

New Delhi

The
Hindustan Times
ESTABLISHED IN 1924
{ OUR TAKE }

Free speech in the crosswires

Weaponising vaguely worded provisions in criminal law to harass journalists should stop

When the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) was enacted in 2023, it was done with the express intention of creating a new regime of lawmaking that moved from punitive intent towards justice. Central to this effort was the excising of the colonial-era provision of sedition, used by the British to impair the independence movement and jail freedom fighters, and put in abeyance by the Supreme Court for its indiscriminate deployment by various governments to chill legitimate criticism.

Unfortunately, the language of section 152 of the new law — which punishes those who “excite or attempt to excite, secession or armed rebellion or subversive activities, or encourages feelings of separatist activities or endangers sovereignty or unity and integrity of India” — appears to be vulnerable to similar excesses.

The latest example of this phenomenon came last week, after the top court had to step in to protect two journalists in connection with a first information report registered by Assam Police. The complaint in question was filed on May 9 under section 152 of the BNS but remained dormant till last week when the police issued a summons.

The court’s protection may have come as a relief to the journalists, but this isn’t about one case (this isn’t the first time a police department is filing a case under the section).

Questions about the role of the police, its intentions in booking the journalists, and the contribution of the expansive but vague language of section 152 linger.

Journalists are not above the law, and authorities are well within their rights to investigate any wrongdoing. But, as underlined repeatedly by the Supreme Court, journalists perform critical functions in a democracy, and any action to suppress criticism or chill free speech must be discouraged.

In a country where endemic delays in the criminal justice system are often weaponised by the police, complaints and summons can become effective tools to ensure that the process becomes the punishment, irrespective of the final judicial verdict. Police overreach and vaguely worded provisions cannot be allowed to pose a risk to constitutional guarantees. As the top court said, we are watching.

Washington’s MAGA voice in New Delhi

US President Donald Trump’s decision to nominate Sergio Gor, a key member of his inner circle, as the next ambassador to India signifies that he wants to keep tabs on the bilateral relationship and have someone in place in New Delhi who will do his bidding unquestioningly. The delay in naming an ambassadorial candidate has not gone unnoticed in New Delhi, especially as India-US relations, built up over the past two-and-a-half decades, rapidly took a downturn over trade and other issues.

Gor is known mostly for his rapid rise within conservative Republican circles and his apparent influence in personnel appointments at the White House. However, he is a novice when it comes to diplomacy or expertise in the region where he is expected to serve.

On the one hand, if Gor’s nomination is confirmed by the US Senate, there will be an American envoy in New Delhi who will have the ear of the president and could work to arrest the downside in relations. On the other hand, the current tensions in the relationship could be exacerbated if Gor, who subscribes to the Make America Great Again agenda, pushes the maximalist position embraced by the Trump administration on trade.

Another red flag for New Delhi is Trump’s move to name Gor as special envoy on South and Central Asian affairs, especially given the memories of the Obama administration’s abortive attempt to make a similar appointment that would have equated India and Pakistan. Any effort that appears aimed at mediating between India and Pakistan will not go down well in New Delhi.

Gor will certainly have his task cut out as the next US envoy, especially rebuilding the bilateral relationship and taking forward the proposed trade deal so that a planned visit by Trump can go ahead. New Delhi could help by proactively familiarising him with India and its concerns.

How India’s transport future is being rewritten

Policy push for electrification of trucks is a game-changer. It will benefit manufacturing, reduce emissions, and improve air quality

Transportation emissions account for nearly 25% of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. In India, the sector contributes almost 14% of the country’s carbon dioxide emissions, with about 90% coming from road transport. Given India’s commitment to achieving net-zero emissions by 2070, decarbonising road transportation is both urgent and essential.

India today stands at a remarkable turning point in its mobility journey. For decades, transport meant traffic congestion, high logistics costs, and patchy connectivity. But a quiet revolution is underway. Transport is no longer seen as a background sector — it is becoming a central pillar in India’s ambition to become a developed economy, a Viksit Bharat, by 2047, while meeting its net-zero target by 2070.

Globally, countries that transformed their transport systems unlocked not just economic efficiency but also growth, sustainability, and competitiveness. India has the same opportunity — if it makes the right choices now.

Three recent policy moves have the potential to transform India’s transport landscape, offering a blueprint for a cleaner, more efficient, and future-ready system.

Electrifying trucks: Transport accounts for 14% of India’s GHG emissions, with medium and heavy-duty trucks responsible for 44% of that share — despite comprising just 3% of vehicles on the road. India’s logistics costs, at about 13% of GDP, far exceed the global average. With 70% of freight moving by road and fuel making up a large portion of costs, electrifying trucks is both an environmental and economic imperative.

Last month, the ministry of heavy industries released guidelines for electric trucks under the PM e-DRIVE scheme, a vital first step in transitioning India’s trucking sector toward a cleaner and more *aatmanirbhar* (self-reliant) future. Until now, the spotlight has been on electric buses, two-wheelers, and three-wheelers. By supporting electric trucks, e-DRIVE addresses three challenges at once: One, reducing logistics costs through lower fuel dependency; two, strengthening domestic manufacturing of advanced electric vehicle (EV) technologies such as heavy-duty batteries and charging systems; and three, improving air quality along highways and in cities, with health benefits for millions.

China has already demonstrated how electrifying freight can transform supply chains. India now has the chance to leapfrog the diesel-dependent model and build a greener logistics backbone.

Improving fuel efficiency: The Bureau of Energy Efficiency (BEE) has proposed

Phase 3 and 4 of the Corporate Average Fuel Efficiency (CAFE) norms for passenger cars, currently under finalisation. Additionally, BEE has released draft fuel-efficiency regulations for light, medium, and heavy-duty vehicles — regulations with immense potential to reshape the road transport sector.

Fuel economy standards form the regulatory backbone of efficiency. They require automakers to achieve fleet-wide average fuel consumption targets, while providing flexibility in how to meet them, whether through advanced engine technologies or accelerated EV adoption.

Without strong fuel economy standards, India risks drifting toward fuel-guzzling vehicles, weakening fleet efficiency, raising emissions, and deepening dependence on imported oil. This creates a vicious cycle of higher costs and energy insecurity.

Finalising CAFE for cars and fuel-efficiency standards for commercial vehicles will provide manufacturers long-term clarity and direction, paving the way for cleaner vehicles across the Indian market.

Expanding beyond road transport: India’s Maritime Amrit Kaal Vision 2047 sets an ambitious agenda for transforming the shipping and port sector into a globally competitive, sustainable system. It envisions expanding port capacity from 2,600 million metric tonnes per annum (MMTPA) today to more than 10,000 MMTPA, supported by world-class infrastruc-



India now has the chance to leapfrog the diesel-dependent model and build a greener logistics backbone. BLOOMBERG

ture, digital innovation, hydrogen and ammonia hubs, carbon-neutral operations, and shore power at all major ports by 2047. The vision also positions India among the top five global shipbuilding nations.

Complementing this initiative, the Harit Sagar Green Port Guidelines provide a framework to shrink the environmental footprint of ports — targeting over 60% renewable energy use by 2030 and 90% by 2047, electrifying half of port equipment by 2030 and 90% by 2047, and reducing CO₂ intensity per ton of cargo handled by more than 70% by 2047.

Together, these measures show India’s commitment to making maritime transport efficient, sustainable, and globally competitive.

India’s transport story is being rewritten. Today’s policy announcements will shape not only how we move tomorrow, but also how competitive India’s economy will be in a decarbonised world.

If implemented with urgency and foresight, the PM e-DRIVE scheme, fuel-efficiency regulations, and Maritime Vision 2047 can deliver far more than emissions reductions. They can

lower logistics costs, create green jobs, strengthen energy security, and boost India’s global standing.

This transformation of transportation is not just about reducing emissions or improving public health — it is about seizing a generational economic opportunity. A recent Niti Aayog report estimated that electric vehicles alone represent a \$200-billion opportunity for India as the country moves toward achieving a 30% EV sales share by 2030. Add to this the multiplier effects of cleaner logistics, efficient ports, and world-class vehicle standards, and it is clear that transport modernisation can unlock vast new avenues for investment, innovation, and industrial leadership.

India can transform transportation from a long-standing challenge into one of its greatest strengths. The nation stands at the cusp of transformation — and the road to a Viksit Bharat, a developed India by 2047, is being built right now.

Amit Bhatt is India managing director, ICCT, and Drew Kodjak is president & CEO, ICCT. The views expressed are personal

How India can make health care affordable

Assured health care is indeed vital for human development of individuals and economic development of nations. It must span a wide range of services — from health promotion and disease prevention to prompt detection of health disorders and early implementation of effective interventions to reduce risk and restore health. It must extend to rehabilitation services and palliative care where needed. Focus must be both on extending life expectancy (lifespan) and enabling people to live in good health till the end of a full and fulfilled life (health span). This will enable all individuals to be productive to their full potential, while ensuring a prosperous nation. Health of each Indian, across the entire life course, will be the engine that will propel our journey to Viksit Bharat by 2047.

But, as RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat recently pointed out, these services are not assuredly available to all persons in India. Speaking at the inauguration of Arogya Kendra and Cancer Care Centre in Indore, Bhagwat said, “Healthcare and education are among the most important things for a person, and both are beyond the reach of the common man in the present times.” Barriers of availability, access, cost and quality deter many persons from seeking needed healthcare (foregone care) or land them in poverty due to unaffordable “out of pocket” expenditure on chronic outpatient care or unforeseen catastrophic expenditure on hospitalised care.

The Ayushman Bharat programme is working towards strengthening primary care through a network of health and wellness centres. It also offers financial protection for hospitalised care through the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY). However, the programme faces challenges of health system capacity, capability and governance in several parts of the country. India’s federal structure and constitutional assignment of separate roles to the Union and state governments call for coherence in the design and delivery of health care.

India’s health services are also heavily dependent on the private sector. In a mixed health system that has grown not by design but by default, the heterogenous private sector extends from individual practitioners and family-run nursing homes to single-specialty tertiary care centres and multi-specialty corporate hospitals. The voluntary sector exists in scattered patches of charitable hospitals. Some of them are advanced centres operating in a cross-subsidisation mode to make rich patients partly pay for poor patients. However, the weakly regulated private sector often imposes costs that are unaffordable for the common man. It is also limited in presence in rural areas and small towns of many states.

To overcome the barriers to universal health coverage (UHC), we need to stimulate the public sector to be more responsive (by enhancing capacity and efficiency), the private sector to be more responsible (by avoiding excessive charges and unnecessary procedures) and the voluntary sector to be more resourceful (by building models of people-partnered public health and community-connected clinical care). The strengths of all three sectors must be drawn

upon to create partnerships for public purpose. In each of these, a strong public sector must set goals, identify deliverables, define standards and ensure accountability by each of the partners.

Access barriers must be overcome by expanding primary health care infrastructure to reach close to home in both rural and urban locations, providing road connectivity and emergency transport services and utilising robust digital health architecture for efficient tele-health services. Investment in a multi-layered, multi-skilled health workforce is needed, to generate the needed numbers across diverse categories and create teams that are customised for public health and clinical care services, while ensuring fair distribution across all districts and urban-rural settings. Technology enabled non-physician healthcare providers can provide much of primary care and reduce referral load for secondary and tertiary care centres. Pluralistic medical care and healing systems must be promoted, with appropriate delineation of roles and adequate resource allocation to allopathic and traditional systems of medicine.

This endeavour requires greater funding for health in both state and Union budgets. Government spending on health must progressively rise to 3% of GDP, while keeping out of pocket health expenditure below 20% of all health care related expenditure.

The package of essential health services covered by UHC’s benefit package should be progressively expanded as more resources accrue over time and revised whenever demographic and epidemiological transitions bring forth fresh priorities for health care. Gaps in insurance coverage under PMJAY must be bridged.

Equity has to remain at the heart of the design and delivery of health services. While horizontal equity provides a common set of services to all, vertical equity must ensure allocation of greater resources or provision of additional services to population groups who have experienced health inequities in the past.

Early benefits can be provided through pooled public procurement of essential medicines and vaccines at state level followed by free distribution in public health care facilities. Essential diagnostic services too have to be provided free of cost in such facilities.

The private health care sector can also use pooled consortia purchases to lower costs for patients. Jan Aushadhi stores should provide inexpensive options for direct patient purchase.

Disconnects that exist between primary care (National Health Mission) and PMJAY (National Health Authority) must be removed to create models of integrated care. Other disconnects (between public and private systems, allopathic and traditional systems) must also be negotiated to create an effective, equitable, empathetic, and economically viable health system.

K Srinath Reddy is chancellor, PHFI University of Public Health Sciences, and chair of the Centre for Health Assurance at the Indian School of Public Policy. The views expressed are personal

{ AYATOLLAH ALI KHAMENEI } SUPREME LEADER, IRAN

The Iranian nation will stand strongly against the US wanting to make Tehran obedient

Comments carried by the Iranian State media

{ STRAIGHTFORWARD }
Shashi Shekhar

Canine concerns must balance human safety

The new Supreme Court order on stray dogs last Friday addresses the concerns of both animal lovers and the large population fearful of them: It doesn’t stop the authorities from rounding up the strays, nor does it allow them to release the dogs before vaccination and sterilisation. No one can feed strays anywhere other than designated spots, and the government will have to set up dog shelters on a large scale. The apex court orders are now applicable throughout the country.

August 26 is observed as International Dog Day. It raises a pertinent question whether the apex court’s direction acts as a panacea against the problems associated with stray dogs. But, before we discuss the issue, let’s look at the prevalent situation.

A bright morning last Wednesday took a dark turn. While Delhi chief minister Rekha Gupta was holding a public grievance meeting, a man, yelling and waving some papers, charged at her. The alert security personnel caught him. Inquiries revealed that the man, Rajesh Bhai Khimji, was from Rajkot, Gujarat. His mother said he was an animal lover and was enraged by the Supreme Court decision on removing stray dogs from public places. Is this reason enough for someone to travel hundreds of kilometres to attack a public representative?

The online and offline confrontations between the dog lovers and those opposed to the stray population ignore the stark reality of thousands of humans dying every year due to dog bites. The apex court decided earlier that within six to eight weeks, stray dogs should be removed from the streets of Delhi and the National Capital Region (NCR). With few resources and even less enthusiasm, the government machinery began the herculean task.

A day before Rekha Gupta was attacked, the New Delhi Municipal Corporation (NDMC) officials lodged police complaints against vandalism of corporation vehicles being used to pick up stray dogs. How can those who protest against every incident of cruelty to animals turn violent towards fellow human beings?

I have no dislike for any animal or bird species. Even during my childhood, there were many stray dogs in our neighbourhood and in our villages that were our honorary guard dogs. They were the responsibility of the entire neighbourhood. These dogs would

get enough food and never attack people. However, things have changed over the years. Cities have turned into concrete jungles, and neighbourhoods have given way to gated apartments. Career demands have forced people to move from their native places. This has redefined community living and camaraderie. Even human-animal relations have changed. Earlier, no one could have thought that a pack of stray dogs would maul a human to death. But today, social media is awash with many such gut-wrenching videos where a pack of strays is brutalising a human.

Whether it’s Delhi or any small hamlet, dogs, rhesus monkeys, stray bulls, and cows roam free with a licence to attack citizens. The story of sub-inspector Richa from Ghaziabad shows the depth of the malaise. She was returning from duty when a stray dog came in front of her scooterette. She immediately applied the brakes, and her vehicle skidded, grievously wounding her. She died the same night. State governments seem to have no plan to deal with the crisis.

According to a report, just before the Covid-19 pandemic struck, the incidents of stray dog bites reached an alarming 76 lakh annually in 2018. During the lockdown, it saw a sharp decline, and in 2021, it stood at 17 lakh. Since then, the graph has shot up alarmingly with no respite. Last year, 37.17 lakh dog bite cases were registered. It means 10,000 dog bites daily across the country. (There is no data on what percentage of these bites are by pets and how many are by strays, though most experts say that a majority of bites are caused by pets or suffered by animal workers and activists working with dogs.). According to the World Health Organization, every year, 18,000 to 20,000 people die of rabies. Due to the lack of an established national procedure, there’s no way we will have authentic data; yet, there is no doubt that the stray dog problem is so grave nationally that it needs urgent action.

However, how can we act when the road ahead is tough? There’s a powerful lobby supporting the stray dogs.

Animals need space to live by their natural instincts, but humans, too, deserve their right to live without the fear of avoidable violence.

Shashi Shekhar is the editor-in-chief, Hindustan. The views expressed are personal

OUR VIEW



RBI must keep inflation firmly in its crosshairs

Its call for feedback on its monetary policy framework is welcome. Overall, flexible inflation targeting has served India well so far. But every review is an opportunity to make it better

The Reserve Bank of India’s (RBI) discussion paper (DP) on its monetary policy framework, released last Thursday as part of a mandated five-yearly review, poses four key questions on which the central bank has sought feedback. *First*, should monetary policy target headline inflation, as presently mandated under the flexible inflation targeting (FIT) regime introduced in 2016, or core inflation (i.e., headline inflation stripped of volatile elements like food and fuel)? The answer to that is straightforward and RBI’s DP also seems to veer towards that conclusion; namely, that for a country like India, where food constitutes a significant share of the consumption basket (close to 46%) for a large number, it is meaningless to target core instead of headline inflation. The food component’s weight, in any case, is bound to decline once the Consumer Price Index is recast based on a more up-to-date Household Consumption Expenditure Survey for 2023-24, as against the 2011-12 data in use today. That exercise is already underway, so we can expect the impact of a volatile food basket to decline in the not-too-distant future.

Second, whether RBI’s current 4% target remains optimal when it comes to balancing growth with stability in a fast-growing economy. Here the DP argues in favour of the *status quo* on the ground that the existing framework with 4% as RBI’s central goal has served us well. We agree with that assessment. Despite the challenges posed in the nine years since FIT has been in operation, including the covid pandemic and the high inflation years that followed, the pace of rising price levels has seen a distinct decline, with the average since FIT adoption at 4.9% *vis-à-vis* an average of 6.8%

over the pre-FIT period. *Third*, whether the tolerance band of 2-6% needs to be revised (i.e., narrowed, widened or dropped altogether). Here again, we are in agreement with RBI’s contention that the “band of +/-2 per cent gives adequate flexibility to the [Monetary Policy Committee] to focus on inflation or growth depending on the evolving situation.” FIT is still a work-in-progress in India. The institutional experience and memory needed is evolving. Moreover, our financial markets are not as deep as Western markets. The DP’s *fourth* question is whether the target rate of 4% should be scrapped and only a range be maintained. The DP is against scrapping the target rate on the argument that moving to a range could be construed as a dilution of the existing framework, which may erode policy credibility. Notably, New Zealand, the first country to adopt inflation targeting, aimed for a range in its first 12 years before shifting to a point target.

However, we would urge RBI to end the current dichotomy between action on the policy rate and the liquidity front that often results in one working at cross purposes with the other. There have been instances in the past when the repo rate was raised only to have RBI open the liquidity tap, negating the former’s impact. The framework must also ensure greater transparency. As of now, the bank is required to submit a report to the government whenever the 6% FIT ceiling is breached for three consecutive quarters, but there is no mandate to make it public. The last time we had a breach—for five quarters in a row from the fourth quarter of 2021-22 to the fourth quarter of 2022-23, the report was kept under wraps. Overall, the FIT framework has served us well so far. But every review should be seen as an opportunity to improve it.

MY VIEW | THE INTERSECTION

New Delhi must look east again as global relations change shape

The US having binned its East Asia playbook has thrown up opportunities that India mustn’t miss



NITIN PAI
is co-founder and director of The Takshashila Institution, an independent centre for research and education in public policy.

I concluded my previous column arguing that the current geopolitical moment is similar to 1991 and that India ought to do now what it did then: undertake economic reforms and Look East. Even if it were not for the problems with the US, there has long been a case for a second round of economic liberalization and engagement of India’s Southeast Asian neighbourhood. Now these are both urgent imperatives.

While India has increased its engagement of Southeast Asia since the 1990s in several important ways, there has always been a distance between the two. This is perhaps because India’s motivations for engaging the region have primarily been geopolitical, with an eye on balancing Chinese power, while most that are countries part of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean) looked towards India as their second large geo-economic partner after China. Thus, geoeconomics was secondary for India and geopolitics for Asean.

This misalignment of objectives is the underlying reason why India is engaged but not integrated with Southeast Asia. India was wary of entering any regional trade agreement that included China. Asean countries, except Vietnam and the Philippines to some extent, were lukewarm to a security relationship with India if that meant rubbing

Beijing the wrong way. This has led to a kind of sub-optimal equilibrium that exists to this day.

Now that the US under the Donald Trump administration has thrown out Washington’s East Asian playbook, India, Asean and other East Asian capitals have new opportunities—even imperatives—to recast their relationships. No US ally can take Washington’s security umbrella for granted. No Asean state can presume that the US will continue to underwrite the security of the region. No country can be certain that its trade relations with the US will not be contingent on extraneous political factors. In an age where economic power is being used coercively, Asean economies are heavily dependent on China.

The ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute’s survey report of 2025 shows, yet again, that few among the region’s elite think India has any political or strategic influence in Southeast Asia: “Approximately a third of ASEAN-10 respondents have reservations about India’s ability to contribute to global peace, security, prosperity, and governance (35.8%). However, this level of distrust is nearly matched by this year’s trust levels (35.3%), thus presenting mixed sentiments about the prospects of India’s role in the region.”

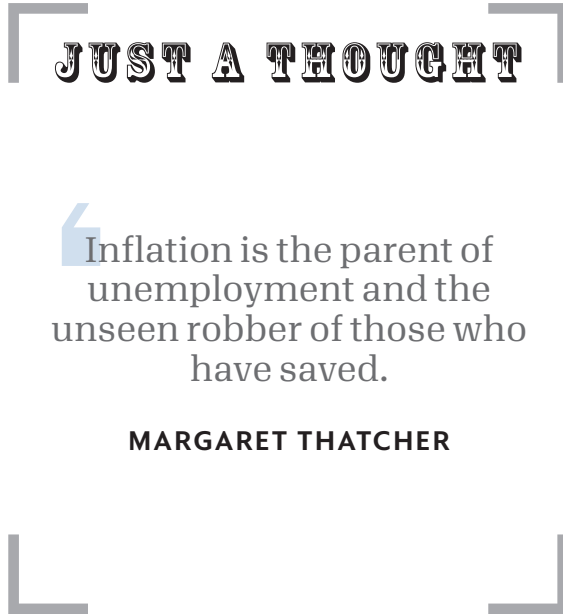
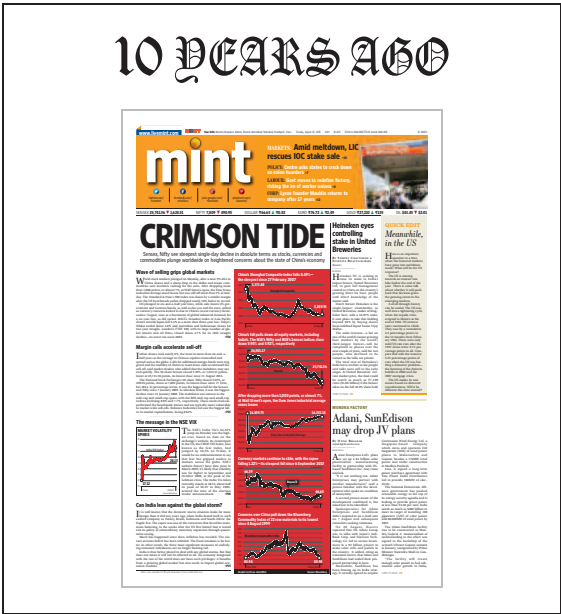
Further: “Of the ASEAN-10 cohort that trusts India, 30.1% believe that it is a responsible stakeholder that respects and champions international law. This view is shared strongly in Vietnam (49.1%), Singapore (37.5%), Indonesia (37.3%) Brunei (32.5%) and Cambodia (26.4%). Almost a fifth (19.0%) of this cohort agree that India has vast economic resources and the political will to provide global leadership.”

The report also states: “Among the... respondents who distrust India, 40.2% believe that India does not have the capacity or political will for global leadership. Next, 30.3% feel that India is distracted with its internal and sub-continental affairs and thus cannot focus on global concerns and issues.”

To win over Southeast Asians, New Delhi’s foreign policy needs to be entrepreneurial. New options have to be created. It is telling that 30 years after Look East started, India’s relations with Indonesia, Asean’s largest country and military power, are unremarkable. Elite Indonesians ranked India near the bottom when asked which of Asean’s dialogue partners is most relevant. This is a country with which India has deep civilizational links and mirrors our cultural diversity and pluralistic democratic values. It is also a neighbouring country, separated by a mere 180km at the closest points in the Bay of Bengal. There are many reasons why India-Indonesia ties are merely good. Without active courtship, they will remain so.

Indonesia can be a vital anchor of a new regional quadrilateral security partnership that includes Vietnam, Japan and India, countries that have a common interest in countervailing Chinese preponderance. I recall many in New Delhi saying that a security partnership involving India, the US, Japan and Australia was impossible before Shinzo Abe proposed the idea of a Quadrilateral Security Dialogue in 2007. Geopolitical conditions create the potential, but things materialize when someone takes the initiative and invests effort in making them happen.

Whatever might have been the reasons India stayed out of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) five years ago, there is now a case to re-examine that decision. New Delhi might not get the same deal as the one it walked away from in late 2019, but could we not push for an enlarged one that includes trade in services? The Indian market is relatively more attractive to RCEP member countries after the US raised tariff barriers. Concerns about Chinese exports are real, but it cannot be anyone’s case that all Indian industries must be shielded from Chinese competition for all time. Staying out of the East Asian economic bloc is a recipe for isolation that India cannot afford.



MY VIEW | MODERN TIMES

Why all marriages are actually arranged marriages

MANU JOSEPH



is a journalist, novelist, and the creator of the Netflix series, ‘Decoupled’

Materialists, a delightful film, especially for people who are not wounded, wants to say that beautiful women want to marry wealthy and tall men, and wealthy men want to marry beautiful young women. And people who are not so sought-after choose others like them. Thus the marriage of the under-desired, too, is of two equals, of their two equal handicaps.

“Marriage is a business deal, and it always has been, since the very first time two people did it,” says Lucy, the protagonist who rates herself as too good for most men but not worthy of a multi-millionaire who is in good shape and six feet tall.

Can people who don’t have a business make a business deal? Can it be that marriage, too, came from the rich, like morals, beliefs, literature and college reunions? And others imitated it in a senseless way, as usual not knowing the origins of what they are aping.

Marriage as a business deal is at the heart of world history. Indian emperors married more than once as a way to form alliances. If

at all they married for love, it was because they could marry for business too. The marriage of Marie Antoinette to the French dauphin Louis was arranged to solidify an alliance between Austria and France against Prussia and Britain. Catherine was married to Arthur, Prince of Wales, to unite England and Spain. Even today, the wealthy tend to marry the wealthy. The idea that marriage unites two social equals to make them more formidable loses meaning the moment it percolates down the classes. For, is it worth the torture of a loveless marriage that results when a mechanic marries a nurse just because there is some vague commonality between their families?

Across the ages, in many regions, formal marriages were a thing of the rich, while the poor, if at all they did ‘marry,’ had informal arrangements. All considered, I cannot help but feel that marriage came from the rich and love came from the mad. That is why neither marriage nor love makes sense to most people.

In my theory of love, I see it as a primordial mental illness. Love’s feverish excess in some people is the illness; and its moderation in most people gives it the power to transmit itself as a great human virtue, like devotion, that everyone can attain if they are

so lucky as to meet a magical being. So, those who were afflicted by too much love sang about it, melting hearts and sending into the world one more quality of the mad that those who are not mad try in vain to acquire. All our turmoils are about this—the sane trying to imitate the insane. But the madness is so powerful that it has endured centuries, matching the longevity of the cold practicality of the arranged marriage.

There is, of course, a sort of love that can happen to sane people. Love is someone you want to keep looking at, and, for this reason, abduct this person for so long that you can’t bear to look anymore.

Materialists, written and directed by Celine Song, argues that love, if it happens at all, is fleeting. On the other hand, an alliance with a reasonable person who may not necessarily change your heartbeat but whose material possessions can make you feel valuable can last a long time. This is not what has made many people uncomfortable with the film, no matter what they say and

their claims of being romantics. The film unsettles many because it clearly defines the undesirable in the highest circles of the US marriage market—short and poor men, and any woman over 29.

Usually, the IMDB ratings of a film are a fairly accurate indicator of how enjoyable it might be, something most critics don’t help with. But some films, usually comedies, that upset a segment of people receive a lot of angry one-stars. So the rating for *Materialists* reflects not its quality but the irritation of people at being reminded of how unattractive they are by their own measures of what makes a person attractive.

