coming months, then we would have changed the stance from neutral to restrictive, right? We did not do that,” the central bank chief said in an TV interview on Wednesday. “We did not do that that precisely because there is elevated uncertainty.”

This is the first time Malhotra has provided a public assessment of India's economy and policy outlook following truce talks between the US and Iran, which have led to a significant drop in global crude prices. That has been a big relief for India, which imports 90 per cent of its oil needs.

The yields on India's 10-year benchmark government bonds fell five basis points to 6.82 per cent, the lowest level in three

EXTERNAL FACTORS

● RBI will take a call on interest rate based on macroeconomic indicators

● India's cumulative monsoon rain-fall remains 43% below normal.

● India imports 90% of its oil needs. ● Upside risks have certainly reduced.



● Monetary policy committee is keeping close eye on both monsoon and crude prices. ● India has “sufficient” food buffers and inflation remains below RBI's 4% target. ● Truce talks between the US and Iran have led to a drop in global crude prices.



AS OF now, as I see it, is the global uncertainty, which is challenge number one, We are very well prepared to meet all challenges.”

— SANJAY MALHOTRA, Governor, India's central bank

months. Overnight index swaps, a key barometer of rate expectations, eased 10 basis points as traders dialed back policy tightening bets.

“The truce itself is fragile. It will take some time for the supplies to restore fully,” Malhotra said, reiterating that the RBI remains data-dependent. “Upside risks have certainly reduced, but we'll have to still wait and watch as to where crude

prices ultimately end up.” Minutes of the RBI's June 3-5 monetary policy meeting showed rate-setters discussed India's economic outlook would improve rapidly once the war ends, when they decided to leave the key rate unchanged at 5.25 per cent. The governor said the monetary policy committee is keeping a close eye on both monsoon and crude prices. Malhotra pointed out

that India has “sufficient” food buffers though policy makers will remain watchful of any impact on the broader economy and inflation. Currently, India's consumer price index remains below the RBI's 4 per cent target.

“As of now, as I see it, is the global uncertainty, which is challenge number one,” Malhotra said. “We are very well prepared to meet all challenges.”

India to focus on pharma in FTA, says Niti

SANGEETHA G. CHENNAI, JUNE 24

The government should draft a standardised pharmaceutical chapter that may serve as a template across FTA negotiations. This will provide consistency in trade negotia-

tions, improve market access and address non-tariff barriers, finds Niti Aayog.

Several existing FTAs contain pharmaceutical-related provisions, but the benefits on the ground are mixed because many provisions remain coopera-

tive in nature.

The recently concluded India-European Union FTA has incorporated pharmaceutical-specific regulatory cooperation clauses, which is a step in the right direction, but it needs to be widely included across the several FTAs

that India is in the process of ratifying.

A model chapter would help ensure greater consistency in negotiations, strengthen market access outcomes, and systematically address non-tariff barriers affecting pharmaceutical trade.

GAMES

SHORT TAKES



Chess legend Viswanathan Anand (left) receives a memento from R. Mohan, Deccan Chronicle's Resident Editor in Chennai, on Wednesday.

Anand conferred top SJFI medal

Chennai: Five-time world chess champion Viswanathan Anand was on Wednesday conferred the Sports Journalists' Federation of India medal at a function organised in association with the Tamil Nadu Sports Journalists' Association here. Anand, currently FIDE deputy president, joins a distinguished list of recipients that includes Sunil Gavaskar, Vijay Amritraj, Prakash Padukone, P. T. Usha and Milkh Singh. “I am proud in a way to have been a catalyst for the growth of chess in India,” Anand said after receiving the honour.

“This is very special because it is hardcore; these are people who will appreciate you for what you did and not necessarily the impact it had or anything else,” he added. The medal was presented to Anand by former India captain and chief selector Krishnamachari Srikkanth at the Madras Cricket Club. — PTI

Vanshika-Shiva shoot mixed silver

Suhl, Germany: The Indian pair of Vanshika Chaudhary and Shiva Narwal delivered a composed performance to clinch the 10 metres air pistol mixed team silver medal at the ISSF Junior World Championship here. The Indian duo shot a total of 469.7 to finish behind Poland's Malgorzata Dabrowska and Ivan Rakitski, who combined for a winning total of 471.9. The bronze medal went to Chinese Taipei 1, represented by Cheng Yen-Ching and Hsieh Hsiang-Chen, who posted 410.0 points. — PTI

Blues take aim at Bangla

Manchester, June 24: With middle-order batting woes and sloppy fielding threatening to derail their campaign, India will be desperate to address those concerns when they take on Bangladesh in a crucial Women's T20 World Cup Group 'A' clash here on Thursday.

India entered the 12-team tournament with the form of their top order as a concern, but Smriti Mandhana and Shafali Verma have largely allayed those fears.

Mandhana has scored 159 runs in three matches, while Shafali has contributed 92, with both batters striking at over 154 and consistently providing brisk starts.

However, the inability of the middle order to build on those platforms has emerged as a fresh concern for the team management.

Skipper Harmanpreet Kaur (SR 109.09), Jemimah Rodrigues (94.11) and Yastika Bhatia (105.88) have each been unable to carry on the momentum provided by the openers, and their failure to accelerate invariably has left a lot to do for the likes of Richa Ghosh and Deepti Sharma.

Having played three matches each, both Kaur and Rodrigues have managed just 11 boundaries between them without hitting a single six. Yastika has struck only three fours in two innings, numbers that are likely to worry the Indian camp.

On their part, Richa (176.92) and Deepti (159.37) have responded well to the challenge but arriving late in the innings with limited deliveries to face has increased the pressure on the duo. Despite their lopsided batting, India (4 points in 3 matches, Net Run Rate of 2.511) are reaping the benefits of victories by big margins — by 64 runs against Pakistan and by 95 runs against the Netherlands — as they look to hold on to the second spot. Australia have cemented themselves at the top of the group with four wins on the trot giving them a total of 8 points and a superb NRR of 4.724. — PTI



Indian captain Harmanpreet Kaur throws a ball during a team fielding practice session on Tuesday, eve of the match against Bangladesh in the Women's T20 World Cup in Manchester, England.

— BCCI WOMEN

Vaibhav to get separate room

New Delhi, June 24: Teen batting sensation Vaibhav Sooryavanshi is set for a rather unusual experience on his maiden senior international tour, during which the 15-year-old will get a separate changing room as part of safeguarding protocols for India's upcoming T20I series in England.

The teenager, who has already created a buzz with his fearless stroke-play, is set to become India's youngest international cricketer, going past the legendary Sachin Tendulkar, who made his

Test debut at 16 years and 205 days in 1989. India begin their tour with a two-match T20I series against Ireland in Belfast starting on Friday, before taking on England in a five-match series from next Wednesday. The England leg of the tour will also bring with it a first-of-its-kind arrangement for the youngster.

According to a report in the British daily The Guardian, Sooryavanshi will have separate changing facilities at all venues in England because International Cricket

Council event safeguarding rules — along with England and Wales Cricket Board regulations — do not allow Under-16 players to use adult changing rooms. “Sooryavanshi will be permitted in the India dressing room during the game and can attend team talks, with the restriction applying only when he is getting changed before and after each match,” stated the report.

“Such measures are standard practice in English sport, with Arsenal's Max Dowman

using a separate changing room to his teammates last season until he turned 16 in December, but will be new to Sooryavanshi as they do not apply in India.”

Sooryavanshi's parents are also expected to accompany him on the tour.

The arrangement will be new for the Rajasthan Royals youngster, who shared the same dressing room as his senior teammates during his time in the Indian Premier League. — PTI

GILL AT NO. 2 RANK IN ICC BATTING LIST

Dubai, June 24: India captain Shubman Gill rose three spots to move to the second spot in ICC ODI rankings for batters, while New Zealand pacer Matt Henry joined Jasprit Bumrah as the world's top ranked bowler in Test cricket here on Wednesday.

Gill is now behind New Zealand's Daryl Mitchell by only 24 rating points as the Indian skipper reaped the benefits of his big scores against Afghanistan in the recently-concluded three-match ODI series.

While he did not bat in the final ODI which India won by 9 wickets, Gill scored 84 and 154 in the first two matches of the series.

Ishan Kishan moved up 21 positions to reach 43rd rank among batters while three Indian bowlers also made big gains in the latest rankings.

Arshdeep Singh moved up 16 positions to reach 22nd, Prasidh Krishna moved up 34 places to get to 58th while allrounder Washington Sundar climbed 17 spots to reach joint 71st. — PTI

Mkts rebound on value buying, easing oil prices

RAVI RANJAN PRASAD MUMBAI, JUNE 24

Benchmark indices rebounded on Wednesday, recovering losses from the previous session on easing geopolitical tensions in the Middle East, declining crude oil prices, progress of the monsoon in western India and value buying in IT stocks. The Sensex gained 790 points, or 1.04 per cent, to close at 76,991.22, while the Nifty-50 rose 197.55 points, or 0.83 per cent, to end at 24,021.65.

Global markets showed mixed trends. South Korea's Kospi index rose 3.26 per cent after falling 9.99 per cent on Tuesday, while Taiwan's Taiex index declined 2.24 per cent. Overnight, the US tech-heavy Nasdaq Composite had fallen 2.21 per cent.

Investor sentiment was supported by lower crude oil prices. Brent crude futures traded between \$73.32 and \$76.76 per barrel, with the last quoted price down 3.9 per cent at

GLOBAL CUES	GLOBAL MARKET
● Sensex up 790 points, closes at 76,991.22.	South Korean Kospi ↑ 3.26 %
● Nifty-50 closes at 24,021.65 up 197.55 points.	Taiwan's Taiex ↓ 2.24 %
● NSE Mid-cap 100 index up 0.10%.	Nasdaq Composite ↓ 2.21 %
● Nifty Small-cap index up 0.39%.	
● Brent crude traded in the range of \$73.32 to \$76.76/barrel.	
● NSE's India VIX fell to 13.39%	

\$73.8 per barrel. The rupee also strengthened to 94.65 against the US dollar from the previous close of 94.73.

“Market surge came on the back of falling prices of crude oil amidst relief about the situation between the US and Iran as well as the possibility of uninterrupted energy flow through the Strait of Hormuz,” said Vikram Kasat, head of advisory, PL Capital.

FIIs sold equities worth ₹1,843.4 crore while DIIs purchased shares worth ₹3,637.26 crore.

Sectoral performance remained mixed. The BSE IT index rose 1.81 per cent and the Bankex gained 1.78 per cent, reversing the sharp decline seen in the previous session. Other gainers included realty, up 2.17 per cent, and consumer durables, up 0.37 per cent.

IT stocks recovered after Infosys chairman Nandan Nilekani addressed shareholders at the company's annual general meeting and dismissed concerns over the impact of artificial intelligence on IT services firms.

S&P: Monsoon, energy stress to hit India GDP

FC CORRESPONDENT NEW DELHI, JUNE 24

Global rating giant S&P Global Ratings on Wednesday said energy stress, sub-par monsoon and slowing global growth will pull down India's gross domestic product (GDP) growth to 6.6 per cent in the current fiscal. The Indian economy

recorded 7.7 per cent growth in the 2025-26 fiscal and 7.1 per cent in 2024-25.

“We project real GDP growth will slow to 6.6 per cent in the fiscal year ending in March 2027, compared with 7.7 per cent in fiscal 2026, amid the energy stress, expectations of a sub-par monsoon, and slowing global growth,” S&P said in its report.

Champ Gulveer fails Asiad test

Bhubaneswar, June 24: Reigning Asian champion and national record holder Gulveer Singh failed to breach the Asian Games qualifying mark set by the national federation in the men's 5000 metres race, clocking a mediocre time in the opening event of the National Inter-State Senior Athletics Championships here on Wednesday.

The 26-year-old Uttar Pradesh athlete, who had clinched a 10,000m bronze medal at the 2022 Asian Games, clocked 13:52.92 to win the race.

But his time was well outside the Asian Games qualifying time of 13 minutes and 39.18 seconds set by the Athletics Federation of India (AFI).

Singh's timing was also far below his outdoor national record of 13:03.93 set last month in Los Angeles, USA. In February 2025, he had become the first Indian to run a 5000m race in sub 13 minutes when he clocked 12 minutes 59.77 seconds to set both a national and Asian Indoor record.

The AFI's selection committee may still consider Singh for the Asian Games as he has already breached the qualifying standard earlier in the year in USA. Singh is currently training in Colorado Springs, USA, under foreign coach Scott Simmons, with full support from the

government's Mission Olympic Cell (MOC). This year, he has competed in seven events, all in the USA, and the National Inter-State outing was his first competition in India this season.

He has been named for both the 5000m and 10,000m in the 32-member Indian squad for the upcoming Commonwealth Games in Glasgow, Scotland. “I am not satisfied with the timing, it's a bit warm. Also, it was a new track, there is less grip and more bounce. I had not done continuous speed workout on this track,” Singh said later.

“I am doing continuous training in Colorado Springs, USA, and my timing has been good. My coach (Simmons) decides everything — training and competitions. I am preparing for the CWG,” Singh added. Singh is also running in 1500m race on Saturday, though it's not his regular event. He had clocked a creditable 3:37.87 last month in the USA, and 3:36.58 last year. — PTI

TREESA-GAYATRI MAKE NEXT ROUND AT US OPEN

Fullerton (USA), June 24: Indian women's doubles pair of Treesa Jolly and Gayatri Gopichand advanced to the second round of the US Open Super 300 badminton tournament after overcoming Spain's Paula Lopez and Lucia Rodriguez in a three-game battle here.

Making her return after an ankle injury layoff, Treesa, partnering Gayatri, defeated the Spanish combination 21-12, 14-21 21-13 in a 51-minute opening-round contest. The Indian duo will next take on Japan's Sumire Nakade and Miyu Takahashi.

In the men's singles qualifiers, Rounak Chouhan secured his place in the main draw with two victories. He first beat France's Enogat Roy 21-19, 21-16 before rallying past Chinese Taipei's Kuo Kuan Lin 13-21, 21-14, 21-10. Chouhan will now face fellow Indian S. Sankar Muthusamy Subramanian in the opening round. — PTI

INTERNATIONAL EDITORIALS



COMMENT

Editorials

New plan to attract foreign investment reinforces market reality on the ground

This month, China is hosting a succession of international business gatherings that collectively reflect the importance the world's corporate sector attaches to the Chinese market.

The China International Supply Chain Expo, which opened in Beijing on Monday, has attracted some 700 major companies and industry groups from 85 countries, regions and international organizations. In Dalian, Liaoning province, the ongoing Summer Davos has drawn over 1,700 global executives, researchers and policymakers from more than 90 countries and regions. And in Qingdao, Shandong province, the Qingdao Multinationals Summit recently wrapped up with 357 multinational corporations — 105 of them Fortune Global 500 companies — from 44 countries and regions.

These are not the numbers to expect if global businesses were genuinely preparing to leave China as some allege. Last year, a total of 70,392 new foreign-invested enterprises were established across China, marking a 19.1 percent increase compared with 2024.

The Western claims that China is an “economic threat” — whether “overcapacity”, “subsidies”, “currency manipulation” or “trade imbalances” — are not new. They are simply recycled in search of listeners. But they have never gained real traction, because China's economic rise has delivered tangible benefits to the world, including developed economies, in the form of stable supply chains, more consumer options and a superlarge market that have created healthy profits for multinationals.

To deflect attention from their own shortcomings in addressing domestic economic challenges in these turbulent times, some Western politicians have resorted to hyping up a “China Shock 2.0” narrative targeting China's “new three” — new energy vehicles, lithium-ion batteries and photovoltaic products.

Yet reality tells a different story — multinationals are still doubling down on their operations in China. The trade data of recent months reinforce this reality. China's foreign trade has continued to demonstrate resilience. Its foreign trade in yuan-denominated terms grew 16.9 percent year-on-year in May. In the process, foreign-invested enterprises remain important contributors to exports, technological innovation and industrial upgrading.

And China's new action plan on foreign investment, rolled out on Monday with fresh incentives for global capital and talent, will only drive a

deeper wedge between the China-bashers' rhetoric and the market reality on the ground.

The plan expands market access, addresses practical concerns of international investors and signals that China intends to attract foreign investment through a combination of market size, complete industrial system, good business environment and institutional openness. The plan also calls for faster revisions to regulations governing foreign mergers and acquisitions, smoother cross-border data transfers, stronger support for foreign-funded research and development centers, tax incentives for reinvested profits and enhanced services for major investment projects.

The contradiction between the Western political rhetoric and business reality is getting harder to ignore — especially in the European Union, which is mulling restrictive trade measures against China in the name of boosting its own competitiveness.

EU companies remain deeply embedded in China's industrial ecosystem and European businesses acknowledge the immense cost of “de-risking” from Chinese manufacturing networks. Supply chains built over decades cannot simply be replicated elsewhere by political decree.

The EU says it backs globalization, yet when it comes to China, the bloc acts as if it's a zero-sum game — where China's gain would be Europe's loss. In fact, China-EU economic ties are mutually beneficial. If the China-bashing politicians in Brussels truly want to fix the bloc's competitiveness problem, they should look at home — not cast blame elsewhere.

China's competitive strengths did not emerge from what the China naysayers claim. They stem from innovation, competition and the long-term hard work of the Chinese people. Against this backdrop, reports that Chinese Commerce Minister Wang Wentao is to visit Brussels assume added significance. Both sides have practical incentives to engage in dialogue and continue cooperation.

China's new action plan on foreign investment clearly indicates that the world's second-largest economy welcomes multinational companies by creating new opportunities in finance, health care, education, biotechnology and advanced manufacturing. For global businesses, the choice remains straightforward. Markets, efficiency and growth opportunities matter more than political slogans in some Western capitals. And for all the political noise surrounding “de-risking”, the world's boardrooms appear to have already made their decision.

Japan's neo-militarist march continues

In recent weeks, a series of actions by Japan — ranging from provocative military maneuvers and missile deployments to political grandstanding and public displays of militaristic symbols — has proved that the Sanae Takaichi government is resolved to adhere to its dangerous neo-militarist course.

The hyped-up need to respond to the much bandied-about “China threat” was again the pretext for the Japan Self-Defense Forces' participation in the annual “Resolute Dragon 26” joint military exercise with the United States, which began on Saturday in Kyushu and Okinawa. The exercise coincided with reports that the US military plans to deploy the Typhon midrange missile systems in Japan.

When the People's Liberation Army Navy's CNS *Liaoning* aircraft carrier strike group was conducting far-sea training, which concluded on Monday, the strike group had to respond professionally to repeated close-range Japanese harassment.