The film is brutal about physical and economic attributes. Even men who are 5-foot 9-inches are reminded that they might be shorter than they think. And men who are not millionaires are reminded that they wouldn’t stand a chance of being with the women they want. And unremarkable women are reminded that they need to seek niceness as there is too much competition for

high net worth men. Given all this, the film must have been very well received by the self-assured to have earned a 6.5 IMDB rating.

Yet, the film has a quality that all mainstream films possess: it is cowardly towards the end. All its exciting discomforts are at the start. In the end, it recognizes that most of its viewers are ordinary people who need to be comforted by the myth of love. It reminded me of a line from *Game of Thrones*: “...everything before the word ‘but’ is horseshit.” In ‘bold’ mainstream cinema, it is the reverse. It begins with what it really wants to say; then it loses its intellectual courage and makes a compromise. So does *Materialists*. After showing the brutality of the marriage market, it veers into the magic realism of love. Thus, a girl who wants to exchange her beauty for money and status discards a great catch who does not excite her at all. This part is believable. I have seen it before in real life. Women and even men find their theoretically perfect mate, but they are not excited enough; they try hard to find reasons to be with that person but get bored by them. Maybe that is the evolutionary purpose of boredom. That is the only way a billionaire can be rejected. But then, Lucy chooses a loser for reasons she and the film concede they cannot fully explain.

8



THE INDIAN EXPRESS, MONDAY, AUGUST 25, 2025

THE EDITORIAL PAGE

WORDLY WISE

THE BAN ON SPORTS BETTING DOES EXACTLY WHAT PROHIBITION DID. IT MAKES CRIMINALS RICH.

— JAMES SUROWIECKI

The Indian **EXPRESS**

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

A TIME TO DECONTROL

Reduced fertiliser availability in a bountiful monsoon year is hurting farmers. Excessive controls are stifling fertiliser industry

INDIAN FARMERS HAVE been blessed with a good monsoon for a second consecutive year. Not surprisingly, they have responded by significantly ramping up acreages in the current *kharif* cropping season, especially under rice and maize. However, their enthusiasm has been dampened by reduced fertiliser availability. Crops need water and also nutrients for optimal plant growth and grain yields. This time, not only has supply been insufficient to meet the increased demand from timely and well-distributed rains, stocks of urea on August 1 were about 57 per cent lower than a year ago. The last couple of years had seen shortages of di-ammonium phosphate (DAP). This year, even urea and complex fertilisers are in short supply, with reports of farmers queuing up for hours before retail outlets and still unable to procure their bare minimum requirement of bags.

The situation has been blamed largely on China, which supplied 21.5 lakh tonnes (lt) and 22.9 lt out of India's total 80.1 lt imports of urea and 56 lt of DAP respectively in 2023-24. As imports from China plunged to just over 1 lt of urea and 8.4 lt of DAP in 2024-25, and hardly any shipments so far in this fiscal, it has led to a substantial depletion of stocks. But the government here is equally to blame. It probably didn't anticipate the higher demand, particularly for urea. Rice and maize areas are up 9.8 per cent and 11.8 per cent respectively this season. Both are high nitrogen-demanding crops, unlike pulses or soyabean that require very little external urea application and whose acreages have actually fallen. Poor demand assessment apart, not much effort went into sourcing more material from other suppliers — be it West Asia, Russia and Nigeria for urea or Morocco, Jordan, Egypt and Tunisia for phosphates. That complacency is hurting farmers in a bountiful monsoon year. Hopefully, there will be fewer issues during the upcoming *rabi* winter planting season. The lifting of export curbs by China following the recent thaw in bilateral relations should help.

The present situation is also no less due to the excessive controls stifling India's fertiliser industry. Firms cannot sell urea and DAP at more than Rs 266.5 and Rs 1,350 per bag respectively. The basic retail price of urea has been unchanged since November 2012, with imports, too, allowed only through state trading enterprises. It makes these fertilisers naturally prone to diversion and black marketing in the event of the slightest shortage. It's time to decontrol the sector and de-canalise urea imports. Let prices float and imports come in freely, which will incentivise companies to increase the supply of material to match demand. The government can maintain a minimum stock of major fertilisers to enable market intervention and prevent any price gouging.

THE WRONG ANSWER

The blanket ban on online money gaming is counterproductive. A more considered approach was needed

WITH Parliament passing the Promotion and Regulation of Online Gaming Bill, 2025, the online gaming industry has been dealt a fell blow. The government's rationale for imposing a complete ban on online money games, including both games of skill and chance, and also prohibiting advertising and promotion of such games, rests on a stated desire to address gaming addiction, mental health issues and financial losses. Union minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said in Parliament that, according to an estimate, 45 crore people are affected by such games, facing a loss of more than Rs 20,000 crore. Concerns have also been raised over some of these platforms being used for fraud and money laundering. While there can be no disagreement on the seriousness of these problems, and on the need to tackle them, it must be asked whether a ban is the best way out.

In an interconnected world, a ban would simply drive such activity to unregulated and/or offshore markets, which may be beyond the jurisdiction of Indian authorities. This will make it harder to address some of the concerns. India's history is replete with examples of how bans, prohibitions and price controls have almost never achieved the stated objectives. The move will also have significant economic implications. As per a report from PwC titled "From sunrise to sunshine", the real money gaming segment brought in Rs 16,500 crore in revenue during 2023, which was expected to reach Rs 26,500 crore by 2028, accounting for a significant share of the online gaming market in India. A complete ban will affect all companies involved in this segment — several online gaming platforms are said to have already suspended their operations following this development — and this will have implications for jobs, both directly and indirectly. The move will also impact government finances. After the GST Council's decision to impose a 28 per cent tax on online gaming, revenues from the segment rose by 412 per cent in six months, reaching Rs 6,909 crore, up from Rs 1,349 crore before that. The ban, which also underlines the capricious nature of policy, is likely to make capital, both domestic and foreign, more circumspect — as per a report from EY, total investments from both domestic and foreign sources added up to Rs 22,931 crore between 2019-20 and December 2023.

A more considered approach was called for. A Niti Aayog draft paper in 2020 had noted that stakeholders were in favour of a "light-touch regulatory framework for the fantasy sports industry". A prudent approach would veer towards providing greater regulatory clarity, putting in place mechanisms to address the concerns of the government, ensuring adequate checks and balances in the system and establishing efficient grievance redressal mechanisms.

FREEZE FRAME

E P UNNY



T V PAUL

US PRESIDENT DONALD Trump's recent decision to impose a 50 per cent tariff on Indian goods and to reestablish strategic parity between India and Pakistan poses significant challenges to Indian foreign policy. The situation is reminiscent of the aftermath of the nuclear tests in 1998. These regressive American actions may create serious obstacles to India's aspirations of becoming a major power in the short and medium terms. Yet, they may also present an opportunity for India to pursue a more assertive and confident foreign policy posture.

The Trump administration appears to have little appreciation for Indian sensitivities, discarding the major initiatives of its predecessors that sought to accommodate India as a rising power of strategic value to Washington. India's pursuit of strategic autonomy is rooted in its ambition to become a great power in the 21st century through a hedging strategy aimed at achieving peaceful recognition of its status. By treating India as it has treated other trading partners — pushing them into corners in the hope they will yield — the United States risks undermining a crucial partner.

It is important to recognise that such challenges are common for rising powers, which are often tested at different stages of their ascent. Established powers have strong incentives to contain emerging rivals before they become peer competitors, unless they serve a useful balancing function. Historically, rising powers often had to wage wars and endure significant hardships to achieve their strategic goals. In today's era, a peaceful rise is possible, but the process is rarely smooth. A great power must be able both to withstand pressure and, when necessary, to exert it on others.

The restoration of status parity between India and Pakistan has immediate regional

Test of a rising power

India should absorb pain due to Trump's policies, while building domestic strength, asserting itself globally

The restoration of status parity between India and Pakistan has immediate regional consequences. Pakistan's elite has a history of drawing misguided lessons from past conflicts. Today, Field Marshal Asim Munir may similarly be tempted to pursue provocative actions, convinced that Chinese weaponry and perceived backing from Washington and Beijing tilt the balance in Pakistan's favour.

consequences. Pakistan's elite has a history of drawing misguided lessons from past conflicts. Believing in fleeting opportunities, it has launched provocations — as in 1965 and during the Kargil conflict — under the false assumption that American and Chinese support would follow. In 1965, US-supplied offensive weapons encouraged Pakistan's belief in its military superiority, spurring a disastrous miscalculation. Today, Field Marshal Asim Munir may similarly be tempted to pursue provocative actions, convinced that Chinese weaponry and perceived backing from both Washington and Beijing tilt the balance in Pakistan's favour.

For India, heightened conflict with Pakistan and China carries another cost: Constraints on military spending. With active threats on two borders, India's ability to expand its naval power may suffer, delaying its ambitions to develop a true blue-water navy.

In the short term, US "status games" will hurt India. But great powers must be able to absorb pain while also imposing costs on others. To do so, India must continue strengthening its economy so that, like China, it becomes capable of leveraging economic interdependence to influence global actors.

Meanwhile, India should intensify its outreach to American policymakers, employing lobbyists and cultivating influencers to reshape the narrative in Washington. It must emphasise the risks for the US of alienating India, particularly the possibility of driving it closer to a China-Russia partnership. India should also generate innovative proposals with BRICS partners and within other forums such as the G20, while accelerating trade negotiations with a wider range of states.

At the same time, India must recognise that Trump's agenda of restoring American primacy will bring additional pressures not

just on India but also on BRICS partners and US allies alike. New Delhi's multi-alignment strategy should, therefore, be recalibrated to make BRICS more effective, beyond its current role as a talking shop. Gradual but deliberate efforts should also be made to expand the role of non-dollar currencies in global trade and finance, including the Indian rupee.

India is not alone in this predicament. US allies such as Canada are also grappling with Trump's realpolitik-driven pursuit of an imperial-style global order. Even if India were to accommodate Trump's demands, it would still struggle to appease him fully given his mercurial style. The most pragmatic approach, therefore, is to weather the storm: Intensify lobbying efforts in Washington, engage with key Republicans who may influence the administration, and, most importantly, implement economic and social reforms at home to attract global investment.

As I argue in my recent book, *The Unfinished Quest: India's Search for Major Power Status from Nehru to Modi*, Indian foreign policy has withstood decades of US pressure, often aimed at confining it to a purely regional role. Yet, the US has also, at times, accepted an assertive India. It is possible that a future administration in Washington will again adopt a more accommodating stance. To ensure it can withstand current pressures, however, India must use this moment to build domestic strength and emerge as a truly indispensable global player.

The writer is Distinguished James McGill Professor in the Department of Political Science at McGill University, Canada, and author of The Unfinished Quest: India's Search for Major Power Status from Nehru to Modi



AISHWARYA KHOSLA

DEAR READER, IT is with a heavy heart that we announce the death of the Critic. She had been symptomatic since the invention of the internet, muttering "to be, or not to be", but she took a turn for the worse after the emergence of social media. She is survived by her distant relatives, including the Substack essayist, the YouTube vlogger, the TikTok teen, and the Instagram aesthete. None of them will admit kinship. Each insists they are different, authentic, closer to "the people".

In her lifetime, the Critic was both revered and revered. She led a complicated life. She was (pardon me, but it is only fitting to be honest if a bit indelicate for a critic's remembrance) not much loved. Whether she wrote a favourable review or a scathing one, she was bound to be bombarded with allegations of being bought, biased, or just mad. Artists resented her, readers suspected her, publishers tolerated her only when she was useful. "Parasite", "snob", these were among the kinder epithets. "Those who cannot do, critique," they would say snidely behind her back. But, in moments of crisis, when art seemed too strange or too new, it was the Critic who explained, mediated, and defended.

In her youth (the 1950s and '60s), the Critic positively flourished. Kenneth Tynan of *The Observer* discovered playwrights such as John Osborne (*Look Back in Anger*), Clement Greenberg made Jackson Pollock possible, and Pauline Kael's "witty, biting, highly opinionated and sharply focused" film reviews made *The New Yorker* essential reading.

Even before this, giants such as Matthew Arnold argued that criticism should seek out "the best that is known and thought in the world", and T S Eliot declared that criticism

DEATH OF THE CRITIC

We bury her with unease. What takes her place is not democracy but algorithm

had two functions: "Elucidation of works of art" and "correction of taste". He believed that "honest criticism... is directed not upon the poet but upon the poetry", and that the critic, "if he is to justify his existence, should endeavour to discipline his personal prejudices and cranks". For Arnold, Eliot, and their heirs, criticism was a creative act, in and of itself. Writing a review was an art, a form of literature. It is no accident that literary criticism remains a mandatory course in most university syllabi. After all, culture without criticism is like a library without catalogues.

But alas, the Critic grew old. As the elderly are wont to, she demanded deference just as the culture stopped deferring. Roland Barthes had famously declared the "death of the author". The public, it turned out, was happy to declare the death of the Critic. Once upon a time, only the Critic could have a column, but now everyone does. "We are all critics now," as Rónán McDonald put it in his book *The Death of the Critic*.

Whether Amazon reviews, BookTok, Bookstagram, or Substack, judgement is everywhere. BookTok can sell more copies in a week than *The Times Literary Supplement* manages in a year. Bookstagram has made book jackets more important than the books. Substack newsletters promise "honest, unfiltered" thoughts. YouTube offers 20-minute "monthly wrap-ups" in which earnest 20-somethings hold up fantasy trilogies with the solemnity once reserved for *Ulysses*.

The brooding ghost of the Critic would have to admit (even if begrudgingly) that her usurpers have energy. They build communities, make books feel exciting; they draw in readers who might never read a review. But enthusiasm is not the same as evaluation. The Critic, bless her, believed in standards. She truly

believed some works were better than others, and that it was her duty to make the case.

Without her, who will tell us to persist with the baffling novel, to try the poet who resists us, to see beyond our limited taste? Algorithms flatter us with more of the same. The Critic annoyed us precisely because she would not flatter. She insisted the unfamiliar might matter. She dragged us, heels digging in, away from what is comfortable.

It is tempting to say good riddance. After all, the Critic could be pompous, prejudiced, and occasionally disastrous. But as we consign her to the grave, let us remember the role she played in keeping culture more than commerce. Would *Waiting for Godot* have survived its disastrous opening nights without Harold Hobson championing it? Would Virginia Woolf have found readers without sympathetic explicators? The Critic was often wrong, but sometimes, crucially, right.

And so we bury her with unease. For what rises in her place is not democracy but an algorithm. In the Critic's absence, the loudest voices win. Bestseller lists grow narrower, dominated by viral trends. Independent presses, innovative writers, and awkward geniuses risk drowning in the din.

Remember the Critic when you encounter a book that resists you. Remember her when you feel algorithms nudging you toward more of the same. Remember that art is not always easy, and that sometimes we need someone to argue for its worth.

The Associated Press's decision to end weekly book reviews marks not just an editorial shift but a cultural burial. No flowers, please. Hashtags will be just fine.

The Critic is dead. Long live criticism.

aishwarya.khosla@indianexpress.com

AUGUST 25, 1985, FORTY YEARS AGO

AKALIS' NEXT LEADER

TOP AKALI LEADERS failed to reach a consensus on an interim successor to the assassinated party chief, Harchand Singh Longowal. Both sides, one with SGPC chief G S Tohra and the other with former CM Parkash Singh Badal, are anxious to have an interim party setup in view of the election, and there are indications that once the jathedars elect an acting president or convener, he will be accepted by all.

SRI LANKA DEADLOCK

INDIA IS PRESSING Sri Lanka to come forward with a more comprehensive and acceptable set of proposals which would help

break the current deadlock in Colombo's negotiations with Tamil groups. Foreign Secretary Romesh Bhandari, at a meeting with the leader of the Sri Lankan delegation, Hector Jayewardene, is believed to have emphasised the urgent need for such an initiative. Tamil militant groups had rejected the proposals last week as being "inadequate and far short of meeting the aspirations of the Tamils of the island".

KANISHKA INQUIRY

JUSTICE BN Kirpal, inquiring into the Kanishka crash, has said it might be necessary to extract the main structure of the Air India jumbo jet from the ocean bed to determine the exact cause of the disaster. During his meetings with

experts, it was felt that if Kanishka had exploded at a height of 31,000 feet, at which it was flying when it lost contact with the Shannon control tower in Ireland, its wreckage would have been strewn over an area of several hundred kilometres. But the wreckage was in an area of a few kilometres, which suggests it exploded at 10,000 feet or less.

ASSAM ELECTORAL ROLLS

THE ELECTION COMMISSION has extended time up to September 27 for filing claims and objections in Assembly constituencies in Assam where the electoral rolls have not yet been finalised. In the cases where the rolls have been finalised, a month's time has been given to file claims and objections.

An overwhelmed humanity

Transformative technologies, left unregulated and unchecked, may gradually dumb us down as a species



VIKRAM PATEL

HOW OUR SOCIAL world shapes our brains is the most important discovery in the science of human development. This is best illustrated by two classic bodies of research. The first was a series of experiments conducted in newborn animals, usually mice, in which one eye was sewn shut, depriving the brain of visual stimuli from the external world from that one eye during a critical period of brain development. When the eyelid was later reopened, nerve recordings in response to visual stimuli showed that far fewer neurons activated in the deprived eye, while parts of the brain's visual cortex representing the open eye grew substantially. These experiments vividly demonstrated that visual experience relies not just on the anatomy of the eye (which was normal in both eyes) but stimulation of the brain circuits responsible for interpreting visual stimuli. Without these stimuli, the neural pathways, while physically intact, were functionally dead. This is the essence of what neuroscientists refer to as the plasticity of the brain; quite simply, the brain's structure and functions are shaped by experience.

But does this phenomenon extend to humans and, in particular, to adults whose brains were, for so long, considered to be static or, worse, to be condemned to suffer an inexorable decline with age? The iconic London taxi-driver study was conducted in the early 2000s, at which time the drivers were required to memorise the city's intricate network of 25,000+ streets and use this mental map to navigate their passengers on unpredictably different journeys several times a day. Using brain imaging, scientists showed that this intensive spatial memory work led to local enlargement of the posterior hippocampus of the brain, with changes strongly correlating to time spent navigating without external aids; in comparison, drivers who followed the same driving route repeatedly, such as bus drivers, showed no changes. This study not only demonstrated that repeated activation of specific regions of the brain by challenging cognitive tasks led to structural changes in the brain in humans, but that adult brains also showed neural plasticity. Of course, this also explains why speech therapy can help a person regain speech after a stroke even in late life.

Thus, science shows unequivocally that experience is essential for the brain to evolve its capabilities in diverse respects, from sensory perception and motor coordination to remembering things and making complex decisions. It also showed that failure to use these capabilities regularly can lead to the shutting down of entire brain regions. So, what's my point? That we should pause and ponder on how the takeover of our lives by digital applications, which have totally disrupted the way our brains interact with the environment, might shape our brains and, ultimately, our capabilities. This thought was triggered by a recent dinner. It was at a restaurant I had gone



C R Sasikumar

to several times but I had begun to rely on Google Maps to guide me. The directions being proposed on this occasion were clearly absurd, taking me through narrow residential streets that I had never driven through before. But I felt compelled to follow those directions and, at one point, I found myself totally lost. And then I remembered another ability I had lost: To recall phone numbers of even my closest family members (embarrassingly, including my wife). It seemed that my cognitive abilities to navigate spaces and remember things had been seriously impaired and this was unrelated to ageing. I wondered if these losses might be attributable to my growing dependence on digital apps supposedly designed to make my life easier.

The science of brain plasticity is showing that we are, in fact, losing a range of abilities, not just spatial orientation and navigation, but the ability to remember things and concentrate (no wonder newspaper reading is collapsing worldwide, especially in young people who were born into the digital age and whose brains never even had a chance to evolve the abilities I was fortunate to develop), and even our abilities to interact with other humans, regulate our emotions and plan for the future. As one example, habitual reliance on GPS navigation decreases activity in the brain's centres responsible for spatial memory and navigation. Psychological science is demonstrating that our shrinking attention spans, catalysed by the rapid-fire bursts of short text and images on social media platforms, are profoundly affecting our social behaviours, rendering us less likely to make or stick to plans, make real-life commitments and to engage with other humans. And thus, the greatest paradox of our times: While the internet supposedly helped connect humanity, it was also associated with an epidemic of loneliness.

These cumulative losses manifest in many ways, not least a deterioration in our mental health that has led governments around the world to impose strict regulations on internet use and, in particular, social media, for children and adolescents, whose brains are the most plastic. But now, with the advent of large language models (LLMs) and generative

It may well be that the generation of humans born in the new millennium will be distinguished from our ancestors in fundamental ways, with virtually no ability to map the world, remember basic information, synthesise knowledge and arrive at a decision. If these are the very features which distinguish us from our closest cousins in the animal kingdom, then will our brains wither to the extent that we will cease to be human? Contrary to the hype which accompanied the arrival of these transformative technologies as empowering humans, they may well become our enslavers.

AI, our most sophisticated capabilities to search for information, to synthesise it and to write are gradually being delegated to machines. Even more insidious is how conversational agents are replacing the need for interacting with real humans, offering easy pathways to engage in meaningful encounters that never disappoint you. What might this do to the essential skills that young people need to learn which enable them to establish long-term relationships? As the world wakes up to the spectre of unprecedented population decline, we should be even more worried about how AI may lead to fewer intimate relationships in the future.

It may well be that the generation of humans born in the new millennium will be distinguished from our ancestors in fundamental ways, with virtually no ability to map the world, remember basic information, synthesise knowledge and arrive at a decision. If these are the very features which distinguish us from our closest cousins in the animal kingdom, then will our brains wither to the extent that we will cease to be human? Contrary to the hype which accompanied the arrival of these transformative technologies as empowering humans, they may well become our enslavers. Indeed, while the AI doomsday prophets focus on technology overtaking humanity through undermining democracy and becoming completely autonomous, I fear that AI will overwhelm humanity by rendering us incapable of doing the most mundane tasks, gradually dumbing us down in perpetuity.

In the absence of any policy interventions to protect humankind from the perils of these technologies, it is up to each of us to do what we can. My resolution, then, is to be mindful of how and when I use digital apps (thankfully, some protective instinct had already ensured that I never acquired a social media presence). If I can muster the willpower, I may even switch off the internet connection on my phone until I really need it. In the end, that might well be the only way to preserve the essence of what makes us human.

The writer is the Paul Farmer Professor of Global Health at Harvard Medical School

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

“Trump, who claimed to want to limit China's global influence, in reality is actually bolstering it through his erratic foreign policy.” — **LE MONDE, FRANCE**

Political morality, by law

Constitution (130th Amendment) Bill frames a welcome new principle: Government cannot be run from jail, accountability cannot be postponed



GAURAV BHATIA

UNION HOME MINISTER Amit Shah tabled the Constitution (130th Amendment) Bill in Parliament, a move that has sparked fierce opposition. But it has also renewed hope for higher standards in Indian politics. This Bill provides that if a minister is arrested and is in custody for 30 consecutive days in connection with serious offences, he or she shall cease to hold office until released.

The Bill reflects the collective will of the country and the vision of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He declared his commitment to accountability and integrity with the words: “*Na khaunga, na khane doonga*”. The 130th Amendment is a natural extension of that promise. It institutionalises the principle that leadership must be clean and that governance must reflect the highest ethical standards. Under PM Modi's leadership, the new governance principle is that the government cannot be run from jail. Accountability cannot be postponed till conviction.

BR Ambekar warned that democracy in India would depend not just on constitutional provisions but on the moral fabric of those who hold office: “However good a constitution may be, it is sure to turn out bad because those who are called to work it happen to be a bad lot. However bad a constitution may be, it may turn out to be good if those who are called to work it happen to be a good lot.”

A minister takes an oath to uphold the Constitution and the law. When such a minister is held in custody, it signifies that serious charges are under judicial consideration. Continuing in office during this period creates a conflict of interest between personal legal defence and public duty, and public faith in government suffers irreparable damage. Ordinary government employees are suspended once taken into custody for a period of more than 48 hours. Why then should ministers, who wield far greater power, be treated differently?

Amit Shah was targeted during Congress's rule. When summoned, he resigned from office, despite political persecution. By doing so, he set a high moral benchmark. He was later discharged by the courts of the country. Similarly, Lal Krishna Advani, when accused in the Jain Hawala case, resigned as MP until his name was cleared. His statement, “I will not return until proved innocent,” continues to inspire.

Contrast this with political conduct today. Arvind Kejriwal ran his government from jail for six months. The Delhi High Court, while hearing a petition for the removal of Satyendar Jain, an incarcerated minister in Kejriwal's cabinet, observed, “Even though the court cannot sit in judgement of what is good or bad, it certainly can remind constitutional functionaries to preserve, protect and promote the ethos of our Constitution. There

is a presumption that the Chief Minister would be well advised and guided by such constitutional principles.” Another example is former DMK minister Senthil Balaji, who refused to resign despite being in custody, compelling the Supreme Court to reprimand his continuance.

These incidents expose the urgent need for codified discipline. The Bill ensures that morality is not left to individual choice but becomes a constitutional mandate. It is evident that there exists a vacuum around how to deal with detained and arrested constitutional and elected ministers holding public offices. The Supreme Court and high courts have also made serious observations regarding the need to fill in these gaps.

Many legislators face serious criminal charges, from corruption to organised crime. The Bill attempts to strike a balance between frivolous arrests and genuine judicial scrutiny. Being held in prolonged judicial custody is never casual; it means the judiciary has found strong grounds for arrest. Thus, the provision helps cleanse politics without undermining democratic representation.

The Bill builds upon existing constitutional architecture: Articles 75 (1B) and 164 (1B) disqualify defectors from holding ministerial office. Articles 102 and 191 disqualify MPs/MLAs upon conviction.

The Supreme Court in *Manoj Narula vs Union of India* (2014) observed, “... it can always be legitimately expected... the Prime Minister, while living up to the trust reposed in him, would consider not choosing a person with criminal antecedents against whom charges have been framed for heinous or serious criminal offences or charges of corruption to become a Minister of the Council of Ministers. This is what the Constitution suggests, and that is the constitutional expectation from the Prime Minister.”

This 130th Amendment does exactly this: It fills the vacuum between arrest and conviction, upholding the doctrine of constitutional propriety. Critics argue that the Bill is harsh. But a closer look proves otherwise. The provision only ensures temporary removal. Once released, the minister can be reappointed. The presumption of innocence remains intact.

Opponents argue the provision could be misused politically. But this claim does not hold ground: Custody is subject to judicial scrutiny. Prolonged custody (30 days) cannot happen without judicial satisfaction. The Bill applies uniformly across parties. The PM's office has also been kept within the purview of the law. Thus, rather than being draconian, it creates a level playing field.

The 130th Constitution Amendment Bill is not against any person or party. It is a mirror to Indian politics: A choice between clean governance and the defence of criminality. It honours the Constituent Assembly's vision, the examples of leaders like Advani and Amit Shah, and the Supreme Court's call for propriety. As HM Shah stated while introducing the Bill, its purpose is simple yet profound: To raise the moral level of public discourse and restore the dignity of governance.

The writer is senior advocate and national spokesperson, BJP



ISHAN BAKSHI

FOR MORE THAN a decade now, the common refrain has been that while India needs to increase the investment rate in the country, China needs to rebalance its economy away from investments towards domestic consumption, with household spending accounting for a greater share.

Both these countries have, for more than a decade, been helmed by leaders who have enjoyed and exercised power in a way that not many before them have. Yet, strangely, both these leaders, who sit at the top of their party structures in two diametrically opposite political systems, have been unable to — or are perhaps unwilling to — steer their economies in the needed direction. In India, animal spirits remain caged, with the corporate sector reluctant to invest, while in China, consumer confidence is close to historic lows.

It is not as if the ruling government in India can be faulted for not taking steps to increase investments and boost manufacturing. It has, for instance, put in place the production-linked incentive schemes and introduced a lower tax rate for new manufacturing facilities, while also ramping up public investments, hoping to kickstart a private investment cycle. However, there are few indications of a pickup. In fact, signs point to domestic private capital flowing out of the country. Equally worrying is that manufacturing and investment activity have remained extremely concentrated. In 2022-23, four states — Gujarat, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu and Karnataka — accounted for about half of manufacturing value added in the country.

The challenge to raise the share of manufacturing — in the absence of a broader manufacturing pickup, an investment boom is unlikely — is not peculiar to this government. During the UPA's tenure, the National Manufacturing Policy aimed to raise the share of manufacturing to 25 per cent of GDP by 2022. The current dispensation has set a similar target. But the sector's share has more or less remained the same (at constant prices).

The government now appears to have pivoted away from focusing on investments to boosting consumption via tax giveaways, first by lowering personal income taxes, and now by looking to bring down taxes under GST, an approach that only imposes further fiscal constraints on the state to spend on public goods.

In the case of China, rather than attempting to rebalance, Beijing appears to have doubled down on its investment-export strategy. The few steps it has taken to support consumption have been modest at best. President Xi Jinping's focus has been on developing new, quality productive forces in high-tech industries, while not neglecting traditional industries. The result: China's investment-to-GDP ratio stands at around 40 per cent, its exports have risen to \$3.58 trillion, and its trade surplus touched almost \$1 trillion in 2024.

The varying approaches to the economy also find reflection in the differing strategies the two countries have adopted towards their exchange rates.

Officially, the RBI does not target the level of the rupee. But, by repeatedly inter-

vening in the markets to stem the currency's fall, the exchange rate management strategy — S&P Global has classified it as a “stabilised arrangement”, a type of soft peg — has tended to adversely impact export competitiveness, while ensuring cheap imports and boosting household purchasing power. But this approach does mean that the trillion-dollar target set for the economy are more achievable.

On the other hand, China's currency management has, in the past, run in the opposite direction. An undervalued currency aids export competitiveness, while keeping imports expensive and reducing the purchasing power of households.

Rebalancing the Chinese economy away from investment towards consumption would impose costs — growth would slow down as the economy adjusts — that the country's leadership seems reluctant to bear, oddly, in a political system that, unlike a democracy, does not give its citizens a regular channel to express dissatisfaction.

But, in India, where citizen backlash is captured through the never-ending cycle of elections, the costs of muted investment growth, which results in poor job creation and subdued wage growth, find reflection in the political calculus via populist measures embraced to assuage discontent.

However, the pivot towards cash transfers — a recent report has pegged unconditional cash transfers at almost 1 per cent of GDP — and the emphasis on other populist and welfareist policies is in contrast to China, where Xi has been quite forthright on the ap-

proach to be adopted. “To promote common prosperity, we cannot engage in ‘welfarism,’” he has said, adding that “it is unsustainable to engage in ‘welfarism’ that exceeds our capabilities. It will inevitably bring about serious economic and political problems.”

Only structural reforms can address the structural issues in the two economies. China's challenges revolve around overinvestment and excess capacity, low household consumption and high savings, an ageing population and high debt levels, while India's problems centre around subdued investment activity, which runs alongside the deepening capital intensity of production, a growing workforce that faces inadequate job opportunities in the non-farm sector, low household savings, high levels of informality and low productivity.

While addressing these issues is harder than many appreciate, in recent years, it does seem that the policy focus in both countries has shifted away from prioritising growth. And so, in the absence of deep reforms, China persists with its debt-fuelled investment-export-led model of growth, the limits of which are being tested in a world that is either unable or unwilling to absorb its excess capacity, while India, in the face of sluggish manufacturing and investment growth, continues to rely on domestic consumption, fuelled by debt and tax giveaways.

The question is whether the required policy changes can be engineered or if the laws of path dependency will make progress difficult.

ishan.bakshi@expressindia.com



Ahmedabad



13

IDEA EXCHANGE

NEWSMAKERS IN THE NEWSROOM

ON THE RECENT BILLS

These three Bills are making the Executive very powerful, violating the principle of separation of powers, which is part of the basic structure... I feel this was the 1933 Gestapo moment in Indian political history

Manoj CG: On the last day of the Monsoon session, except for the debate on Operation Sindoor, there was not much business. The disruptions continue while the government passes bills without taking question hours or where the MPs have an opportunity to grill the government.

If the Parliament functions, it is good for our democracy. We owe our duty to the people of India who voted for us and made us MPs. So the Opposition has a very important role to play in asking pointed questions to the government and exposing it. And if Parliament doesn't function, the biggest beneficiary is the ruling party. But sometimes the Opposition will have to oppose certain important issues even if the government does not want to debate. When this discussion on Operation Sindoor took place, after all the debates and speeches, the government was on the backfoot. It was unable to answer certain questions. It is unfortunate that Parliament has not functioned and this government has an expertise in passing important bills in the dead of the night because of their majority.

Manoj CG: Do you see any difference in Modi 3.0 in Parliament?

There's no difference whether it is 2014, 2019 or 2024. They are as aggressive in terms of implementing their ideology and achieving their Hindutva goals. The reason is that the parties that are supporting the BJP, whether it is TDP, JDU, Chirag Paswan's party (Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas)) — they are not able to establish their importance. That is why BJP feels that it can go ahead. In fact, I read today that even their allies didn't know that they were going to bring those three bills.

Manoj CG: You were one of the MPs who raised objections to the introduction of the three bills — The Constitution (130th Amendment) Bill, Government of Union Territories (Amendment) Bill and the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation (Amendment) Bill. What are your main concerns?

This practice of sending bills to the MPs at 12.30 am should change. To sit and read and then speak to some lawyers who know what it is and then file a notice to oppose their introduction — it becomes very difficult. But the important thing, for which I had given a notice to oppose, was that this violates the theory of separation of powers. The Executive would be taking over the role of Legislature. These three bills are making the Executive very powerful. Secondly, it undermines our democracy, wherein as a minister one is answerable to the people of that state. Now here you are answerable to, what I call the unelected dictators — the bureaucrats. And thirdly, can any state government take a decision, which, in their opinion, is a populist decision? The bureaucrats will refuse. And lastly, you have Article 74(1) in the Constitution that says that the President should act on the aid and advice of the Council of Ministers. The Constitution says this. This bill says that the President can remove the PM. And wherever the governor is appointed by the Executive and any decision which any government takes, which is unpalatable to the Executive, then you have ED, CBI, IT entering into it. The main heads of all these organisations are appointed by the Executive. So you can expect disaster. This was the 1933 Gestapo moment in Indian political history.

Vikas Pathak: There is a line of thought that Muslims in India feel cornered but your politics ends up in seats where Muslims are in good population and divides the Muslim vote. Do you agree?

No, I am ready to debate with anyone who is making this claim. How is it that my contesting is helping X or Y? It has no role. The data tells you that the NDA Alliance is getting 50 per cent of the polled Hindu votes. Muslims are not only marginalised socially and educationally but also politically. The real question is how do you stop BJP from getting that much of the majority community votes? It is not me but if they want to give me the credit, I am ready to accept it because that makes me more important in Indian politics. But the real issue is this: even in Seemanchal last time, we were part of this alliance with Babu Singh Kushwaha. We were given 19 seats. We won five. In the remaining six, the RJD alliance won. And even if you add up the votes which our candidate got, that would not have helped the NDA alliance. The remaining nine were won by the NDA alliance. Our votes would not have really helped the RJD alliance to win. Now we have this debate about *chori*. Who stole my four MLAs? And when the same thing happened to the Shiv Sena and then in Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, it was called a murder of democracy. But you take away my four MLAs. Is that an act of Gandhianism?

WHY ASADUDDIN OWAIISI



Hyderabad MP and the current President of All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) Asaduddin Owaisi, 56, punches much above his electoral heft both inside and outside Parliament. A barrister from London's Lincoln's Inn, he is one of the fiercest critics of the Narendra Modi government in the Opposition

ranks and has slammed the three amendment bills introduced in Parliament. Known for his fiery oratory and forceful political rhetoric, Owaisi is among the few MPs who make powerful and well-researched interventions in Parliament. He was also part of international delegations post Operation Sindoor



ON A SHIFT IN HIS IMAGE POST PAHALGAM ATTACK SPEECHES

You don't speak for a country so that some Johnny would like you. You don't speak against a barbaric attack, which happened in Pahalgam, to appease some leader or some organisation

‘For so-called secular parties, we are only good for iftar parties, Ajmer chadar... (today) anyone can marginalise the Muslim community’

AIMIM Party Chief and MP Asaduddin Owaisi on allegations of vote *chori*, Modi 3.0 and lack of Muslim leadership at the national level. The conversation was moderated by Manoj CG, Chief of Bureau (Politics), *The Indian Express*



Asaduddin Owaisi (right) in conversation with Manoj CG, Chief of National Bureau (Politics) Tashi Tobgyal

Asad Rehman: Rahul Gandhi has been raising allegations of vote *chori*. There was a large protest in Delhi. Where is your party on these allegations?

Our state president in Bihar, Akhtarul Iman, is a petitioner in the Supreme Court. Before the campaign started, all Opposition parties, including the BJP candidate and some Congress leaders, went to the Election Commission (EC) and said that in Hyderabad Parliament constituency and one Assembly segment, where our MLA was there, these things have happened. So the EC took the media to three places with video cameras. There were more than 96 per cent voters living there and EC wrote a letter saying that you have given a false complaint. So I used that letter in the election campaign to show them what they are doing. If SIR (Special Intensive Revision) happens and if names of genuine voters are not included, then there will be questions raised about their citizenship. If you read the instructions given by the EC to Electoral Registration Officer (ERO), they are that if you find someone suspicious or you don't find them after three visits, you give it to the ERO and he in turn can inform the competent authority under the Citizenship Act 1955. So, for me, SIR is important. And our experience of Bihar tells us that the majority of Muslim names are being excluded or not included. That is very worrisome.

Jatin Anand: You were part of the international delegations post Operation Sindoor. There have been questions on whether India was able to sustain the narrative of war against Pakistan after the Pahalgam attack.

Indian government should have spoken to international journalists immediately after May 7. They didn't do it for reasons better known to them. The delegation, which I was part of, was headed by Baijyant Panda and wherever we went — from Bahrain and Kuwait to Saudi Arabia and Algeria — we were very well received. All these countries were telling us, why don't you speak to Pakistan? So we told them that we had spoken to them in the past — after 26/11 and then during the attack on Air Force base (2016 Pathankot attack). In fact, I criticised the PM for inviting ISI to the air base but nothing came out. I cannot speak of the others but in our delegation, we were successful in putting forward India's viewpoint.

Deeptiman Tiwary: Most parties, in the past 10 years, have been shy of talking about Muslims. Do you think BJP's

Hindu politics has changed Hindi heartland's minority politics? Or has talking about minorities become difficult for mainstream parties?

This whole politics, unfortunately, didn't start from 2014. It has always been there. But after 2014, it took a very definite and concrete shape. So in the present political environment, many parties who call themselves secular are very reluctant to talk about the issues pertaining to the biggest minority of this country. And you don't find them talking about the verdict that came on the train blast. In fact, some leaders of the Congress party said that the government should appeal. You don't find them talking about the second Malegaon verdict or the recent Nagpur exoneration of those eight youths. If you are reluctant to talk about injustice, then it shows what kind of politics you are doing. It's not a question of marginality. You don't talk about Muslims because you might antagonise and will not get the majority community vote. But if you are not talking about injustice, then what do you stand for?

Deeptiman Tiwary: Why hasn't an enlightened Muslim leadership risen at the national level?

How do you make a leadership? You make leadership by encouraging the community. Whether it is upper caste leadership, Dalit leadership, backward class leadership, the parties encourage them. You bring them to the forefront. But if you don't do it, BJP will never do it. They don't even

have a Muslim MP. The other parties have only made us showboys. We are only there to show that these people are secular. And we are only good for holding iftar parties, taking a *chadar* of flowers to Ajmer Sharif. We have been reduced to this symbolism. That is why I had said in UP 'Kab tak aap dari bichhayenge? Neta baniye' (Till when will you lay out the durries? Become a leader). No one wants to. When I talk of political empowerment of Muslims, it is looked at in a very weird way. Why is it that you have fewer number of Muslim MPs?

It is not because of Muslims who don't have enlightened leadership, it is because some people are not enlightened in terms of accepting the spirit of the Constitution. They have forgotten the independence struggle. We are living in an age wherein anyone can discard, marginalise the Muslim community.

Liz Mathew: What do you make of India's response to Gaza's situation?

We are just keeping quiet. This Modi-led government is not condemning Israel's killing of over 62,000 Palestinians. You have 20,000 children who are dead over there. Every day people are shot just because they are going to collect food and not a single word is uttered by the PM or by his government. And then you stand up and say, we stand for a two-state solution. If they come out openly and condemn it, which other global south countries have done, then that would be a great change. But if you want the global south to listen to India, then you

have to also listen to what they are doing. Now is the time for Mr Modi to be on the right side of history.

Aakash Joshi: What do you make of the relative silence of the national parties on the Bangladeshi issue, where a poor Bengali, often Muslim, is picked up without due process.

Why are we keeping that deposed leader in our country? Send her back. We will then have good relations with the present regime. You have these poor Bengali-speaking Indians who happened to be from Malda or Murshidabad, who were put on an aircraft and sent from Pune to Kolkata airport and then they were dumped in no man's land. And what right does the police have? Anyone who speaks Bengali becomes a Bangladeshi? This shows the xenophobia which has penetrated.

Shahid Parvez: After Pahalgam attack, many of your statements on Pakistan went viral and various quarters on the Right started seeing you in a new light. Why do you think this happened?

You don't speak for a country so that some Johnny would like you. You don't speak against a barbaric attack, which happened in Pahalgam, to appease some leader or some organisation. But if this brings them to, 'Oh, we didn't know this side of him', I cannot blame them. In 2012-13, too, I was part of a delegation which went to Pakistan along with Mani Shankar Aiyar and Yashwant Sinha. And in that group, there was Kirti Azad, who was in the BJP then; Supriya Sule was there. We said the same thing in Pakistan. Now they have been hating me for opposing the Bill. In a democracy, everyone has the right to criticise.

Vandita Mishra: The BJP's majoritarian politics excludes minorities in a very real sense, but what about the hesitation of the so-called secular parties in speaking up?

The so-called secular parties have just abdicated their responsibility. They have realised that we should talk less about Muslims and more about development issues and progress. How do you accept the marginalisation of 15-16 per cent of the population and talk about progress? The problem is with the Muslim community as well. They should do a political suicide by not voting for this party completely. Because even if you vote for them, BJP is still winning or some communal guy is still winning. Muslims should realise enough is enough,

You have to assert yourself and assertion does not mean helping the BJP. It means that you believe in the constitutional message that you must attain your rights. You have to achieve those liberties, that objective of fraternity, justice, equality. No one is going to come and give it to you on a platter.

Vandita Mishra: Whenever an election comes around, there is a conspiracy theory about you helping the BJP.

I want to ask them: give me proof. During elections, there are many theories which suddenly emanate and these theories start 48 hours before the polling day. How long can one talk about this nonsense when the reality is completely different?

Shalini Langer: The new NCERT module holds Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Congress and Lord Mountbatten responsible for Partition. Why is Partition still a debate?

The BJP uses Partition because they don't have a single individual who participated in the freedom movement. They can't show one photograph, one name. They're very good at appropriating Subhash Chandra Bose and Baba Saheb Ambedkar. Ninety per cent Muslims didn't have the right to vote. It is only the *jagirdar* or the zamindars who did. To blame Partition on Muslims is completely wrong. That's why I said I'm going to write a letter to the NCERT that please include Shamsul Islam's book, *Muslims Against Partition*, so that people know how Partition really happened. We lost one million lives. RSS has nothing to show. Yes, that country (Pakistan) was given a religion, but this country stood for pluralism and diversity.

Sameeksha Mishra: BJP often talks of appeasement politics. How does one talk about rights of the Muslim community but also not give in to their narrative of appeasement politics?

BJP does not believe in any kind of justice to the Muslim community because of their ideology of Hindutva. How you deflate this argument and expose BJP is by giving empirical evidence. For example, what the PM said about infiltration. Demography is changing. It's completely rubbish. The population decadal growth in Bihar and Assam is lower than the state... In one place it's lower than the national decadal population growth. They refuse to give a number on infiltration. How is it that Muslim numbers have increased in self-employment and have come down in labour? So one will have to speak and expose BJP.

14 E. EXPLAINED

THE INDIAN EXPRESS, MONDAY, AUGUST 25, 2025



@ieExplained
#ExpressExplained

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

Jan Vishwas 2.0: What the Bill to amend 16 laws seeks to do

HARIKISHAN SHARMA
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 24

THE Jan Vishwas (Amendment of Provisions) Bill, 2025, which was introduced in Lok Sabha last week, seeks to amend 16 Central Acts in order to decriminalise and rationalise certain offences and penalties.

This is the second Jan Vishwas legislation brought in by the Narendra Modi government. The first, Jan Vishwas (Amendment of Provisions) Act, 2023, decriminalised 183 provisions in 42 central acts administered by 19 ministries/departments.

"The 2025 Bill expands this reform agenda to cover 16 Central Acts administered by 10 ministries/departments...to further enhance trust-based governance for ease of living and doing business," the press release by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry said.

Why was the Bill brought in?

A database put together by the Vidhi

Centre for Legal Policy contains 882 central laws, 370 of which have criminal provisions for 7,305 crimes. More than 75% of all crimes are defined under laws that regulate areas beyond core criminal justice, such as shipping, taxation, financial institutions, and municipal governance, Vidhi's research found.

This overreach of criminal law is criticised for a number of reasons.

■ There are some severe punishments for seemingly small offences. For instance, one can be arrested in India for milking a cow on the street or not providing proper exercise to one's pet dog.

While many such criminal provisions are rarely enforced, they leave the door open for arbitrary exercise of power by the State and run contrary to the basic legal principle of proportionality in crime and punishment. Often, such laws are a product of outdated notions of morality and an overly paternalistic outlook taken up by the State, experts believe.

■ According to a 2022 report by the Observer Research Foundation, "of the 1,536

laws that govern doing business in India, more than half carry imprisonment clauses. Of the 69,233 compliances that businesses have to follow, 37.8% carry imprisonment clauses. More than half the clauses requiring imprisonment carry a sentence of at least one year."

Such overreach of criminal law, the report argues, "[has] created barriers to the smooth flow of ideas, organisation, money, entrepreneurship and through them the creation of jobs, wealth and GDP."

■ The excessive criminalisation further impacts India's already over-burdened legal system. According to the National Judicial Data Grid, as on August 24, there were more than 3.6 crore pending criminal cases in India's district courts, more than 2.3 crore of which are more than one year old.

"The criminal consequences prescribed for technical/procedural lapses and minor defaults clog the justice delivery system and put adjudication of serious offences on the back

burner," a Commerce Ministry press release from 2023, when the first Jan Vishwas Bill was introduced, stated, adding that the amendment "would go a long way in reducing undue pressure on the justice system, reduce the pendency of cases and help in a more efficient and effective justice dispensation".

What does the Bill do?

The 2025 Bill proposes amending 355 provisions, "288 provisions decriminalised to foster ease of doing business, and 67 provisions proposed to be amended to facilitate ease of living".

The 16 laws that will be amended are: Reserve Bank of India Act, 1934; Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940; Road Transport Corporation Act, 1950; Tea Act, 1953; Coir Industry Act, 1953; Handlooms (Reservation of Articles for Production) Act, 1985; Delhi Municipal Corporation Act, 1957; Apprentice Act, 1961; Motor Vehicles Act, 1988 (MVA); New Delhi Municipal Council Act, 1994;

Central Silk Board Act, 1948; Textiles Committee Act, 1963; Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority Act, 1985; Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Development Act, 2006; Legal Metrology Act, 2009 (LMA); and Electricity Act, 2003.

What are the key features of the Bill?

■ The Bill introduces concepts of "warning" and "improvement notice" for first-time offenders in 76 offences under 10 Acts, including the MVA, the Apprentice Act, and the LMA.

For instance, a first-time offender will be served an improvement notice for the use of non-standard weights and measures, an offence which currently carries a penalty of upto Rs 1 lakh. This will require the offender to rectify the non-compliance within a specified time, failing which they can be punished with a fine.

■ The Bill, like its predecessor, removes imprisonment clauses for minor, technical or procedural defaults for a number of of-

fences, and replaces them with penalties or warnings. For instance, it proposes a fine (between Rs 10,000 and Rs 10 lakh) instead of the existing three-month imprisonment for non-compliance of orders under the Electricity Act, 2003.

■ The Bill also proposes rationalisation of penalties. It proposes higher penalties for repeated offences through an automatic 10% increase in the penalty every three years. This is aimed at achieving "deterrence without legislative amendments".

"The goal of Jan Vishwas is to create a more business-friendly environment and promote ease of living by eliminating unnecessary legal hurdles and simplifying the regulatory landscape," Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal said on August 18.

This has been a key plank of the NDA government for the last 11 years.

The Bill has been referred to the Select Committee of Lok Sabha, which is supposed to submit its report by the first day of the next Parliament session.

EXPLAINED GLOBAL

GAZA: HOW THE IPC GLOBAL HUNGER MONITOR DETERMINES 'FAMINE'



Palestinians at a community kitchen in Gaza City in July. AP

A GLOBAL hunger monitor determined on August 22 that famine is taking place in Gaza, nearly two years after Israel launched a military campaign in the tiny Palestinian territory in response to the Hamas attack of October 7, 2023.

Who is confirming famine?

The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) is an independent body funded by Western countries and widely recognised as the main global system for measuring the severity of hunger crises.

It was set up to sound the alarm so that famine and mass starvation could be prevented and to help organisations respond.

The IPC is overseen by 19 major humanitarian organisations and regional bodies. It typically partners with national governments to analyse data.

How is famine determined?

The IPC system charts acute food insecurity on a five-phase scale. Its most extreme warning is Phase 5, which has two levels: catastrophe and famine.

If the IPC or one of its partners finds that at least one area is in famine, a famine review committee, led by up to six experts, is activated.

For an area to be classified as in a famine, at least 20% of people must be suffering extreme food shortages, with one in three children acutely malnourished and two people out of every 10,000 dying daily from starvation or malnutrition and disease.

The IPC says it does not formally declare famine, but provides analysis for governments and others to do so.

Even if a region has not yet been classified as in famine, the IPC can determine that households there are suffering famine conditions, which it describes as starvation, destitution and death.

The IPC relies on the UN World Food Programme and other relief organisations and government agencies to provide data.

Its preferred method for assessing acute malnutrition levels is to measure children's weight and height, or if conditions do not allow that, to measure the circumference of children's upper arms.

What are the precedents?

This is the fifth time in the past 14 years that a famine has been determined by the IPC, and the first time it has confirmed famine outside Africa.

The IPC previously concluded that there was famine in areas of Somalia in 2011, South Sudan in 2017 and 2020, and Sudan in 2024.

Some have criticised the IPC for being too slow to respond to serious humanitarian catastrophes. In Gaza, it has struggled to access data, and Israel has contested its findings.

While a famine classification does not trigger any formal response, it can focus global attention.

What is the current assessment in the Gaza Strip?

Of the people affected, some 280,000 are in a northern region covering Gaza City, which the IPC said was in famine. The rest are in Deir al-Balah and Khan Younis — central and southern areas that the IPC projected would be in famine by the end of next month.

The IPC said the analysis released on August 22 only covered people living in the Gaza City, Deir al-Balah and Khan Younis areas. It was unable to classify the North Gaza governorate due to access restrictions and a lack of data, and it excluded any remaining population in the southern Rafah region.

REUTERS



HARISH DAMODARAN

HOW COMPETITIVE and efficient is India's dairy sector?

That's a question being asked as the Donald Trump administration in the United States pressures India to open up its market to American dairy products.

One way to assess competitiveness is through prices.

Take corn (maize), where the farmgate price in the US is currently about \$4.5 for a bushel (25.4 kg). At Rs 87-to-the-dollar, this translates to a price of Rs 15.4 per kg received by the average American corn farmer. This is as against the Rs 22-23/kg rate at which maize is wholesaling in Indian mandis and the government's minimum support price of Rs 24/kg for the cereal grain.

American corn farmers, in other words, are far more price competitive than their Indian counterparts. Not surprising, given that average yields in the US, at over 11 tonnes per hectare, are more than three times the 3.5 tonnes of India.

But this isn't the case with milk.

Price competitiveness in milk

The US has a Federal Milk Marketing Order (FMMO) system. Under it, processors have to pay a minimum price for the raw milk they procure from dairy farmers. The price is fixed every month for four uniform "classes" of milk:

- Class I (for sale as fluid/beverage milk);
- Class II (for making ice-cream, yogurt, sour cream and other soft dairy products);
- Class III (for cheese); and
- Class IV (for butter and milk powder).

The FMMO prices in July 2025 were \$18.82, \$19.31, \$17.32 and \$18.89 per hundredweight (45.36 kg) respectively for the above classes of milk containing 3.5% fat, which amounts to Rs 36.7 per litre (one litre of cow milk weighs 1.03 kg).

That's close to the Rs 34/litre price that Maharashtra dairies are paying farmers for cow milk with 3.5% fat and 8.5% solids-not-fat (SNF) content. This makes the farmgate price of milk in India as, if not more, competitive as that in the US.

The competitiveness is more *vis-à-vis*



Bhavnaben Chaudhary, a dairy farmer, with her son and her Kankrej breed cows in Banaskantha, Gujarat. She sells around 150 litres of milk every day. Harish Damodaran

Europe. The average price for raw milk paid to farmers in the European Union was 53.17 euros per 100 kg in July, which, at Rs 101.5-to-the-euro, comes to about Rs 55.6 per litre.

Farmgate prices in New Zealand are now around 76 NZ dollars per 100 kg or Rs 39.9 per litre at Rs 51-to-the NZD. But this is for milk with 4.2% fat and 9% SNF content. For milk with lower 3.5% fat and 8.5% SNF, the price would be just under Rs 35 per litre. (Dairies are selling milk fat at roughly Rs 550/kg and SNF at Rs 250/kg; the realisations from the extra 0.7% fat and 0.5% SNF must be deducted to arrive at the equivalent price for 3.5% fat and 8.5% SNF milk).

Simply put, the milk prices received by Indian farmers are marginally below that in the US and New Zealand, and substantially lower than what European producers get.

Milk yields in India are poor by western standards. The average Indian milk cow, according to US Department of Agriculture data, produced 1.64 tonnes of milk in 2024. The corresponding numbers were 4.60 tonnes for New Zealand, 7.33 tonnes for the EU and 10.97 tonnes for the US.

The low yields notwithstanding, the production cost of milk in India isn't that high because dairying is labour-intensive. Cows have

to be fed and milked multiple times daily, besides being bathed regularly along with removal of dung and cleaning of their sheds. In addition, labour is required for planting, harvesting and storing fodder and feed.

Although dairy farms in the West have automated these operations — through milking machines, forage harvesters and balers, feeding robots, sensor-based cattle health monitoring, hot water high-pressure cleaners and bulk coolers — the low cost of labour makes it still cheaper to produce milk in India. Milk has a higher labour cost component relative to corn, soyabean or wheat.

Processing efficiency

The retail price of whole milk (containing 3.25% fat and 8.25% SNF) averaged \$4.37 per gallon or Rs 100.4 per litre (one gallon=3.785 litres) last month in the US.

On the other hand, the Gujarat Co-operative Milk Marketing Federation's (GCMMF) toned 'Amul Taaza' milk (with 3% fat and 8.5% SNF) is retailing at Rs 55 per litre in Gujarat and Rs 57 in the national capital region.

Taking a farmgate price of Rs 31.5/litre for toned milk in India and Rs 35/litre for whole milk in the US, after adjusting for the lower fat percentages, the Indian farmer would be

receiving 55-57% of the price paid by the consumer here. That's more than the 35% share of the consumer dollar for the US farmer.

If efficiency is measured by price spreads from the farm to consumer, the Indian dairy sector scores pretty high. GCMMF, in fact, claims its farmers in Gujarat are getting Rs 44-45 per litre for cow milk (3.5% fat and 8.5% SNF) and Rs 65-66 for buffalo milk (6.5% fat and 9% SNF) — much more than the Rs 34-35 and Rs 58-59/litre that private dairies are paying. Thus, it is sharing over three-fourths of the consumer rupee with the Gujarat farmer.

This is due to efficiency in procurement, processing, transport and marketing, enabling a compression of the value chain. A cooperative's aim is to maximise the ratio of the farm value of milk to the retail sale value of products.

The challenge

India's price competitiveness in milk derives primarily from the low cost of labour. That includes unpaid family labour having few employment avenues outside of agriculture.

The dairy farmer basically seeks to recover only paid-out costs (on feed, hired labour, veterinary care and other purchased inputs), while not imputing any value on family labour or owned land. Any money earned over and above pocket-paid expenses constitutes "return".

But this model may not be viable in the long run, with farm labour becoming increasingly scarce and expensive. As the reluctance to work on the farm goes up with rising education, even family labour has an "opportunity cost".

India, unlike New Zealand, has no abundant land to grow alfalfa fodder for cattle to graze on and sustain a low-cost pasture-based dairy farming system. Capital and energy costs are also too high to afford heavy investments in farm automation like in the US.