Showing the lengths that the Takaichi government is going to in pursuing its agenda, at last week's G7 summit in France, Takaichi tried to push for a “joint stockpile” of critical minerals to alleviate the so-called “rare earth shortages” Japan's business and military sectors face. Her aim is to mitigate Japan's self-created predicament by forming a united front against China. However, the initiative met a cold reception and merely served to show her readiness to call white black.

Takaichi's flustered reaction at the G7 summit when the US leader brought up Pearl Harbor for the second time, after first mentioning it during her visit to Washington in March, illustrates that she is not forgetful — she simply wants Japan's unsavory wartime past to evade global scrutiny.

Her government is also attempting to stoke narrow nationalist sentiment at home to rally public support for the resurgence of militarism.

During Japan's match with Tunisia at the 2026 FIFA World Cup at Monterrey Stadium in Guadalupe, Mexico, on Saturday, some Japanese fans repeatedly displayed a “rising sun flag”, a symbol of

Japanese militarism during World War II.

No wonder, it immediately sparked criticism from China, the Republic of Korea and other victim nations of Japan's aggression in history. Displaying the flag is a flagrant violation of FIFA regulations that explicitly prohibit political, offensive, or discriminatory flags, banners and materials inside World Cup stadiums. The presence of such symbols at an international event points to an alarming degree of “normalization” regarding Japan's historical aggression among some segments of the Japanese public.

Taken together, these actions paint a clear and troubling picture: Japan is pushing forward a multipronged neo-militarist agenda. This is reinforced by its recent drive to expand arms exports, collaborate with Western allies on weapons manufacturing and hike military spending to record levels. Meanwhile, right-wing politicians are intensifying their revisionist campaigns — distorting school textbooks to downplay wartime atrocities and making pilgrimages to the Yasukuni Shrine, a site that shamelessly “glorifies” Japan's war criminals as “national heroes”.

These actions are part of a systematic push to undermine Japan's postwar constitutional restraints — driven by right-wing forces' ambitions to transform Japan into a “normal country”, if not a fully-fledged war machine.

To that end, they readily paint neighbors, including China, as “security threats”, and have even claimed that the Taiwan Strait situation constitutes a “survival-threatening situation” for Japan, one they argue demands an armed response.

The international community cannot afford to overlook the seriousness of this moment. Japan is effectively dusting off the same playbook it used in the lead up to and throughout WWII. The country is fast emerging as a significant danger to regional stability. The historical record of unbridled Japanese militarism is one of devastation. To ensure that history does not repeat itself, the world must stay alert and resolutely push back against these reckless moves.

Song Chen



Opinion Line

BRICS should aim at common, cooperative, sustainable security

As senior officials gathered in New Delhi this week for the 16th Meeting of BRICS National Security Advisors and High Representatives on National Security, an undercurrent was the mounting resolve among developing countries to reject their long-as-signed place “on the menu”.

Representing nearly half the global population and about 40 percent of the world's GDP, the grouping has evolved from a coordination mechanism for its founding members into one of the most important platforms for the Global South to amplify its voice and influence. Its growing focus on security cooperation indicates that countries long relegated to the margins of global security governance are no longer content to be at someone's mercy.

That broader transformation formed the backdrop to Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi's visit to New Delhi for the security meeting.

A series of bilateral meetings Wang had with officials from different countries on the sidelines of the BRICS gathering, including India's National Security Advisor Ajit Doval, Deputy Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council Qadir Nizamipour and South Africa's Minister in the Presidency Khumbudzo Ntshavheni, shows China's commitment to enhancing communication and coordination with the BRICS members.

A common thread ran through those discussions. In a world facing mounting security challenges, closer

cooperation and coordination are essential.

BRICS members increasingly see themselves as stakeholders in a multipolar international order. Security should encompass economic resilience, social stability and human well-being.

BRICS therefore serves as a builder of multilateralism at a moment when the practice is under strain. The grouping's appeal lies in its rejection of the old either-or logic that has long dominated geopolitics and its upholding of dialogue instead of confrontation, partnership instead of bloc politics, and cooperation instead of containment. In an age seemingly defined by polarization, such common-sense ideas should prevail.

Just as importantly, BRICS should champion political solutions to international disputes.

Too many crises today are framed through the lens of military options before diplomatic ones have been exhausted. Lasting peace cannot be imposed; it must be negotiated. That requires respecting legitimate security concerns, seeking common ground and refusing to allow disagreements to become permanent barriers.

The larger question hanging over global politics is who gets to write the rules. BRICS is a defender of fairness and justice in a system that was designed without the full participation of developing countries. The grouping advocates a more representative multipolar order and a more inclusive form of globalization — one

that reflects today's realities rather than yesterday's hierarchies.

Underlying much of this vision is China's Global Security Initiative, which calls for common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security. Its central premise is difficult to dismiss: in an interconnected world, security cannot be hoarded by a few and denied to the many.

The conversations in New Delhi suggest that, despite the grouping's differences on some issues, its members are increasingly inclined toward a common understanding that BRICS should evolve into a force promoting a more balanced international order through cooperation.

BRICS members should strengthen security cooperation by managing internal security matters effectively and delivering visible results in both traditional security and nontraditional areas such as technology governance and counterterrorism.

The overextension of “security” by some countries, however, is becoming an excuse to weaponize economic and trade policies — a dangerous trend that warrants collective attention.

Security challenges today are inextricably linked — no country can be secure at the expense of another. The only viable path forward is common, comprehensive, cooperative and sustainable security, grounded in respect for sovereignty and a commitment to dialogue over confrontation.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

What They Say

Industrial foundation needs further strengthening

Editor's note: China is committed to strengthening its industrial foundation in the coming years. Outlook Weekly news magazine spoke to Chen Xuedong, an academician at the Chinese Academy of Engineering, about improving this vital sector. Below are excerpts of the interview. The views don't necessarily represent those of China Daily.

While China has made notable progress in strengthening its industrial foundation, several challenges persist. For instance, there is a high dependence on foreign suppliers for core foundational products.

There remains a gap in the quality and reliability of domestically produced foundational products.

Weaknesses in the industrial foundation have restricted enterprises' access to high-end markets, while the technological content and value added of export products remain relatively low, limiting the manufacturing sector's transition toward higher-value activities.

To address these challenges, China should accelerate the upgrading of its industrial foundation, coordinate efforts to advance industrial foundation reengineering and promote major technological equipment development programs.

National science and technology projects should strategically focus on fields such as instrumentation and industrial software. Establishing a competitiveness evaluation system for the country's industrial foundations is crucial, along with forward-looking planning for the foundational prod-

ucts and technologies required by emerging and future industries. In major national plans, breakthroughs in industrial foundation technologies should be recognized as landmark achievements alongside advances in major equipment and systems.

The enhancement of the industrial foundation should be integrated with the development of high-quality and effective technological equipment. There should be differentiated industry clusters for major technological equipment and specialized industry clusters for small and medium-sized enterprises. World-class industry clusters supported by stable supply chains should be developed to better respond to the restructuring of the global industry chains.

Efforts should focus on key industry chains, organizing coordinated research on critical foundational technologies through enterprise-led collaboration among industry, academia and research institutions.

Research on failure modes and failure mechanisms, as well as long-life and high-reliability design and manufacturing, should be strengthened, alongside pilot-scale testing and validation.

Enterprises producing foundational products should be encouraged to accelerate digitalization, networking and intelligent transformation to improve manufacturing processes. Product lifespan and reliability should be enhanced through the establishment of quality grading systems and premium pricing mechanisms for high-quality products.

Standardization systems should be strengthened, testing and certification capabilities improved, and a deeper understanding of the needs of users developed through effective demand-response mechanisms.

The integration of technological innovation and industrial innovation should be further strengthened. Enterprises should be encouraged to increase investment in new growth drivers, emerging technologies and innovative products, generating original and disruptive technological breakthroughs.

Enterprises should also be encouraged to expand international cooperation. Chinese companies should be guided to establish diversified and multilevel partnerships in key segments and optimize the global layout of research, production and services.

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Contact us at:

China Daily
15 Huixin Dongjie Chaoyang District,
Beijing 100029
News: +86 (0)10 6491-8366
editor@chinadaily.com.cn
Advertisement: +86 (0)10 6491-8631
ads@chinadaily.com.cn
Subscription: +86-400-699-0203
subscription.chinadaily.com.cn
App: www.chinadaily.com.cn/mobile/daily.html

China Daily UK
90 Cannon St, London EC4N 6HA, UK
+44 (0) 207 398 8270
editor@chinadailyuk.com

China Daily Asia Pacific
China Daily Hong Kong
Unit 1818, Hing Wai Centre, 7 Tin Wan
Praya Road, Aberdeen, Hong Kong
+852 2518 5111
editor@chinadailyhk.com
editor@chinadailyasia.com

China Daily USA
1500 Broadway, Suite 2800,
New York, NY 10036
+1 212 537 8888
editor@chinadailyyusa.com

China Daily Africa
P.O. Box 27281-00100, Nairobi, Kenya
+254 (0)20 692 0900 (Nairobi)
editor@chinadailyafrica.com
enquiries@chinadailyafrica.com
subscription@chinadailyafrica.com

Views

Prakoso Bhairawa Putera

A bridge linking innovation to adoption

As leaders from business, government, academia, and the innovation sector gather in Dalian, in Northeast China's Liaoning province, for the Annual Meeting of the New Champions 2026, also known as the Summer Davos, one question deserves particular attention: Why do some innovations become part of everyday life while others remain prototypes, pilot projects or just promising laboratory results?

The question of how innovation can scale up is especially relevant as the world searches for new engines of growth. Artificial intelligence, clean energy, biotechnology, smart transportation, digital payments and space technology offer new possibilities.

Yet possibility alone does not translate into public value. A bridge must be built between invention and widespread adoption.

That bridge is institutions. Innovation scales up when society builds the institutions that transform bright ideas into trusted, funded and widely adopted realities.

Technology opens the door, but institutions make people, markets and governments willing to walk through it. A prototype proves that something can work. Scale shows that society is ready to use it widely.

China offers several examples of scaling. BeiDou, for instance, is not only a story of launching a satellite navigation system. Its real breakthrough lies in how that system has transformed into an ecosystem of applications. BeiDou is now integrated into smartphones, transportation, agriculture, logistics, location-based services, and various civilian applications.

The satellites operate in space, but their economic value grows when they are linked to standards, devices, industries, and everyday services.

BeiDou has scaled not only because of its technological sophistication, but because institutional support has turned strategic infrastructure into a public platform and application market.

A similar lesson comes from new energy vehicles. Electric cars don't become mainstream simply because of better batteries or attractive designs.

Consumers need assurance: availability of charging infrastructure, reasonable operating costs, after-sales services, and a supportive energy ecosystem. This is why new energy vehicles require more than products.

They require policy packages, incentives, standards, charging networks, battery-swapping systems, industrial investment, and coordination among government, automakers, battery producers, and energy providers.

Hence, the innovation being scaled is not just the car, but an entire low-carbon mobility system.

China's high-speed rail and the Fuxing

train show how standardization can become an engine of scale. High-speed rail is a transportation project, but at the national scale it becomes an industrial system, a public service system, and a system of trust.

For high-speed trains to operate safely, punctually, and across many regions, they require technical standards, efficient operators, rail networks, signaling systems, manufacturing capacity, maintenance systems, financing, and a culture of safety.

Fuxing shows that innovation is not just about speed, but also about organizing technology into a replicable, expandable, and trustworthy system.

Indonesia's Quick Response Code Indonesian Standard is another example. Before QRIS, digital payments were fragmented, with multiple applications and service providers, each having its own code and system.

For small merchants, especially micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises, this diversity was a barrier.

QRIS changed this by introducing a national standard, enabling one code to accept payments from different applications. Here, innovation becomes a public utility. The regulator doesn't merely supervise the market; it builds a shared standard so that innovation is used more easily by millions of people.

QRIS shows that scalable innovation does not always require complex technology. Sometimes, the most crucial innovation is a standard that makes technology simple, affordable and inclusive. When small shops, street



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

Anthony Moretti

China affirms vision of a better global future

The first quarter of the 21st century has offered several reminders of how volatile the world is. Multiple wars dotted the news. Poverty, food insecurity and economic displacement threatened millions of people. A global pandemic crippled humanity. And most recently, public officials and private citizens have warned about the dangerous potential of artificial intelligence.

Amid these and other worries, China released a timely white paper titled "More Just and Equitable Global Governance: China's Principles, Proposals and Actions" on June 17.

The document outlines the country's vision of a brighter future, not just for developed nations, but crucially for the developing world.

At its core is a call for "building a just and equitable global governance system". Multilateralism, described as the "only viable path forward", alongside major countries acting in a responsible manner, is seen as essential in enabling such an environment.

Nations must engage in consultation, cooperation and communication. Additionally, if nations prioritize "we" before "me" and affirm that each of the world's 8 billion people deserves domestic stability and international peace, then China's often-stated goal of a shared future for humanity can be realized.

China's Global Governance Initiative is frequently referenced in the white

paper. Unveiled in September 2025, the initiative advocates for the international rule of law, supports multilateralism, places people at the center of all efforts and demands tangible solutions for real-world challenges.

World peace and global development are vital to the success of the GGI, which has already been endorsed by more than 160 nations. Releasing the white paper, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said the GGI "has evolved from a Chinese proposal into an international practice, and it is showing ever growing vitality".

The white paper underscores a crucial point: no country, no matter how powerful, should place itself above the United Nations, which is described as the "most comprehensive, representative and authoritative international organization" that "plays an irreplaceable and vital role in global governance".

China's unwavering support for the UN has been regularly demonstrated. The white paper affirms that the UN should occupy its rightful position atop the global hierarchy of organizations tackling the world's most vexing challenges.

China's endorsement of the UN is especially critical now, as certain nations appear determined to undermine it financially and structurally.

The divisive rhetoric emanating from



vendors, tourism actors, public transport users, and everyday consumers use the same payment standard, innovation ceases to be a novelty and becomes a new habit.

From BeiDou and new energy vehicles to high-speed rail, Fuxing and QRIS, a similar pattern can be seen. Innovation scales up when there is public trust, standardization, long-term financing, supporting infrastructure and collaborative governance.

No single entity can scale innovation on its own. Researchers discover, startups test, industries produce, governments set standards, financial institutions provide capital, and society legitimizes through everyday use.

This message is vital for the Summer Davos 2026. The world isn't short of great ideas. What is often lacking is the mechanism to scale those ideas to work socially.

Therefore, global forums such as the Annual Meeting of the New Champions should not only celebrate new technologies, but also discuss how those technologies can become trusted, funded, adopted, and sustained.

Today's "new champions" are not the first inventors of technology but the societies, companies, cities, and countries that can build bridges between discovery and broad adoption.

They understand that innovation doesn't just come from laboratories, but

also thrives in institutions, standards, financing, infrastructure, and public trust.

Recognizing this challenge, the National Research and Innovation Agency of the Republic of Indonesia has launched an initiative to strengthen the bridge between research and real-world impact.

The concept is simple but strategic: Indonesia needs a shared home for innovation where ready-to-use technologies can be displayed, connected, licensed, incubated, and matched with industries, state-owned enterprises, local governments, universities, investors, startups, and communities.

As a national innovation showcase, hub, and one-stop service, the initiative embodies the principle that innovation can scale only when good ideas are supported by institutions that connect knowledge, intellectual property, financing, co-creation, co-development, and public use.

Ultimately, innovation is not only invented but also organized. Breakthroughs open possibilities, but institutions turn those possibilities into realities.

The future will not be shaped only by those with the best ideas, but by those who can enable good ideas to grow into real, broad, and sustainable public value.

The author is a senior researcher and director of Policy Formulation for Research, Technology, and Innovation, at the National Research and Innovation Agency, the Republic of Indonesia. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



Zhou Shuchun

The author is chief researcher at the China Watch Institute, China Daily.

Opening a new chapter in parenting

Two recent headlines have reignited a familiar debate about parenting and family education. On June 15, the United Kingdom announced a ban on a range of social media apps for children under 16, saying the move aims to "give childhood back to children".

Earlier in the month, Nvidia CEO Jensen Huang joked that "once you've been raised by Asian parents, you need therapy for life".

Juxtaposed, these otherwise unrelated remarks raise a critical question: What challenges does family education face in the age of artificial intelligence, particularly in Asia?

The UK's observation that today's children are growing up in a world where "technology has invaded every area of life" aptly captures the environment shaping the youngest generation.

Huang's self-deprecatory quip, made days ahead of the college entrance exam, or *gaokao*, triggered a heated debate over Asian — especially Chinese — parenting. As usual, opinions were sharply divided.

But Huang's reflection was itself two-sided. It was not merely a criticism of Asian parenting, as some have framed it.

While joking that he was criticized all his life — alluding to the East Asian tendency to tell children they are never quite good enough — he also credited that upbringing for making him tougher. In his view, Asian children often grow into adults who are exceptionally resilient.

The UK's observation that today's children are growing up in a world where "technology has invaded every area of life" aptly captures the environment shaping the youngest generation.

Any discussion on Asian-style parenting or family education must move beyond simplistic praise or blame. Take China as an example. It is undeniable that many families impose high standards while falling short on emotional communication, leaving some children with psychological scars.

Yet Chinese families almost universally regard education as central to a child's growth, emphasizing foundational skills such as math and language as a means of securing a competitive advantage.

This rigor and measured pressure can foster resilience and drive, which is a likely factor behind the consistently superior academic performance of East Asian students globally.

This parenting style has historical and cultural contexts. Rooted in Confucian traditions and embedded in the national psyche, it is a value system based on the belief that "jade must be polished to shine". It is also a mirror of a parental mindset shaped by hardship.

Generations who lived through social upheaval and scarcity made it their life's mission to ensure the security of their children. They rarely verbalize their affection and express their love through sacrifice, investing everything in the education of their children. This has been the defining trait of Chinese parents for decades.

Clearly, Asian-style parenting should not be dismissed outright. But we also cannot ignore the fact that the emerging AI era may pose sharper challenges here than elsewhere.

As AI reshapes how children learn and grow, the limitations of traditional models are becoming increasingly apparent.

Problems linked to AI — from over-reliance on technology to emotional detachment — may get amplified in East Asian societies, compelling a fundamental rethink.

For instance, if traditional East Asian family education leans too heavily toward knowledge over capability, there's an urgent need to correct this.

As AI takes over repetitive and memory-based tasks, human strengths — creativity, imagination, interpersonal skills — become paramount.

Grades may determine short-term outcomes, but mindset shapes lifelong trajectories. Parents must get over their obsession with scores and prioritize holistic development, moral grounding, innovative thinking and critical inquiry to encourage exploration.