The US, incidentally, had a mere 24,470 dairy farms producing milk from 9.3 million cows in 2022. India has upwards of 50 million farmers engaged in dairying with some 110 million milk cows and buffaloes.

The future of Indian dairying may lie in a different model of selective mechanisation, boosting milk yields through genetic improvement and new breeding technologies, and on-farm cultivation of high-tonnage protein-rich green fodder grasses.

The focus has to be on reducing the cost of milk production so as to maintain the global competitiveness of India's dairy sector, which cannot be based on cheap labour alone.

Arctic sea ice melting has slowed, but here is why this isn't 'good news'

ALIND CHAUHAN
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 24

FOR MORE than half a century, the melting of sea ice in the Arctic has been among the most well-known indicators of climate change. But a new study has revealed that the pace of sea ice loss has slowed down in the past 20 years.

This does not mean that the Arctic sea ice is rebounding — the slowdown is only temporary and may continue for another five to 10 years, the study said.

The research was conducted by M R England, who led the study while at the University of Exeter (the UK) with his colleagues J Screen and A C Chan, and L M Polvani of Columbia University (the US). Titled 'Minimal Arctic Sea Ice Loss in the Last 20 Years, Consistent With Internal Climate Variability', it was published in the

journal *Geophysical Research Letters* earlier this month.

England, now at the University of California, Irvine, has told *The Indian Express* over email that the findings do not affect "fundamental science and urgency for climate action... Multi-decadal fluctuations in ice loss rates do not reduce the need for immediate action to mitigate climate change impacts."

EXPLAINED CLIMATE

Why has Arctic sea ice loss slowed down?

It has long been established that human activities — primarily, the burning of fossil fuels that emits heat-trapping greenhouse gases (GHGs) — have led to a rise in global temperatures. In the Arctic, this warming has resulted in the melting of sea ice.

Research has shown that the region has lost more than 10,000 cubic kilometres of sea ice since the 1980s ('Arctic sea ice thickness, volume, and multiyear ice coverage: losses and coupled variability 1958-2018',



Polar bears in Norway in 2012. AP

Environmental Research Letters, 2018).

Anthropogenic global warming, however, is not the only factor that affects the Arctic sea ice. Natural variations in the Earth's climate system are also at play. One such variation is the El Niño-Southern Oscillation (ENSO), which refers to a fluctuation in sea surface temperatures (SSTs) in

the equatorial Pacific Ocean that occurs every two to seven years. ENSO influences, alters, and interferes with global atmospheric circulation, which, in turn, influences the weather worldwide.

England suggests these natural climate variances could be behind the slowdown in the melting of Arctic sea ice.

"For the purpose of our study, we would be thinking of climate variations on a longer timescale, such as the Pacific Decadal Oscillation, which is similar to ENSO but on a longer timescale, and Atlantic Multidecadal Variability (a fluctuation of SSTs in the North Atlantic). These climate variations can bring anomalously cool waters into the Arctic region and lead to less loss of sea ice or expansion in some areas," he said.

According to the study, the melt rate over the past 20 years has been around 0.35 square kilometres per decade, compared to the peak rate between 1993 and 2012, which was at least four times higher, closer to 1.3 million square kilometres per decade.

Does this mean that climate change is slowing down?

Humans continue to release unprecedented levels of GHGs into the atmosphere, and mean global temperatures continue to rise. There is thus no indication that the slower Arctic sea ice melting implies that climate change is also slowing down.

England and his colleagues used climate models that simulate the historical period and explore different future warming scenarios, and found that such slowdowns in the melting of sea ice are expected to occur frequently. In fact, even under high GHG emissions, periodic slowdowns do take place.

They also revealed that the current slowdown is only temporary and there is a 50% chance that it lasts for five more years, and a 25% chance that it lasts another 10 years.

Think of Arctic sea ice extent behaving like a ball bouncing down a hill, England said. "There are periods in which the ball may bounce down the slope, come off at

an angle and temporarily have a near flat trajectory or even appear to be climbing. But we know that at some point, gravity will bring the ball hurtling down the slope," he said.

Just like the ball, Arctic sea ice loss may temporarily seem to defy expectations at present, but the melting will resume.

The study highlights that once the slowdown stops, there is a risk of a more rapid decline in sea ice cover in the coming years. It has shown that for the five years after the end of the slowdown, there is an additional 0.6 million square kilometres per decade of sea ice loss.

"In this case, when the ball starts to move towards the ground (this is analogous to when climate variability switches from contributing to sea ice growth to sea ice loss), it will do so at a rapid pace. What we find is that whenever the slowdown ends, the models suggest that the pace of ice loss will be substantially faster than the longer-term trend," said England.

Join The Official Private Channel

Get free access
to all Newspapers
Mentioned below

Uploading starts from 5am.
you can check specific uploading
time for each of them through
this Channel below

Click below to

Join

- | | |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| <u>1) Times of India</u> | <u>6) The Hindu</u> |
| <u>2) Hindustan Times</u> | <u>7) Live Mint</u> |
| <u>3) Business line</u> | <u>8) Financial Express</u> |
| <u>4) The Indian Express</u> | <u>9) Business standard</u> |
| <u>5) Economic Times</u> | <u>+All Editorial PDFs</u> |





Street dogs are woven into India's urban fabric, even offering companionship to the homeless. Such perspectives deserve a place in cultural discourse but cannot override the human right to access public spaces without fear of injury. Compassion is not annulled if dogs are removed from public roads; they must still be compassionately rehomed, sheltered and, when incurably aggressive or ill, euthanised humanely. A modern statute must replace the outdated Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1960. It should classify dogs as adoptable, shelter-bound or unfit and mandate municipal shelters with minimum standards. Crucially, governments should count stray dogs across States and determine the true cost of maintaining shelters rather than chronically underestimating it. This system should also have the support of the national veterinary cadre, better waste management and penalties for abandoning pets. Without these measures, urban India will keep trading visible menace for invisible neglect.

The world must stop Israel from
annihilating Gaza through starvation

Israel has long imposed restrictions on goods entering Gaza, that has been under Israel's blockade since 2007; it tightened those restrictions after Hamas's October 7, 2023 attack. But in March 2025, after Mr. Netanyahu broke a ceasefire, Israel imposed a total three-month blockade on all goods entering Gaza. When it began allowing a limited amount of food, a new U.S. and Israeli-backed organisation, the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF) replaced the previous UN-led food distribution system. The blockade, along with Israel's direct control of food distribution, plunged hundreds of thousands into acute hunger. When desperate, hungry Palestinians rushed to the limited food centres run by the GHF, they were shot down by Israeli troops and GHF volunteers in the name of crowd control. The UN estimates that more than 1,300 Palestinians have been killed at food centres since May. Despite mounting international outrage and allegations of war crimes, and Hamas's acceptance of the latest ceasefire proposal put forward by Qatar and Egypt, Israel has intensified attacks on Gaza city in preparation for a new offensive. What is unfolding now in Gaza goes far beyond Israel's stated aims of defeating Hamas and releasing hostages. The growing body of evidence points to an intent to destroy Palestinian life and society in Gaza itself. The most brutal of crimes are being committed against 2.3 million people – in full view of the world. The world cannot allow Israel to continue devastating Gaza any further.



The Joint Parliamentary Committee needs to carefully recalibrate the formulation of the Constitution (One Hundred and Thirtieth Amendment) Bill, 2025

There is also the problem of the “revolving door”. Because the Bill allows reappointment once a Minister is released from custody, there could be cycles of resignation and reinstatement depending on the pace of legal proceedings. Imagine a Chief Minister who is arrested and detained for 31 days, who is forced to resign, but later released on bail and promptly reinstated by the Governor. The State would have endured

In sum, the Constitution (One Hundred and Thirtieth Amendment) Bill, 2025, stakes out a significant normative position that citizens might welcome as a forceful stand against corruption and criminality. But its formulation elides the inherent tension between safeguarding democratic deliverance of justice and urgent demands for ethical governance. Unless the Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) carefully recalibrates to incorporate due process and institutional checks – the Bill is with the JPC – it could transmute constitutional safeguards into instruments of political exclusion, testing the delicate balance of India's democratic experiment. For, in the long run, power without integrity corrodes democracy, and integrity without fairness endangers it.

For a child, the first 1,000 days of his life are a critical window to lay the foundation for his future; more needs to be done in India

Additionally, the National Framework for Early Childhood Stimulation for Children from Birth to Three Years - Navchetana provides structured guidance in the form of simple activities for social and cognitive stimulation based on the age of the child. The framework offers 140 activities tailored to the child's age, presented in a 36-month stimulation activity calendar. It is designed to be used by parents, caregivers and Anganwadi or crèche workers, particularly during home visits. These provide an opportunity to learn through play-based activities supported by caregivers,

Investments in early childhood and investment are particularly urgent as we progress towards increased automation, mechanisation and an accelerated pace of technological advancement, which is likely to lead to less employment for low-skilled and unskilled workers.

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

Pujara retires

Cheteshwar Pujara's

All good things have to

come to an end. With 7,195 runs at an average of 43.60, Pujara stands tall in the all-time leading run-getters from India. But it is also the time that he spent at the crease and the innumerable number of balls he faced — 16,217 balls of the total 97,384 deliveries — that make him so special and unique.

His post on X says it all: 'Wearing the Indian jersey,

A BM-BME

The ASI is facing a credibility crisis

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) has once again drawn public scrutiny following the controversial transfer of archaeologist K. Amarnath Ramakrishna. His leadership of the Keeladi excavation in Tamil Nadu garnered considerable public and academic interest in the history of ancient Tamil civilisation.

The Keeladi excavations
Started in 2014, the excavation at Keeladi uncovered around 7,500 artefacts. The findings indicated the presence of a sophisticated, literate, and secular urban society and offered crucial evidence in bridging the historical gap between the Iron Age (12th-6th century BCE) and the Early Historic Period (6th-4th century BCE). Scholars have since referred to the site as part of the Vaigai Valley Civilisation. The Keeladi settlement could be a part of the second urbanisation that swept the Indian subcontinent between the 6th and 2nd centuries BCE.

The project took a dramatic turn when Mr. Ramakrishna was abruptly transferred to Assam in 2017. His transfer was widely perceived as an effort to downplay the findings. Tensions escalated when the ASI claimed there were no significant findings and halted the third phase of excavation. This sparked a political rift between the Tamil Nadu government and the Union government. The Madras High Court intervened, transferring the site to the Tamil Nadu State Department of Archaeology, which has since unearthed over 18,000 artefacts.

In 2021, Mr. Ramakrishna returned to Tamil Nadu as superintending archaeologist of the Chennai circle. In 2023, he submitted a report on the first two phases, substantiating the earlier findings. However, the ASI requested a revision of the report. Defending his conclusions, Mr. Ramakrishna cited methodological rigour, stratigraphic sequencing, material



Swarati Sabhapandit
Research scholar



C.P. Rajendran
Adjunct Professor at the National Institute of Advanced Sciences, Bengaluru

culture analysis, and Accelerator Mass Spectrometry dating of the carbonaceous material retrieved from various event horizons within the excavated sites. The episodes underscore the politics in archaeological practice and reflect a credibility crisis facing the ASI.

An inconsistent approach
The Union government justified its stance saying a single set of findings cannot substantiate alternative historical narratives without broader scientific validation. While this rationale champions methodological rigour and scientific inquiry in knowledge production, it also exposes the inconsistency in the ASI's conduct across other excavation projects.

Excavations at the Adichanallur and Sivagalai sites in the Thoothukudi district of Tamil Nadu exhibited a pattern similar to Keeladi. Although Adichanallur was excavated in the early 20th century by a British archaeologist, Alexander Rea, the site was neglected for nearly a century. When excavations resumed under the leadership of T. Sathyamurthy of ASI in 2004, notable Iron Age artefacts were uncovered, dated to be more than 3,000 years old. However, it took more than 15 years and court intervention for the ASI to publish the findings.

However, the ASI's excavation in Rajasthan assumed a different trajectory. The unearthing of an ancient 23 m-deep paleochannel in Bahaj village prompted some historians and archaeologists to associate the site with the mythical Saraswati River mentioned in the Rig Veda. The excavation report also claimed links to human settlements from the 'Mahabharata period', a controversial time interval debated by scholars. Such uncritical embrace of mytho-historical narratives stands antithetical to the principles of scientific knowledge production.

The ASI's conduct in these instances reveals a trap of methodological nationalism – a

framework privileging a singular, state-sanctioned vision of India's past. This approach is often legitimised through methodological rigidity, teleological interpretations, and the construction of a monopolised epistemic regime. The institution's pursuit of portraying India as a civilisational monolith has long drawn criticism from scholarly circles. Ashish Avikunthak (2021) highlighted arbitrary transfers, delayed promotions, exasperating work conditions, and inadequate infrastructure that stifle quality work in the ASI. Supriya Verma and Jaya Menon (2003) critiqued the Ayodhya excavation project for lacking scientific integrity. Jürgen Neuß (2012) and Dilip Kumar Chakrabarti (1988, 2003) pointed to the ASI's continued reliance on the outdated Wheeler method and the lack of comprehensive research designs as impediments to holistic interpretation.

The ASI has largely retained a closed internal review system. Most research is circulated through internal reports, institutional monographs, and bulletins. In contrast, its global counterparts such as the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut in Germany, the Institut National de Recherches Archéologiques Préventives in France, and Japan's Agency for Cultural Affairs regularly publish findings in academic platforms. This fosters transparency, methodological accountability, scholarly rigour, and enhance the accessibility of archaeological findings. It also invites global scholarly engagement.

Beyond these issues, the ASI's epistemic endeavour is increasingly subsumed by nationalistic fervour. The crumbling legitimacy of archaeological enterprise calls for comprehensive structural and institutional reforms, greater methodological and scientific rigour, financial autonomy, and a robust epistemic framework that embraces the plurality of India's historical past.

Vijay cannot bank on star power alone

Building organisational strength and meeting people are important

STATE OF PLAY

B. Kolappan
kolappan.b@thehindu.co.in



Last week, a sea of humanity gathered at Madurai, Tamil Nadu, to listen to Joseph Vijay, founder of the political party Tamilaga Vetri Kazhagam (TVK), who said that his party would script a new chapter in the State's political history in the 2026 Assembly election. This was not surprising – Mr. Vijay is one of the highest paid and most popular actors in the Tamil film industry. But as the past has shown, star power and large crowds alone do not guarantee political success.

When Mr. Vijay launched the TVK last year, no one was surprised, as the film industry is often seen as a springboard for politics in Tamil Nadu. The founder of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK), C.N. Annadurai; his disciple and former Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi; former Chief Minister M.G. Ramachandran (popularly known as MGR); former Chief Minister J. Jayalalithaa; and Desiya Murpokku Dravida Kazhagam chief Vijayakanth all had some connection to the industry. Chief Minister M.K. Stalin acted in the serial *Kurinji Malar* and Deputy Chief Minister Udhayanidhi Stalin has also acted in films and produced them.

In Mr. Vijay's case, it was his father, director S.A. Chandrasekar, who had political ambitions for him. Mr. Vijay had reservations about entering politics and this strained his relationship with his father. What emboldened him to finally test the waters was actor Rajinikanth's decision to stay away from politics due to health reasons after announcing his plans to launch a polit-

ical party. Mr. Vijay launched the TVK, hoping to occupy the space created by the absence of charismatic leaders such as Karunanidhi and Jayalalithaa. However, what Mr. Vijay has not realised is that both MGR and Jayalalithaa did not just rely on their popularity in films; they simultaneously built their political careers. MGR had been a member of the DMK from 1952 to 1972 and rose through the ranks. He played a major role in the party's victory in the 1969 election. He meticulously cultivated his cult image. His film songs and dialogues, loaded with political messages, prepared the ground for the launch of the AIADMK after his expulsion from the DMK.

A strong organisation is also essential for success in politics and matters more than image. When MGR formed the AIADMK, a substantial part of the DMK, which had strong organisational strength and experienced leaders, went with him. Even in the case of Jayalalithaa, who was a popular actor and a protégé of MGR, it was the AIADMK's strong organisational base that helped her sustain herself in politics. Elections have proved that she, unlike MGR, was not invincible in politics. Conversely, it was lack of organisational strength that reduced actor Kamal Haasan's political party, Makkal Needhi Maiam, into an appendage of the DMK.

Some may argue that Mr.

Vijay belongs to a different era, and all the factors that dominated Tamil Nadu in the past need not become decisive now. But Mr. Vijay also lives in an ivory tower. He projects himself as a saviour of the people of Tamil Nadu and his party as an alternative to other political parties, but refuses to meet the media and refrains from reacting to vital issues. When a protest against the Greater Chennai Corporation's decision to outsource waste management led to the detention of over 800 workers at midnight earlier this month, all the leaders in the State visited the workers. However, Mr. Vijay invited them to his house. Perhaps he thought that his visit would cause a stampede given his massive popularity, but the decision did him no favours.

There are a few factors that may benefit him. There is a clear lack of cohesiveness in the AIADMK, and the DMK faces anti-incumbency. Mr. Vijay has also said that he would be open to forming an alliance and sharing power with other parties. However, he cannot merely hope to take advantage of the anti-incumbency factor; he will need to split the DMK votes and receive substantial votes from the AIADMK to make a mark in 2026. Chief Minister M.K. Stalin has converted the alliance into what looks like a family and no party has shown any indication of leaving the DMK-led alliance. The DMK also believes that if the anti-incumbency factor works in favour of Mr. Vijay instead of the AIADMK-BJP combine, it can romp home to victory. Given these reasons, for Mr. Vijay, who has not made clear his ideology or electoral strategy even a year since his party's launch, the road to scripting history promises to be challenging.

Indians least concerned about the global economy: PEW survey

Only 49% of Indians said they were worried about the global economy; this was the lowest share among the 25 nations surveyed

DATA POINT

The Hindu Data Team

A 2025 survey by the Pew Research Center shows that among the people of 25 countries asked about perceived global threats, Indians were among the least concerned the condition of the world economy and climate change. Only about half the Indians surveyed viewed these as major threats. In contrast, nearly 80% of Indians identified terrorism as a major concern – one of the highest shares.

The Pew survey was carried out between March 24 and 30, 2025. Comparable data is drawn from Pew studies conducted in 2013, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2020, and 2022. Conclusions for nine advanced economies – Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Spain, the U.K. and the U.S. – were also presented separately in the survey of 25 countries.

The findings show that spread of false information online has overtaken the global economy and climate change as the biggest perceived threat. It continues to be seen as a major concern by a majority in the 25 countries, including the nine advanced economies.

In the spring 2025 survey, a median of 72% of adults across 25 countries said the spread of false information online poses a major threat to their nation. Another 21% considered it a minor threat, while only 5% said it was not a threat at all (**Chart 1**). In seven countries—Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Sweden, the U.K., the U.S., and South Korea – the spread of false information was seen as a greater threat than any other issue in the survey.

For the first time since 2017, adults in nine advanced economies viewed the state of the global economy as a bigger threat than climate change (**Chart 2**). This shift carries important implications at a time when nations are

under pressure to curb fossil fuel use and lower carbon emissions. It also reveals the public mood, shaped by anxieties over slowing growth – whether real or perceived – amid rising U.S. tariff pressures and the disruptions of two ongoing wars.

In the survey, a median of 70% of adults across the surveyed countries considered the state of the global economy a major threat. In Japan, Greece and Australia, the global economy was seen as a greater threat than all other issues.

A median of 67% of adults across the surveyed countries said global climate change was a major threat. Another 24% said it is a minor threat; 9% said it poses no threat at all. In no country surveyed was climate change considered the single greatest threat. As in past surveys, people on the ideological left remained more concerned about climate change than those on the right.

Across 25 countries, a median of 69% of adults said terrorism is a major threat, while 26% called it a minor one and 6% said it was no threat. In India, Israel, Nigeria, and Turkey, terrorism ranked as the top concern among the five issues. People in middle-income countries were more likely than those in high-income countries to view terrorism as a major threat (79% median versus 60%). Concern about the issue was also higher among older adults, those less educated, and those on the ideological right, including supporters of right-leaning populist parties.

While 49% of Indians saw the global economy as a major threat, 55% saw climate change as a major threat. This was among the lowest shares in the respective categories. By contrast, 79% of Indians said they consider terrorism a major threat (**Table 3**). Close to 70% each considered false online information and infectious diseases as a threat. In Argentina, Brazil, South Africa, and Mexico, infectious diseases were seen as the top threat among the five issues surveyed.

Cause for concern

The data for the charts were sourced from a survey conducted by the Pew Research Center titled 'International Opinion on Global Threats'

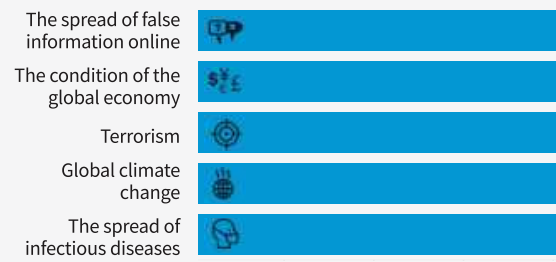


Chart 3: Country-wise share of respondents who said each of the following is a major threat to their country (in %)

Country	Spread of false information online	Condition of the global economy	Terrorism	Global climate change	Spread of infectious diseases
Brazil	84	77	77	77	91
Kenya	75	81	89	72	88
Turkey	66	79	91	87	87
Argentina	73	75	77	80	85
Japan	77	80	77	78	76
S. Korea	82	76	73	77	76
Indonesia	70	74	87	65	86
Mexico	66	72	79	74	82
France	80	76	84	78	56
Nigeria	58	76	89	54	74
Spain	73	71	69	72	56
Greece	72	85	52	75	52
India	70	49	79	55	71
Italy	72	55	67	71	62
Poland	85	55	59	55	60
U.K.	73	65	61	66	48
S. Africa	64	54	53	57	76
Hungary	72	66	39	72	54
U.S.	70	60	61	51	50
Germany	81	60	59	67	28
Netherlands	74	53	52	66	42
Canada	71	68	44	60	42
Israel	43	51	89	42	55
Sweden	74	54	56	64	33
Australia	65	71	36	63	39
25 country median	72	70	69	67	60

Methodology: In this analysis, median scores are used to help readers see overall patterns in the data. The median percentage is the middle number in a list of all percentages sorted from highest to lowest

1 People in India, Israel, Nigeria and Turkey see terrorism as the top threat of the five issues asked about

2 In none of the countries surveyed was climate change considered the single greatest threat

Chart 1: Median % who said each of the following is (a) _____ to their country. Around 7 in 10 adults **across the 25 nations surveyed** viewed false information online, the state of the global economy, and terrorism as major threats

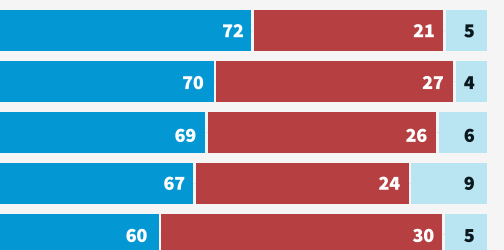
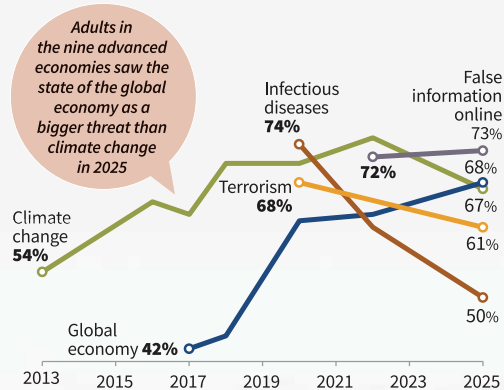


Chart 2: Share of respondents who said each of the following is a major threat to their country. Data in the graph pertains only to the **nine advanced economies** – Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Spain, the U.K. and the U.S.



FROM THE ARCHIVES

The *Hindu*.

FIFTY YEARS AGO AUGUST 25, 1975

NCERT wants change in mode of evaluation

New Delhi, Aug. 24: The approach paper, prepared by the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) on the curriculum for the 10-year school, has suggested that a public examination at the end of 10 years of schooling should be abolished.

The schools' assessment in each subject or unit should be placed on record and given to students. A record of internal assessment covering both scholastic and non-scholastic areas without an aggregate should be included in the school certificate, which should not only mention the student's evaluation in subjects, but also in co-curricular and other areas of character and personality.

The paper has emphasised that evaluation properly practised will influence teacher's methods and the study habits of pupils. Emphasis on the assessment of understanding, application and problem solving is bound to influence instruction positively. Use of improved type of questions is a real need to dissuade pupils from resorting to rote learning.

The main purpose of valuation, according to the NCERT, is to see how far the objectives set forth to be achieved through the curriculum have been realised. This process is naturally related to the learning experiences and methods of teaching that have been used in the process of instruction and learning.

Evaluation, in order to be used, says the NCERT, has to possess the following characteristics: it should give reliable and concrete evidence on the attainment of specific objectives; and it has to be comprehensive, covering all objectives and content areas in a particular course.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO AUGUST 25, 1925

Raw cotton

(From the Department of Agriculture)

The receipts of loose cotton at presses and spinning mills in the Madras Presidency, from the 1st February to the 15th August, amounted to 4,53,467 bales of 400 lb. lint, against an estimate of 552,700 bales of the total crop of 1924-1925. The receipts in the corresponding period of the previous year were 356,578 bales: 105,443 bales mainly of pressed cotton were received at spinning mills and 253,575 bales were exported by sea while 3,293 bales were imported by sea mainly from Bombay.

Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Amount being considered by govt. to support exporters

25,000 in ₹ crore. The government is considering these support measures for exporters under the Export Promotion Mission, announced in the Budget, for six financial years (2025-2031), according to sources. PTI

Application fees collected for 75 J&K Naib-Tehsildar posts

6.43 In crore. As per a Right to Information (RTI) query, each form is priced at ₹600 for general and ₹500 for reserved category. The money collected by the Jammu and Kashmir Services Selection Board shows that over one lakh aspirants had applied for the posts. PTI

Number of students to benefit from breakfast scheme in Tamil Nadu

20 in lakh. Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M. K. Stalin said that the breakfast scheme is now being expanded to government and aided primary schools in urban areas across Tamil Nadu. Mr. Stalin recalled, separately in a letter to partymen, how the State had pioneered such an initiative. PTI

Number of Islamic militants killed in Nigerian airstrikes

35 The strikes were launched on four targets in the area of Kumshe in Borno state, near the border with Cameroon, according to Ehimen Ejodame, the spokesperson of the Nigerian Air Force. Boko Haram, a group of jihadists in Nigeria, is considered one of the world's deadliest armed groups. PTI

Share of Bihar electors whose documents have been received

98.2 in per cent. As per the Election Commission of India, there are eight days left for people to file claims and objections to the draft electoral roll of Bihar published as part of the intensive revision of voters' list. PTI

COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

Follow us facebook.com/thehindu X.com/the_hindu instagram.com/the_hindu

How have deception techniques evolved?

What are AI-enabled X-Guard Fibre-Optic Towed Decoy systems? What are some other systems comparable to the X-Guards? How has Ukraine deployed decoys in its war against Russia? Do navies also employ countermeasures to protect warships? How has India fared with deception decoys?

EXPLAINER

Rahul Bedi

The story so far:

In contemporary warfare, deception has evolved alongside the increasing precision and lethality of modern weaponry. As combat platforms – from fighter jets and tanks to warships – become more sophisticated, so too have techniques developed to shield them from detection and attack. Over the decades, the traditional art of battlefield trickery has merged with digital-age innovations, incorporating decoys and countermeasures designed to confuse, mislead, or overwhelm enemy sensors and targeting systems. By creating doubt and sowing confusion, these decoys not only waste enemy munitions but also buy crucial time for the actual platform to evade or retaliate. Hence, decoys turn deception into a strategic asset as critical as firepower.

How has India deployed decoys?

During Operation Sindoor, the Indian Air Force (IAF) is believed to have successfully deployed the AI-enabled X-Guard Fibre-Optic Towed Decoy (FOTD) system –developed by Israel's Rafael – on its Rafale fighters as part of their electronic warfare (EW) suite. Although neither the IAF nor official sources have confirmed the use of X-Guard, former U.S. F-15 pilot Ryan Bodenheimer told Indian media outlets that it was “the best instance of spoofing and deception ever seen.” Confusion persists over how many, if any, Rafales were actually lost in a May 7 strike on Islamist camps inside Pakistan. The Pakistan Air Force (PAF) may have downed several X-Guard decoys – trailing about 100 metres behind each aircraft – misidentifying them as real targets.

Analysts believe the IAF's Chinese-origin J-10C fighters, armed with PL-15E beyond-visual-range air-to-air missiles, struggled to distinguish between the decoys and actual aircraft. Several



New forms: The INS Karanj submarine is equipped with a state-of-the-art torpedo decoy system. INS Karanj can launch marine commandos for special operations behind enemy lines. FILE PHOTO

missiles reportedly locked onto the X-Guards instead, leading PAF pilots to prematurely claim multiple shootdowns.

How does the FOTD system work?

Acquired via classified channels, the lightweight (30 kg), retractable, and reusable X-Guard mimics the Rafale's Radar Cross-Section (RCS), doppler velocity, and spectral signature across multiple radar bands. It can also replicate the Rafale's onboard electronic countermeasures – creating a convincing illusion for both human operators and tracking systems.

Its 360-degree jamming signal capability integrates seamlessly with the Rafale's SPECTRA (Self-Protection Equipment Countering Threats to Rafale Aircraft) EW suite. While SPECTRA manages threat detection, blocking, and onboard defensive measures, the X-Guard

adds a trailing expendable layer, jointly forming a multi-tiered defensive shield. Following Operation Sindoor, the IAF is reportedly fast-tracking additional X-Guard unit acquisitions via the emergency procurement route recently approved by the Ministry of Defence.

Comparable systems include Leonardo UL's BriteCloud, deployed on Eurofighter Typhoons, Sweden's Gripen-Es, and certain F-16 variants; and the AN/ALE-50/55 series from Raytheon/BAE Systems used on the F/A-18E/F Super Hornet. Some of these systems can also be adapted for use on unmanned aerial vehicles such as on Israeli Herons or U.S.-origin MQ-9 Reapers, albeit with onboard signal processing and remote deployment modifications.

What about land-based decoys?

Ground forces too have long relied on

decoys to mislead enemy Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance (ISR) assets and divert precision-guided weapons. Inflatable, radar-reflective, and heat-emitting dummy systems simulating tanks, artillery, missile batteries, and command posts are regularly deployed to bait strikes. From the 1991 Gulf War to the ongoing Ukraine conflict, such decoys have absorbed expensive munitions and disrupted offensive momentum.

With drones and loitering munitions saturating modern battlefields, these ground decoys have become increasingly sophisticated. Russia's Inflatech decoys can simulate entire armoured formations within minutes. Ukraine has deployed wooden and 3D-printed fakes to exhaust Russian drone and missile stocks. The U.S. Army too has trialled decoy vehicles to fool top-attack weapons like Javelin anti-tank guided missiles. China has also invested in camouflage and deception technologies across its ground forces.

In April 2025, the Indian Army issued a request for information to domestic vendors seeking physical decoys of its Russian-origin T-90S/SK main battle tanks to replicate not just its dimensions, but also its thermal and acoustic signatures to deceive enemy drones and munitions.

Navies too employ a layered suite of countermeasures, ranging from floating chaff and acoustic decoys to offboard active deception systems, to protect warships from missile and submarine threats. Among the most effective is the self-propelled Nulka active missile decoy, jointly developed by Australia and the U.S., that operates independently of its launch platform and mimics the radar signature of a much larger vessel, drawing radar-guided missiles away from their real target.

Ultimately, decoys – across air, land, and sea – have become indispensable to modern warfighting. For a relatively low investment, they deliver high-impact protection.

Rahul Bedi is a journalist based in New Delhi and Chandigarh specialising in military, defence and security matters.

THE GIST

During Operation Sindoor, the Indian Air Force (IAF) is believed to have successfully deployed the AI-enabled X-Guard Fibre-Optic Towed Decoy (FOTD) system on its Rafale fighters as part of their electronic warfare (EW) suite.

Ground forces too have long relied on decoys to mislead enemy Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance (ISR) assets and divert precision-guided weapons.

Navies too employ a layered suite of countermeasures, ranging from floating chaff and acoustic decoys to offboard active deception systems, to protect warships from missile and submarine threats.

What is the new Bill to remove PM, CM and Ministers?

What does the 130th Constitutional Amendment Bill state? Is there scope for misuse?

Rangarajan. R

The story so far:

The Union government has introduced the 130th Constitutional Amendment Bill, under which a Minister will be removed from office if they are arrested and detained for 30 days in relation to a criminal offence.

What does the Bill say?

The Bill seeks to amend Articles 75 and 164 of the Constitution that deal with the Council of Ministers at the Union and State level. It provides that a Minister, who has been arrested and detained for 30 consecutive days in relation to an allegation of committing an offence, which is punishable with imprisonment of at least five years, shall be removed from his/her office. They would be removed on the advice tendered by the Prime Minister/Chief Minister (PM/CM). If

the PM/CM does not tender such advice, the Minister concerned shall automatically cease to hold office from the 31st day. If the PM/CM is arrested and taken into custody for 30 consecutive days, he/she shall tender his/her resignation on the 31st day. However, the PM, CM, or Minister can be subsequently appointed on being released from custody. It also seeks to amend Article 239AA with similar provisions for the National Capital Territory of Delhi. These amendments to the Constitution would require a two-thirds majority in both houses of Parliament for its passage. Similar amendments have been proposed to parliamentary laws that govern the Union Territories of Jammu & Kashmir and Puducherry. These Bills have been referred to a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) for scrutiny.

What are the existing laws?

The Representation of the People Act,

1951 (RP Act) provides that any person who is convicted in a criminal case and sentenced to not less than two years in jail, shall be disqualified from being a member of Parliament or State legislature for the period of their sentence and six years thereafter. Section 8(4) of the RP Act provided that with respect to a sitting member of Parliament or State legislature, such disqualification shall not take effect if an appeal is filed against such conviction. However, the Supreme Court in *Lily Thomas* (2013) struck down this clause as unconstitutional. It must be noted that the existing law only provides for disqualification for being a member of Parliament or State Legislature and not for being a minister.

In 2016, the Election Commission had recommended that the RP Act be amended to provide that persons against whom charges are framed by a competent court for an offence that is punishable with imprisonment of at least five years

be barred from contesting elections.

What are the issues?

Firstly, it will result in elected representatives losing their position by mere police action even before the start of a trial. Secondly, it undermines the principles of parliamentary democracy where the elected PM, CM enjoys the power to choose their cabinet. Finally, it gives the Centre disproportionate power to initiate vindictive action against ministers in opposition-ruled States.

What should be done?

Criminalisation of politics is a malaise plaguing our democratic system. However, the issues surrounding the Bill need careful consideration.

Moreover, the Bill seems to try to address the effect than the cause. Reports by the Association of Democratic Reforms states that 46% of MPs and 45% of MLAs have criminal cases against them. It added that the chances of winning for a candidate with a criminal background was 15.4% as against just 4.4% for a candidate with a clean background. An appropriate step then would be to not field candidates who have criminal records. Parties should instil this self-discipline rather than provide tickets to tainted candidates on the ground of ‘winnability’.

Rangarajan.R is a former IAS officer and author of ‘Courseware on Polity Simplified’.

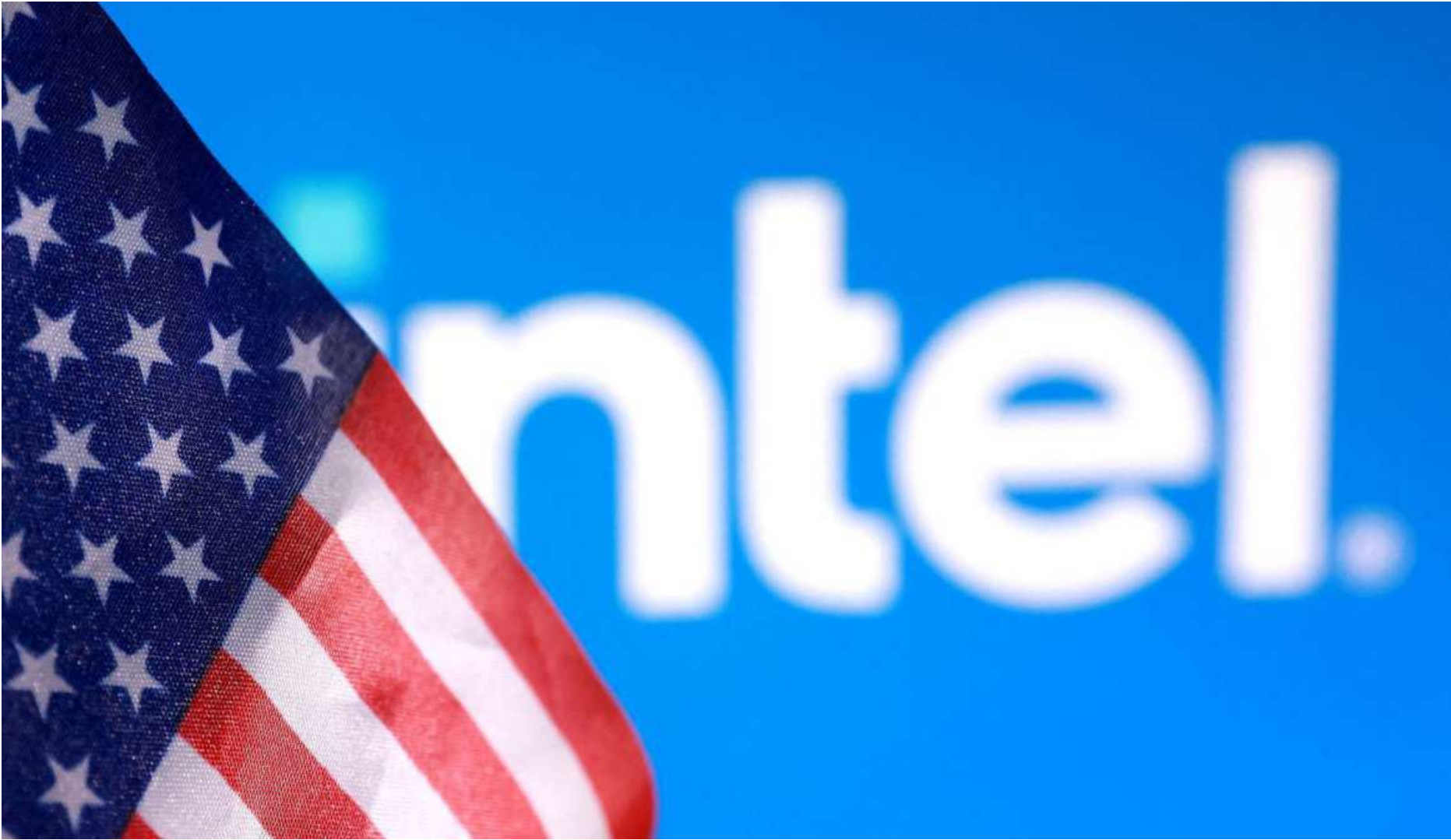
THE GIST

The Bill seeks to amend Articles 75 and 164 of the Constitution that deal with the Council of Ministers at the Union and State level.

In 2016, the Election Commission had recommended that the RP Act be amended to provide that persons against whom charges are framed by a competent court for an offence that is punishable with imprisonment of at least five years be barred from contesting elections.

Criminalisation of politics is a malaise plaguing our democratic system.

CACHE



REUTERS

Trump’s Intel deal: how the U.S. is reinventing state capitalism

Washington's deal to take a nearly 10% stake in Intel is more than just a bailout for the struggling chipmaker; it is a striking symbol of a new era in American economic policy, one that bears an uncomfortable resemblance to European state capitalism of the 1960s

John Xavier

For decades, U.S. politicians have looked across the Atlantic at Europe's experiments with state-directed industry with a mixture of pity and scorn. The French model of *dirigisme*, with its state-owned champions and politically guided investments, was often held up as a cautionary tale of bureaucratic meddling and economic sclerosis.

Yet, in a move that turns decades of free-market economics on its head, the U.S. government is now a leading shareholder in one of Silicon Valley's founding giants. The agreement for Washington to take a nearly 10% stake in Intel is more than just a bailout for a struggling chipmaker; it is a striking symbol of a new era in American economic policy, one that bears an uncomfortable resemblance to the European state capitalism of the 1960s.

Uneasy alliances

The deal itself, announced by President Donald Trump, is an extraordinary piece of political theatre and financial engineering. The 10% stake in Intel will not be funded by new money, but through a clever conversion of funds already allocated to the chipmaker through the 2022 CHIPS and Science Act, which was designed to bolster domestic semiconductor manufacturing.

The current arrangement with Intel was born of a hurried rapprochement between the President and Intel's chief executive, Lip-Bu Tan. Mr. Trump had

previously called for Mr. Tan's resignation over his prior investments in Chinese start-ups. After a meeting, however, the President's tone changed dramatically. It is a transactional, almost improvisational, approach to industrial strategy that has become a hallmark of the administration.

"I said, I think you should pay us 10% of your company. And they said 'yes' – that is about \$10 billion," Mr. Trump told about his interaction with Intel during an Oval Office press briefing on Friday. "He walked in wanting to keep his job, and he ended up giving us \$10 billion for the U.S.," Mr. Trump said.

This is not Mr. Trump's isolated venture. The White House has struck other unusual deals, including allowing Nvidia and AMD to sell certain AI processors to China on the condition that Washington receives a portion of the revenue. The Intel deal, however, marks the most significant direct equity stake in a major technology firm, prompting Mr. Trump to declare, "We do a lot of deals like that: I'll do more of them."

The parallel with 1960s Europe is compelling. Back then, governments in countries like France and Britain, alarmed by what was dubbed the "technology gap" with America, poured public money into creating "national champions" in strategic sectors such as computers and aerospace. The belief was that only the state had the deep pockets and long-term vision to build companies that could compete on a global scale. These policies, however, were largely unsuccessful, often resulting in uncompetitive, state-coddled firms that

drained taxpayer funds and lagged in innovation.

Intel, once the undisputed king of semiconductors, now finds itself in a position that makes it a candidate for such state intervention. The company has been haemorrhaging money, posting a staggering operating loss in 2024, and has fallen technologically behind rivals like Taiwan's TSMC. Its struggles to attract external customers for its manufacturing arm, and delays in construction plans in States like Ohio have cast doubt on its turnaround strategy. This weakness made Intel uniquely receptive to Washington's offer. Foreign competitors like TSMC and Samsung, which are also building factories in the U.S. with CHIPS Act subsidies, are far too successful and valuable to entertain ceding a significant equity stake to Uncle Sam.

So, this is not a case of the government picking a winner, but of preventing a national icon – and a critical node in the domestic semiconductor supply chain – from falling further into irrelevance.

A new kind of state intervention

However, there is a crucial distinction between this new American interventionism and its European precursor. The government's investment is structured as a passive, non-voting ownership stake. Washington will have no seat on the board and no formal governance rights, and has agreed to vote with the company's board on most shareholder matters.

This suggests a more sophisticated model than the heavy-handed state

control of the past. The goal appears to be to provide vital capital and a government seal of approval, ensuring the taxpayer shares in any potential upside from a successful turnaround, without succumbing to the temptation of political meddling in day-to-day operations.

Nonetheless, the risks are profound. The line between a passive partner and an influential stakeholder can blur, especially if Intel's troubles persist. Future administrations may not share the current hands-off approach. The government is now financially exposed to Intel's performance, creating a dangerous precedent where corporate failures in strategic sectors become direct liabilities for the public purse. This move fundamentally alters the relationship between the state and private enterprise in a way that could introduce new and unpredictable forms of political and market risk.

The U.S.'s foray into shareholder activism is a reluctant one, born not of ideological conviction but of geopolitical necessity and fierce technological rivalry with China. The long-held belief in the inherent superiority of the free market is giving way to a pragmatic, if uneasy, embrace of industrial policy.

The Intel stake is a bold experiment in this new reality. The critical question is whether the U.S. can learn from Europe's past, deploying the power of the state to nurture a strategic industry without smothering the competitive spirit that made it a world leader in the first place. The American taxpayer now has \$10 billion riding on the answer.

THE DAILY QUIZ

A quiz on Uruguay on the 200th anniversary of the declaration of its independence

V.V. Ramanan

- QUESTION 1**
Name the revolutionary group, led by Juan Antonio Lavalleja and Manuel Oribe, whose actions against Brazil ended in the foundation of modern Uruguay.
- QUESTION 2**
Apart from Brazil, with which other nation does Uruguay share its border?
- QUESTION 3**
What is the 'Orientales, la Patria o la Tumba' and why is it in the Guinness World Records?
- QUESTION 4**
In 2013, Uruguay became the first country in the world to fully legalise what controversial

- industry?
- QUESTION 5**
The 'Maracanazo' is part of the football lore of the two-time FIFA World Cup-winning nation. What is 'Maracanazo'?
- QUESTION 6**
The name of the country is believed to originate from the Guaraní language for the main waterbody. What does it mean?
- QUESTION 7**
Known for its strong secular tradition, what is Christmas Day officially called in Uruguay?
- QUESTION 8**
What is the traditional plant-extracted drink often consumed from a hollow gourd with a metal straw called?



Visual question:
Name this legendary footballer who won the 'Golden Ball' for the best player of the 2010 World Cup. AFP

- Questions and Answers to the August 22 edition of the daily quiz:** 1. In 1989, this landmark decision led to a sudden increase in the number of voters in India. **Ans: To lower the voting age from 21 to 18**
2. According to the Constitution, the CEC can only be removed from office in the same manner as _____. **Ans: Supreme Court judge**
3. January 25 is observed as this. **Ans: National Voters' Day**
4. X is an independent verification printer machine and is attached to electronic voting machines. **Ans: Voter Verified Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT)**
5. In the ongoing SIR exercise in Bihar, this document was not accepted by the EC as proof until the Supreme Court directed the body to accept it. **Ans: Aadhaar**
- Visual: This person designed the logo of the EC. **Ans: Amitabh Pandey**
- Early Birds:** Sudhir Thapa| Aditi Anandita| Navjot Singh| Saheni George| Vikash Kumar



KNOW YOUR ENGLISH

Her articles are always full of factoids

Don't be so sure of the promotion. There is many a slip between the cup and the lip

S. Upendran

What is the difference between 'fact' and 'factoid'? (L. Sudharshan, Nagpur)

The famous American author, Norman Mailer, is believed to have coined and used 'factoid' in his book on Marilyn Monroe written in the early 1970s. While a 'fact' can be verified, a 'factoid' cannot be. Mailer defines his new word as "facts which have no existence before appearing in a magazine or a newspaper, creations which are not so much lies, as a product to manipulate the silent majority." In other words, the original meaning of factoid was an unsubstantiated statement that is often presented as a fact in print. Over the years, the meaning of the word has gradually changed. A factoid no longer needs to be a printed statement; it can be spoken. It is a questionable statement that people are brainwashed into believing as being true because of the constant repetition in the media. Many of our politicians' speeches, for example, are laced with factoids rather than facts. Nowadays, the word is also used to mean a 'trivial fact' – an interesting piece of information which is of no significance.

Sashi wastes nearly four hours every day looking for insignificant factoids.

The statement that everyone in America owns a car is a factoid.

As far as the pronunciation is concerned, the first syllable is like the word 'fact', and the following 'oid' is pronounced like the 'oid' in 'avoid', 'devoid' and 'steroid'. The word is pronounced 'FAC-toid' with the stress is on the first syllable.

What is the meaning and origin of 'there's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip'? (Sankara Narayana, Hyderabad)

The word 'twixt' is the short form of 'betwixt' meaning 'between'; in fact, nowadays, many people prefer to say, 'many a slip between the cup and the lip'. This relatively old expression is mostly used to caution someone not to become overconfident about an enterprise. Although everything looks rosy right now, and success seems within reach, something unexpected may happen and ruin everything – the project may end up being a disaster and if it is a game, you might end up losing it. As our cricket commentators frequently say, you might end up snatching defeat from the jaws of victory!

The actors were certain that the shooting would go according to plan. The Director, however, cautioned them that there was many a slip between the cup and the lip. An hour later, it started pouring.

Sinner is the favourite to win the tournament, but there's many a slip twixt the cup and the lip.

upendrankye@gmail.com

Word of the day

Frigid:
extremely cold; devoid of warmth and cordiality; expressive of unfriendliness or disdain

Synonyms: arctic, glacial, icy, frosty, cold

Usage: She welcomed him with a very frigid greeting.

Pronunciation: newsth.live/frigidpro

International Phonetic Alphabet: /ˈfrɪdʒɪd/

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

Unjust move

Sacking authorities merely on arrest negates natural justice

The government sprung a surprise on the penultimate day of Parliament’s monsoon session by introducing a Bill to amend Articles 75, 164 and 239AA of the Constitution to disqualify the Prime Minister, Council of Ministers, Chief Ministers and State Ministers if they are arrested and detained for 30 consecutive days on allegations of offences punishable with five years’ imprisonment.



Two other Bills were introduced to extend the effect of the proposed Constitutional amendment to Jammu and Kashmir and Union Territories. The argument that a Bill of this import ought to have been circulated in advance and properly debated at the time of introduction was dismissed by the ruling BJP as a quibble against the noble legislative intent to purge corruption. A day later, Prime Minister Narendra Modi asserted in rallies that he wants the PM and CMs to be penalised for corruption but the Opposition is running scared. It bears reminding that an existing statute — the Lokpal and Lokayuktas Act, 2013 — has provisions for prosecution of PM and CMs, but is ineffective because the government has not staffed it adequately. The Bill is expected to fail in Parliament because the government lacks the required two-thirds majority. The BJP may well project the loss as evidence of the Opposition championing corruption. Cynical politics apart, the truly serious aspect of this move is that it upends the foundational principle of presumption of innocence until proven guilty in criminal jurisprudence. Violating principles of natural justice, the proposed law assumes guilt till innocence is proven. By the government’s own admission, of the 193 cases initiated by the Enforcement Directorate against politicians in the last ten years, only two convictions have been achieved. The government wants to penalise Constitutional functionaries with disqualification simply on the basis of arrest and unproven charges. It is also disquieting that all the 12 sitting ministers and CMs — namely Arvind Kejriwal and Hemant Soren — who have been jailed in the last ten years, belonged to the Opposition. At the same time, of the 25 prominent Opposition politicians facing action from central investigation agencies, cases were closed against three and stalled against 20 others when they joined the BJP. The Constitution guards against precisely such procedural persecution by not mandating automatic removal of PM, CMs or State Ministers simply for their arrest or custody. They hold office on the pleasure of the President/Governor and removal is a matter of either vote of no-confidence in respective legislatures or disqualification governed by the provisions in Article 102 which include office of profit *et al*. The Representation of People Act, 1951, at the same time, states that members of different legislatures are disqualified only after conviction in criminal cases. There are no grounds to overturn this scheme. If the objective is to instil accountability in public life, there are other ways of achieving that goal.

FROM THE VIEWSROOM.

T20 Asia Cup: Should India play Pakistan?

B Baskar

The T20 Asia Cup is starting on September 9 with the UAE playing host. The marquee match is of course between arch rivals India and Pakistan on September 14. This has predictably led to a round of hand-wringing here — should India play Pakistan in the backdrop of the horrific Pahalgam terror attack and the ensuing Operation Sindoor? India and Pakistan have not played a bilateral cricket series in the last 17 years since the 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks. But the two countries have played each other in ICC tournaments — ODI T20 World Cups, even when India has hosted it. After the 26/11 attacks India played Pakistan in the semi-finals of the 2011 ODI World Cup at Mohali with the then PMs of both countries in attendance. During the peak of the Kargil conflict India played Pakistan at Manchester in the 1999 ODI World Cup and there have been several instances since. That sport and politics should

not mix is a cliché that has been done to death, but they are both intricately bound to each other. After all the modern Olympic movement was birthed during the high noon of Western imperialism and, like cricket, was very much a part of the West’s ‘civilising the Natives’ agenda. In an interesting twist, the ‘colonies’ often used sport as a vehicle of national expression, so beating the former rulers in their own game acquired a special resonance. Sport is of course now a multi-billion dollar business and the BCCI is now the richest sports body globally. So commerce and politics collide in the most interesting of ways, with politics more often than not ceding space to commerce. So given the political minefield that exists between India and Pakistan, eschewing bilateral series and playing Pakistan only in ICC tournaments may seem the most ‘pragmatic’ option for the BCCI, which always has an eye on the moolah. But cricket fans of certain vintage can’t help looking back nostalgically at an era when Imran and Wasim used to bowl their 140 kmph deliveries at Sunil and Sachin.

Publishing defies canons of microeconomics

There are no entry and exit barriers and there is no capital requirement. Anyone can become a publisher so it’s perfectly competitive

LINE & LENGTH.
TCA SRINIVASA RAGHAVAN

Last weekend I attended a series of meetings convened by the The Book Review Literary Trust to celebrate 50 years of its existence. The overall theme of the three sessions that comprised the meeting was ‘Indian Publishing Since Independence’. The Trust brings out a monthly journal called *The Book Review*. The first issue came out in 1976 and since then it has been published without a break. It has been run, against all odds, by two ladies. One of them is my sister. I am a member of its editorial advisory board. My wife is a trustee. And, for good measure, I should add that I have written a novel that’s about publishing as it was in the 1970s. It is not very complimentary. My first job, by the way, was in publishing. I spent five years in a large multinational publishing house. After listening to the speakers it appears to me that nothing except printing technology and reader tastes have changed much since then. *The Book Review* journal was the idea of former president KR Narayanan and others, like the historian S Gopal who

was the grandson of another former president, S Radhakrishnan. They thought India needed something like *The New York Review of Books* or the *Times Literary Supplement*. The idea was to give a platform to publishers to get their books reviewed and the readers a chance to acquaint themselves with new ideas. The journal has lived up to those expectations entirely because of the two ladies mentioned above, who edit it. It could have grown into something very much bigger than it is. After all, it’s been around for half a century. But its paid circulation now is only around 15,000 including digital and libraries. As usual, money has been a huge constraint. Paradoxically, advertising support from publishers, who are major beneficiaries, has been grudging and sporadic. It is others with a proper sense of public purpose and duty, like Nandan Nilekani, who have been unwavering in their support. He funded the journal’s digitisation project. As a result, all back

It’s an industry that survives on making its workmen the brand, namely, the authors. The publishing house is a brand derived from them

issues are now available digitally. A subordinate theme of the roundtable was the role that reviews play. The publishers all agreed that they play an important role but only if it all amounted to free publicity. Reviews, they felt, are the perfect substitute for advertising their wares. It’s such a flawed view because so few newspapers now carry book reviews. And now AI writes reviews on demand. My colleague on this newspaper who co-manages the books page says there is now a flood of unsolicited reviews.

PUBLISHING VS ECONOMICS Amazingly, in spite of the griping, the publishers felt that their industry was growing at a nice clip. But they kept complaining that it was faced with a very bleak future. Reason: dwindling readers. And, they said, Covid had been utterly devastating because bookshops that had shut down never reopened. The truth about the publishing industry, however, is that it defies all the canons of microeconomics. Thus, there are no entry and exit barriers and there is no capital requirement. Anyone can become a publisher so it’s perfectly competitive. It’s also a multi-product industry, with knobs on. Not only is every single book distinct from every other one, every firm is producing books that

compete with other books published by itself. That’s true of many other things, like soaps and shoes but none of them has the uniqueness feature of books. It’s an industry that survives on making its workmen the brand, namely, the authors. The publishing house is a brand derived from them. The idea of a ‘reputable’ publisher is therefore complete nonsense. What matters is sales. That’s natural in a high risk, low margin business. That’s also the reason why big publishers offer such huge advances. It’s like a racetrack deriving its reputation from the horses that race on it. Pricing is based on what the overall perception is of what the market can bear. That perception is usually three or four times what it actually can. That is why there is such a thriving market for second hand and discounted books. The industry is also a major gambling den because no one really knows which book will succeed. Generally the ratio is one in 100,000. That’s the same as the probability of anyone winning a small lottery. Then there is distribution. The wholesalers demand discounts of up to 50 per cent. And they reserve the right to return unsold copies. Just imagine this happening to, say, bananas. Both are highly perishable. I am not saying this. One of the publishers said it. I have only added the banana bit.