Similarly, the rise of AI risks fostering children's dependence on digital companionship, including chatbots — a likely reason behind the UK's social media ban. In cultures already criticized for limited parent-child interaction, this risk intensifies. The temptation to outsource parenting to AI warrants still more serious caution.

The home is the first school of life, and parents are a child's first teachers. In China, family education has evolved from a private matter into a national priority.

From the first Five-Year Plan for Family Education in 1996 and the National Family Education Guidelines in 2010 to the Family Education Promotion Law enacted in 2021, China's approach has steadily become more systematic and institutionalized.

Encouragingly, as Gen Z and millennials become parents and social norms evolve, the traditional archetype is also shifting.

Many see this as a conscious effort to break cycles of intergenerational trauma and build healthier family relationships. Clashes between old and new mindsets might persist for some time to come, but a new era of family education has undoubtedly begun.

The FT View



FINANCIAL TIMES

‘Without fear and without favour’

ft.com/opinion

Opinion Science

We are marinating in a crisis of our own making

Maria Hergueta



W

ars create abnormal environments. They empty streets and hit infrastructure, shutter workplaces and schools. They threaten food and water supplies, and require shelters for public safety. They stress-test emergency services, create casualties and cost lives.

We are slowly marinating in a war of our own making – against an enemy, climate change, that once seemed distant but now fires ever more frequent warning shots. Temperatures in parts of England and Wales are likely to reach 39C by Thursday, prompting the Met Office to issue a rare “red extreme heat national severe weather warning”, signifying risk to life and infrastructure. France just reached 42C. Hundreds of French schools are shut or closing early, and a nuclear power plant was

Climate change once seemed distant but now fires ever more frequent warning shots

shut down because of cooling issues. The current heatwave in Britain, which follows a scorching May, looks set to shatter the 35.6C record set for June during the heatwave of 1976, chiefly remembered today through grainy newsreels of melting ice creams and packed beaches. That recollection, according to meteorologists, health specialists and climate groups, who gathered in London on Monday to mark its 50th anniversary, leaves out the grittier realities of water shortages, failed harvests and the then Labour government even appointing a minister for drought. This anniversary meeting was no feel-good throwback but instead a terrifying fast-forward into a sweltering future. The centrepiece was a Met Office projection of a plausible heat-wave for 2056, based on 2.5C of global warming. It showed temperatures spiking at 45C in England, 41C in Wales and 38C in Scotland, with multiple nights hotter than 20C. That “tropical night” threshold makes it harder to cool down, as does high humidity. By chance, a paper published in Nature Climate Change this week shows the hottest nights are warming faster, at 0.32C per decade, than the hottest days (0.27C), and that “population exposure to dangerous heat has increased markedly” since 1950, due

The US Treasury market rests on shakier ground

Reforms are necessary to bolster the backbone of the financial world

The world’s go-to safe haven asset, US government bonds are the cornerstone of the global financial system. But the \$30tn Treasury market has shown new signs of strain due to shifting demand dynamics, large US deficits and shocks from unpredictable policymaking. Long-term yields have crept higher: the benchmark 10-year rate has largely been above 4 per cent in recent years, while last month a new issue of 30-year debt launched at a yield of 5 per cent for the first time since 2007. Treasury markets also appear more fragile, as seen in the bond market response to President Donald Trump’s “liberation day” tariffs last year. Washington will need to address these risks if it is to avoid higher and more volatile borrowing costs. Weaker demand for Treasuries is part

of the story. In the early 2000s, central banks around the world, including those in export-led Asian economies, parked their considerable savings in ultra-safe Treasuries. Excess demand meant the US could finance its deficits while paying low interest rates. Former Federal Reserve chair Ben Bernanke called this phenomenon a “global savings glut.” But in recent years, as the US has continued to issue debt and run large deficits, foreign central bank buying of Treasuries has not kept up. This shift was in part driven by economic factors, such as reserve drawdowns as China defended a declining renminbi, as well as strategic rationale: the looming threat of sanctions has encouraged Russia and China to diversify away from Treasuries and into assets such as gold. With fewer buyers chasing a growing pool of Treasuries, yields have crept higher in recent years. From a global savings glut, European Central Bank board member Isabel Schnabel has

declared that we are transitioning to a “global bond glut”. Another factor, as former Treasury official Geng Ngarmboonanant has pointed out, has been a change in Treasury buyers. Shorter-term investors such as hedge funds have flocked to US government bonds, more than doubling their presence in the past five years by purchasing a record share of the market. Unlike central banks and pension funds that must buy safe assets, funds are often more rate-sensitive buyers and can sell quickly in times of stress. Many of them finance trades by borrowing money to exploit small price discrepancies, adding more leverage to the Treasury market, which amplifies volatility. Changes to the plumbing of the Treasury market could relieve some of this pressure. The Securities and Exchange Commission adopted new rules for mandatory central clearing for Treasuries that could decrease counterparty risks, improve liquidity and possibly lower borrowing costs. Many banks

Though regulatory changes would support confidence, problems will persist as long as policymaking is capricious and the country continues to run large deficits

argue that amending bank capital requirements adopted after the global financial crisis would allow banks to buy and hold more US debt. A growing stablecoin market might enhance demand for Treasuries, but if badly administered, could add new sources of strain. The US Federal Reserve under its new chair Kevin Warsh could play a role remedying Treasury market fragility, for instance by developing emergency tools. That said, he has expressed a preference for quantitative tightening and less forward guidance, both of which could raise borrowing costs. Though regulatory reforms would support confidence in the US government bond market, problems will persist as long as policymaking is capricious and the country continues to run large deficits. The surest way to counteract Treasury market instability is for the US government to proactively pursue greater fiscal responsibility and policy stability. If it does not, adverse market reactions could end up forcing its hand.

Letters

Assessing impact of El Niño requires a forward-looking model

With El Niño under way, Kenza Bryan and Steven Bernard’s recent discussion (Report, [FT.com](#), June 12) is a useful reminder that the most important climate risks are not only about gradual warming but how that warming changes the frequency and intensity of extreme events. This emphasises the need for forward-looking climate models or climate-conditioned catastrophe models, as reliance on historical experience alone is insufficient. The climate baseline against which these

extreme events occur is already changing. The same El Niño pattern can produce different impacts when it occurs against a warmer climate baseline, particularly where higher temperatures alter rainfall intensity, soil moisture or heat stress. Much of the discussion tends to focus on what El Niño does in aggregate to global temperatures or rainfall patterns. The more relevant issue for decision makers is how those shifts translate into simultaneous impacts across regions.

A single El Niño event can drive heatwaves in one geography, drought in another and flooding elsewhere at the same time, creating correlated losses across supply chains and investment portfolios. These compound effects are difficult to capture when risks are assessed in isolation or averaged across large regions. For an insurer, investor or supply chain-exposed company, the issue is not only the severity of one event but whether losses occur in several regions at once.

Future El Niño events cannot be viewed in isolation from climate change, nor assessed only country by country or peril by peril. For businesses, insurers and policymakers, this points towards a growing need for forward-looking, scenario-based approaches that test exposure across multiple configurations of extreme events, rather than relying on historical averages or single-event comparisons. **Isaam Hanif**
Head of Science and Research at SLR Bristol, UK

Leverage ratios are a crude tool to reduce banking risk

I would not tend to agree with David Aikman of the National Institute of Economic and Social Research on the question of easing the leverage ratios within the prudential regulation of banks (Opinion, June 18). In essence these ratios represent the pair of braces within the “belt and braces” rules for measuring capital adequacy, where the main system of risk-weighted capital ratios is the belt. The former are crude – or, as Aikman would have it, simple by design. For leverage ratio purposes, any gilt-edged sovereign bonds held by UK banks – and the reserve balances they hold with the Bank of England, much bloated since 2008 through the impact of quantitative easing – are treated as if they were equally risky, with such exposures as nonprime residential mortgages, or unsecured consumer or SME business credit.

It is misleading, though not literally incorrect, to state as Aikman does that it was the risk-weighted side of the capital rules that failed so catastrophically in 2007-8. Within that framework, it was I think the inadequate capital ratio numbers applied to the total of each bank’s risk-weighted assets, more than the risk weightings in themselves, that caused the problem. Those ratios have been greatly strengthened, especially for the big systemically important banks, through a phased transition (mainly completed by 2016) under the globally agreed Basel III package. Also tightened are the liquidity rules, measuring the ratio of liquid reserve assets to deposit liabilities etc, as a separate pillar of prudential supervision from the measurement of capital against the assets sides of banks’ balance sheets. **Andy Thompson**
Worcester Park, Surrey, UK

In Italy, Vannacci’s rise is an affront to democracy

Your article on Roberto Vannacci’s growing influence (“Meloni under fire from far right’s new ‘Caesar’”, Report, June 18) rightly identifies the challenge he poses to Giorgia Meloni and Italy’s governing coalition. However, the significance of his rise extends beyond electoral arithmetic. What should concern democrats across Europe is not simply that Vannacci is attracting voters dissatisfied with Meloni’s moderation but the nature of the ideas he advances. His calls for a return to “cultural homogeneity”, his hostility towards minorities, his attacks on LGBT citizens and his proposal to drastically reduce Italy’s foreign population are not solutions to Italy’s economic and social challenges. They are expressions of exclusionary nationalism that undermine the principles of pluralism and equal citizenship on which modern



democratic societies are founded. Equally troubling is his admiration for Vladimir Putin’s Russia and his advocacy for ending support to Ukraine while restoring closer ties with Moscow. At a time when Ukraine continues to defend its sovereignty against Russian aggression, such positions amount to a rejection of the values of freedom, self-determination and international law that Europe has sought to uphold since the end of the second world war. The lesson from Vannacci’s emergence should not be that Giorgia Meloni has moved too far towards the political centre. Rather, it is that economic uncertainty and political disillusionment continue to provide fertile ground for those who promise national renewal through exclusion, division and nostalgia. Europe has seen before where such politics can lead. They deserve scrutiny, not normalisation. **Federico Forni**
London SW15, UK

Nudging employers to remember their manners

It’s clear that courtesy is being sidelined in the UK’s entry-level job market (“Five university leavers on what it really takes to land the first job”, Work and Careers, May 28). Many young and capable candidates report that they are not even dignified with a response to their often time-consuming job applications. While the UK General Data Protection Regulation does not require employers to respond to every applicant, as controllers of applicants’ personal data they must respond to subject access requests (SARs), usually within one month. Petty though it may seem, a sufficient flood of SARs from “ghosted” candidates may nudge employers to rediscover common courtesy in their recruitment processes. **Lewis John**
St Helier, Jersey, Channel Islands

Gutting aid to fund defence won’t make Britain safer

UK Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer’s plans for defence spending have been the subject of much debate recently (Report, June 12). While some support the increase as a necessity in these uncertain political times, and others argue that it does not go far enough, what is rarely discussed is the catastrophic trade-off taking place behind the scenes. This additional funding will redirect billions of pounds from overseas aid, and the consequences must be acknowledged by the public and addressed by the government. Almost 700mn people worldwide live in extreme poverty, without reliable access to healthcare, education, employment and other basic services. While this is first and foremost a humanitarian issue, it also has profound implications for global stability and, indeed, our own security. Poverty, state fragility and conflict are deeply interconnected. Countries suffering from severe deprivation are more vulnerable to instability, displacement and the conditions in which violent extremism can flourish. The consequences rarely remain within national borders. From the Sahel to the Middle East, insecurity and humanitarian crises have demonstrated how underdevelopment contributes to wider regional and international challenges. Therefore, while Starmer and his ministers may believe it is in the UK’s best interests to prioritise defence spending, doing so at the expense of overseas aid could ultimately prove counter-productive. Defence is essential, but so too is addressing the conditions that give rise to insecurity in the first place. Britain and its allies will never be able to foster a safer world through drone strikes and gunfire. **Matilde Santos**
The Borgen Project, London W2, UK

BlackRock headlines don’t tell the full story

The online headline “BlackRock private credit fund honours less than 40 per cent of redemption requests” on your June 13 report is factually correct. The context not sufficiently highlighted is that BlackRock honoured the maximum redemptions permitted under the fund’s quarterly liquidity framework. Without context, non-payment of redemption requests beyond the contractual 5 per cent limit can easily be interpreted as an inability to pay, rather than adherence to the fund’s governing terms. Headlines can shape the perceptions of investors, regulators and boards, potentially leading to conclusions – and actions – that may not be warranted by the full picture. **Anirudh Chowdhry**
Lyndhurst, NJ, US

Can a lasting Iran nuclear deal be forged in 60 days?

I was a member of the UN Security Council sanctions panel on Iran when the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) was agreed in 2015 (“How to bridge the impasse over Iran’s nuclear programme”, Opinion, June 23). The JCPOA was not perfect, not least because the constraints on Iran’s nuclear programme lasted only 10 to 15 years, but I thought it was the best solution at that time to the problems created by the programme given that there was no chance that the Security Council would approve more sanctions. The 14-point MoU agreed by the US and Iran will enable the Strait of Hormuz to be reopened. But the issues surrounding Iran’s nuclear programme remain on the table, to constitute part of a final deal to be negotiated within 60 days (extendable with mutual consent). The JCPOA took almost two years to finalise, and although the starting point today is different (not least because much of Iran’s nuclear infrastructure has been bombed), an agreement on nuclear issues within 60 days seems unlikely. **Jonathan Brewer**
New York, NY, US

Challengers need more help in UK audit market

The audit reforms that were proposed following the collapse of Carillion were supposed to drive audit quality and increase market choice (“Easing of UK audit clampdown leaves Big Four stronger than ever”, Opinion, June 4). While it is encouraging to see standards improving across the market, there is very little evidence that it is opening up. Analysis by the Financial Reporting Council in December suggested that the Big Four accounting firms still audit more than 85 per cent of the FTSE 350. There are many high-quality challenger firms that would welcome the opportunity to compete for more of this work but the additional regulatory and financial costs associated with doing so remain a significant barrier to entry. Recent governments have mandated the audit regulator to do more to stimulate growth. This needs to include stimulating competition and choice across the UK audit market, which should also help drive quality. **Martin Clapson**
Chair, Association of Practising Accountants, Bishop’s Stortford, Essex, UK

Correction

● Nicholas Klingaman, formerly principal research fellow at the National Centre for Atmospheric Science, left Citadel in 2025 and is no longer head of weather at the hedge fund, as wrongly stated in an article on June 23.

Opinion

Zelenskyy may have the last laugh over Trump

GLOBAL AFFAIRS

Edward Luce



Which man is likelier to be leading his country in 2029, Donald Trump or Volodymyr Zelenskyy? The savvy bet would be Zelenskyy, even if Trump tries to defy term limits. No other world leader can claim to have survived and thrived on the enmity of both Trump and Vladimir Putin. The misfortunes befalling Russia’s “special military operation” mean he could also outlast Putin. But Zelenskyy’s tenacity goes further than the battlefield. He, more than any other western leader – barring Trump (and

for different motives) – has the ability to catalyse change in Europe. Trump likes to hang out with winners. In the Oval Office 15 months ago he presented Zelenskyy as the loser. He said the Ukrainian did not have any cards. Having failed to get him to sign a one-sided mineral rights deal, Scott Bessent, Trump’s Treasury secretary, referred to Ukraine’s leader as “this little fucker” and the “special-needs child for the Europeans”, according to Maggie Haberman and Jonathan Swan in their new book, *Regime Change*. Children with special needs often have difficulties learning. Ukraine’s capacity to innovate on the battlefield suggests Zelenskyy does not face such challenges. The situation on the ground has not necessarily been moving to Russia’s advantage. Trump thus took a very different approach to Zelenskyy last week at the G7 summit in Evian. The measure of the US president’s shift was evident in

the G7 statement commending Ukraine’s “resilience” and “new momentum”, while promising more western arms and aid to carry it through next winter. It is doubtful Trump can ever bring himself to see Zelenskyy as a winner. His retributinal instinct means he cannot forgive Ukraine’s leader for declining to age for Ukraine. Via the same “discharge petition” used to get around the block by the Republican Speaker, Mike Johnson, when publishing the Epstein files, Ukraine aid passed comfortably. The Senate will be the test. Would Trump veto it? That there is no obvious answer today is telling. More significant is whether Trump approves Zelenskyy’s plea to make Patriot air missile defences in Ukraine. The Ukrainian president claims he has – and Lockheed Martin would presumably welcome the business. Given Trump’s conviction that Putin is regional top dog, his green light is unlikely. But Zelenskyy has new leverage. Teams of Ukrainian defence entrepreneurs are advising the Pentagon as part of its new \$54bn drone warfare budget. Ukrainian start-ups and those who use their products on the battlefield are in acute demand globally. It is becoming harder for Trumpians to

present Ukraine as a welfare beneficiary. Nor, in an age when America’s first family is openly using the president’s office to enrich itself, does the charge of Ukrainian corruption any longer carry resonance in Washington. Zelenskyy has had his share of graft scandals. But Trump, who has suspended America’s Foreign Corrupt Practices Act, is partial to dealmaking inducements. Zelenskyy can offer some nowadays. Putin, on the other hand, is uninterested in Trump’s recurring offers to broker a deal. That also explains Trump’s acquiescence to the G7 communiqué. With the fires from recent Ukrainian drone strikes visible in Moscow and St Petersburg, Putin is in no state to negotiate. Zelenskyy’s clarity of purpose gives him greater potential sway over the west’s future than any leader other than Trump. Canada’s Mark Carney also has a clear agenda, courtesy of Trump’s predatory rhetoric. But the debate over

Ukraine’s EU membership could help give birth to a genuine European defence identity. Given Trump’s distaste for the alliance, the debates over EU expansion and the future of Nato will increasingly overlap. With the largest and most modern military in Europe, Ukraine’s voice will be critical. Zelenskyy’s rhetoric stands as a rebuke to the timidity of western leadership. As one British prime minister is replaced by another, and France faces the prospect of a far-right president next year, Zelenskyy offers conviction. Amid a world of rightwing strongmen, he makes the case for liberal democracy without apology. Because of Ukraine’s circumstances, he speaks to a larger audience than other leaders – except one. Trump is no friend of the “west”. Zelenskyy, meanwhile, is reminding the west of itself.