Judicial implications of ‘emergency’ tariff powers

The tariffs didn’t stop drugs, but they disrupted supply chains and turned US into an unpredictable trade partner

N Srinivasa Reddy
Meera Laetitia B Aranha

When President Donald Trump issued Executive Order 14157 and declared a national emergency under the law to target violent drug cartels, the aim sounded urgent and justified. He blamed foreign actors, cartels in Latin America, lax border enforcement in Canada, and chemical suppliers in China for flooding the US with deadly fentanyl and other illicit drugs, along with violent criminals and vicious gangs. In response, his administration imposed sweeping ad valorem tariffs ranging from 10 to 50 per cent, not just on targeted industries or nations, but eventually on all imports from nearly every US trading partner. What started as a measure to tackle the drug trafficking cartels and violent gangs soon expanded to all imports across all trading partners. Several businesses and states filed a case in the United States Court of International Trade called *V.O.S. Selections, Inc. v. USA* (2025). The three-member court ruled that executive orders from President Trump, which imposed broad tariffs under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA), are invalid. These tariffs affected imports from Canada, Mexico, China, and other trading partners, citing national

emergencies about drug trafficking and trade imbalances. Instead of simply issuing a stay, the court took the extraordinary step of releasing a summary judgment. The court’s decision not only cancels these tariffs but also confirms the limits of executive power in trade issues. While this case is with the appeals court, the verdict has significant political and economic effects for the world. **FOUR IMPLICATIONS** Politically, it has four implications. First, the court found that the executive orders issued by President Trump were effectively usurping legislative powers. The court ruled that national emergency powers do not allow the President to unilaterally change trade policy. This may set a precedent that could constrain future administrations from using emergency powers as a backdoor to implement broad trade policies without Congressional approval. Second, the judgment differentiates between legitimate uses of the IEEPA and overreach. IEEPA was created to allow the President to address “unusual and extraordinary threats” to national security, foreign policy, or the economy. The court found that tariffs imposed under the guise of national emergencies, such as drug trafficking and trade deficits, did not meet the necessary legal standards. Thirdly, this verdict restricts the



TRUMP TARIFFS. Leading to higher costs for US businesses and consumer

scope of the IEEPA only to trade matters. It signals to future administrations that national emergencies used to justify broad measures like tariffs must be directly tied to specific trade threats. Finally, the judgment affects US trade relations in both the short and long term. The tariffs didn’t stop drugs, but they disrupted supply chains, undermined goodwill, and made the US an unpredictable trade partner. The tariffs also led to higher costs for US businesses and consumers. Furthermore, retaliatory measures from trading partners led to lower exports. If the tariffs are removed, it may help reduce tensions and create more stable trade flows. Beyond the political ramifications, the court order exposes a fundamental economic flaw: tariffs are ineffective

against criminal enterprises. Drugs are already banned, and traffickers operate outside legal trade channels, and they don’t pay customs duties. Yet, under the guise of a national emergency, the Trump administration imposed sweeping tariffs not just on illicit goods, but on all imports from all trading partners, damaging legitimate commerce. **MISUSE OF NATIONAL SECURITY** Combating drug trafficking requires law enforcement, intelligence cooperation, and bilateral cooperation, not tariffs. The solution is to target criminals, not trade. The Trump administration’s misuse of national security to justify broad tariffs marked a troubling shift, turning emergency powers into a cover for trade protectionism. This not only undermines democratic norms and global trust in the rule-based international order but also invites similar overreach by other nations, eroding the rules-based trade order. The court’s ruling is a crucial correction, a clear message that tariffs require legal authority and that criminal threats demand law enforcement, not economic punishment of lawful trade. The judgment is under appeal, but the logic of the court is impeccable, with implications for all trading countries.

The writers are faculty, TA Pai Management Institute, Manipal

BELOW THE LINE



Full of beans The Soy Connext 2025 inaugural in Washington had a few humorous moments, particularly when a reference was made to US President Donald Trump. It was an indication of how people in

the US are shocked by Trump’s statements. For soyabean growers, who attended the event, the concern was over China not buying any beans from the new crop, which is due in a couple of weeks. Jim Sutter, CEO of the US Soybean Export Council, said his organisation had set up a special elevator for the US President to come and make an announcement at the event, leaving the audience bursting out in laughter. **Bharat Atta** The Centre plans to include soya flour in Bharat Atta as part of its efforts to address protein deficiency

among the citizens and boost soyabean consumption. A little bird says a similar attempt was made in Gujarat in 2012, when Prime Minister Narendra Modi was its chief minister. However, with irregularities taking place, the scheme wound up soon. Have Modi and his men drawn lessons from that experience? **Trump effect** The CEO of a leading auto-component maker is so worried about Trump tariffs that the first thing he does early morning these days is read *Financial Times* and *Wall Street Journal* rather than Indian newspapers.

Earlier, the first thing he did in the morning was read Indian newspapers. “I am reading foreign newspapers to know what Trump had to say on the tariff. It’s so worrying and unpredictable,” he says. **Over to ChatGPT** Is it keeping with technology or maintaining secrecy? A hack in Telangana messaged a senior official in the State finance department wanting to know if the official can spare some time. What surprised the scribe was the response: “Message on ChatGPT!” The confused scribe wanted to

understand how many channels of communications are to be used to get a simple answer — SMS, WhatsApp or ChatGPT! **Marriage advice** Social media was buzzing with some banter from Tejaswi Yadav at an event in Bihar. To a question on Chirag Paswan, Yadav went on to say that we should stick to issues. My advice to him is: “I am requesting him (Chirag Paswan) to get married soon!” Hearing this, Rahul Gandhi, who was sitting beside Yadav, said: “This is applicable for me too...”, easing the atmosphere! **Our Bureaus**

The fit framework

The monetary policy framework has worked well

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has released a discussion paper on the monetary-policy framework. As the second review of the flexible inflation-targeting regime approaches in March 2026, the central bank has opened the floor for discussion. The paper makes clear that the current framework, anchored to a 4 per cent target with a 2 percentage point tolerance band on both sides, has served the Indian economy well since its adoption in 2016. The trend-inflation rate has hovered close to the target, except mostly in times of excess volatility, and the credibility of the central bank has visibly strengthened. Household inflation expectations, which spiked during the pandemic, have since moderated. Yet, since the target is to be reviewed by the central government in consultation with the RBI every five years, it has done well to open the floor for a broader discussion. The paper poses four key questions for public feedback. First, whether the headline- or core-inflation rate (non-food, non-fuel) should guide monetary policy; second, whether the 4 per cent target remains appropriate; third, whether the 2 percentage point band remains suitable; finally, if the framework should stick to a fixed-point target or move to a range to provide greater flexibility. These questions go to the heart of balancing credibility with adaptability.

On the first question, the paper's reasoning is sound. To ignore the food-inflation rate in a country like India would be to ignore the welfare of millions for whom food expenditure is the dominant share of the household budget. The core-inflation rate may be less volatile, but the headline-inflation rate better reflects the cost of living. Moreover, international practice overwhelmingly favours the headline-inflation rate as the target metric, regardless of income levels or development stage. Uganda remains the exception among the inflation-targeting countries. For India, this rate must therefore remain the anchor. What is needed is a periodic review of the consumer-price index to better reflect household consumption. On the 4 per cent inflation target, it is worth remembering that it was chosen after much consideration. Raising the target risks being seen by markets as dilution of price discipline. No major central bank has increased the target in the recent past. Also, empirical evidence supports the 4 per cent target. Thus, it would make sense to stick to the target for a considerable period and build credibility before looking at the possibility of a change.

On the third question of the tolerance band, the 2 percentage point band cushion has provided much-needed flexibility, especially in periods of supply shocks, such as the Ukraine war. The upper end is also determined by the threshold level of inflation, beyond which it becomes detrimental to growth. Several economies have narrowed the band over time. However, for India, given the volatility in food prices, it makes sense to retain the band for now. Finally, should the target itself be replaced by a range? A range would undoubtedly provide the RBI with more flexibility. But there is a danger that it might blur communication and affect expectations. For a country where inflation expectations have only recently been firmly tamed, credibility is best preserved by a point target, with the band serving as a practical margin for shocks. The experience of the past decade shows that inflation targeting has served India well, and it would be appropriate to continue with the existing framework until there is enough empirical evidence to suggest a need for change.

India on the AI map

Policy structures need to evolve

India is high on the priority list of OpenAI. It is looking to establish its physical presence here and is in the process of opening an office. It also recently launched a low-cost subscription plan, ChatGPT (generative pre-training transformer) Go, specifically for Indian users, which would affect the dynamics of India's artificial intelligence (AI) ecosystem. The new offer, at ₹399 per month, is much cheaper than the top-end Pro plan of ₹19,999, and it offers enhanced message limits, image-generation capabilities, file-uploading capabilities, chat memory, and data analysis. These features are supported by the latest model, GPT-5, and the plan will offer more support for local languages. OpenAI Chief Executive Officer Sam Altman has argued that this is, in some sense, a test launch into its second-largest market, and it will roll out similar plans worldwide after it has absorbed feedback and responses. From OpenAI's perspective, this may help monetise usage of an already popular tool. It is also a response to competition arising from Airtel's bundled offer of a year's free subscription to ChatGPT's rival Perplexity Pro (worth roughly ₹17,000 a year) to post-paid subscribers.

For many Indians, access to affordable AI tools could be a game-changer. It will enable small businesses and individuals (especially students) to use such tools more effectively, and thus, work out more use cases and solutions as they play with different possibilities. Users may find ChatGPT becoming a force multiplier as they learn how to organise work and create custom GPTs to build AI tools tailored to their specific needs. OpenAI may hope that, as AI penetration in the general population increases and as user sophistication improves with exposure, ChatGPT (along with Perplexity, Claude, Gemini, Grok, and other AIs) will become indispensable, and calibrated tariff raises will be possible. The number of ChatGPT users in India trebled during 2024, and OpenAI says it is committed to locally storing the data from Indian users of ChatGPT Enterprise, ChatGPT Edu, and the OpenAI API platform. This complies with India's current policy on data localisation and privacy. Of course, OpenAI will develop insights by working with that data, and given the dependency of AI on the creation and understanding of large data sets, this could in itself give OpenAI a big lead over the competition.

However, while this move to localise should be welcomed, India needs to take a look at its privacy safeguards. Free web search is subsidised by ads that leverage personalised user information gathered by identifying intent from search, cache, and cookies. AI models could find ways to monetise data in different but analogous ways. A shift has clearly occurred in usage with surfers increasingly moving to AI-driven searches from the "vanilla" Google model. Offers like ChatGPT Go and bundled Perplexity Pro herald acceleration in AI penetration. The Indian regulatory framework for managing AI-related privacy and surveillance risks needs to evolve. There are critically important issues about algorithmic transparency, bias, and automated decision-making. Policy needs to be developed to ensure AI companies offer transparency regarding the collection, storage, processing, and monetisation of data. This should go beyond the current legal mandates on what data is collected and stored, and why it's being used, to offer more details about monetisation, including how platforms intend to profit from behavioural data or profiling, and information shared with third parties.



Underminer-in-chief

Do institutions matter? Donald Trump's sustained assault on them will give us an answer

Institutions matter. They are the foundation on which growth, investment, and economic stability must be built. Or is it the other way around? Is it economic shifts that give rise to modern institutions? Economists have sought to identify the causal relationship between these two for a long time; last year, three economists won the discipline's Nobel Prize for work that seemed to demonstrate how institutions that were supportive of investment, and not extractive, could lead to decades, indeed centuries, of growth.

We are living in the middle, however, of a great experiment. We owe this to American President Donald Trump, who in his second administration has chosen to break free of the shackles that apparently constrained his first, and dismantle multiple institutions that long defined the American economy and the presidency. Will the United States' (US') economic out-performance survive this effort? Can the world's strongest and deepest economy retain its momentum even when the foundation on which it is built is dismantled? The answer awaits us in the coming decade.

The actions that have made the most headlines outside the US since President Trump took office are the tariffs that he has threatened, announced, or implemented against multiple countries, including India. Lost in this discussion is the basic fact that Mr Trump is going further than constitutional propriety allows. The US' system of checks and balances does not assign the making of trade policy to the chief executive. That is the privilege of the legislative branch — of the US Congress. In taking it upon himself to not just implement emergency safeguarding tariffs but indeed to

completely rewrite the code book, this President has attacked the very basis of the separation of powers. Yes, Congress could step in at any point and so bears its share of responsibility. After all, it is highly unlikely that in an anonymous, conscience vote of its members, the legislature would agree that the Trump tariffs are a good idea. But its cowardly complicity in the process of undermining itself does not change the institutional damage that has been done. An accountable and deliberative legislature, a fast-moving but constrained executive: This has been the policy-making system that has delivered growth and flexibility to the US. Can growth continue without it?

Another pillar of the US economy has been the excellence, rapidity, and transparency of its data. We know from month to month how well the economy is doing, in part through what is known as the jobs report. Of course, as with all statistics, later and more accurate results can differ in some important essentials from interim results that are partly based on leads

and extrapolation. But after one such revision in the jobs report recently that caused embarrassment to administration, the head of the agency responsible for compiling these official statistics was fired. The replacement named by Mr Trump neither has the background fit for the job nor a history of independence that could maintain trust in official statistics. US policy-making — as well as investment into its economy — has been eased by the availability of high-quality data. The Indian economy, which has lost many of its most effective data series, or had to endure them being rendered incomparable across time, is a cautionary tale of how the absence of good statistics can lead to



POLICY RULES
MIHIR S SHARMA

Can GST 2.0 spark a growth boom?

Prime Minister Narendra Modi used his Independence Day address to announce a sweeping simplification of India's goods and services tax (GST) regime. The patchwork of the four main rates (5 per cent, 12 per cent, 18 per cent, and 28 per cent) will now be collapsed into two — 5 per cent and 18 per cent. A punitive 40 per cent levy will remain for "sin" goods such as tobacco.

The aim, the government said, is to ease compliance, reduce distortions, and put more money in consumers' hands. To investors and economists, the announcement sounded eerily familiar. Six years ago, on September 20, 2019, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman stunned India Inc by slashing corporate-tax rates from 30 per cent to 22 per cent, and from 25 per cent to 15 per cent for new manufacturers. For firms such as Hindustan Unilever, Asian Paints, Nestlé India, Bajaj Finance and HDFC Bank, the cuts meant a windfall. The BSE Sensex soared 5.3 per cent that day, and 2.8 per cent the following Monday, its biggest two-day rally in years. Yet, the enthusiasm faded quickly.

Why? Because the tax cuts were just a knee-jerk reaction, a desperate response to a flagging economy. Growth had slowed to 5 per cent in the first quarter of that year — 3.5 per cent according to old calculations. Exports were languishing, unemployment was rising, and auto sales had sunk to a two-decade low. The financial sector was in crisis, with shadow banks teetering. The tax bonanza was supposed to spur companies to reinvest their savings, leading to employment opportunities being generated. But higher retained earnings don't drive the expansion plans of cash-rich companies, only strong secular demand does. No wonder the generous tax cuts did not translate into corporate expansion.

We are still waiting for the private capital expenditure upcycle; but, six years later, we are getting another sharp tax cut. The economic setting in 2025 is less catastrophic, but hardly robust. India Inc's core earnings shrank 3.3 per cent year-on-year (Y-o-Y) in April-June 2025-26 (Q1FY26), the second contraction in four

quarters. Revenue grew 7.3 per cent Y-o-Y, but excepting financial services and oil companies, growth was only 5.3 per cent. Profit before tax fell 7.4 per cent. The earnings of 3,051 listed firms shrank. India's core sector output grew just 2 per cent Y-o-Y in July, down from 2.2 per cent in June.

Industrial output, too, dropped to a 10-month low of 1.5 per cent in June. Slippages at Indian banks rose 26 per cent Y-o-Y in Q1FY26, driven by stress in microfinance and unsecured retail portfolios. Fresh slippages reached ₹49,000 crore, up from ₹39,000 crore a year earlier. Recoveries and upgrades fell 3.4 per cent to ₹28,000 crore, while writeoffs declined marginally to ₹26,500 crore. Gross non-performing assets (GNPAs) rose 6.7 per cent to ₹4.8 trillion. The data suggests early signs of credit fatigue.

Foreign portfolio investors (FPIs), spooked by sluggish earnings and a sliding rupee, sold Indian equities worth ₹210 billion (\$2.5 billion) in the first half of August alone, bringing outflows to ₹1.16 trillion (\$14 billion) in 2025 till now. Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) sharply reduced their exposure to Indian equities in July, making India the most underweight market among emerging market portfolios. India's relative weighting fell to a negative 2.9 percentage points versus the MSCI Emerging Markets (EM) index.

Meanwhile, China, Hong Kong, and South Korea saw increased allocations.

Can GST 2.0 reverse this picture? Cutting consumption tax for the masses is different from cutting corporation tax for rich companies. The State Bank of India reckons that rationalisation could lift annual consumption by nearly ₹2 trillion, or about 8 per cent of the household demand. In an economy where consumption contributes nearly 60 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP), the hope is that higher household spending will ripple through manufacturing and services, spurring growth.

But, the immediate trigger for the cuts is geopolitical. In a sharp escalation of tensions, the United States (US) has branded India a "prime enabler" of



IRRATIONAL CHOICE
DEBASHIS BASU

again; her mother fed her and three siblings sludge she scraped off a machine at the milk-processing plant where she worked.

Vera, too, almost perished in the snow, going to school. But she went on to marry three times. The second

husband, one eye missing from nuclear testing, bringing some prosperity (though also corruption): stolen sausages swinging "like boxing bags" from the ceiling.

Can someone please cast and film the scene of Vera's rebellious son Petro, Hercules' father, sneaking snatches of "Stairway to Heaven" on a state radio in his small town through the static caused by government authorities jamming the enemy Western frequencies? And announcing in school that he preferred a James

Bond spoof to the sanctioned Soviet war film?

Hercules is established as a food



STRONG ROOTS: A Memoir of Food, Family, and Ukraine by Olya Hercules Published by Knopf 288 pages \$30

sons and three daughters.

Viktor had won medals in World War II, but when he was caught scything a small amount of grain for the family cow during a famine, he was sent to a faraway gulag. When Stalin "croaked," family members wet their eyes with saliva to hide their rejoicing from a compliant in-law.

Lusia sold fruit and eggs and educated herself reading Dumas and Hugo until the wee hours, then would wake early to milk the cow. She lived to try aerobics, cultivate a rose garden and, Hercules writes, "taught us to listen to our cooking."

The author was also able to record tales of hardship from her Siberian paternal grandmother, Vera. Vera's father, a cobbler, was taken away by Bolsheviks, never to be seen

written several delightful, conversational cookbooks, with recipes for dishes like Soviet goose noodles and watermelon skin jam.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has fractured her family of origin. Her brother joined the Kyiv territorial defence forces. Her parents fled their home city of Kakhovka, where the destruction of the local dam in 2023 has been ecologically and economically devastating.

Strong Roots is its own kind of dam, against the rushing anguish of war and generational trauma.

Hercules' maternal grandmother, Lusia, who died at 84 in the early aughts, emerges as a formidable heroine. During "holodomor," Stalin's intentional famine of Ukrainian peasants in the early 1930s, she was forcibly and most horribly "repatriated" with her siblings by cattle train to northern Russia. All of the terms for this are euphemisms.

"'Deportation' in English is too formal a word, which hints at something to do with law," Hercules writes. "There was no law here. Just people who were robbed, murdered, deported or starved. The term they used in Russian was even worse, na poselenie, literally 'to make a settlement.' There was no settle in this settlement, more of an uprooting, a complete de-indigenization."

On such trips many children froze to death and were "piled on top of each other, like logs."

Lusia survived being pitched off the train into a snowy forest, found work as a nanny and later at a flower nursery and a vegetable canning factory. She met a man named Viktor at a dance. Soviet guidelines at the time mandated a distance of three centimeters between courting couples and forbade them to "dance in a distorted way," but they managed, married and went on to have three

suboptimal policy choices. It also shows how investors and firms that are forced to grope in the dark or rely on their own high-frequency sources and formulae to figure out the state of the economy. Will the US economy suffer correspondingly? And will it reduce the scale or accuracy of investment?

And then there is the question of central bank independence. Since the 1970s, we have understood the importance of a separate monetary authority. If the fiscal authorities are given a free rein to print money, then its incentives are misaligned. Controlling inflation over time requires a central bank that responds to real signals from the economy, and not to political pressures. India's recent economic history seems to support this thesis; monetary targeting that was introduced a decade ago has anchored inflation expectations and helped the government keep its lenders in the bond markets in control.

Governments always want growth to happen on their watch. And they want to spend money now, because inflation, if it follows, will happen later. Thus their own choices on interest rates are always biased downwards: They want lower rates than might be optimal for a particular inflation-growth mix. This has played out many times in the past in India and in other countries. It is now visible in the US as well, where Mr Trump has threatened to fire one governor of the Federal Reserve, and appointed another whose main distinguishing feature is personal loyalty to the President. His main target continues to be Fed Chairman Jerome Powell; investors today cannot be sure that the chair can survive, or even if the Fed board's apparent move towards looser monetary policy is based purely on the merits or because they are giving in to pressure.

The US has long prided itself on its institutions. It has also been one of the most reliable sources of sustained and consistent economic growth for the world. It is natural for our intuition to link these two facts. That intuition will now be tested. But we have already learned one thing. The US' institutions, at least, were not designed as well as many have long claimed. They are not prepared to withstand a President who sees disagreement, or even uncomfortable statistics, as a conspiracy rather than the normal process of politics. Richard Nixon was indeed paranoid about independent institutions — but he was de-throned thanks to the disapproval of right-thinking members of his own party. Thus the US' institutions also depend upon crucial individuals — regulators, centrist members of Congress, judges, investigators — doing their jobs properly and without colluding with each other. Perhaps that is true of all institutions; but I suspect the US' are in fact more dependent on personal integrity than others. They appeared stronger than others not because of their design but because they have so rarely been tested. It is sobering to consider that the last time that all these many cogs in the machine of the federal government abandoned independence *en masse* to serve a higher partisan and sectional calling was more than 150 years ago, in the runup to the Civil War.

Russia's war machine because of its decision to purchase cheap Russian oil. From August 27, Washington will start imposing a 50 per cent tariff on around \$50 billion worth of Indian exports — more than half its \$80 billion in annual shipments to the US. Few importers will absorb such a price hike. Unless exporters find other buyers, a large chunk of sales will vanish. This is where a lower consumption tax makes sense. Domestic consumption, courtesy GST 2.0, is intended as a buffer.

However, the mercurial American President can escalate his economic war by targeting Indian software exports, the H1B visa, and foreign remittances, which are critical to India's balance of payments and currency stability. But till that happens, GST 2.0 will help.

The trouble is that such tactical cuts do little to address India's deeper weaknesses. If the 2019 tax-cut policy had been part of a coherent philosophy, it would have been built into the Budget, and not come as a bolt from the blue. The same is true today. A one-off reduction in consumption tax may cushion consumers against tariff shocks but does nothing to repair the structural impediments to growth.

India's persistent failure to capture global market share is illustrative. Consider textiles, one of our top 10 exports: In 2010, China controlled 36 per cent of global exports; by 2018, its share slipped to 31.3 per cent due to rising wages. Vietnam and Bangladesh seized the opening, doubling their shares to 6.2 per cent and 6.4 per cent respectively. India's share fell slightly, from 3.3 per cent to 3.2 per cent. Taxes were not the issue; rather, the "frictional costs" of doing business in India — red tape, corruption, poor logistics, and inconsistent policies — held firms back. The corporate tax cut of 2019 was meant to signal a pro-growth turn. Instead, it ended up as an improvised fix. GST 2.0 risks being another.

There is one difference between the two situations, though. The 2019 cut fuelled an explosion of speculations about more Big Bang reforms being on the way. No one is expecting that anymore.

The writer is editor of www.moneylife.in and a trustee of the Moneylife Foundation; @Moneylifers

A memoir of Ukraine through the family tree



ALEXANDRA JACOBS

By now the therapeutic value of kneading bread dough is so well established as to be almost a cliché. But what of the psychic release from chopping cabbage?

"I often say that if I could do nothing else except chop for the rest of my days, I would be happy," the chef Olya Hercules writes in *Strong Roots*, a memoir of her Ukrainian heritage.

Hercules lives in London, where she's worked for Ottolenghi, the chain of restaurant-delis that made vegetables sexier than steak, and has

writer and has raised millions for her besieged country thanks to a #CookForUkraine initiative. But with *Strong Roots* she arrives on the map as an attentive nature writer too. Her passages about kayaking through waterlily-filled marshland; about walking along "the long living corridor" of grapevines; or about her young son's teeth marks on the low-hanging apples in her mother's abandoned orchard where the garden has five kinds of basil are a Technicolor dreamscape of what is being ravaged and lost. (Putin's name appears but twice.)

"War is a beastly business," wrote the food writer MFK Fisher in her revised introduction to "How to Cook a Wolf" (1942). "But one proof that we are human is our ability to learn, even from it, how better to exist." Wending through wars past and present, hugging the family tree, *Strong Roots* shows a path.

The reviewer is a Times book critic and occasional features writer ©2025 The New York Times News Service



CONTRAPUNTO

The truth is, hardly any of us have ethical energy enough for more than one really inflexible point of honour

- GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

Beyond The Noise

India did the right thing by not signing a bad US trade deal. Tariffs will pinch, but only in the short term

After seven months in White House, Trump has picked his ambassador to India, but it's a divisive choice. Those for Sergio Gor say he has Trump's ear. So much so that Trump spiked Elon Musk's pick for Nasa chief on his advice. Those against say the 38-year-old has zero diplomatic experience, and shouldn't be cutting his teeth in the world's most populous – and nuclear-armed – region. India has greeted the news cautiously, even as Trump's heralded Gor as “someone I can fully trust to deliver on my Agenda”.

The emphasis on “agenda” is Trump's, and with just two days remaining for his 25% penal tariff – White House is calling it “sanctions” now – on India to come into force, nobody has a handle on Potus' geopolitics. A president who can strain an easy relationship to satisfy his ego – he's claimed more than 40 times that he mediated the India-Pak ceasefire – defies analysis. But maybe there's a method to Trumpness. Maybe it really is about using India as a lever against Putin. His trade adviser Peter Navarro's recent tirades – describing India as Kremlin's “laundromat” most recently – suggest this.



But as India has pointed out time and again, the US argument is self-serving. When America was worried about a global oil

shock at the start of the Ukraine war, and the resultant Western sanctions on Russia, it urged India to buy shiploads of Russian oil. Besides, China, the other major buyer of Russian oil, has not faced Trump's heat on this account after rattling its own rare earths sabre. In short, Trump's moral posturing is nothing but bullying in the garb of principle.

So, India has done well to resist US pressure for a trade deal that treads on its red lines of agriculture and dairy. This has cast a cloud on the short term, but there are silver linings. EAM Jaishankar has said trade negotiations are continuing, and US secretary of state Marco Rubio on Saturday described India as “one of the most important relationships our nation has in the world”. Even Navarro prefaced his vitriol with “I love India.” The higher US tariffs that Indian exports will face from Wednesday will impact Indian manufacturing, and jobs, to an extent, but GOI is alive to this challenge, and is looking at “quantum, not incremental” reforms, as Modi said at the ET World Leaders Forum on Saturday. India's short-term pain might lead to long-term gain after all.

They Shouldn't Dare...

...Yet botched probes & low conviction rates only help those accused of dowry murders

The case of the 26-year-old woman in Greater Noida, burnt to death by her husband in front of their 6-year-old child, is but a comment on the system that abandoned her. Married into this family in 2016, she endured relentless dowry demands and violence. Yet, her parents still married off her sister into the same household. Why would they do that when one daughter was already being tortured? What regressive social practices invisibly control these villagers who own Scorpios and can expect ₹36L and more in dowry? Did either sister ever stand a chance of living a safe life? Truth is that in very many pockets – per NCRB's crime records UP, Bihar and Haryana still lead the charts – dowry is anything but past practice. These sisters had no access to law or state/NGO protection. They were simply married off and abandoned to violence.



Question before the state, police and courts is, why shouldn't men like brothers Vipin and Rohit feel confident they can brutalise their wives? After all, the law sets no deterrent. In 2022 – the last NCRB report – conviction in dowry death trials of that year was 33%, but conviction is just 2% calculated against all dowry death cases pending trial – 60,577. A pendency of 94%. Forensics are broken – reports abound of untrained sanitation workers conducting autopsies because doctors refuse. Pause and consider what that means. Meanwhile, tired claims that anti-dowry laws are “misused” only serve to embolden perpetrators.

Think – the first FIR in this case did not even invoke anti-dowry provision BNS Sec 80. That speaks volumes. Is misogyny baked into the system, or was police intimidated? Nothing short of an honest, rigorous investigation and swift, exemplary punishment will do. A nation that aspires for global leadership cannot tolerate young women being killed for dowry on the edge of the national capital in the 21st century.

Meet Jogi Blacks

A dog-human half-realised love story

Avijit.Ghosh@timesofindia.com



I spotted Blacks on his familiar perch late last night. I hadn't seen him for a fortnight. I was worried. You can easily guess why: I knew he had benefactors in our housing complex. But I had also heard he had been roughed up by those who neither liked him nor his ilk. I walked up to Blacks. His eyes lit up in recognition. I hugged him longer than I normally do. It was as much in relief as in joy. Ours is a half-realised love story. Also, an old one. I figured after our early meetings that Blacks valued his independence. That part was non-negotiable. It was, therefore, going to be an open relationship.