edward.luce@ft.com

The rise and fall of US hegemony

Martin WolfEconomics

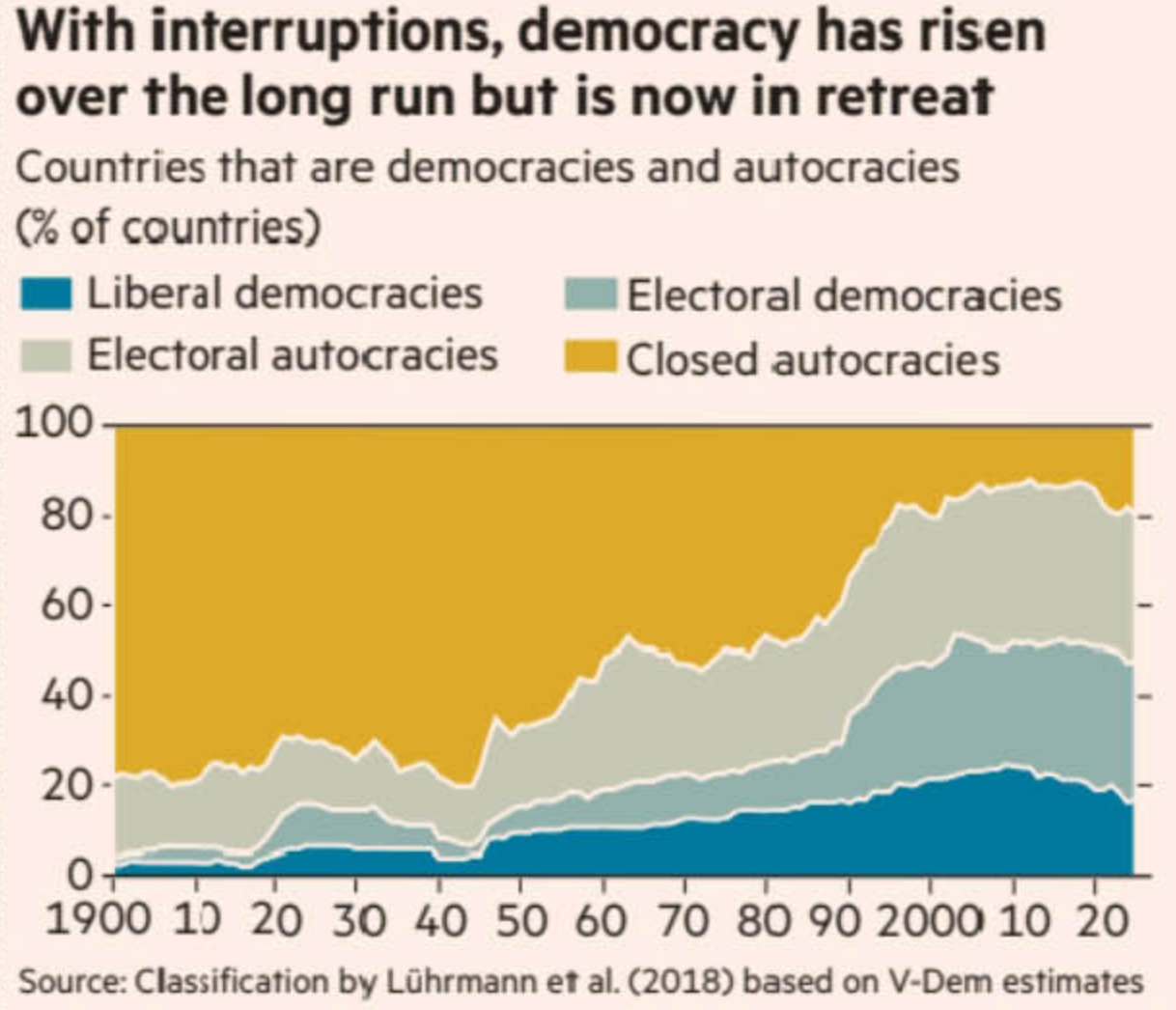
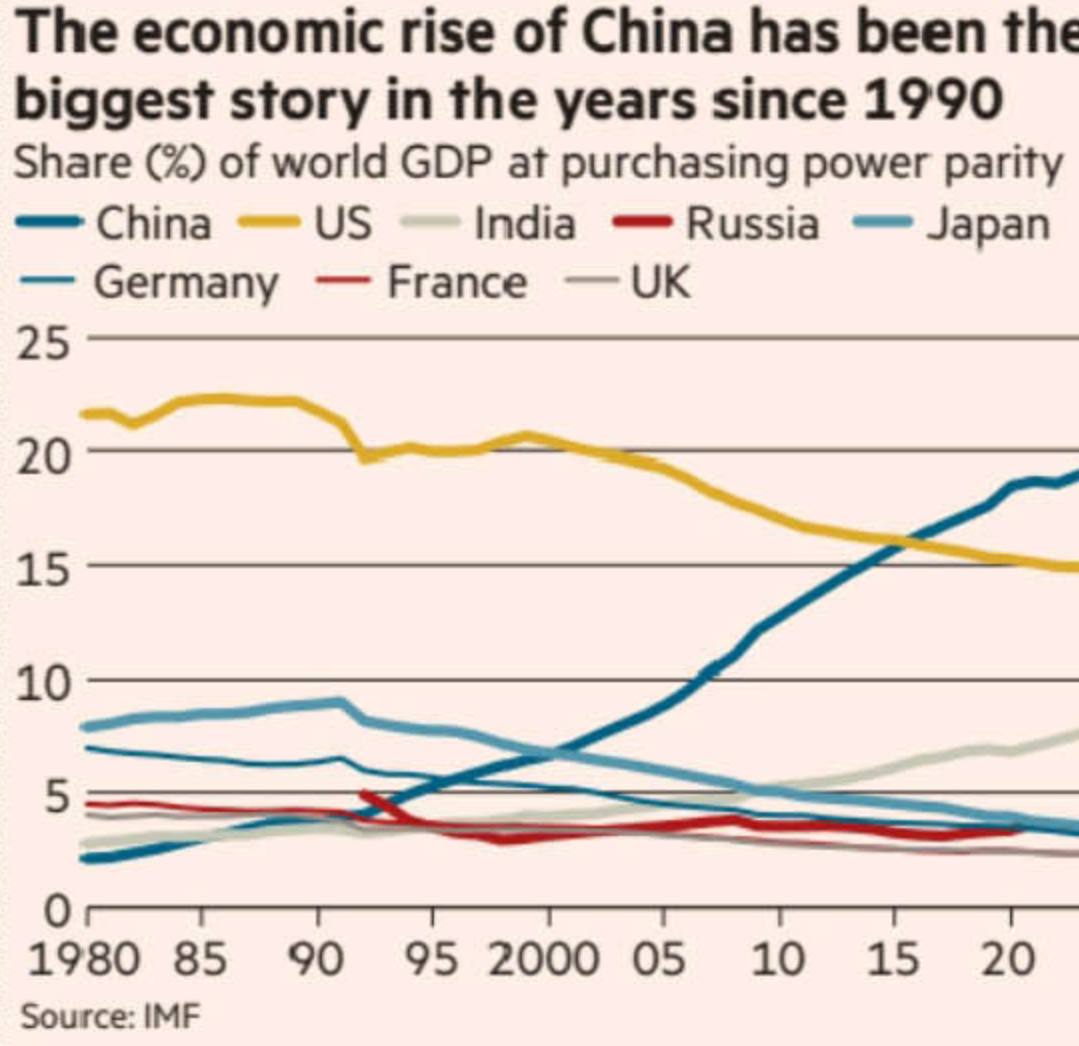
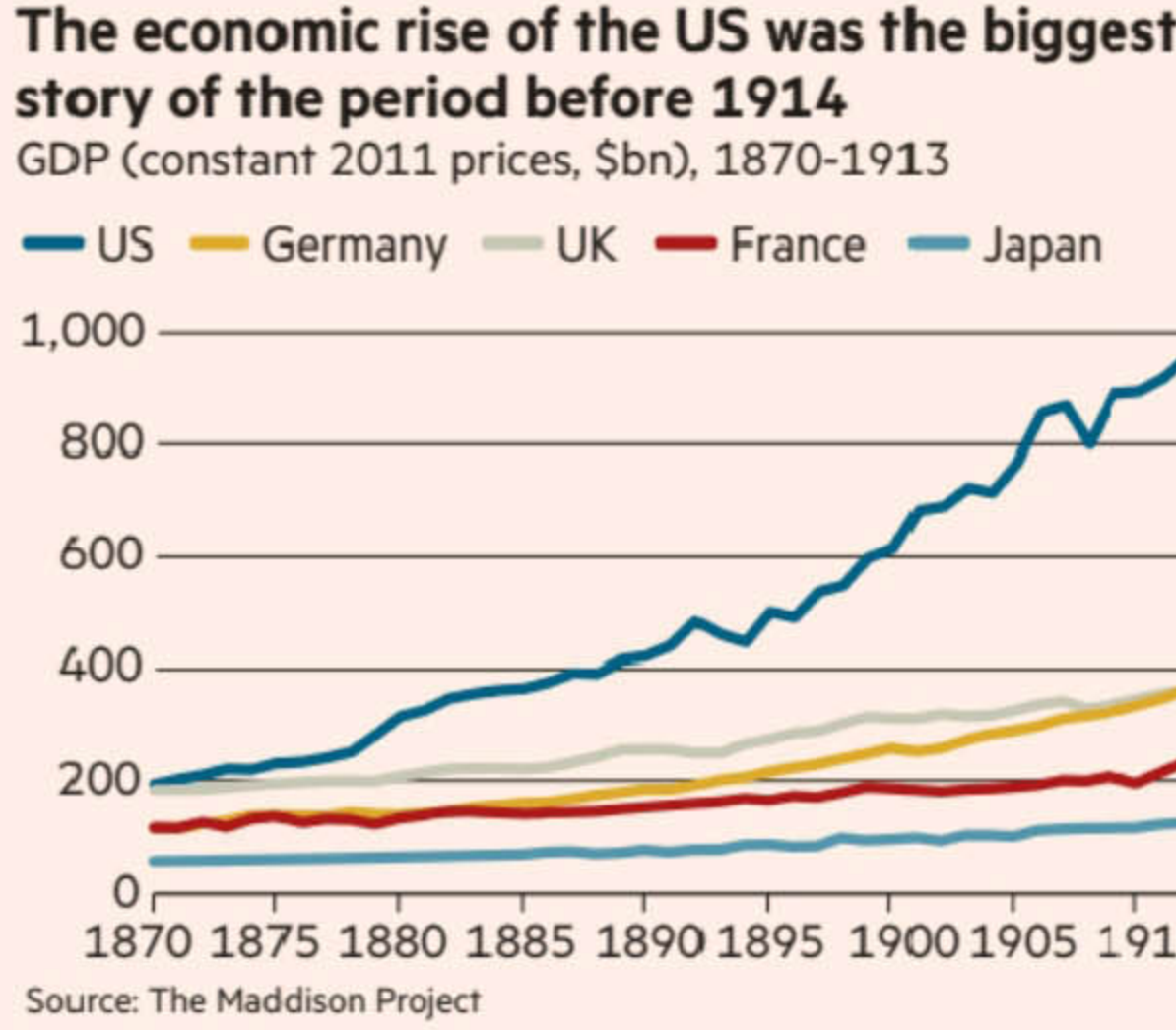
On the eve of its 250th birthday, the country and the international order it created are in crisis



The US was the victor of the 20th century. With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, it not only possessed unmatched political and economic power, but embodied admired values of constitutional government and freedom. This did not last. To understand why it triumphed and how it failed one must go back at least to the 19th century. In the middle of that century, European powers – notably the UK, possessor of a vast empire and the power of steam – ruled the planet. Then, in the years leading up to 1914, the “second industrial revolution” occurred, with the US in the lead. Advances included chemicals, electricity, telephony, pharmaceuticals, the internal combustion engine, powered flight and radio. Big changes occurred, not least an era of globalisation. There were also shifts in the balance of power. Within Europe, the most important event was the rise of imperial Germany. Another was the rise of Japan. Yet the biggest change of all was the rise of the US. By 1914, it had become much the world’s biggest economy. The struggle for mastery in Europe between the rising power of Germany and the incumbent powers of the UK, France and imperial Russia was not the central question they thought it was. It was rather when the US would become the dominant power. (See charts).

By the end of the first world war, the US was the master of Europe. Unfortunately, it supported a peace that its sub-

sequent withdrawal made unenforceable. Its abdication, together with the domestic political upheavals, the inflations of the 1920s and the mass unemployment of the Depression, led to the second world war. This time was different, however. Partly stimulated by its competition with Soviet communism (itself the fruit of 19th-century ideological ferment and the destruction of the Russian imperial system), the US stayed engaged. Thus started the cold war. In this conflict Europe was divided, the western part became dependent upon the US, the European empires disappeared and a social democratic consensus emerged. Laissez-faire had gone. Managed capitalism was the new order. Despite the “neoliberal” revolution of the 1980s, it remained the order. The way it was managed was merely tweaked somewhat. Between 1989 and 1991 the Soviet Union and its empire collapsed. The US called its triumph over the totalitarian ideologies of fascism and communism and all its geopolitical rivals – Germany, Japan, the British empire and the Soviet Union – the “unipolar moment”. History laughs. Within 35 years of its triumph, the US role as a stabilising hegemon has disappeared, just as that of the UK had done by 1900. Again, the changes that have been transforming order into disorder and victory into defeat are simultaneously economic, technological and political. The most important were the rise of



China, the digital revolution and the triumph of rightwing populism. China was weaned away from its alliance with Russia in the 1970s. Soon afterwards, Deng Xiaoping chose “reform and opening up”. Another superpower emerged. The US had a peer competitor for the first time in over a century. As in the 19th and early 20th centuries, a liberal era, this time led by the US, promoted a second globalisation, turbocharged by disruptive information and communications technologies. America called its triumph over all its geopolitical rivals the ‘unipolar moment’. History laughs

Other upheavals include financial crises and mass migration. Again, as before the first world war, there have been big social and political changes, partly triggered by (and triggering) political struggles. In the late 19th century, these were dominated by demands of class and nation. This time they have been more demands of gender, race and identity. In both cases, conservative (and nationalist) counter-revolutions arose. Today, on the eve of its 250th birthday, the US and the world order it created are in crisis. In the US, the administration is corrupt, incompetent and, most important, hostile to the norms and values that animated the founding fathers. The Declaration of Independence proclaimed liberation from tyrants. Donald Trump wants to be one. Worse, he is cutting the sinews of US

power – the rule of law, world-leading science, trusted alliances and confidence in its economic and political stability. A government of whims is replacing one of laws. In the world, democracy has been in retreat for two decades: according to V-Dem, just 7 per cent of the world’s population now lives in liberal democracies. Xi Jinping can smile. This world echoes that of the years before 1914. So, how might it end? The good news is that nuclear weapons hugely reduce the threat of war between the great powers. Moreover, no major power today suffers from the militarism of the early 20th century and the even more insane militarism of the 1930s and 1940s. Again, the good news is that today’s governments are still mostly expected to ensure the prosperity of their peoples. The unparalleled

economic growth of the post-second world war era has encouraged a demand for even more of that prosperity, more or less everywhere. The bad news is that we confront a host of challenges that can only be met together. The global environment is one. Yet another is managing the implications of revolutionary new technologies, notably AI. Not least, there is once again the question of whether arbitrary despotism will become the global norm or freedom and democracy still thrive. The world many of us hoped for some 35 years ago, after the collapse of Soviet despotism, the world the US largely created, is disappearing. So, too, at least for a while, is that US. We do learn from history. But then, alas, we forget.

martin.wolf@ft.com

Nick Clegg

Fairy tales and economics do not mix well. Yet Britain has been in the grip of economic fairy tales from both right and left for over a decade. From the right came the Brexit fairy tale of a Britain bounding free of pettifogging EU constraints on our nation’s swashbuckling strengths. Ten years on, this bedtime story lies buried under the reality: a tsunami of red tape at our borders and a permanently enfeebled economy. From the left the fairy tale has gone something like this: until 2008 Britain had decent public services and a growing economy because of the policies of Labour governments. The 2008 finan-

cial crash had nothing to do with those governments and the policies after 2010, most especially fiscal policies, have destroyed growth ever since. Their apparent Andy Burnham has gone further, breezily dismissing “40 years of neoliberalism”. Everyone who cares about the UK’s future should care whether Labour can now move beyond such fairy tales and generate the one thing that might stave off a more polarised and extreme takeover of British politics – sustainable growth. Without it, mainstream politics is doomed. Current signs suggest that Labour wants to continue to talk to itself rather than addressing the world as it is. Much of that can be traced back to a fateful decision taken after its election defeat in 2010: instead of confronting the profound effects of the financial crisis – including at the time the largest peacetime deficit in UK history – Labour

defaulted to its comfort zone, vilifying anyone who sought to grapple with the new economic and fiscal reality and airbrushing their own actions from the record. In early 2010, before the election, Gordon Brown and Alistair Darling had The signs suggest that Labour wants to continue to talk to itself rather than addressing the world as it is quietly enshrined in law an obligation to reduce the deficit by half over four years (faster than the subsequent coalition government, as it turned out). Yet within months, Labour abandoned support for meaningful fiscal entrenchment, preferring to moralise against “austerity”.

Replacing policy with sanctimony meant that Labour simply couldn’t accept the facts: that growth was possible even when fiscal policy was tight and that the adjustment of that period was in line with what Labour had been planning itself (if with a different mix of taxes versus spending reductions). The facts tell a different story: from late 2012 to the Brexit vote in 2016, the UK economy regularly grew faster than the G7 average; indeed in 2014, the last full year of the coalition, the UK’s annual growth (just shy of 3 per cent) outstripped the US – almost unimaginable now. At the same time, and contrary to many predictions, employment rose, with 2mn net jobs created. The relevance to today is obvious: since we managed to foster growth when money was short, are there lessons that could help the probable Burnham government do the same? As the banking crisis of 2008 mutated

into a sovereign debt crisis engulfing Europe, the coalition government’s response was consistent: uphold political stability (the coalition lasted a full five years, considerably longer than the May, Johnson, Truss, Sunak and now Starmer premierships that followed in chaotic succession); pursue far-reaching reforms across education, energy, pensions and more; maintain Britain’s flexible labour markets; invest in our science base; reduce tax on work and entrepreneurship; and maintain open trade with our biggest trading partners. Of course, the comparison between now and then is not exact: some of the growth was a natural rebound from the depths of the 2008 downturn; the reduction in public spending came after unusually high spending at the tail-end of the Brown government; monetary policy was far looser; and the quadruple whammies of Brexit, Covid, Ukraine

and Donald Trump had not yet hit. Nor was life perfect – productivity and real wages remained flat and some policies proved less successful than others. Yet given it was the last time the UK enjoyed a sustained period of economic growth and political stability – both tragically undone by the Brexit vote – it is worth comparing the current approach. What is striking is that Labour appears to be moving in the opposite direction: marrying political instability with limited policy reform; imposing new costs on employers; starving our universities of financial certainty; and taking only tentative steps to reopen trade with Europe. Burnham’s Labour has one more chance to change course. Looking at what has worked before might be a good place to start.

The writer was UK deputy prime minister from 2010-15

Opinion

The New York Times

What Greenspan Should Be Remembered For

Roger Lowenstein

The author of “America’s Bank: The Epic Struggle to Create the Federal Reserve.”

WHATEVER else, Alan Greenspan should be remembered for what is surely the rarest virtue among public officials: admitting error. The moment was Oct. 23, 2008. The American financial system was in tatters. Bear Stearns and Lehman Brothers were bust, and the government had taken equity stakes in private banks in a bid to arrest the crisis. Americans were swamped with mortgage debt and suffering through a brutal recession.

Mr. Greenspan, the former chairman of the Federal Reserve, had retired less than three years earlier. No one had championed the free market system or worked to block financial regulation, which he disparaged as both harmful and unnecessary, with more ardor than he had. As head of the most powerful of the agencies that regulated banks, he hadn’t used his authorities to quash the bubble in mortgage lending.

Mr. Greenspan was no corporate toady or business apologist. He was an honest and inquisitive intellectual committed to the principles of Adam Smith, principles that work well most of the time.

This was not one of those times, and his conviction was shaken. “Those of us who have looked to the self-interest of lending institutions to protect shareholders’ equity, myself included, are in a state of shocked disbelief,” he confessed that day to the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform.

Mr. Greenspan questioned the principles he had developed as a young disciple of Ayn Rand and employed in a storied career as an adviser to corporate chieftains and later to U.S. presidents.

“The modern risk-management paradigm held sway for decades,” he said, referring to the esoteric economic models that had assured traders of the soundness of the billions in securities that had been layered on top of home mortgages — securities that in 2007 and 2008 suffered tremendous losses and caused banks to fall like dominoes. “The whole intellectual edifice, however, collapsed in the summer of last year.”

Under grilling from Representative Henry Waxman, the committee chairman, Mr. Greenspan bluntly admitted he had made “a mistake.” Although he tried to blame it on a “flaw” in the models, his admission was striking for one who had flown very high — a comedown that should be imprinted in the memory of every person in a position of responsibility over economic policy.

Alan Greenspan was the country’s first and possibly last celebrity Fed chairman. He moved in a world of diplomats and stars — his second wife was the journalist Andrea Mitchell — and for nearly 20 years, his words moved markets. Stockbrokers as well as ordinary people parsed them for clues to the future, though it sometimes took a lexicographer to decipher his convoluted phrasing. A friend used to call me when some pronouncement of the chairman’s was creating havoc in the stock market: “What is he saying?” he would excitedly demand. “What is he saying?!” (Kevin Warsh, confirmed as the Fed chair last month, seems to have adopted Mr. Greenspan’s penchant for abuse language.)

Mr. Greenspan guided the Fed’s Board of Governors with a polished and seemingly effortless touch. In Congress, he claimed respect from both parties — quite a feat given his right-wing philosophy. Nominated for a fifth term in 2004, he was confirmed by the Senate with just one dissenting vote. More recent Fed chiefs got more than a dozen. In



STEPHEN JAFFE/REUTERS

America’s first celebrity Fed chair exhibited a rare virtue: admitting error.

1999, Phil Gramm, chairman of the Senate Banking Committee, told Mr. Greenspan, “You will go down as the greatest chairman in the history of the Federal Reserve Bank.”

Even if Fed chairs tend to be given too much credit or blame for events on their watch, Mr. Greenspan presided over what was then the longest peacetime economic expansion in U.S. history, lasting from 1991 to 2001.

But even during that prosperous decade, the themes of his response to the later mortgage bubble were present.

As Mr. Greenspan described in his memoir, his approach solidified in the mid-1990s, a time when the stock market was soaring and new cable news programs and their small-investor fans were suddenly taking an interest. In November 1995, the Dow Jones average cracked 5,000, a milestone that represented a doubling in only five years; by the following October the Dow was at 6,000. Shortly after, Mr. Greenspan addressed the annual dinner of the American Enterprise Institute in Washington; he wondered aloud whether stocks were showing signs of “irrational exuberance.” The next morning panicky traders, fearing that the Fed would intervene, rushed to sell, and the Dow plunged nearly 150 points, although it immediately recovered.

As stocks continued their breathtaking rise, Mr. Greenspan confided in his fellow governors that they might have to raise interest rates to quash speculation. By the following spring, the Dow neared 7,000. The Fed raised rates, and the market fell. But once again, it came roaring back. By June, the Dow was at 7,800.

Humbled, Mr. Greenspan concluded, “You can’t tell when a market is overvalued,

and you can’t fight market forces.” He never tried to rein in stock prices again.

And so, a pattern: Ignore bubbles as they inflate, intervene if and as necessary to clean up the mess after they pop. In 1998, after the sudden collapse of a giant hedge fund, he led the Fed to cut interest rates three times to stabilize markets. Within weeks of those cuts, eBay went public, and its shares tripled on the opening day of trading. Greased by cheap money, dot-com stocks inflated in a new bubble. After they collapsed, and after a spate of corporate scandals, Mr. Greenspan rushed to the rescue again, cutting the overnight Federal Funds rate until it reached 1 percent. Mr. Greenspan’s light touch was enough to contain these emergencies — but not the larger one to come.

Raised by a single mother during the Great Depression, Mr. Greenspan, who played saxophone for a jazz band before becoming a big-time consultant and obtaining a doctorate in economics, was the first Fed chief to think broadly about the revolution in computer technology, and it seduced him. Again and again, he expressed the belief that computers would increase productivity and thus allow the Fed to cut rates further than previously thought possible without stoking inflation. He was prescient in seeing the computer’s power, and his resistance to intervening in bubbles would have been correct had he applied it with a little discretion.

By the end of his time at the Fed, a huge bubble was inflating. Mortgage brokers were peddling loans without requiring borrowers to document their earnings, a sign of troubling excess in the most important asset for ordinary Americans: their homes.

The central bankers’ cliché that one never

“knows” a bubble for sure was true, but the Fed’s job is to weigh relative risks, not certainties. Signs of froth in mortgages were omnipresent; buyers were getting full financing at teaser interest rates; speculators chasing quick flips were posing as buyers; 40 percent of mortgages were going to subprime buyers and those who lacked documentation.

Mr. Greenspan made much of the “blunt tool” argument — that raising interest rates risked penalizing the entire economy merely to cool the housing sector. This betrayed the Fed’s metamorphosis into an institution of elites: government and academic economists who live in a world of computer models. Before the Greenspan era, the Fed was closer to its original design, an institution of bankers entrusted with safeguarding the banking system.

The Fed and its sister regulators had specific tools to stem the crisis — at a minimum, they could have demanded that mortgage banks obtain proof of their clients’ income and give loans only to people who could repay them. Mr. Greenspan, the celebrity Ph.D., focused on the highbrow work of determining interest rates; he failed to crack down on hyper-permissive lending terms — grubby, detailed work in which Mr. Greenspan never showed any interest.

In recent times, Fed governors with real-world lending experience have become so rare that their absence is not even noticed. Mr. Greenspan shaped how modern central banks operate. But even he had to admit that his infatuation with models had been wrong. The country’s financial leaders might remember that humbling moment in 2008 and what it showed: Overconfidence and complacency can mar even the most storied of reputations.

Congress Must Act Now to Save Social Security

Bernie Moreno and Elizabeth Warren

Mr. Moreno, a Republican, is the senior U.S. senator from Ohio. Ms. Warren, a Democrat, is the senior U.S. senator from Massachusetts.

ONE of us is a Republican from Ohio who built a business that generated hundreds of jobs. The other is a Democrat from Massachusetts who built a career protecting consumers from financial tricks and traps.

We don’t agree on everything, but here’s one thing we do agree on: Congress must act now to save Social Security for generations of Americans to come.

Social Security is a core component of our nation’s promise — a covenant between the federal government and Americans who pay into it throughout their working years so they can retire with dignity.

That promise is at risk of unraveling. For years, seniors in Ohio and Massachusetts have told us how concerned they are about the future of Social Security. A new report from the trustees who oversee the Social Security Trust Funds shows they are right to worry: Unless Congress acts, the fund from which most Social Security beneficiaries are paid will be significantly depleted by late 2032. After that, Social Security benefits could be cut by more than 20 percent.

That’s just six years away. Instead of cutting benefits for the retirees who count on

Social Security, we need to take bipartisan action to protect those benefits, reward work and restore fairness.

That starts with a common-sense solution: lifting the Social Security payroll tax cap.

For 2026, the payroll tax cap, or taxable maximum, is \$184,500. Workers and their employers each pay 6.2 percent on wages up to that amount. (Self-employed individuals pay 12.4 percent.) Today, the maximum Social Security withholding for one worker is \$22,878, or 12.4 percent of \$184,500. Not a penny more, even if an individual’s salary far exceeds \$184,500.

Since the vast majority of Americans make less than that, most people are paying Social Security taxes on 100 percent of their earnings while the highest earners are paying on only part of theirs.

Why should a middle-class nurse pay a larger share of her paycheck than a wealthy corporate lawyer? This is doubly unfair in an economy in which top earners’ wages, over time, have pulled far ahead of those of the average worker.

According to one estimate, eliminating the payroll tax cap would inject around \$3 trillion into the program over the next 10 years. Lifting the cap so that all income is treated the same would generate substantial revenue that would extend the solvency of Social Security for another generation.

Our plan would also help to safeguard Social Security’s earned-benefit structure, in



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which workers make contributions to the program from their paychecks. This structure has delivered a basic level of retirement certainty for generations. One 2025 poll found that 65 percent of Democrats and 62 percent of Republicans support lifting the cap, “including a significant majority of respondents with annual household income over \$200,000.”

This is a no-brainer: The wealthiest Americans, who have benefited the most from America’s opportunities, should contribute the same percentage of their income as a factory worker in Chillicothe, Ohio, or a teacher in Worcester, Mass.

Most Americans work into their 60s or 70s. Throughout their working lives, they pay into Social Security with the understanding that it will help them support themselves in retirement. With rising prices and artificial intelligence causing economic uncertainty for the future, Social Security must remain a stable foundation to help retirees afford life’s basic necessities.

Social Security was created by overwhelming bipartisan congressional majorities. Today, members of Congress from both parties must come together again to save it. That’s why the two of us are working together on legislation to remove the cap on Social Security taxes and extend the solvency of our retirement system. Americans deserve nothing less. Preserving the American dream for our children and grandchildren depends on it.

‘No Child Left Behind’ Nostalgia Is Delusional

Ross Wiener

An independent education policy consultant who, from 2002 to 2009, was the policy director for the Education Trust.

NEW data from Stanford's Educational Opportunity Project confirms what close observers already knew: America's test scores are slipping. The pandemic worsened the decline, but the slide began years before. In one-third of school districts, students are reading a full grade level lower than they were in 2015.

The new data is emboldening calls to restore something like the No Child Left Behind Act, the stringent, test-based accountability policy that defined American education from 2002 to 2015 and imposed penalties on schools whose students did not meet proficiency requirements on state standardized tests. The Atlantic captured that impulse in a 2025 podcast episode titled “Bring Back High-Stakes School Testing.” In it, Margaret Spellings, a secretary of education under President George W. Bush and now president of the Bipartisan Policy Center, argued that we need to restore “the muscle of accountability, the muscle of assessment.” Rahm Emanuel, exploring a 2028 presidential run, said in April that Democrats have abandoned standards and accountability and must return to them.

It was a mistake to treat test scores as the purpose of public schools rather than as partial proxies for what a good education actually delivers. Reading and math are profoundly important, and improving instruction must be part of any serious agenda. But test-based accountability policies were not sufficient decades ago. They are even less adequate now.

From 2002 to 2009, I was the policy director for the Education Trust, one of the most influential education reform organizations in the country. I testified before Congress, built coalitions for standards-based reform, and published analysis to advance No Child Left Behind, genuinely believing it was the path to public schools that better served low-income students and students of color. The early results seemed to vindicate us: Test scores rose, especially in elementary math among Hispanic and Black students, though much less in middle school, and never much in reading.

But there was a question I couldn't shake: Were the outcomes we were holding schools accountable for the ones that actually determined whether a young person flourished? I still remember when I first encountered research showing that high school G.P.A. predicted college graduation better than standardized test scores. I went to my boss's office to discuss it, expecting her to help me push back, but she confirmed it was true, and always had been. If so, I recall thinking, why are we fighting so hard for test scores to be the arbiter of quality education?

Years later, research from the University of Chicago Consortium would show that schools' effect on students' social well-being and work habits predicted academic gains about as well as test performance did, and was more predictive than test scores for students' graduating from high school, enrolling in college and staying out of the criminal justice system.

Accountability policy gave unprecedented authority to the idea that standardized test performance is the most important outcome schools produce and made it the organizing principle of American schooling. What could be easily tested gained importance. What could not — the practical, civic, relational and developmental — was pushed to the margins.

Over time, I became convinced that, with the best of intentions, I and many others in the education reform community had transferred our moral commitment to children over to the standardized tests. We had done this earnestly, not cynically, but we still did damage.

In 2023, 40 percent of high school students reported persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness. One in five had seriously considered suicide; nearly one in 10 had attempted it. Research from the SNF Agora Institute at Johns Hopkins found that 40 percent of Gen Z believes political violence can be justified, compared with 11 percent of baby boomers. Too many students

experience school as an obligation with few opportunities for agency or meaning; recent survey data indicates that large shares of students find school boring and irrelevant and are struggling with engagement in the classroom. The academic crisis and the human crisis are not entirely separate phenomena.

The strategies that produced the early gains of the No Child Left Behind era depended on a social contract: comply with adult-designed systems, defer questions of meaning and purpose, and the payoff will come. Earlier generations may have endured school that felt boring or disconnected because they trusted that adults and institutions knew better. Many young people today do not share that trust, and they are not going to push aside their own questions of meaning and purpose on the assurance that compliance will eventually be rewarded.

You cannot accountability-pressure your way to better educational outcomes when chronic absenteeism has skyrocketed, mis-

It was a mistake to treat test scores as the purpose of public schools.

behavior is common, students are disengaged and skeptical that school prepares them for the lives they want to lead, and teachers feel not just tired but stripped of the professional trust that makes the work meaningful.

The reality has changed. Too much of the old reform playbook has not.

Four years ago, the nonpartisan think tank Populace, which conducts opinion research that seeks to uncover what Americans actually believe, not what they say for social approval, asked adults to rank their K-12 priorities. Practical skills ranked first. Critical thinking ranked second. Demonstrating good character ranked third. Preparing for college was 47th on the list. Standardized test performance was 49th.

Meanwhile, young people are placing more emphasis on purpose, relationships and contribution than on older markers of status. For a generation, the reform coalition took its validation from economists and

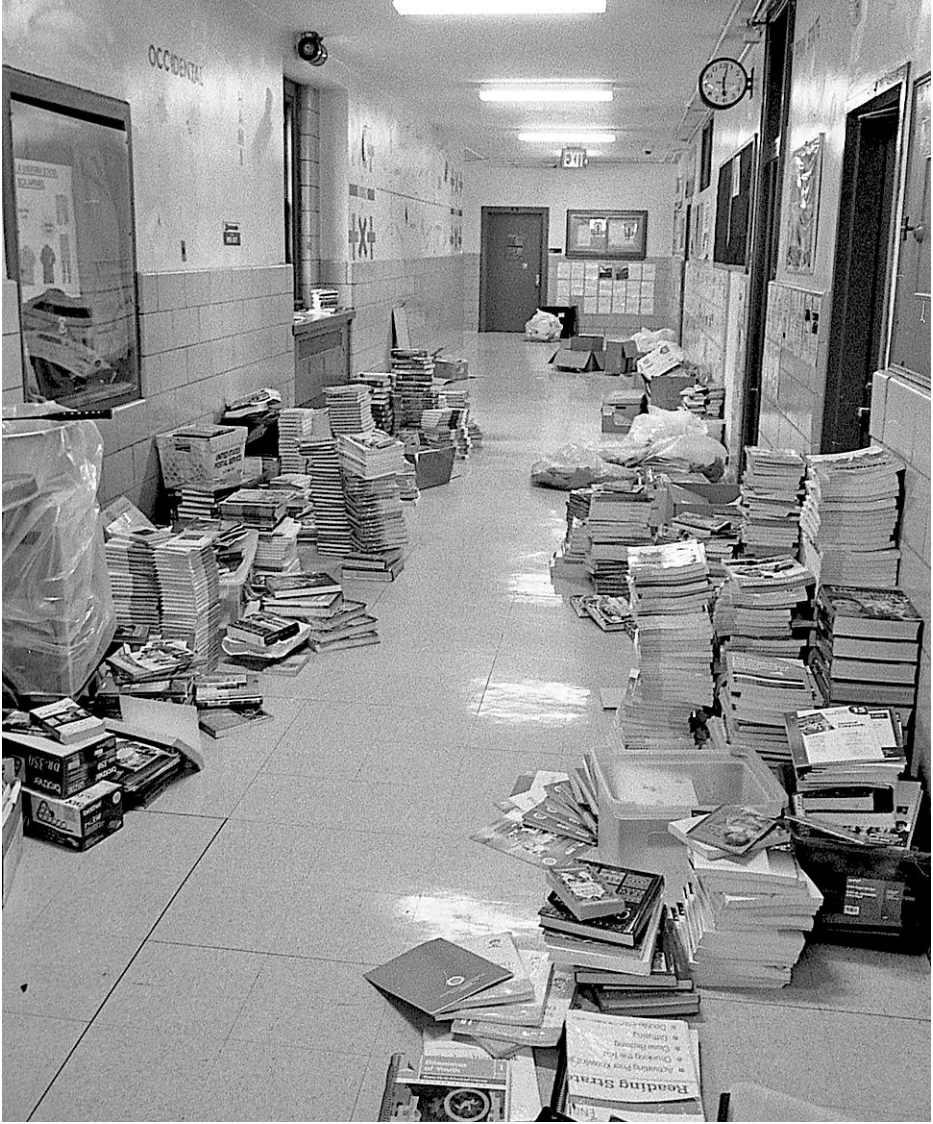
accountability metrics, while treating parents, students and communities as mere functionaries rather than partners in a shared civic enterprise.

Taking their priorities seriously would mean broadening what we expect from the classroom. Schools should put what students can do on equal footing with what they know, embedding real skills in academic learning rather than leaving them to chance or sequencing them to later in life. Schools should reconnect with the communities they serve, so young people learn through and about the places where they live. And they should reanimate the character-forming, developmental mission a pluralistic democracy requires.

Federal policy has an essential role to play in public education: protecting civil rights, funding quality data and research and encouraging promising practices to spread. But the formative mission cannot be mandated by Washington. Belonging, the foundation of both learning and civic commitment, is relational and starts local; it cannot be standardized or scaled, but must be cultivated by schools that are responsive to the communities they serve.