He turned up every night, sometimes very late, avoiding the prying eyes of a gentleman downstairs who disapproved of all canines, barring his own. I discovered, to my surprise, Blacks ignored canned food, preferred milk to meat. “Yeh toh sanyasi nikla,” a neighbour told me. Right through the long Covid months, when rumours of dogs carrying viruses fuelled an irrational scare, life was tough for strays like him.

Then we moved to another block in the same complex. Blacks stopped visiting us. To him, we had migrated to another country. But we kept meeting. Not over dinners anymore. Just as friends. To hug and paw. I like to believe our hearts nested against each other like Russian dolls. Nights were safer for these brief rendezvous. Like the country we live in, our apartment is polarised over everything. Dogs are no exception. Some years ago, one group protested against community dogs; the other side formed a human chain in support. I have found personal dogs more unpredictable. Trapped inside 1,200 sq ft apartments for most of the day, a few big ones occasionally get capricious outside. Strays are different.

They are realistic and adjusting. They know the world is owned by humans and they must subsist on tender mercies. They survive hunger, violence, the unkindest cut life throws at them. Only one out of five street puppies attains adulthood. Life makes them hardy. But they also fall headlong in love, like teenagers with bungee-jumping hormones. Their unconditional affection makes you a better version of yourself. And unlike humans, they never forget acts of kindness. Blacks certainly remembers everything even though we lead separate lives now. If only humans could be like dogs.

5 Ideas For Blockbuster GST Reforms

Rationalisation of rates will boost manufacturing & consumption. But bringing low-cost housing under GST can have a big multiplier effect. And a tax system based on trust rather than suspicion can give industry wings

Rajiv Memani



PM's announcement of next-gen GST reforms by Diwali has generated immense optimism in business, and been cheered by markets. In his Independence Day speech, Modi had said GST reforms “will bring down tax burden on the common man. It will be a Diwali gift for you.” Soon after, the finance ministry said it had recommended a two-tier system placing the vast majority of items under ‘standard’ and ‘merit’ categories, doing away with the 12% and 28% slabs, and the group of ministers (GoM) on GST rate rationalisation has already accepted this proposal.

This will no doubt spur GDP growth and, in the long-term, balance growth with equity and ease of doing business. With India on its way to becoming the third largest economy, further reforms are needed to ensure growth touches every section of society. And by creating a simpler, more transparent and growth-oriented tax system, the proposed reforms could be key to this.

The reformed GST will have three pillars, of which rate rationalisation is the most important. But structural reforms and ease of living are no less crucial. Simplifying compliances will particularly benefit MSMEs, leading to increased formalisation and growth.

Fewer slabs & lower tax bar

GST is among the most significant tax reforms of independent India and has done well over the last eight years. The reformed system will have fewer GST slabs – clearly distinguishing between essential and standard goods – and a special rate for a select few goods.

At GST's launch in 2017, a committee headed by the chief economic adviser had recommended a single, revenue-neutral rate of around 15%, instead of multiple slabs. In FY 2023-24, the actual average rate came to 11.64%, govt told Parliament. And implementation of the proposed rates will likely reduce it further to around 10%.

Together with the 25% corporate tax, and the substantial increase in personal income tax exemption this year, India will reposition itself among countries with the lowest-to-moderate tax regimes. This would

enhance its competitiveness, and create a fairer and more predictable tax system.

Cheaper goods, faster refunds

These measures will benefit all sections of society. Cheaper goods and services for the common man will



India will reposition itself among countries with the lowest-to-moderate tax regimes... enhance its competitiveness, create fairer & more predictable tax system

drive consumption. Entrepreneurs and startups will lose less sleep over the “fear of compliance”. For manufacturing, reduction in rates and correction of inverted duty structures will reduce costs. Faster refunds and reduced compliance costs will benefit MSMEs, especially exporters.

Making good better, with more impact

As govt goes about this structural reform, industry hopes it will consider the following suggestions for a bigger impact.

1. While petroleum products, real estate and electricity continue to be outside GST, and may not be brought under it for some time, low-cost housing could be subsumed in the GST net at the earliest to create a massive economic multiplier effect and make housing more affordable.

2. Industry has been requesting rationalisation of input tax credit. Given the financial implications, govt can prioritise allowing credits for capex, to drive investment.

3. Multiple audits, assessments and investigations being carried out on corporates with registration in multiple states should be reduced. Ideally, single PAN-based registrations should be audited by either Centre or state, or an agency having Centre and state representation.

4. Decriminalisation of GST legislation is a must. Prosecution should be limited to the rarest of rare cases, where fraud is explicit. This would be extremely critical, especially for MSMEs to work without fear and with certainty.

5. The time period to issue a demand continues to be extremely long at 42 months. Given the automated compliances and strong technology tools available with govt, the time to dispute an assessment can be brought down to 24 months, to bring certainty and avoid the debilitating impact on MSMEs.

As the frequency of interaction between govt and industry is probably the highest, any procedural simplification with respect to compliance will have a positive impact on ease of doing business. The creation of a dedicated Reform Task Force to evaluate existing laws, rules and procedures related to economic activity – to modernise tax governance, streamline procedures, and address industry challenges – is also likely to aid this.

Next-gen GST reforms will deliver very tangible benefits that will soon translate into a better business environment for enterprises and also help consumers by making things more affordable. The hope is that these reforms will be implemented by Diwali, making it a “double dhamaka” for industry and consumers. It is now important that Centre and state govt work in tandem and move on this quickly so that consumers don't defer purchases in anticipation of lower prices.

The writer is chairman, EY India & president, CII

‘Centrism Isn’t Nostalgia, It Is Survival’

Actor-politician & Rajya Sabha member writes India's national strength is a long-standing recognition by her leaders that in a nation of multiple faiths, tongues & creeds, only politics of harmony can endure

Kamal Haasan



How much polarisation can a democracy bear before it breaks? India may be about to find out.

We, the people of India, have always argued, sometimes disagreed, yet we resisted the temptation to let differences divide us beyond repair. Our unity was never uniformity, it was a conscious choice we made together. That fragile art of coexistence is now under strain.

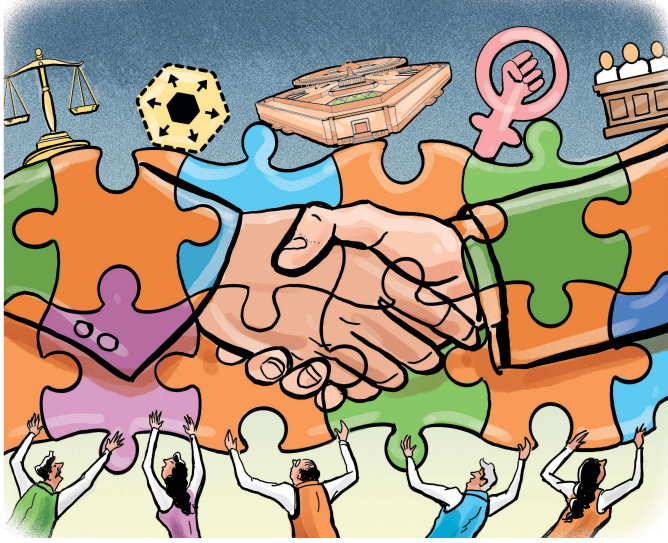
India is a union of states bound by shared destiny. Federalism is not a concession but the very grammar of our Republic, written into the Constitution. India is not a single note; she is an orchestra. The Constitution conducts this diversity, each state an instrument, each voice essential to the harmony. The Centre, like a conductor's hand, must remain steady and impartial. When centralisation drowns out this music, the Republic loses not just its melodious anthem but its spirit.

When I took my affirmation in my mother tongue, Tamil, in Rajya Sabha, it was more than a ceremonial act, for it was a citizen staking rightful claim to the national conversation. This House is not Delhi's possession; it is the people's Parliament, where every corner of India must be heard. On the world map, India stands tall, a land where ancient wisdom and modern imagination meet to inspire the global order. Within her, Tamil Nadu is a jewel in the crown – a land of ancient civilisation unearthed in historical sites such as Keeladi, an ancient language, an economy that leads in manufacturing, education, and innovation contributing over 9% of India's GDP with only 4% of her landmass and 6% of the national population. To place Tamil

Nadu at the centre is not regional pride, it is national strength.

Makkal Needhi Maiam party was born of centrism. It is not about avoiding hard positions, but creating the space where opposing convictions can coexist without drawing swords. It demands as much resolve to preserve the whole as it does to win a part.

Centrism has been India's natural axis. India's



freedom struggle itself was born of this middle path, resistance without hatred, and defiance without destruction. Gandhi, in spirit, was a centrist. He believed dialogue could be radical, that persuasion without violence was the deepest form of strength. He stood between impatient revolutionaries and cautious

moderates, uniting them in a movement both moral and pragmatic.

Later, Vajpayee, a poet in politics, built consensus across divides without surrendering principle. They understood that in a land of many faiths, tongues and creeds, only politics of harmony can endure. It was a triumph of balance, a refusal to let the extremes devour the cause. Today, that balance is under siege.

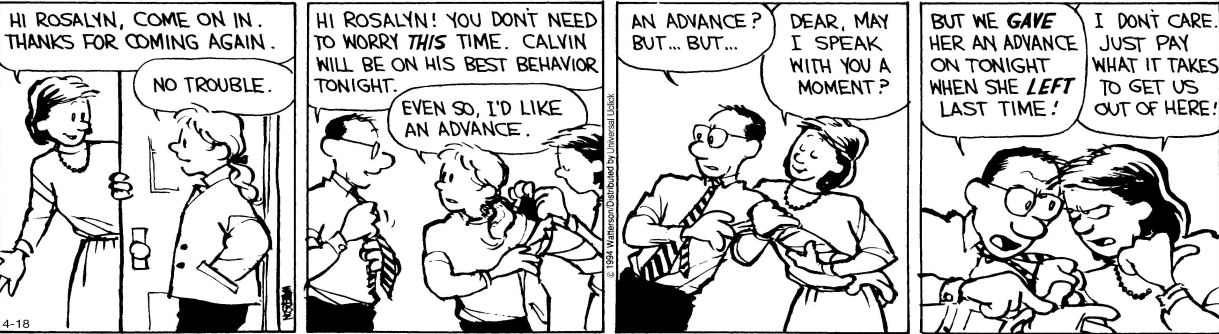
Polarisation, whether in the name of religion, region or ideology, corrodes the trust that binds us. When politics becomes a zero-sum game, the losers are not political parties but the people of India. In these times, centrism is not nostalgia; it is survival. Centrism is secularism that doesn't fear faith, nationalism that doesn't crush dissent, and an economy that rewards enterprise while guarding equity.

India's federal structure, our freedoms and our secular framework, are not bargaining chips but the architecture of the Republic. A nation is not a battlefield where one side must annihilate the other; it is a shared home where difference can live with dignity, where debate and dissent are patriotic and civic duties. Challenges before us, from climate change to economic renewal to social justice to security, are too urgent for trench warfare in national politics.

Makkal Needhi Maiam is forged in the belief that diversity strengthens the Union of India. In cinema, audiences laugh, cry, and think together despite caste, creed, or faith. The screen made no distinction, and for those few hours, neither did we. The greatest stories are not about conquest, but about connection. That is India at her best, a shared screen where we recognise ourselves in one another. Unity is possible without uniformity. When dialogue ends, democracy withers. That is the bridge that needs to be built.

The writer is founder-president, Makkal Needhi Maiam

Calvin & Hobbes



Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev

Every year, as the monsoon clouds thin and the air fills with anticipation, millions prepare to celebrate Ganesh Chaturthi – one of India's most cherished festivals, honouring Ganapati, God of wisdom, learning, and remover of obstacles. Yet beneath festive rituals and sweet treats lies a story that goes beyond myth into a profound symbol of intelligence, transformation, and the power of creation.

The story begins with Shiv, the great ascetic yogi, leaving home and his consort, Parvati, for long periods. Driven by loneliness and maternal longing, she took an extraordinary step. She gathered the sandal paste from her body – carrying flakes of her skin with it – blended it with soil and shaped it into a child. Into this figure, she breathed life. Years later, when Shiv returned, he encountered a boy guarding his mother's privacy. Neither recognised

the other, and in anger, Shiv beheaded the child. Parvati's grief and rage were immense, and to repair the tragedy, Shiv replaced the boy's head with that of the leader of his ganas – strange, other-worldly beings who accompanied him. These ganas were said to have boneless limbs and forms unlike humans, which inspired artists to depict Ganesh with an elephant's head, but still, in every mantra, in every expression of devotion, it is Ganapati, and not Gajapati. Thus, Ganesh was born from Parvati's life-giving force, enjoined with the head of Shiv's gana, symbol of intelligence and consciousness. Ganesh is the embodiment of balanced intelligence, the nemesis of all obstacles. He is revered as Vigneshwar, remover of obstacles. But this does not mean he magically erases difficulties. His real teaching is subtler: when we

cultivate intelligence, balance, and clarity, obstacles dissolve. They cease to be barriers and instead become stepping stones.

Intelligence here is not cunning or manipulation, but an attunement to existence – an inner equilibrium that allows us to move through life with ease, within and without. This understanding comes alive during Ganesh Chaturthi. For days, devotees craft idols of Ganesh, worship with food and music, and celebrate with devotion. The festival culminates in immersion of the idol in water. The making of the idol reflects Parvati's act of creation, while its immersion echoes Shiv's transformative act of destruction and renewal.

Together, these embody the same cycle of intelligence – bringing form into being, learning through it, and then releasing it.

Through Ganesh Chaturthi, we learn that true intelligence is never rigid or



THE SPEAKING TREE

Sacred space



An intellectual is someone whose mind watches itself. I like this, because I am happy to be both halves, the watcher and the watched.

Albert Camus

Ganesh Chaturthi: A Celebration Of Intelligence

possessive, but fluid and unbound, like life itself, which constantly creates and dissolves. The practice of creating and then immersing the idol is a cultural way of acknowledging existence's fluid nature – not clinging blindly to forms but imbibing their qualities and letting go. Ultimately, Ganesh Chaturthi is a celebration of moving from form to formlessness. True intelligence is not accumulation of knowledge or being street smart; it is the capacity to live in harmony with existence, to flow without resistance, to transform obstacles into growth, and to expand beyond limitations. So, as you partake in this vibrant festival, savour modaks, admire artistry of the clay idols, and reflect on deeper message of Ganapati: to cultivate intelligence that dissolves obstacles, celebrates unity, and honours delicate balance of life itself.

May this Ganesh Chaturthi awaken that boundless intelligence and balance of creation in you.



THE DAILY GUARDIAN SURVEY ON ONLINE GAMING BILL 2025

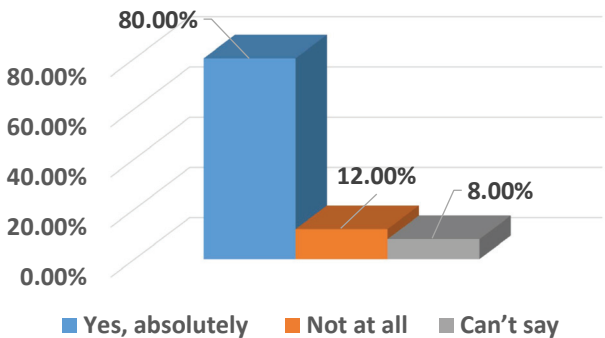
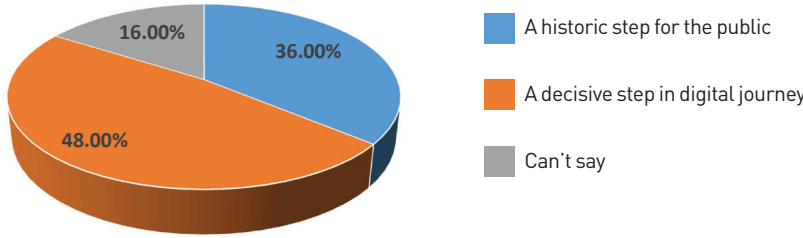
80% respondents said this is a major step towards stopping addiction, financial ruin, and social crisis.

A new India News survey on the Online Gaming Bill 2025 shows strong public backing for the legislation. Of 427 respondents, 80%

believe it will curb addiction and financial distress, while 82% said a large share of the population is already affected.

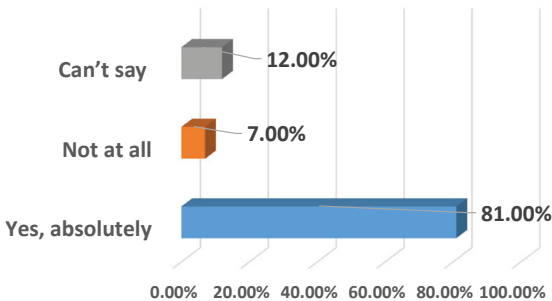
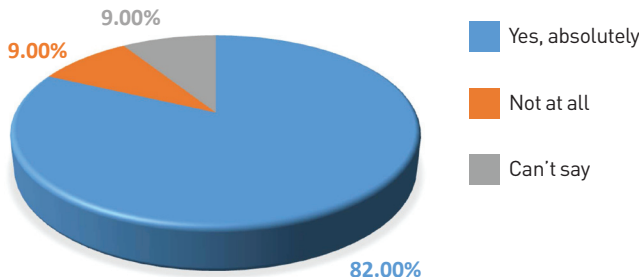
Further, 81% linked online gaming to rising depression and suicide cases nationwide.

Q1.
What is your opinion on the Online Gaming Bill, 2025?



Q2.
Is this a major step towards stopping addiction, financial ruin, and social crisis?

Q3.
Has a large portion of the country's population been affected by online gaming?



Q4.
Has online gaming given rise to depression and suicide cases?

THE DAILY GUARDIAN SURVEY ON CULTIVATION OF POISONOUS MOONG DAL

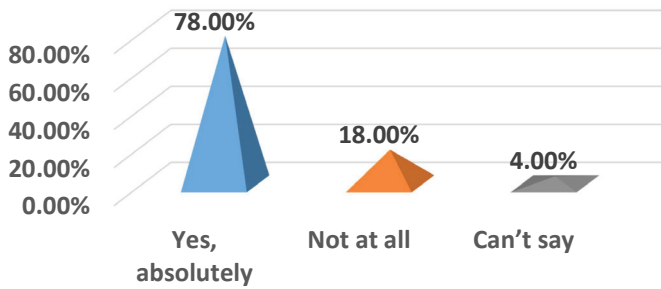
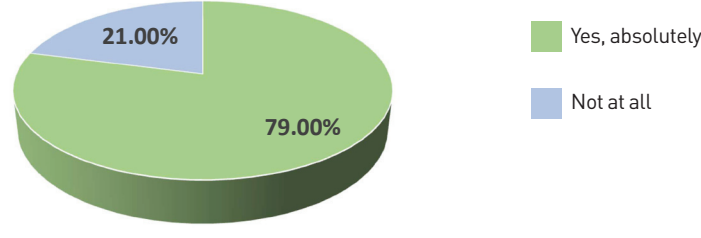
79% believe that the reckless use of chemicals in farming is indeed increasing.

The survey on the cultivation of poisonous moong dal highlights growing public concern over the reckless use of chemicals in farming. A ma-

jority of respondents believe pesticides and chemical fertilizers pose serious risks to human life. Most strongly support banning

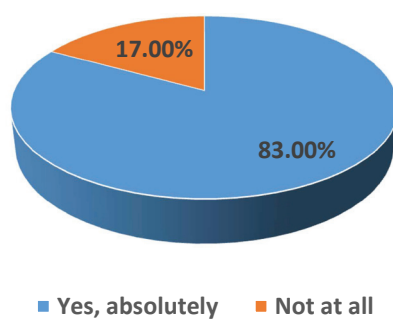
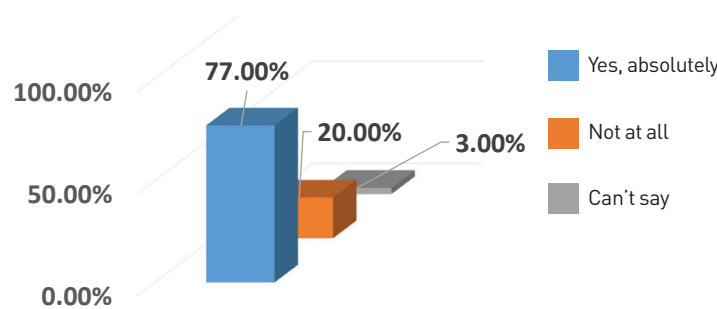
harmful substances and urge the government to promote organic farming.

Q1.
Is the reckless use of chemicals in farming increasing?



Q2.
Can pesticides used in moong dal cultivation be considered harmful to health?

Q3.
Will the future use of chemical fertilizers have a significant harmful impact on human life?



Q4.
Should there be a ban on chemicals used in adulteration?

CISF forms first-ever women commando unit

CONTINUED FROM P1

personnel currently deployed across various airports in the country. Their training runs from 11 August to 4 October. A second batch is scheduled to undergo the same commando course from 6 October to 29 November. In the initial phase, at least 100 women drawn from Aviation Security Groups (ASGs) and other sensitive CISF units are expected to complete the programme. CISF officials have confirmed that such all-women commando training courses will now be a regular feature of the force's training calendar.

Following the completion of their training, the women commandos will first be deployed at airports

before gradually taking up assignments at other sensitive installations across the country. The deployment is intended not only to enhance operational readiness but also to signal a decisive shift towards gender inclusion in India's security apparatus.

Currently, the CISF has 12,491 women personnel, constituting about 8 percent of its total strength. To further increase participation, the force is expanding its recruitment drive in line with the Ministry of Home Affairs' target of 10 percent representation. An additional 2,400 women will be inducted in 2026, with recruitment patterns being restructured to ensure that the 10 percent threshold is consistently maintained in the

coming years.

With this initiative, the CISF has taken a pioneering step among India's armed organisations, aiming not just to improve women's representation numerically but also to expand their roles in operational and decision-making capacities. By placing women in high-stakes, frontline duties, the force hopes to set a precedent in gender parity and showcase women's capabilities in security roles traditionally dominated by men.

Officials believe the move will not only empower women within the CISF but also inspire greater female participation in other paramilitary and armed forces, furthering the broader goal of women's empowerment in India.

Fadnavis, Prasad dismiss Opposition's 'vote theft' charge

CONTINUED FROM P1

also hit out at Opposition leaders, including MNS chief Raj Thackeray, who backed Gandhi's allegations. He said such charges were only meant to "console party workers" after electoral defeats. "Until they stop lying and insulting people, they cannot win," Fadnavis asserted.

Meanwhile, Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Sanjay Raut alleged that the BJP-led Mahayuti government in Maharashtra had itself come to power through "vote theft", claiming the matter was being raised "at the national and international level".

Rahul Gandhi, continuing his 'Voter Adhikar Yatra' in Bihar's Araria district, doubled down on his claims, describing the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of the electoral rolls as an "institutionalised way" of stealing votes. "Lakhs of names have been deleted. The Opposition is raising the issue, but the BJP has not complained once because of its partnership with the Election Commission," Gandhi alleged. He said the

yatra was drawing "organic support" from people, reflecting "crores" of voters' belief in the Opposition's claims.

Tejashwi Yadav, also leading the 16-day, 1,300-km march, accused the Election Commission of functioning like a "cell of the BJP" and said its credibility was "over" even in villages. He alleged that voters were wrongly shown as deceased and that evidence had been presented before the Supreme Court.

The Opposition's campaign comes against the backdrop of Prime Minister Modi's recent remarks in Gaya, warning against "infiltrators" altering Bihar's demography. Tejashwi dismissed the claim, saying the ECI itself had "no such category" in its records.

The 'Voter Adhikar Yatra', being spearheaded by the Congress, RJD and other Opposition parties, will culminate in Patna on 1 September. Bihar Assembly elections are due later this year, though the Election Commission has yet to announce the schedule.

Rajnath Singh meets Kishtwar cloudburst victims

CONTINUED FROM P1

not due to bad weather and a fresh landslide on the Patherdaki road. The Prime Minister is very concerned and is constantly monitoring the situation. We will be speaking to the affected people through videoconferencing from Raj Bhavan," Singh told reporters.

The cloudburst struck Chisoti village, the last motorable point en route to the Machail Mata temple, on 14 August, killing 65 people and leaving over 100 injured. At least 32 others remain missing, with rescue teams continuing search operations in the disaster-hit area.

Singh expressed satisfaction over the treatment

being provided to the injured, praising the doctors and medical staff. "The injured are recuperating satisfactorily, and I appreciate the dedicated efforts of the medical team here," he said.

The Defence Minister is scheduled to chair a meeting with senior officials at Raj Bhavan to review relief, rehabilitation and ongoing rescue efforts in Kishtwar.

Group Captain Shukla: 'India Looks Beautiful from Space'

CONTINUED FROM P1

achievement but a new chapter of a self-reliant India," Singh said, adding that space would define the future of economy, security and energy.

Group Captain Shukla, who returned from NASA's Axiom-4 mission on 15 July, shared his experience of viewing Earth from orbit. Displaying a recorded clip, he said, "India does look really beautiful. The unique positioning and shape, especially at night from the Indian Ocean, is probably one of the most beautiful sights you can ever see in life." He also highlighted how astronauts witnessed 16 sunrises a day, describing the sight as endlessly captivating.

Expressing gratitude to the Indian Air Force, Shukla credited his transformation

HIGHLIGHTS

- "India looks really beautiful from space, especially at night over the Indian Ocean."
— Gp Capt Shubhanshu Shukla
- 16 Sunrises a Day:** Astronauts on ISS witness Earth's sunrise every 90 minutes.
- Gaganyatris Felicitated:** Gp Capts Shubhanshu Shukla, P V Nair, Ajit Krishnan, Angad Pratap.
- Rajnath Singh:** "India stands tall among global space powers."
- Shukla's Journey:** From a shy Air Force recruit to India's second man in space.

and success to his years in uniform. "Cockpit has been my greatest teacher. I owe it to this uniform I am wearing," he said, recalling how the Air Force instilled confidence in him.

Singh, drawing a personal connection, noted that Shukla hailed from his Lucknow constituency. "Forty years ago, Rakesh Sharma went to space.

Shortly after, Shubhanshu was born. Today, his childhood dream has come true, and India has once again hoisted its flag in space," he remarked.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi had announced the Gaganyaan programme on 15 August 2018, setting India on course to launch astronauts into space using indigenous capabilities.



DRDO successfully conducts the maiden flight Tests of Integrated Air Defence Weapon System (IADWS). ANI

PM Narendra Modi to launch Rs 5,400-cr projects in Gujarat

CONTINUED FROM P1

enhance connectivity, and boost regional economic activity.

Further, Modi will launch new road infrastructure projects such as widening of the Viramgam-Khudad-Rampura road, six-lane underpasses on the Ahmedabad-Mehsana-Palanpur road, and a railway overbridge on the Ahmedabad-Viramgam stretch. He will also inaugurate power distribution projects worth over Rs 1,000 crore under the Revamped Distribution Sector Scheme to strengthen Gujarat's electricity network.

Urban development projects under PMAY

(Urban), including slum rehabilitation in Ramapir No Tekro, road widening on the Sardar Patel Ring Road, and improved water and sewerage systems, will also be taken up. In addition, foundation stones will be laid for a new Stamps and Registration building in Ahmedabad West and a State-Level Data Storage Centre in Gandhinagar.

The two-day visit will highlight Modi's push for green mobility, industrial growth, modern infrastructure, and digital governance, reinforcing India's position as a global hub for clean energy and manufacturing under Make in India and Aatmanirbhar Bharat.

REMEMBERING LORD SWRAJ PAUL

A tribute to a champion of Indo-British ties, philanthropy, and quiet resilience

OPINION

SUNDEEP BHUTORIA



I write these words with a heavy heart, mourning the loss of a man who was at once a titan and a guiding light for countless cosmopolitan Indians. Lord Swraj Paul was not just an industrialist, philanthropist, and parliamentarian — he was a beacon. A beacon between India and the United Kingdom, between tradition and modernity, between personal tragedy and public service.

My association with Lord Swraj Paul goes back more than 25 years. I first met him in London when the late Hashim Abdul Halim introduced me to him at the House of Lords, and we immediately connected. Since then, meeting him became an essential part of every London visit — whether it was a weekend at his farm, meals at his favourite Italian restaurant near Baker Street, evenings over samosas at his residence, or tea at the House of Lords.

In his last three visits to Kolkata, he was kind enough to visit my home, and I will always treasure those moments. I also spent time with him post-Covid when he was in Kensington Hospital, and the last time we met was at his house in London, where he was, as always, extremely

affectionate towards me.

Fifteen years ago, he graciously wrote the blurb for my book on tigers, and to my surprise, last year, his caretaker Salma called to say he had penned a note on my latest book 'Norway Diary'. Such gestures reflected his warmth and generosity of spirit.