In 2010, at Springfield Renaissance School, a public school in Springfield, Mass., serving mostly low-income students of color, ninth graders were trained by city engineers to conduct energy audits of school buildings. They collected data, ran cost-benefit analyses and produced a report recommending how the city could lower its carbon footprint and reduce energy costs. The mayor invested in their plan; the city began recouping its investment within a year. Organizations like EL Education, High Tech High and Big Picture Learning have built whole school models around a similar approach: rigorous academic learning embedded in real problems, with real audiences and real stakes.

Public schools educate nearly nine in 10 American children, in cities, towns and rural hamlets across the full range of our diversity and divisions. The era of national, test-based education policy helped turn schools into both targets and drivers of polarization. Renewing public education requires balancing firm commitments to excellence and fairness for every child with the recognition that public schools, at their best, are civic institutions that communities recognize as their own.



KALADA HALLIDAY

LETTERS

The Pool That Reflects Trump's Presidency

TO THE EDITOR:

Re “Creature From the Green Lagoon,” by Maureen Dowd (column, June 21):

Ms. Dowd astutely identifies the Reflecting Pool project in front of the Lincoln Memorial as the perfect metaphor for Donald Trump's presidency.

The big beautiful Reflecting Pool (which turned from green to blue and back to green) provides the same pattern we see over and over again with challenges the administration faces, from Covid in the first term to wars in Ukraine and Iran in the second.

First, Mr. Trump brags that he can solve the problem on Day 1 or very easily. He says past administrations (Barack Obama's and Joe Biden's) were a “disaster.” It turns out that all of his promises are empty.

Like the pool itself, Mr. Trump has provided a moment of sparkle with no substance. The problem that existed before he got involved ends up being worse.

Mr. Trump thoughtlessly spends taxpayer money by handing the job over to people who don't know what they are doing, he ignores the advice of experts, and he underestimates the complexity of the problem.

When things go wrong, he will not accept any responsibility. For some reason, most Republicans in Congress keep falling for it.

ADAM MICHELS
SAN FRANCISCO

TO THE EDITOR:

Re “Firm Hired to Rid Pool of Algae Is Tied to Trump Donor” (front page, June 20):

I hope someone in Congress

Politics of Fine Dining

TO THE EDITOR:

“Thai Hot Spot in Philadelphia Tops Honors” (Food, June 17) noted that this year's James Beard Awards ceremony was “infused with plenty of politics and local pride.”

To those who don't want to hear about politics or so-called D.E.I. in the food and dining industry, I'd ask, Who exactly do you think is making it possible to eat at these great restaurants? Who do you think is picking your Little Gem lettuce, your organic strawberries, your endives and blood oranges?

Who is setting your dining tables with bespoke silverware, wiping your crystal wine glasses and whisking away the detritus of your succulent meals? Who is washing, mopping and, yes, cooking in these immaculate temples to gastronomy?

Immigrants, that's who.

SUSAN DEUTSCH
VENICE, CALIF.

The Times welcomes letters from readers. Letters must include the writer's name, address and telephone number. Those selected may be edited, and shortened to fit allotted space. Email: letters@nytimes.com

is keeping track of the Trump administration's wasteful spending of taxpayer dollars.

There are the vanity projects: the failed restoration of the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool, the takeover of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, the proposed triumphal arch, the demolition of the East Wing of the White House, the modifications to a Boeing 747 that Qatar gave to the U.S. government. This is a partial list, to be sure.

Then there are the big-ticket items: the Defense Department's war in Iran, the resulting burden of higher gasoline prices on the American people and the added cost of living from the president's tariffs, to name a few examples.

This information should be collected and shared with the American people before the fall elections. These are the president's initiatives, but the Republicans in Congress are complicit; they sat by and did nothing, allowing the president to spend taxpayer dollars without meaningful oversight.

DAVID BALDWIN
PETALUMA, CALIF.

TO THE EDITOR:

There is not a single painted public pool I have ever been to where a visitor could cause significant peeling or surface damage merely by touching it, unless the coating had already been improperly applied or had long suffered from inadequate maintenance.

The condition of the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool suggests a problem that predates any individual's visit. Peeling paint and persistent algae growth are typically signs of deterioration that develops over time, not the result of a momentary encounter by a member of the public.

Government officials should be addressing the quality of the work performed and the adequacy of maintenance rather than trying to shift responsibility onto a visitor. Public facilities belong to all Americans, and accountability for their condition should rest with those charged with maintaining them.

President Trump selected the people providing the inadequate maintenance. He should look at his questionable capacity to properly identify competence.

STEPHEN SOMERSTEIN
SAN FRANCISCO

Learn Something New

TO THE EDITOR:

Re “A Choice Between Comfort and Novelty,” by Melissa Kirsch (Inside The Times, June 15):

At age 92, I was looking for a project — something besides lunches with friends, canasta, etc. — so I started studying Hebrew. It is hard work, but it keeps me busy with memorization and repetition. And it is exciting. Learning anything is thrilling.

Shalom.

SHIRLEY SMITHBERG
NEW YORK

COLUMNIST | BRET STEPHENS

If You Love America, Cringe for It

MY FATHER was fond of the Spanish expression “en los pequeños detalles se ve la persona” — the person is revealed in the small details. Last week, at the summit of the Group of 7 leaders in France, two details revealed two people in two starkly different lights.

The first — who else? — is Donald Trump, the world's most powerful man yet possibly the world's smallest. Speaking to a journalist, the president claimed that Giorgia Meloni, the right-wing prime minister of Italy, with whom he was once friendly but has since fallen out, “begged me to take a picture with her. She wanted a picture with me so badly,” before adding, “I wouldn't have done it, but I felt sorry for her!”

Meloni's response came swiftly. Trump's statement, she said, was “totally invented.”

“I don't know why the president of the United States behaves this way toward his own allies,” she said in a video posted to social media. “After all, this is not the first time it has happened. I can only say that it's upsetting that he doesn't have the same resolve toward the enemies of the West, toward the enemies of the United States, toward leadership to which he instead proves much more indulgent.”

“There is one thing he should remember,” she concluded. “I *never* beg — and neither

does Italy.”

No prizes here for guessing who's telling the truth — or who, despite their very considerable difference in physical size, is the bigger and braver person. But there's also a lesson in this relatively trivial but telling episode that it behooves Americans to learn on the eve of our semiquincentennial: If you love America, now is the time to cringe for it.

Cringing is not simply a physical reflex stemming from embarrassment or disgust. It also involves a mix of compassion and empathy. You cringe when someone's child flubs their lines in a school play. You cringe for a spouse trying to calm an abrasively drunk partner at a dinner party. You cringe whenever you feel implicated, if only as a human being, whenever someone humiliates those near them, even when they're the last to know it. It's how I felt for Jill Biden the night of her husband's debate debacle.

To exist as a sentient American in the age of Trump is to live in a perpetual cringe — morally, aesthetically, intellectually, politically. If the administration were a play or film script, it would be neither farce nor tragedy but instead a kind of absurdist travesty, “Waiting for Godot” meets “Pulp Fiction” meets “Dumb and Dumber.”

However much we may disdain him, the president has the rest of us on the hook, as the face and voice of a country that ought to

know better. Trump's angry visage draped between the exterior columns of the Department of Justice? That's us. His gilded, meretricious redecoration of the White House? That's us. His repeatedly avowed admiration for Vladimir Putin? That's us. His laughable claim about having achieved regime change in Tehran? That's us. His Mafia-like threats against NATO allies? That's us. His indescribably vain (and pathetically fruitless) effort to affix his name to the Kennedy Center? That's us. His venal family profiting off his presidency in ways both transparent and tacky? That's us.

The same goes for his insult of Meloni, which may be far from the worst of his sins but is also the most emblematic for being at once so utterly unnecessary as well as dementedly self-defeating. *That's us.* The same country that freed its slaves, welcomed immigrants, invented airplanes, liberated concentration camps, landed men on the moon and challenged the Soviet Union to tear down this wall now bids to be the global equivalent of the expensively dressed man soiling his pants at a cocktail party.

For 10 years, I've watched my former political party work overtime not to cringe; to pretend that the Vesuvius of verbal infamies erupting daily from Trump's mouth is either unimportant, or hilarious, or calculating and

Trump's insult of Meloni was as unnecessary as it was dementedly self-defeating.

shrewd. Republicans turned their tolerance for the president's mental goo into a shot-drinking contest — the more you drank, the manlier you were supposed to be. John McCain and Mitt Romney refused to play, to their everlasting credit; other Republicans, less admirably, did so only after Trump had ended their political futures.

But for 10 years, too, I've also watched the president's opponents fail to appreciate the necessity of cringing — by understanding their role in Trump's rise. The Democrats and their media enablers who, until June of 2024, insisted Joe Biden was fit for a second term (surely knowing, somewhere in the dim recesses of their minds, that this could only help Trump) are complicit. So are the progressives who, on one cultural issue after another, shoved the Democratic Party so far to the left that it became the very caricature of what MAGA-world said it was.

Here, then, is our American challenge: Let's not be afraid to cringe. Ronald Reagan predicted, correctly, that the Soviet Union would end up on the ash heap of history; now it's our turn to risk winding up on the ash heap of idiocy.

So let's not look away from the parts we played in bringing America to this moment. Let's remember who we once were, because it's what we may yet be again — if only we feel the sting of our present shame.

OPINION

Everyone vs. Superintelligence?



BUSINESS WORLD
By Holman W. Jenkins, Jr.

Et tu, Satya? It must be international “gang up on frontier models” week. The Trump administration still hasn’t lifted its effective ban on commercial distribution of the latest model from Anthropic, America’s leading AI company. Microsoft CEO Satya Nadella added his own kick in the shin, calling for cheaper, decentralized AI to undercut the startups leading (and funding) a quest for artificial superintelligence. If that wasn’t enough, Five Eyes—the spy-agency collaboration of the U.S., U.K., Canada, Australia and New Zealand—issued a rare public warning about the dangers of fast-advancing artificial intelligence.

Unrelated or not came Tuesday’s global tech selloff, an aggressive Chinese manifesto on AI competition and a renewed Beijing rare-earth war against Western tech manufacturers.

We’re just under two weeks into a Trump-inaugurated new artificial-intelligence era. The most cutting-edge products are too dangerous to be released to the public. Governments will treat them like weapons that only government should have access to. When the Trump administration reacts fearfully to the rise of a company like Anthropic, incoherence and chaos are the Trump way. But

any administration would react. When government says it’s worried about public safety and national security, in both cases it’s worried about its own authority. It’s worried about the government not being the government anymore.

You can see the same thing happening this week in Europe. Its defense thinkers are raging quietly about the continent’s strategic vulnerability after the U.S. cut off access to Anthropic’s Fable 5 model.

But without customers, how are America’s AI leaders supposed to keep funding the push toward ever more powerful artificial general intelligence? Will IPO investors still come as expected to fill the hole?

Don’t be so sure. Four months ago Anthropic’s Dario Amodei could comfortably speculate that “things would have to go pretty badly” for the industry’s trillion-dollar investment not to be quickly repaid with trillion-dollar revenue. “If you’re off by only a year,” he added, “you destroy yourselves.”

Well, a definition of “pretty badly” is government ripping your latest product out of the hands of millions of eager customers.

Not that the Trump administration’s fears are a figment of an overactive imagination. Mr. Amodei himself has publicly fretted about terrorists, criminals and despots getting access to what he calls 50 million Nobel Prize-level geniuses in a data center—i.e., the wherewithal to manufacture a

mold-breaking chemical, biological or cyber weapon.

Other fears, such as destabilizing job loss, strike me as overblown or unduly speculative. The so-called alignment problem, or AIs developing their own agendas and deciding to eliminate humanity? I worry about that even less: Governments clearly will stamp down on anything they don’t control.

In seizing control, though, they can also stop progress that already faces challenges on the financial front. Last year, the entrepreneur behind

America must think quickly about how to meet AI safety goals without losing its lead.

China’s DeepSeek paid lip service to the costly quest for superintelligence. But he already was pricing his model to undercut Western models, which he was suspected partly of having pirated. Now China’s agenda has become Microsoft’s agenda. Ditto many startups devoted to mining the vast gap between what it costs the leading AI companies to produce their research and what customers are willing to pay for access to the models.

Pete Hegseth at the Pentagon may nurse an infantile grudge against Anthropic, accounting for some of the company’s troubles with the administration. But wake up to reality. Being negotiated in

real time is either the end of U.S. progress toward superintelligence, because investors will stop funding it, or the end of such advances being available to anyone except the U.S. government and its designated licensees.

Yet this is only a stopgap in addressing the larger problem. How to curb rogue actors in the long run? How to establish AI deterrence against China, Iran, Russia and North Korea? It’s already clear that AI will have to be the solution to problems created by AI. Given the inherently unpredictable and spontaneous nature of AI outputs, experts also doubt that built-in safeguards (i.e., censorship) in publicly released models can be a sufficient fix. That leaves one path.

In past years this column has suggested how surveillance might address America’s mass-shooter problem. The data only needs to be aggregated; red-flag algorithms need to be programmed in. In the future, an irreducible function of AI will certainly be to monitor how people and governments around the world are using AI to identify and interrupt antisocial projects before they come to fruition.

A coming surveillance state has seemed inevitable. The question has been how to contain it within democratic, legal and constitutional constraints. The time has come to get cracking on this problem. It may be the best or only way to make sure AI gains can then be widely implemented in the economy.

As America’s Mood Sours, Its Creed Endures



POLITICS & IDEAS
By William A. Galston

As the U.S. headed toward its bicentennial in 1976, the mood was far from ebullient. The cultural changes of the 1960s had created new divisions in American society. Watergate had reduced trust in America’s institutions, and the ignominious withdrawal from Vietnam had reduced confidence in its leaders. The Soviet Union seemed to be on the march, the U.S. in retreat. The 1973 Arab oil embargo contributed to years of inflation, and President Gerald Ford’s “Whip Inflation Now” initiative symbolized the failed response to it.

The country needed reinvigoration and renewal, but the 1976 presidential election didn’t provide it. Jimmy Carter’s campaign pledge of “a government as good as its people” spoke to the restoration of morality in public life but proved inadequate to the challenges of the late 1970s. Not until Ronald Reagan’s victory in 1980 did the country begin to regain confidence in the future.

As the U.S. commemorates its 250th anniversary, the public mood resembles that of 50 years ago. Trust in institutions is at record lows, another energy shock has boosted inflation, and what the public judges to be a failed war against Iran has further

diminished confidence in the Trump administration’s competence. Again, the country’s religious and cultural divisions have widened.

There are important differences. In the 1970s, the bipartisan effort to remove President Richard Nixon from office signified to many that the constitutional crisis he created had been surmounted. Today we are in the midst of another constitutional crisis as President Trump relentlessly expands executive authority without effective congressional resistance.

Fifty years ago, America was far less polarized. There were plenty of liberal Republicans and conservative Democrats, and the presidential contest between a moderate Republican and a moderate Democrat featured the narrowest ideological gap in decades.

The effects of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, which reopened the nation to large flows of newcomers for the first time since the 1920s, were barely noticeable in the 1970s. Today, it is apparent that the act changed the country’s demographics in ways that many welcome but many others deplore.

Our loss of confidence in the future is palpable. According to an AP-NORC Center poll, only 34% of Americans believe that the American dream—if you work hard, you’ll get ahead—still holds true, compared with 51% who believe that it no longer does. Nearly 6 in 10 Americans believe that

our best days are behind us, according to Pew Research Center. Majorities believe that by 2050 the country will be more politically divided, our system of government won’t work as well, the economy will be weaker, living here will be more dangerous, and the U.S. will be less important in the world. This loss of confidence has a theological dimension.

The bicentennial, too, was a time of division and uncertainty. How does today compare?

According to the Public Religion Research Institute, the share of Americans who believe that “God has granted America a special role in human history” has fallen from 62% in 2012 to 44% today.

Accompanying this loss of confidence is an erosion in national pride. The share of the population saying that they are “extremely” or “very” proud to be American has fallen from 82% in 2013 to 51% today, according to PRRI. This decline is especially notable among adults under 30, only 34% of whom report pride in being American, compared with 66% of Americans 65 and older.

An American Enterprise Institute survey found large differences in the civic outlook of young and older adults. Only 50% of Generation Z thinks that it’s very important to give

students an understanding of the ideas and history that tie Americans together, compared with 78% of baby boomers. Young adults also de-emphasize responsibilities, such as voting and working, that older Americans believe are part of being a good citizen.

Still, there are grounds for hope as America’s 250th birthday approaches. Despite our differences, we retain consensus on fundamentals. According to PRRI, across political, demographic and religious lines, about 9 in 10 Americans agree on what it means to be “truly American”: believing in the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and the individual freedoms guaranteed by the Bill of Rights; respecting American political institutions and laws; and accepting people of diverse racial and religious backgrounds. (A smaller but still substantial majority adds being able to speak English.) Majorities don’t believe that being Christian or of Western European heritage or having ancestors who served in American wars are important to being American.

Among the majority of Americans who identify with neither the socialist left nor the MAGA right, I sense a yearning for new leaders who can bring us together around our shared beliefs while offering a credible agenda for the next stage of our national journey. Hope has always been America’s default setting, and despite all, I believe it still is.

BOOKSHELF | By Mark Yost

The Year the Nazis Lost

1942

By Richard Hargreaves
Osprey, 496 pages, \$40

On March 10, 1942, a German military aircraft equipped with special cameras took off from an air base outside Nikolaev, Ukraine. The nine-hour reconnaissance flight of the Junkers Ju 88 covered more than 100,000 square miles, “barely one third of the land Hitler sought to occupy through his summer offensive in 1942,” writes Richard Hargreaves. “It was not cities, geographical features and land that the Nazi dictator wanted but the rich oil fields of the Caucasus.”

The campaigns to capture that oil and defeat the Red Army, as well as the Axis forces’ second front in North Africa, are the subjects of “1942: Hitler’s Gamble for Victory.” Mr. Hargreaves, a British journalist who has published several books on World War II Germany, offers a well-written and carefully researched account that illuminates all sides of these grinding battles. In addition to vivid accounts of the fighting, there are pithy summations of the risky strategies behind the German operations in what became an all-or-nothing year for the Third Reich.

All of the risk stemmed from Hitler’s decision to break his nonaggression pact with Stalin and invade the western part of the U.S.S.R. in June 1941. Hitler’s Operation Barbarossa became the largest military operation in history and a disaster for both Germany and the Soviet Union, with enormous numbers of dead and wounded on each side. This was a marked change from the easy German victories in Western Europe in the early days of the war.

By early 1942, “many senior officers wondered whether the German Army could defend itself, let alone take the offensive,” Mr. Hargreaves observes. “Three out of five of the 162 German divisions in Russia were barely able to defend themselves, while fewer than a dozen could be considered fit for offensive action.”

Everything was in short supply: rifles, machine guns, anti-tank guns, artillery. The Luftwaffe had lost 2,800 aircraft. Germany began a second year of its attack on the Soviet Union, Mr. Hargreaves reports, “roughly on an equal footing with its foe—though with 500 fewer machines than the previous summer and without a good 1,500 experienced aircrew.”

The graphic details of the day-to-day fighting on the Eastern Front, which Mr. Hargreaves excerpts from official reports, as well as from soldiers’ diaries and letters home, are every bit as horrific as those from World War I. After the Battle of the Kerch Peninsula, one Soviet official reported that land and water alike were “littered with corpses.” The battle had begun as a Russian offensive in December 1941 but ended in German victory in May 1942. “A sweet smell of corpses hangs over the battlefield,” a soldier in the German 49th Infantry Regiment recalled. “Some of those who were killed are blue-black; as if pumped up, they burst out of their uniforms.”

As the Wehrmacht fought these ghastly battles in the western U.S.S.R., it was also fighting the British in North Africa. Here, too, the Germans enjoyed early success, driving the British and their Commonwealth forces some 350 miles across the rim of Africa, from their stronghold outside Tobruk, Libya, to western Egypt. The fighting was no less brutal than in the U.S.S.R.

Mr. Hargreaves shares harrowing images from the First Battle of El Alamein in early July, such as those drawn from the experiences of an Italian officer: “The battlefield was lit by flares dangling beneath parachutes. . . . Lieutenant Gerardo Salinardi’s column of motorized infantry was caught in the open. The men scrambled out of their trucks and into improvised foxholes as the British gunners found their range. Cries for help filled the night.” Salinardi would remember the scene as a “night of horror and terror.”

As the Wehrmacht engaged in ghastly battles in the Soviet Union, it was also fighting in North Africa. In both cases, early success was a mirage.

The harsh desert climate of North Africa created hazards very different from those on the Eastern Front. As one German commander later explained, the midday heat brought both exhaustion and visual mirages, “making expanses of water, oases with palms or larger objects seem like tanks or motor vehicles, only to disappear when you got closer.”

Mr. Hargreaves’s account of the North African fighting does much to dispel the myths that surround Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, the German tank commander and so-called Desert Fox. Many German commanders, Mr. Hargreaves reveals, felt Rommel favored “speed first, not safety,” and Rommel’s impulsiveness “frequently bordered on recklessness.”

In both Africa and the U.S.S.R., logistics was a challenge that only got worse. “The deeper Axis troops were drawn into Egypt,” Mr. Hargreaves notes, “the longer their supply lines became, while the enemy’s grew ever shorter.” Supply lines in the Caucasus campaign that summer also “became increasingly difficult to sustain, with railheads as far as 70 miles behind the front.”

The decisive encounter of the year was the Battle of Stalingrad, in southwest Russia, which began on July 17, 1942. By February 1943, Germany’s Sixth Army, Fourth Panzer Army and Army Group B were destroyed. After nine months of campaigning on the Eastern Front, Mr. Hargreaves calculates, the German forces had suffered one million casualties, “a quarter of them dead or captured.”

“Hitler’s crusade in the East,” as Mr. Hargreaves calls it, cost Germany dearly. The army had “failed to reach its geographical objectives, Suez and the Caspian Sea. It failed to deny its foes the supplies they needed to sustain the war, either by blocking the Suez Canal or denying the Soviet Union oil from its vast reserves in the Caucasus. It failed to secure those same oilfields for its own war effort.”

At the end of 1942, the Allies were in a stronger position than they had been at the start. The British had regained control in North Africa, while the Americans had begun their first serious African campaign near Casablanca. And the Soviets proved that they could withstand everything the Axis threw at them. For Germany, “victory was a possibility—and no more than that—in 1942,” Mr. Hargreaves concludes. “One year later, the best it could hope for was holding off defeat for as long as possible.”

Mr. Yost writes about military history for the Journal.

OPINION

REVIEW & OUTLOOK

Orders From Union Headquarters

Readers sometimes say we’re partisan when we point out that Democratic politicians these days take political dictation from teachers unions. Well, we are about to get a market test.

On Tuesday the heads of the nation’s two largest teachers unions delivered their marching orders to the country’s 24 Democratic Governors: Don’t opt into the new federal tax-credit scholarship program, or suffer their political wrath.

**Randi Weingarten and
Becky Pringle tell
Democratic Governors
who’s your daddy?**

“We urge you to protect families and public education in your state by saying no to the Trump private school voucher scheme,” write Randi Weingarten of the American Federation of Teachers and Rebecca Pringle of the National Education Association.

“Endorsing this voucher program would disregard both the Democratic National Committee platform and the wishes of voters,” they add in their “Open Letter to our Democratic Governors.” That “our” is a nice political touch, suggesting the union bosses know who owns whom in this relationship.

The new scholarship program lets individuals claim a credit up to \$1,700 on federal taxes for donations to scholarship organizations. Donors of any state can claim the credit, but the student beneficiaries have to be in states that opt in. The scholarships don’t cost state budgets a penny.

The union chiefs clearly see a competitive threat they aren’t about to tolerate. They roll out all the usual false clichés about school choice, claiming the program is a “Trojan horse” to destroy public schools.

They claim the vouchers will “shrink public school enrollment, reducing per pupil state revenue.” That’s an admission that parents may

prefer other schools or home-schooling for their children. Vouchers only shrink public school enrollment if children enroll elsewhere.

The tax-credit program can also be used by public school students, which the pair dismiss as “crumbs.” But \$1,700 is real money for most people, and groups are already looking at how to help public schools take advantage. A recent webinar by Marguerite Roza of Edunomics laid out possibilities, including using the funds for tutoring or “enhanced” services like field trips.

Money has been pouring into public schools for decades even as student learning falls. Schools hire more staff to pad union ranks, but students who graduate often can’t read or do middle-school math. Many states and cities also have “hold harmless” policies that keep schools funded as students leave. See New York City, which is spending \$290 million to make sure schools don’t lose money next year even as they lose tens of thousands of students.

Another letter this month from dozens of teachers unions in 23 blue states led by New York and Illinois echoed the national threat. The drumbeat to Democrats is clear: Opt into the program, and risk losing our election endorsement and campaign money. National teachers unions have donated nearly \$700 million to political groups and causes on the left since 2015, according to an April report from Defending Education.

So far the only Democratic Governors to say they’ll opt in are Jared Polis of Colorado and Kathy Hochul of New York. This month Oregon Gov. Tina Kotek said she won’t. More than a dozen haven’t decided. It’s a revealing test: Will Governors show their priority is students, or are they taking orders from the unions?

Zohran Mamdani, Slumlord

New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani last month issued a housing plan that calls for building more—what else?—public housing. So it’s startling to hear even some progressive elected officials complain about the appalling conditions at the city’s existing housing projects.

New York Attorney General Letitia James, Brooklyn Borough President Antonio Reynoso and New York City Council member Crystal Hudson on Monday issued a press release condemning a months-long natural gas outage at a New York City Housing Authority (Nycha) complex in Brooklyn.

This “is unacceptable. Without gas service, a simple but essential home-cooked meal becomes much more difficult,” they aver. Tenants “deserve to live in dignity with basic necessities like working stoves and ovens.”

Yes, they do. Perhaps the Democratic leaders could file a complaint with the city about this slumlord. Oh wait—the city is the slumlord. And a months-long gas outage isn’t unusual in Nycha building. Tenants regularly endure leaky pipes, mold, rodent infestations and furnace breakdowns. Perhaps Mr. Mamdani considers this “the warmth of collectivism.”

Nycha says it needs \$78 billion to bring every apartment up to standard. That’s \$439,275 per unit, which is about as much as the cost of a home in most parts of America, and it’s the bill that adds up when the city delays maintenance so it can spend money instead on union pensions and more social welfare.

While Nycha apartments fall deeper into dis-

**He wants to build more
public housing when
there’s no natural gas in
many current buildings.**

repair, Mr. Mamdani last month proposed that the agency finance new housing projects across the city. Just what the city doesn’t need.

His plan would require construction workers on these projects to be paid at least \$40 an hour in wages and benefits. Such wage mandates are why it cost Nycha \$1,973 per apartment to install LED lights, as we wrote several years ago—and why the agency’s backlog of repairs is taller than the Empire State building.

Mr. Mamdani hilariously proposes in his housing plan an “economic mobility program” to train Nycha tenants to “launch home-based childcare businesses,” which would be subsidized by the city. The program would guide tenants through “health and safety compliance.” Will the filthy apartments without heat pass city inspection?

Mr. Reynoso and other Democrats running for Congress have made Nycha a campaign issue. Most have called for more federal funding, though Washington already covers two-thirds of Nycha’s operating budget. Rep. Adriano Espallat wants the feds to divert money from immigration enforcement to Nycha.

Meantime, his Mamdani-backed primary opponent, Darializa Avila Chevalier, has endorsed legislation by Sen. Bernie Sanders and Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez that would spend hundreds of billions of dollars to eliminate CO2 emissions from public housing. New York City has found a cheaper way to do that: Neglect buildings, and voila, gas emissions gone.

ernment.” A ruling otherwise, he adds, would aggrandize Washington and weaken the federalist system created by the Founders.

**A Rastafarian who was
shaved by prison guards
loses at the High Court.**

Occasionally a party that loses at the Supreme Court will still win the larger debate, because the legal outcome is such a frustration of justice that it prompts change. The case of Damon Landor, a dreadlocked Rastafarian who was forcibly shaved by state prison guards, belongs in this category.

Mr. Landor’s religious vow, based in the Old Testament, was not to cut his hair, which nearly reached his knees. Drug charges sent him to a Louisiana prison for five months. With three weeks left, he was transferred to a new facility. Upon arriving, he gave the intake officer a copy of a federal court ruling, holding that the law requires accommodating Rastafarians. He says the guards threw it in the garbage, cuffed him, and shaved his head.

Mr. Landor should have been protected by the Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act (RLUIPA). But what recourse does he have now? No court can restore his hair. He can’t sue Louisiana for damages because of sovereign immunity. So he wanted to sue the prison officials personally.

Unfortunately for him, that lawsuit has a federalism problem, the Supreme Court says 6-3 in *Landor v. Louisiana Dept. of Corrections*. Under RLUIPA, Justice Neil Gorsuch writes, state prison systems that take federal money must agree not to substantially burden religious exercise. Individual prison guards, however, aren’t a party to that bargain.

“Congress’s power to spend money does not include the power to regulate,” Justice Gorsuch says. “Spending Clause statutes can bind only those who voluntarily and knowingly undertake obligations by agreement with the federal gov-

The three liberals, no surprise, take a liberal view of the federal government’s power. The Constitution’s Spending Clause gives Congress “a power to legislate, not merely to negotiate,” Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson writes, which the majority reduces to “nothing more than the wheelings-and-dealings of an especially wealthy private party.”

The prison guards in question “are agents of the State” who “wield its power,” and the majority’s distinction is “hairsplitting,” she adds. As a result, Americans “who suffer violations of their religious freedom in state prisons—no matter how blatant—will often be left remediless,” and “prison officials will have little incentive to abide by federal law, even if it is handed to them on a piece of paper.”

That’s if Congress doesn’t act. “To be sure,” Justice Gorsuch says, “Mr. Landor and the dissent identify ways in which Congress *could* have lawfully imposed personal liability.” He suggests Washington’s funding could require state officers “to enter separate contracts with the federal government consenting to answer suits under RLUIPA.” Or perhaps the money could require states to assent to damage suits against their prison systems.

Is it possible for lawmakers to find that kind of agreement? RLUIPA passed in 2000 by unanimous consent. But in these polarized days, Democrats often treat “religious liberty” as if it’s code for right-wing agenda. Mr. Landor’s case is evidence it isn’t, and Congress can act for religious prisoners of all faiths.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Inflated GPA Nirvana Comes at a High Price

Neetu Arnold’s proposal (“Whip Grade Inflation Now,” op-ed, June 17) is sensible and would go a long way toward making college grades more meaningful.

It’s very similar to the Contextual Transcript policy the UNC-Chapel Hill faculty council adopted back in 2011. I led that effort, which was unfortunately never implemented. The contextual transcript would have reported each grade along with statistics as to where that grade fell in the class’s distribution. It would have also reported a student’s “Schedule Point Average,” a measure of how the students’ traditional grade point average compares to other students in the same mix of classes.

Providing this context on transcripts allows students to explore rigorous, challenging courses without having to worry about the hit to their GPAs. It lets prospective employers and admissions officers understand students’ achievements more accurately. It gives programs like scholarships, academic distinction, and competitive majors better ways to reward achievement. And it reduces the incentive for students and instructors

alike to seek inflated grades instead of accurate measures.

UNC should have implemented the policy when it was first approved. Hopefully Ms. Arnold’s proposal will spur colleges to take similar steps.

PROF. ANDREW J. PERRIN
*Johns Hopkins University
Baltimore*

Mr. Perrin was on the faculty at UNC-Chapel Hill from 2001-2021.

For many upper-tier private colleges, grade inflation has accompanied tuition inflation. When annual tuition was less than \$5,000, a student battled to earn a grade above a C in difficult courses. Now, with annual tuition at five figures, nearly every course is an easy A or B. Inflated GPA nirvana comes at an inflated price.

JIM ROWBOTHAM
New York

Given the overwhelming leftwing bias of today’s college professors, guess which students will suffer when the number of A’s are restricted?

THOMAS F. BERNER
Yonkers, N.Y.

‘Familiars’ Need the Consent of the Watched

Christopher Mims’s article about Familiar Machines and the company’s Familiar robot is a welcome look at a genuinely new category of technology (“It’ll Nuzzle and Snuggle, but Will It Play Catch?” Exchange, May 9). The privacy questions it raises, however, go deeper than data storage. The company’s founders say the device will process data on-device by default. That is a meaningful commitment. But the harder challenge is who gets to decide what the robot does and on whose terms.

The Familiar is designed to monitor an aging parent or other dependent adult on behalf of a family member who likely purchased and configured the device. That arrangement quietly splits the person who is being watched from the person who consented to the watching. A senior living alone might not fully understand what the robot in the corner is

observing, inferring or reporting. She may not have a ready way to say: not now, not this room, not today.

Meaningful consent in this context isn’t a checkbox during setup. It is an ongoing, legible relationship between the person being monitored and the device monitoring her. The Familiar’s wordless, expressive design is charming precisely because it signals emotional attunement. That same design should be used to signal transparency: when the robot is observing, what it is noticing and how to tell it to stand down.

The questions worth asking early aren’t only about encryption and data minimization. They are about whether the person at the center of the system has genuine agency over it.

JULES POLONETSKY
*Chief executive
Future of Privacy Forum
Washington*

Blame Green Regulations for Solar’s Troubles

Rahm Emanuel rightly identifies America’s dependence on Chinese solar as a policy failure in his op-ed “On Energy, Democrats Can Learn From Texas” (June 16), but he misattributes the cause. The U.S. didn’t lose solar manufacturing because Republicans prioritized oil and gas. We lost because China deployed over \$50 billion in state subsidies while American policymakers buried an industry the U.S.

The Teamsters Put Their Wages Above Public Good

Unionized truck-driver Keith Hernandez writes in his letter “Driverless Trucks Take Good Jobs Away From Americans” (June 18) that, in an attempt to “put profits over people,” driverless-truck companies threaten his and other Teamster members’ “good union wages and benefits.”

Mr. Hernandez should look in the mirror—it’s the Teamsters who put profits over people. The profits: Teamster members’ excessively high wages, which union obtains by protecting them from competition. The people: The hundreds of millions of hardworking Americans who pay unnecessarily high prices for delivery services as a result.

If driverless-truck companies successfully break the Teamsters’ hold, these companies will indeed profit, but only insofar as they lower the prices that Americans pay. While unions generate profits for their members at the expense of the people, economic competition generates profits for entrepreneurs only by enriching the people.

PROF. DONALD J. BOUDREAU
*George Mason University
Fairfax, Va.*

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Pepper ... And Salt

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL



“We’ll never work things out if you keep going from zero to Samsonite in sixty seconds, Alma.”

OPINION

Hamilton Inspires Trump’s Economic Statecraft

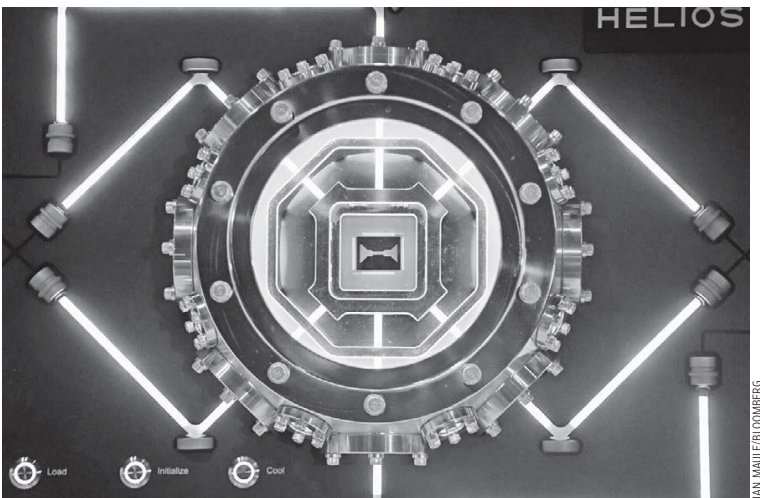
By Scott Bessent

For the better part of a century, the U.S. was the principal architect and guarantor of an open global economic system that delivered great benefits. It raised our allies from the ruins of war, widened the channels of global trade, and lifted standards of living worldwide. Yet its assumptions need revisiting. While shaping the postwar order and defending against the specter of communism, the U.S. accepted asymmetries in trade that served a larger strategic purpose. We opened our market because it helped to create a more prosperous world. We tolerated trade imbalances because American economic strength appeared unassailable.

Every nation ‘ought to endeavor to possess within itself all the essentials of national supply.’

Over time, however, those choices hardened into habits, habits into assumptions, and assumptions into vulnerabilities. We assumed that access to the U.S. market could be granted without condition—and therefore without consequence. We assumed that supply chains would function in a crisis, that low prices would make up for lost capacity, and that other countries would treat our firms as fairly as we treated theirs. But then strategic industries migrated abroad, critical supply chains concentrated in unfriendly jurisdictions, and nonmarket practices distorted competition. Our economic policy had become unmoored from our national strategy.

Under President Trump’s leadership, the U.S. Treasury is working to restore economic security as the foundation that allows a nation to fulfill its most basic obligations. Emboldened by our actions, other countries began to exploit our dependence as leverage. Now is the time to correct this. We need to insist on trade that is fair, reciprocal and consistent with our national interest. This is why the U.S. Treasury is organizing its economic statecraft around five core principles. First, economic security begins with national capacity. We have rediscovered at great cost what Alexander Hamilton taught us: that every nation “ought to endeavor to possess within itself all the essentials of national supply.” Our strength is derived from what we can build, for the nation that can’t produce what it needs isn’t truly secure. The nation that depends on its adversaries for critical inputs isn’t truly sovereign. And the nation that reduces its economics to consumption isn’t truly prosperous. As Hamilton put it, we must enlarge “the sphere of our domestic commerce.” Economic security begins with the capacity to build, invent, finance and scale the industries that will define the next century, among them semiconductors, artificial intelligence, quantum computing, advanced manufacturing, shipbuilding, critical minerals and pharmaceuticals. More than economic sectors, these are sources of national power. The U.S. must lead in all of them. Second, America’s openness must be reciprocated by its trading partners. Every nation has the right to



A Hewlett-Packard quantum-computing chip.

regulate its own economy, but regulation descends into discrimination when it targets American firms because they are American. The U.S. possesses many tools to remedy practices that distort trade and undermine reciprocity. We will use these tools judiciously but decisively. Third, America must write the rules of the next economy. Economic competition is no longer confined to the movement of goods across oceans and ports. It will be shaped by the platforms, systems and protocols through which commerce flows in the 21st century. In each of these domains, standards can become strategy. If the U.S. and our partners set open, secure, market-based standards, this century’s economy will tilt toward freedom and prosperity. Fourth, financial leadership is a central instrument of statecraft. There is nothing accidental about the dollar’s place in the world, and our leadership role comes with

enormous advantages. But it also imposes considerable obligations. Sanctions evasion, terror financing, proliferation financing, cybercrime, narcotics trafficking and corruption all exploit weaknesses in the financial system. Treasury’s job is to protect the financial system by rooting out these abuses. Fifth, economic statecraft must serve the American people. America’s competitive advantage has never been limited to our natural resources or the depth of our capital markets. It resides most of all in the character and the capacity of our people: the entrepreneur with an idea, the worker who can master new trades and technologies, institutions with the freedom and confidence to flourish. Our founders scarcely could have foreseen the world we inhabit today: the industries we have built, the technologies we have invented, the prosperity we have created and the

power we have attained. But they did understand something far more enduring: that the fortunes of a nation are shaped by the energies of its people. Those energies transformed a small republic on the edge of a continent into the most prosperous nation in the long sweep of human civilization. We will preserve that inheritance by ensuring that our openness strengthens America and the partnerships we form are worthy of the name. America welcomes its partners and we are stronger because of them. But our partnership now carries expectations and, in some instances, nonnegotiable obligations. Trading partners of the U.S. should expect a nation committed to strong alliances and productive economic relationships, a nation that welcomes fair competition, rewards investment, and believes in open commerce. But they should also expect a nation that is now more aware of its interests—and more prepared to protect them. These are reasonable expectations for any nation. They are necessary and essential for the U.S. because we have been, and will remain, the most important economic partner in the world. But we are now a partner with higher standards and greater expectations. We are a partner that has regained knowledge of the value that we offer—and the will to defend it.

Mr. Bessent is U.S. Treasury secretary. This article is adapted from a Tuesday evening speech at the Economic Club of New York.

Trump Administration Gets Civil Rights Back on Track



UPWARD MOBILITY
By Jason L. Riley

When Congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964, it also created the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission to placate the law’s detractors and oversee its Title VII employment provisions. Over the decades, however, unelected EEOC bureaucrats came to embody everything that’s wrong with the administrative state. Earlier this month the Justice Department moved to rein in the EEOC’s use of “disparate impact,” or racially disproportionate results, to determine whether an employer has run afoul of civil-rights statutes. “Although the Constitution now guarantees equal treatment, it has never guaranteed equal results,” Justice’s Office of Legal Counsel said in an opinion that describes the agency’s Title VII rules and guidance as unconstitutional and inconsistent with recent Supreme Court decisions. “Despite trying to promote equality, EEOC’s disparate impact liability interpretation under Title VII actually fosters the very discrimination its guide-

lines seek to address,” acting Attorney General Todd Blanche said in a statement. “This opinion will now allow businesses to hire based on performance, restoring equal opportunities in the American workplace.” The straightforward intent of Title VII was to outlaw racial discrimination in the labor force, where blacks were being kept out of jobs and denied promotions. The act stated in plain English that it “shall be an unlawful employment practice” to “fail or refuse to hire or discharge any individual, or otherwise to discriminate against any individual with respect to his compensation, terms, conditions, or privileges of employment, because of such individual’s race, color, religion, sex, or national origin.” The goal wasn’t to grant the federal government control over nearly every aspect of the workplace. “Management prerogatives, and union freedoms are to be left undisturbed to the greatest extent possible,” Rep. William McCulloch (R., Ohio) said in a statement for a House Judiciary Committee report. “Internal affairs of employers and labor organizations must not be interfered with except to the limited extent that correction is required in discrimination practices.”

Opponents of the bill feared it would require less-qualified blacks to be hired and promoted over better-qualified whites. While many of these objections were disingenuous coming from Democrats in the segregated South who had no intention of supporting civil rights for blacks, proponents nevertheless took pains to address such concerns.

With ‘disparate impact’ theory, the EEOC long ago departed from its mission to prevent discrimination.

Hubert Humphrey, the liberal Democrat from Minnesota who shepherded the bill through the Senate, insisted the act didn’t “provide that any preferential treatment in employment shall be given to Negroes or to any other persons or groups.” If anyone can find “any language which provides that an employer will have to hire on the basis of percentage or quota related to color, race, religion, or national origin,” he said, “I will start eating the pages one after another,

because it is not in there.” Supporters noted repeatedly that Title VII’s language was unambiguous. Racial discrimination on the part of the employer had to be intentional and couldn’t be inferred from disproportionate outcomes in the hiring and promotion of minorities. These reassurances won the day eventually. The Civil Rights Act passed comfortably, 290-130 in the House and 73-27 in the Senate, with a higher percentage of support from Republicans than from the Democratic Party, which still included a sizable bloc of Southerners who opposed equal treatment for blacks. President Lyndon Johnson signed the bill into law on July 2, 1964, and it’s notable that public opinion largely mirrored the consensus in Congress. A Gallup poll taken earlier that year found that supporters of federal antidiscrimination legislation outnumbered opponents by 2 to 1 (61% versus 31%), and among white Northerners the ratio was more than 3 to 1 (71% versus 21%). Despite reassurances from Humphrey and others in Congress, however, within three years EEOC staffers began redefining “discrimination,” sidestepping the statutory language of the bill

and ignoring the legislative history. They determined that statistical disparities could be used as evidence of hiring bias and that employers could be held liable for racial imbalance in the workplace, even if it was unintentional. Alfred Blumrosen, the EEOC’s first compliance chief and one of the people who drafted its initial disparate-impact guidance, later admitted that the agency’s power didn’t “flow from any clear congressional grant of authority” and that it “required a reading of the statute contrary to the plain meaning.” To make matters worse, the EEOC’s rogue actions were endorsed by an activist judiciary. In *Griggs v. Duke Power Co.* (1971), the Supreme Court said hiring practices that were “neutral on their face, and even neutral in terms of intent” could be unlawful if they resulted in racial imbalances. The decision gave employers an incentive to use racial preferences in hiring to avoid being sued for discrimination. It also gave the public good reason to turn against “affirmative action,” which used to mean equal opportunity for all but came to mean special treatment for some. It’s long past time we clean up this mess, and the Trump administration has taken an admirable step.

How Iran Plans to Consolidate Its Victory

By Reuel Marc Gerecht
And Ray Takeyh

Wars are judged by how they end, not by successes along the way. President Trump has done more to cripple Iran’s nuclear apparatus than his predecessors, but that may not matter. The memorandum of understanding sets the stage for an eventual nuclear revival, since what’s been blown up can be rebuilt as long as enough oil flows, the regime’s illicit dual-use import network remains operational, and U.S. and Israeli intelligence fails against Iranian vigilance. This war’s apparent denouement—fear of damage to energy infrastructure in the Arab Gulf states, declining global oil reserves and, most consequentially, Washington’s refusal to take and hold the Strait of Hormuz—

will militate against the rebirth of Mr. Trump’s belligerency later. An American victory now would require Mr. Trump to make a military commitment, with its U.S. and Arab losses, and blockade Iran for as long as needed. American politics, if not the president’s temperament, work against such boldness. Tehran will deliberately disrupt the cease-fire to demonstrate Washington’s timidity. It may close and then open the strait to put pressure on its adversaries, as it did recently over Lebanon. The agreement is probably too advantageous to be completely scuttled, but its limits can be stretched. Americans, who usually think the world revolves around economics, consistently misapprehend how revolutionaries embrace tumult. The leaders in Tehran believe they have triumphed.

How the Iranian regime will likely win the war is a testament to its guile, ruthlessness and determination. The Islamic Republic’s evolving strategic doctrine was first honed at home. Last year’s 12-day war left the regime with a nuclear program buried under rubble and an embarrassing imbalance between its defensive capacity and its enemies’ offensive strength. The theocracy feared an insurrection—and met it head-on in January. During the protests, the mullahs shelved their traditional playbook of targeted violence. The nationwide bloodbath should have signaled to outsiders that the regime, from top to bottom, would ferociously resist any coercion. Exported abroad, Tehran’s new doctrine was dubbed “offensive deterrence.” In response to a massive American-Israeli bombing campaign, the regime expanded the geography of the conflict, targeting the Gulf states and closing the strait. Iran showed scant concern for the energy interests of China—a great-power ally once thought capable of imposing restraints on the Islamic Republic. Already, tributes are flowing. Even before nuclear negotiations have begun, Washington has waived restrictions on Iranian oil sales for 60 days. This cash-and-carry policy has a regional dimension. The memorandum of understanding reads: “The Islamic Republic of Iran will conduct dialogue with the Sultanate of Oman to define the future administration and maritime services in the Strait of Hormuz, in discussion with other Persian Gulf littoral states in line with the applicable international law

and sovereign rights of coastal states of the Strait of Hormuz.” The Sunni Gulf kingdoms, which have always relied on the West to fend off menacing neighbors, are enjoined to come to terms with Persians. Javan, a mouthpiece of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, has spelled out the parameters of the new order. “In the regional arena, it became clear to neighboring countries that they had no choice but to engage positively and Trump took bold actions other presidents never dared, only to end up where they were all along.

 constructively with Iran,” according to the newspaper on June 15. “From now on, the Persian Gulf will be influenced by political and security arrangements centered on Iran.” This means that the Gulf states will both pay for protection and conduct their foreign policy in a manner consistent with Tehran’s preferences. Throughout the process, the Iranian regime proved steadfast with its ally, Hezbollah, by bringing Lebanon into its agreement with Washington. If granted peace, Hezbollah will likely replenish its arsenal and redeploy its operatives south. It is a sign of the times that an American vice president would threaten a loyal ally for striking a terrorist organization bent on its destruction. A notably depressing provision of

the agreement reads: “The Islamic Republic of Iran and the United States undertake to respect each other’s sovereignty and territorial integrity and to refrain from interfering in each other’s internal affairs.” All despotic governments seek such recognition from Western democracies. Mr. Trump’s acknowledgment must be particularly satisfying for Tehran given that he confidently called for regime change five months ago. Perhaps more self-defeating, Mr. Trump has lost the fulcrum of his leverage—his unpredictability. He crossed lines that previous presidents dared not traverse only to end up where they were all along: He is another American politician hoping to induce the Iranian regime toward pragmatism by dangling financial rewards. His administration now speaks of hard-liners and pragmatists as if it can detect fissures in the regime and manipulate them to its advantage. That has been the fool’s gold of American statesmen since Jimmy Carter’s presidency. The Islamic Republic has achieved what Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi only dreamed of—effective control of the Gulf. The Shah wanted to police the waterway to prove his bona fides to the West. The Islamic Republic intends to prove the opposite—that at last the West has been broken. Mr. Gerecht is a resident scholar at the Foundation for the Defense of Democracies. Mr. Takeyh is a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations.

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Opinion

EU's staggering hypocrisy over human rights

DR. RAMZY BAROUD

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has every right to condition the EU's relations with any other country or bloc on respect for human rights. That, of course, would hold true if she genuinely cared about such values herself.

In response to last week's signing of the memorandum of understanding between the US and Iran — intended to bring an end to a destructive war — Von der Leyen declared that the EU does not intend to lift its sanctions on Tehran.

Speaking ahead of the G7 Summit, she firmly conditioned any diplomatic thawing on domestic changes within the Islamic Republic. "The principle of sanctions is that we need real change on the ground before we can think about lifting them," she stated.

Viewed in isolation, the bloc's position might appear principled, even commendable. In its broader geopolitical context, however, it exposes a staggering level of hypocrisy.

In fact, the EU's duplicity was laid bare on the very same day. During a Foreign Affairs Council meeting in Luxembourg, the bloc's foreign ministers were unable to take a unified stand on imposing sanctions on extremist Israeli National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir.

While the EU continues to engage Israel — providing Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his extremist coalition with desperately needed political and economic lifelines — European publics have increasingly moved in the opposite direction. Recent polling across numerous countries has revealed an increasingly unfavorable view of both Israel and Netanyahu. Across Europe, mass demonstrations, consumer boycotts, campus mobilizations and divestment campaigns reflect the widening gap between public opinion and official policy.

This reality appears entirely irrelevant to Von der Leyen, who remains preoccupied with the human rights records



Dr. Ramzy Baroud is a journalist, author and the editor of The Palestine Chronicle. His latest book, "Before the Flood," was published by Seven Stories Press. His website is ramzybaroud.net. X: @RamzyBaroud

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of states viewed as Western adversaries. Such concern is not motivated by solidarity with victims but by the desire to maintain political leverage that can be invoked when convenient and ignored when necessary.

For anyone to believe that Von der Leyen has suddenly discovered that human rights should occupy center stage in any responsible foreign policy is simply delusional. This is especially true given how restrained she remained, both in terms of language and action, as the US-Israeli war on Iran expanded into a regional catastrophe.

It is tempting to conclude that, for Von der Leyen and many other Western leaders, some human rights matter more than others. Yet even that assessment grants too much credibility to their position, because it assumes that human rights are the actual basis of policy. More often than not, they are merely invoked when politically convenient.

The war involving Iran, the subsequent

US-Iran agreement and the major geopolitical shifts surrounding both unfolded largely without meaningful European involvement. Reduced to the role of spectator — or occasional cheerleader — the EU exerted little influence over events, underscoring its diminishing relevance in Middle Eastern and global affairs.

This helps explain why Von der Leyen resorted to familiar rhetoric about human rights in Iran while remaining largely silent on Israel's devastating actions in Palestine, Lebanon, Syria and elsewhere in the region. With Brussels' influence steadily shrinking, moral posturing has become a substitute for meaningful diplomacy.

Will the EU continue along this path of growing irrelevance or will it finally heed the views of its own citizens, challenge Israel's impunity and pursue a foreign policy genuinely independent of Washington? The answer may determine whether it can reclaim political relevance — or continue its slide into long-term decline.

It is tempting to conclude that, for many Western leaders, some human rights matter more than others

COURTESY: AMALU RAMWASHAHQ AL-AWQAT



His childish and obsessive need for attention appears unquenchable and has become a defining feature of his role in government

Ben-Gvir's handling of Gaza flotilla a PR disaster

YOSSI MEKELBERG

In the age of social media, we can learn much about a person's character from what they post — and even more from what they post with a sense of pride.

In the case of Israeli National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, there is an interesting range of content: baseless incitement and accusations against political opponents; pride in inflaming tensions on Al-Haram Al-Sharif under the guise of defending the right of Jews to pray there; and, more recently, a video showing himself taunting activists from a Gaza-bound flotilla intercepted by Israeli naval forces, while they knelt with their hands tied behind their backs.

The last of these was an act more likely to bring someone a step closer to The Hague than to earn the highest military decoration for valor.

To argue that Ben-Gvir has demonstrated utter incompetence during his three and a half years in charge of the

National Security Ministry would be a massive understatement. His childish and obsessive need for attention appears unquenchable and has become a defining feature of his role in government. In this case, the humanitarian flotilla to Gaza was simply another low-hanging fruit.

Understandably, for the Israeli government, a flotilla carrying hundreds of activists highly critical of Israel's conduct in Gaza is a nuisance. Likewise, for the country's security forces, dealing with it while simultaneously managing countless other tasks is far from ideal. Yet, whether one agrees with this type of protest is ultimately irrelevant, because it is entirely legitimate.

This Israeli government is not only brutish and incompetent but often lacking in prudence as well. Ben-Gvir and his political twin Bezalel Smotrich are merely prominent examples. The handling of this and previous flotillas is a case in point.

The decision to send naval forces,



Yossi Mekelberg is a professor of international relations and an associate fellow of the MENA Program at Chatham House. X: @YMekelberg

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including an elite commando unit, to intercept the Global Sumud Flotilla, board the vessels, detain the activists and redirect the ships to the port of Ashdod was precisely what the activists hoped for. They gained maximum publicity and another opportunity to expose Israel's security forces and Ben-Gvir as brutal.

The message practically wrote itself: If this is how peaceful activists are treated, what must Palestinian detainees and prisoners be experiencing? From a public relations perspective, it was game, set and match to the activists.

More damage was done by the handling of the flotilla than would likely have resulted from allowing it to reach Gaza under Israeli supervision. It is difficult to see how significant harm to Israel's security could have resulted from such an approach.

Alternatively, if Israel still believed it necessary to prevent the flotilla from reaching Gaza, it could have stopped the

vessels in its territorial waters and treated the activists professionally and respectfully, rather than in the manner shown in the footage that Ben-Gvir himself proudly shared on social media.

If this sounds sensible, that is precisely why Ben-Gvir was unlikely to pursue it, especially so close to a general election.

Yet, while Ben-Gvir deserves criticism, responsibility does not end with him. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, whose political survival has repeatedly depended on alliances with figures such as Ben-Gvir, has adopted a posture of "see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil" when it comes to the conduct of his ultranationalist partners.

What Netanyahu should have done was dismiss Ben-Gvir immediately upon the publication of the video and unequivocally condemn the behavior it displayed. Since he failed to do so, the stain and shame of the episode belong not only to Ben-Gvir but to both men.