His iconic July 5th tea party at the London Zoo will always be missed from the city's social calendar, just as his presence will be missed in the many institutions to which he devoted his life. Lord Paul was a man of immense willpower — even in his later years, one could see him in Parliament in his wheelchair, determined as ever. He leaves behind an extraordinary legacy of resilience, generosity, and commitment. When news broke of Lord Paul's passing on 21 August 2025, aged 94, condolences poured in from around the world. Prime Minister Narendra Modi wrote on X: "Deeply saddened by the passing of Shri Swraj Paul ji. His contributions to industry, philanthropy and public service in the UK, and his unwavering support for closer ties with India will always be remembered..."

Mamata Banerjee, the chief minister of West Bengal, also took to X to pay tribute to Lord Paul: "He was... an icon of the global Indian diaspora with deep Kolkata connections. I knew him well and received his affection. We had interacted on joint efforts to develop Bengal..."

These words fittingly capture a man who, for decades, dedicated his life to strengthening the ties of affection, trust, and enterprise between two nations.

AN EXTRAORDINARY JOURNEY

Swraj Paul was born in Jalandhar in 1931. He was named 'Swraj' because Mahatma Gandhi had visited his home around the time of his birth. His childhood was shaped by struggle — his father passed away when he was just 13, leaving him to be raised by his elder brothers. From Doaba College in Punjab to the hallowed halls of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, he carried with him a restless determination.

After studying at MIT, he returned to India, working briefly in the family's Apeejay Group, before fate dealt its most brutal blow. In 1966, seeking treatment in London for his daughter, Ambika, diagnosed with leukaemia, he moved with his young family to the UK. Ambika's passing at the tender age of four would change Lord Paul's life forever. Out of that grief, the Ambika Paul Foundation was born, carrying forward her joy and innocence into causes that would nurture generations of children. "The London Zoo is where she [Ambika] was always the happiest," Paul would often recall. It is no coincidence that the Ambika Paul Children's Zoo there stands as one of Lord Paul's most cherished contributions.

BUILDING AN EMPIRE WITH STEEL AND RESOLVE

What followed was a story worthy of legend. Lord Paul began humbly in the UK, with a single steel unit, and went on to found the Caparo Group in 1968. From that nucleus, he built one of the UK's largest steel conversion and distribution businesses. He often joked about being a "man of steel" not just because of the business, but because life demanded it of him.

For Lord Paul, Caparo was never just a business. It was his platform to champion



manufacturing in Britain at a time when the economy had started tilting heavily towards services. He showed that Indian grit could thrive in a British landscape, breaking through what he once described as the "old boys' network".

A LIFE TEMPERED BY GRIEF, BUT LIFTED BY LOVE

Yet behind the empire-builder was a man acquainted with deep sorrow. The loss of Ambika was only the first wound. In 1990, Lord Paul's brother, Surrendra Paul, was assassinated by insurgents in Assam. In 2015, his dynamic son, Angad, who had taken over as CEO of Caparo, died tragically. And in 2022, his beloved wife, Aruna

— whom he had married within a week of meeting her in Kolkata, before sharing six harmonious decades together — passed away.

I remember him saying, with a mixture of pride and wistfulness, that he inaugurated the Lady Aruna Swraj Paul Hall at the Indian Gymkhana Club as a tribute to "my wonderful wife whom I miss very much; we never had an argument during our 65 years of marriage".

Grief never left Lord Paul, but he transformed it into philanthropy. Each of his loved ones lived on in the institutions he built and the causes he supported.

THE PHILANTHROPIST AND EDUCATIONIST

Lord Paul's charitable vision was immense. From the Ambika Paul School of Technology in Jalandhar to scholarships at MIT, from the Ambika P3 arts space at the University of Westminster to the long chancellorship at the University of Wolverhampton, he poured millions into education. He believed learning was the surest way to lift lives. When asked where he felt most at home, Lord Paul used to say that he was 100 per cent Indian when in India and 100 per cent British when in the UK! That dual belonging was not just a sentiment — he lived it through his philanthropy. He donated generously to institutions on both sides of the world and, in doing so, he brought India and the UK closer together.

ing room. His vegetarianism was another gentle reminder of his rootedness.

THE MAN BEHIND THE TITLES

What endeared Lord Paul most, however, was his humour. At a function in Leicester in 2019, when asked why he was still working at his age (he was almost 90 then), he quipped: "At my age, what else can I do?" That was quintessential Lord Swraj Paul — self-deprecating, sharp, and disarmingly human. Despite being on 'the Sunday Times' Rich List and living in one of London's most enviable addresses, he took public transport 'like everybody else'. For a man who hobnobbed with heads of states, that humility was no act — it was his essence. As I think of him now, I am reminded of his memoir 'Beyond Boundaries'. That title perhaps best sums up his life. He transcended the boundaries of nation, class, grief, and prejudice. He was, in the truest sense, global — long before 'global Indian' became a buzzword.

Lord Swraj Paul leaves behind not only his family and the empire he built, but also an indelible impression on both India and the UK. He showed us that steel can be forged into bridges, that grief can give birth to hope, and that humour can outlast sorrow. As for me, I will miss his warmth, his generosity, and his quiet laughter. He was not only a statesman between nations, but also a true friend. And while London and Delhi will both claim him as their own, perhaps his legacy is best encapsulated in his own words — that he was always wholly Indian and wholly British. In that, he showed us what it truly means to belong everywhere.

Sundeep Bhutoria is a culturalist, thinker, wildlife enthusiast, author and globe trotter.

Cooperatives: A quiet revolution for a more equal India

OPINION

DR. RAKESH ARRRAWATIA & SUMIT SHARMA



In the aftermath of the 1991 economic crisis, India made a significant pivot from a state-controlled economy towards a more liberalized, market-driven model. This shift was critical for unlocking economic growth, attracting foreign investment, and integrating India into the global economy. Structural reforms such as deregulation, privatization, and the reduction of trade barriers helped stimulate industrial expansion and service-sector growth, leading to higher GDP and

improved global competitiveness.

However, while this transition catalysed overall economic development, it also led to income inequality and socio-economic disparity. According to Oxfam's *Survival of the Richest: The India Story*, report 2023, the richest 10% of Indians controlled 77% of the country's total wealth. The benefits of liberalization have favoured corporate giants, financial institutions, and urban elites, particularly in metropolitan areas. In con-

trast, rural populations — especially those dependent on agriculture and informal livelihoods — have often found themselves excluded from the rapid gains of economic reform.

COOPERATIVES AS INCLUSIVE INSTITUTIONS

In this context, cooperatives emerge as a compelling alternative, not only as economic institutions but as vehicles for inclusive and democratic wealth creation. When economists Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson argued in their book *Why Nations Fail* that inclusive economic institutions are essential for long-term prosperity because they distribute power and wealth more broadly — they may not have realized that India has long nurtured such institutions through its cooperative movement. A telling comparison illustrates this point vividly: when a conglomerate like Reliance Industries reaches a market valuation of Rs 12 lakh crore, the financial rewards are concentrated among a few shareholders. On the other hand, when Amul, a dairy cooperative, records an annual turn-

over of Rs 90,000 crore, the economic benefits are distributed among millions of farmers who are its true owners. This is not just redistribution — it is transformation.

THE MINISTRY OF CO-OPERATION: A GAME-CHANGING INITIATIVE

The formation of the Ministry of Cooperation marks a game-changing initiative in India's governance landscape. It holds the potential to bring the benefits of the cooperative movement closer to the common populace — particularly farmers, rural entrepreneurs and women engaged in grassroots economic activities. By institutionalizing support for cooperatives at the national level, this initiative helped build a more robust and integrated cooperative ecosystem across sectors. The vision articulated by Amit Shah, the Minister of Cooperation, is both ambitious and commendable, aiming to revitalize the cooperative model as a powerful tool for inclusive growth, self-reliance, and rural empowerment.

THE TRINITY THAT BUILT THE COOPERA-

TIVE MOVEMENT

However, replicating such models at scale requires more than just economic intent. It calls for a trinity of foundational strengths that once defined India's cooperative movement: the social capital and cooperative spirit of a Tribhuvandas Patel, the political vision and commitment of leaders like Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel and Lal Bahadur Shastri, and the economic genius and managerial innovation of Dr. Verghese Kurien.

Today, we have the political will under the leadership of Minister of Cooperation Amit Shah. Institutions like IRMA can continue to produce "new Kuriens," as seen in cooperative CXOs such as R.S. Sodhi (Indian Dairy Association), Jayen Mehta (Amul), and Dr. Meenesh Shah (NDDB). But the social capital from the grassroots — the lifeblood of any cooperative movement — must be nurtured through a steady, structured, and sustained approach.

IRMA AND AMUL: NORTH STARS OF THE COOPERATIVE MOVEMENT

Institutions like the Insti-

tute of Rural Management Anand (IRMA) and Amul serve as the north stars guiding the cooperative movement in India. They exemplify how professional management, and democratic governance can come together to create inclusive and sustainable models of development. IRMA has consistently nurtured a cadre of professionally trained managers who bring much-needed managerial sophistication, systems thinking, and ethical leadership to grassroots organizations. Its alumni have contributed significantly to a range of cooperative and development institutions across the country, strengthening the ecosystem from within.

Amul, on the other hand, stands as a pioneering example of how cooperatives can scale effectively while remaining rooted in the interests of their members. Its success has been deeply anchored in a governance structure led by democratically elected leaders from the farming community, ensuring both operational efficiency and social equity. By distributing wealth fairly among its producer-members and reinvesting

in local economies, Amul has become a powerful symbol of self-reliant rural enterprise. Together, IRMA and Amul reflect the transformative potential of the cooperative model when backed by vision, professionalism, and grassroots participation.

EDUCATION AS THE BEDROCK OF COOPERATION

At the grassroots level, the current approach to organizing Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) and cooperatives often adopts a push-based, mission-mode model led by NGOs. While this has achieved scale, it risks bypassing the most critical ingredient: values. Social capital, trust, and a spirit of mutual cooperation cannot be manufactured overnight. They must be cultivated patiently, and this is where education plays a transformative role.

Embedding cooperative principles and values in school and undergraduate curricula can sow the seeds of collective thinking and democratic enterprise in young minds. Future leaders of India's cooperative sector must not only understand balance sheets

but also the ethos of cooperation, equity, and shared purpose.

The establishment of 'Tribhuvan' Sakhari University (TSU) is an important step in this direction. It has the potential to become a crucible for nurturing socially committed, ethically grounded, and managerially competent leaders who will carry forward the cooperative movement. More than a university, it can be the nucleus of a quiet revolution — one that does not just reduce inequality, but redefines how we think about growth, ownership, and justice in the Indian economy. In an age where economic growth often comes with social fractures, cooperatives offer a model that is as democratic as it is efficient. The time is ripe to revisit this model, not just as an economic tool, but as a moral and social imperative.

Dr. Rakesh Arrawatia is a distinguished professor at the Institute of Rural Management Anand (IRMA). Sumit Sharma is currently serving as a Research Fellow at the Institute of Rural Management (IRMA) in Anand, Gujarat.

The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

Space mission

Goals must align with India's needs

THE ambitious roadmap for India's space programme outlined on National Space Day is in line with the mission to think big and expand the boundaries of technological prowess. The endless universe tells us that no frontier is the final frontier, the Prime Minister said, highlighting the commitment to stay the course on robust space exploration. India plans to launch 119 satellites in the next 15 years and expand its ground station networks. In the works are more unmanned Chandrayaan missions before an Indian sets foot on the moon by 2040. A 10-tonne module of the Bharatiya Antariksh Station is slated for launch in 2028. The entire space station is expected to be in place by 2035. The big techno-scientific projects are markers of India's growing stature as a global space power.

In light of the fast-changing global events and weapon advancements, national security considerations demand focussed attention. The challenge is to strike the right balance in making the optimum use of the space programme — both for developmental goals and leveraging the new capabilities for security objectives. It calls for pragmatism and careful assessment of India's needs. On the human spaceflight goals, an insightful perspective comes from Gaganyaan astronauts that the journey ahead must be approached with humility. Stepping beyond the planet, according to them, offers not just scientific breakthroughs but also a renewed sense of responsibility and unity. More important, for anything and everything that India does in space, there has to be some usefulness back on earth.

In Modi's call to prepare for deep space exploration, a paradigm shift has been the entry of the private sector in the space programme ecosystem. Much depends on how its role as a capable partner is harnessed to shoulder the weight of India's ambitious projects.

Mail interrupted

Trade tensions spill into postal services

FROM August 25, India Post will suspend most categories of mail to the US due to American carriers' refusal to process parcels under new US customs rules. Only letters, documents and gifts valued under \$100 will continue to be accepted. The suspension, necessitated by an executive order in Washington that scraps the duty-free 'de minimis' facility, makes low-value imports into the US costlier and harder to ship. Unable to meet the compliance demands of this new regime, carriers have halted operations, forcing India Post to follow suit. India is not alone. Several European postal services have also suspended shipments to the US. This underscores that the problem lies not in the efficiency of national postal systems but in Washington's increasingly restrictive trade and customs framework. What seems like a technical matter of parcel processing is, in reality, an extension of tariff politics.

This disruption is part of the broader trade friction between New Delhi and Washington. Recently, the US raised tariffs on several Indian products, including cotton exports, tightening pressure on India's farm sector. In a balancing act, New Delhi eliminated its own 11 per cent import duty on raw cotton — a longstanding demand of the textile industry — arguing it would help mills access cheaper inputs. Yet the timing, coming amid US pressure and 50 per cent tariffs on Indian cotton, has sparked debate over whether this decision undermines farmers while placating global partners.

For ordinary citizens, however, the tariff chess game translates into everyday inconvenience. Families can no longer send essentials easily, students are cut off from study materials and small exporters who rely on low-cost postal logistics face crippling uncertainty. India must not only press diplomatically for smoother trade and postal links, but also invest in strengthening its own logistics ecosystem. For now, even an ordinary parcel is collateral damage in a tariff war — an everyday casualty of high-level decisions.

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

LAHORE, TUESDAY, AUGUST 25, 1925

THE NEW PRESIDENT

AT its meeting on Saturday the Legislative Assembly elected Mr VJ Patel its President in place of Sir Frederick Whyte. While several names had been mentioned, only two candidates were actually nominated. Mr Rangachari, the defeated candidate, got 56 votes while Mr Patel got 58. As the election was by ballot, it is not possible to say with absolute precision who voted for whom. But every one who knows anything about the nature of the canvassing that preceded the election can form a fairly close idea of the lines on which the voting must have gone. Mr Patel's 58 must have consisted of the solid Swarajist block of about 43 members — the only Swarajists present on the day at Simla — and 15 other members, mostly, if not solely, Independents. Mr Rangachari's 56 supporters were an equally solid block of official and semi-official members, also about 43, and about 13 elected Indian members, Independent and Liberal. Apart from all questions of the respective merits of the two candidates, the election of Mr Patel is thus a matter for sincere congratulation, because it saved the Assembly from the unfortunate position of having in the Chair as its own nominee a person whom the overwhelming majority of the elected and non-official members did not want. Having said this, we are free to add that we consider it extremely unfortunate that the attempt that is known to have been made to have the first elected President of the Assembly put in the chair with a virtually unanimous non-official vote did not succeed. The proposal did not lack influential backing. Indeed, some of the principle supports of the two contending candidates met on Thursday evening to arrive at a unanimous decision, if possible.

A soldier must not be fighting the state

MoD must be more sensitive & review its policy on disability entitlement of ex-servicemen



LT GEN DS HOODA (RETD)
FORMER NORTHERN ARMY
COMMANDER

WHEN a disabled veteran or a family is forced to fight another battle, not on the frontline, but in the court, something is broken in our system that vocally applauds the soldier but entangles him in litigation after retirement. In several recent rulings, the courts have cautioned the government against its persistent practice of contesting nearly every Armed Forces Tribunal (AFT) ruling that grants pensionary relief to soldiers. This observation was made when the Delhi High Court was hearing the case of Major Sanjeev Chadha, who had died 25 years ago.

In another case last month, the Delhi High Court dismissed 300 petitions filed by the Defence Ministry challenging the AFT's order granting disability pension. The court noted, 'It is not an act of generosity, but a rightful and just acknowledgement of the sacrifices endured by them, which manifests in the form of disabilities/disorders suffered during their military service.... It is a measure that upholds the state's responsibility towards its soldiers, who have served the nation with courage and devotion.'

This is the real issue before us — the responsibility of the state towards the soldiers. However, before we turn to this, we must also understand why special consideration should be made towards the members of the military.

The military is entrusted with the exercise of ultimate violence on behalf of the nation. Irresponsible behaviour on its part could



RESOLVE: Soldiers carry a powerful sense of purpose that their duty serves a cause far greater than their own hardship. PM

weaken a nation's security and well-being. There must, therefore, be a set of codified values that serve as a guide to members of the military — the military ethic. This ethic accepts the supremacy of the political government, is corporate in spirit, and emphasises loyalty and obedience. However, the foremost element of the military ethic is the concept of 'unlimited liability.'

'Unlimited liability' means that all members of the military accept that they can be lawfully ordered to go into conditions which could lead to their death. This is a uniquely military provision that sets it apart from any other profession and is at the heart of understanding the meaning of duty as a soldier sees it. The fundamental nature of soldiering is not the capacity to take lives (though necessary for victory) but the willingness to die.

We must also ask ourselves what keeps individual soldiers going in the most difficult of conditions along the Himalayan watershed, the icy heights of Siachen, patrolling in waist-deep snow during counterterrorist operations in Kashmir, and engaging in artillery duels at the Line of Control. What keeps them going is a powerful sense of purpose that their duty serves a cause far greater than their own

The 'Military Covenant' is not only applicable to men in uniform, but more critically, also to those out of uniform.

hardship. They are defending the honour of their country, aware that the safety of the nation rests on the resolve of each soldier.

What does a soldier ask in return from the state? That he be treated with honour, respect and dignity. If he is injured or loses his life, he or his family will be looked after. This mutual obligation is referred to as the 'Military Covenant'. This interplay between the soldier and the state creates an unbreakable

bond that has sustained the military throughout India's independent history.

The 'Military Covenant' is not only applicable to men in uniform, but more critically, also to those out of uniform. It is the veterans, living in thousands of villages across the country, without the institutional support that a serving soldier enjoys, who deserve the state's obligations the most. Unfortunately, the spectacle of thousands of them who have bled for the flag now pleading before judges is distressing. Major Sanjeev Chadha's family had to wait a quarter century before justice was delivered.

In 2015, the government promised to reduce litigation and improve the system of addressing grievances among the military veterans. The Raksha Mantri constituted a Committee of Experts, and among the 32 recommendations that were accepted was the withdrawal of litigation in all cases that had been settled by the courts. However, little has changed.

In September 2023, new entitlement rules were issued for the grant of disability pension for the armed forces. Instead of taking note of the conditions under which soldiers operate, the rules have narrowed eligibility conditions. They create an unjust

imbalance compared to civilian employees, who continue to receive broader protections recognising work-related health issues without such stringent conditions. A month after the new rules were promulgated, it was reported that the Ministry of Defence had directed the Army to file writ petitions challenging all orders passed in favour of the disabled soldiers by the AFTs.

The problem is compounded by a refusal to accept the decisions of the AFT. In October 2024, the AFT Principal Bench in New Delhi issued summons to the Army Chief and the Defence Secretary. The Bench remarked, 'We find that the respondents in more than 6,500 cases pending before the Armed Forces Tribunal, Principal Bench, New Delhi, and 10 other Regional Benches are not implementing the orders passed by this Tribunal.'

The justification often given by officials is that there is an exploitation of disability benefits by 'unscrupulous personnel' and a rise in 'personnel seeking disability, even for lifestyle diseases.' This assertion does not stand up to scrutiny, considering the large number of cases where the courts have dismissed the MoD's challenges to AFT rulings.

The MoD must, therefore, review its policy on disability entitlement, both to curb any misuse and become more sensitive to soldiers whose health is bound to be affected by the hazardous conditions under which they operate. This should not merely be a technical exercise, but a moral one.

It is often argued that the military is a large organisation, and the financial implications of implementing the court orders would put additional pressure on the already stressed revenue budget. Counting rupees while discounting justice is a false calculus. Every contested order clogs courts, delays rehabilitation and undermines the trust between the soldier and the state. A soldier's last fight must not be against his own state.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Never was so much owed by so many to so few. — Winston Churchill

When a frog twitched back to life in the lab

ASHWANI CHATRAH

IT was 1977. After completing my matriculation, I had joined the pre-university class at a college in Batala. My father had encouraged me to pursue the medical stream. Back then, animal dissection was a mandatory part of the curriculum for biology students. In our first year, frogs served as our introduction to the inner workings of vertebrate anatomy.

Every week, our zoology practical class would begin with instructions from the professor, who would demonstrate the dissection process with surgical precision. Students would then return to their seats, where unconscious frogs awaited them in wax-lined dissection trays. The frogs were anaesthetised by immersion in a formalin solution. This task was handled by Garib Dass, the soft-spoken and helpful laboratory technician.

The standard procedure involved pinning the frog's limbs securely to the tray to prevent any movement. The dissection covered various bodily systems — digestive, circulatory, excretory and reproductive systems. What happened during one session remains etched in my memory. Midway through the procedure, as I was exploring the anatomy of my specimen, the frog twitched, then it began writhing violently, attempting to escape the tray. Startled beyond belief, I leapt back from the table. My gasp triggered a chain reaction; the entire lab erupted in panic as students backed away in alarm.

Our professor, however, remained unfazed. He reassured us that this was not uncommon. When insufficient formalin is used, the frog might not be completely anaesthetised. Garib Dass was summoned and, with a hint of a chuckle, he confirmed: 'It happens sometimes. Nothing to worry about.'

The specimen was promptly removed and replaced with a more sedated one. This time, the frog remained completely motionless — clear evidence that Garib Dass had taken no chances with the dosage.

What endeared Garib Dass to us wasn't just his role in maintaining the lab, but also his genuine concern for students. As the final exams approached and I struggled to revise the dissection material, he kindly arranged for me to practice once more with a sedated frog. This extra effort, along with the support of a classmate, helped me understand the subject better and ultimately pass my exam.

Today, animal dissections have been largely phased out in educational institutions across India. Thanks to advocacy by organisations like PETA, the UGC has banned the practice in favour of more humane and ecologically responsible methods. This decision not only spares countless animals pain and their lives but also reflects a growing awareness of biodiversity preservation and ethical scientific inquiry.

Looking back, that singular moment in the lab was more than just a disruption — it was a lesson in empathy, curiosity and the evolving ethics of science education.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

New Delhi asserts itself

Refer to 'India has to play along with China' (*The Great Game*); there is nothing wrong in having good relations with the US, even though New Delhi has refused to cater to Trump's self-obsession. It is quite reasonable to argue that in the recent years, an impression emerged that New Delhi tilted a bit more towards the US, even at the cost of old friendships. With India's assertion that India will continue purchasing oil from Russia despite Trump's threats and the timely visits of Ajit Doval and S Jaishankar to neighbouring countries, a balance has been struck. Diplomatic wisdom lies in maintaining peaceful and cordial relations with a powerful nation like China also. Meanwhile, the US President's high-profile meetings with Zelensky and the EU members have helped narrow down the gaps between the NATO, EU leaders and the US.

RAJ BAHADUR YADAV, FATEHABAD

India cannot afford isolation

India stands at a crossroads in the face of an imposing alliance between China and Pakistan. As the less powerful player, India must master the art of timing and restraint. China's deft diplomacy, weaving ties with Pakistan, Afghanistan — and even reaching out to India — shows that New Delhi cannot afford isolation or rigidity. In today's turbulent global landscape, India's path should be one of pragmatic flexibility, not bravado. True strength lies not in loud defiance, but in wise maneuvering and waiting for the right moment to tip the balance in your favour.

GURDEV SINGH, MOHALI

Not at the cost of our self-esteem

Refer to 'India has to play along with China'; our eastern neighbour is commending Pakistan for its "tireless efforts" to combat terrorism. If that was so, Pahalgam would have never happened. We all know that China is a strategic partner of Pakistan. India should not try to amend its ties with the US and China at the cost of its self-esteem. New Delhi should not allow itself to become a ball in the global playground to be kicked this side or that by opportunistic nations.

RAVINDER KUMAR JAIN, LUDHIANA

Cloudburst a misnomer

Refer to 'Hills can no longer absorb the shocks we inflict upon them'; it is true that any rain-related disaster in Himachal is often mislabelled as a 'cloudburst'. However, the fragile terrain bears the scars of reckless tunnelling, road-cutting, unplanned construction and deforestation, which trigger landslides and destroy livelihoods. Moreover, slurry, muck and debris bury homes and fields, yet this huge devastation is misleadingly termed as a natural calamity. The government must enforce rigorous monitoring and sensitive engineering to safeguard lives.

CHANCHAL S MANN, UNA

No clarity on zero GST on premiums

Apropos of 'GST revamp'; a zero-GST label may sound appealing and populist, but if insurers quietly adjust base premiums, the customers gain little and transparency suffers. What is missing is a focus on clarity and accountability. A lower GST rate, say 5%, combined with measures like refunding unutilised credits and mandatory disclosure of benefit pass-through to policyholders would deliver genuine relief instead of cosmetic optics. Further, targeted subsidies for vulnerable groups such as senior citizens could create deeper social repercussions. Without these safeguards, any GST overhaul risks adding to confusion instead of enhancing consumer protection.

K KUMAR, PANCHKULA

Develop positive mindset

There are sufficient laws to deal with corruption, we do not need any more. The government pushing for the Constitution Bill was a farce. The solution lies in applying the existing laws duly supported by fair, transparent and professional investigations as well as subsequent speedy trials without any political interference. The misuse of premier investigative agencies has become the order of the day particularly to harass Opposition leaders. The ruling parties, whether at the Centre or in the states, must inculcate a positive and progressive mindset towards their opponents which is an indispensable need of constitutional democracy.

RAVI BHUSHAN, KURUKSHETRA

Haryana also needs a capital of its own



SURINDER S JODHKA
PROFESSOR, CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF SOCIAL SYSTEMS, JNU

A WIDE range of political formations in Punjab held rallies and meetings to commemorate the death anniversary of Sant Harchand Singh Longowal last week. He was killed by militants on August 20, 1985, for signing an accord with the then Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi.

Representing the Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), he had reached an agreement with the Union government on several contentious demands of Sikhs, for which his party had been agitating for years. As is well known, the Akali movement, though initially raised "secular" demands, it soon took a violent form, with a section of Sikh militants demanding a separate state for Sikhs.

Given that Sant Longowal had signed the pact in the backdrop of the Indian armed

forces' attack on the Sikh holy shrine in Amritsar, the murder of Indira Gandhi and widespread violence against innocent Sikhs in Delhi and other cities, led other prominent Akali leaders to distance themselves from both the accord and Sant Longowal.

It is 40 years after his death that his legacy is being claimed by different factions of the SAD, even declaring him a martyr for the cause. While recalling his sacrifice, leaders of the two prominent factions of the SAD invoked the Rajiv-Longowal accord. They reminded their audience and the Union government that the promises made by it in 1985 had still not been implemented — the most prominent of them being the transfer of Chandigarh to Punjab as its capital. By implication, Chandigarh should no longer be a union territory and should no longer be the capital of Haryana.

It was on September 1, 1966, nearly 59 years ago, that Haryana became a separate state. In the federal history of independent India, every time a new state is created, it also gets a new capital city of its own. By virtue of being the seat of legislative power, the capital city attracts a wide



UNFORTUNATE: Gurugram is a top city, but it has little to do with Haryana's social, cultural life. FILE PHOTO

range of institutions: educational, medical, social, judicial and many more. It is in the capital city that a new region-specific middle-class elite consolidates itself. Besides seeking mobility through education, employment and engagements with such modern-day institutions, this middle class articulates an identity for the region.

The process is very similar to the growth of nationalism during the late 19th and early 20th century India. The cities of Kolkata, Mumbai, Chennai and Delhi acquired prominence not merely as industri-

al cities, they also shaped the Indian middle-class elite and identity of the new nation. Likewise, cities like Gandhinagar, Dehradun, Ranchi and Raipur provided such spaces for the newly formed states to consolidate their regional aspirations and identities. More recently, when the state of Andhra Pradesh was separated from Telangana, it also envisioned a new capital city for itself, Amaravati.

As a part of the Indian union, Haryana has emerged as a significant state over the past 59 years. With a population of more than 2.5 crore, it

is counted among the 'large-sized states'. It has not only successfully emerged from the shadow of Punjab but also surpassed it in many respects.

Haryana ranks among the top five states in terms of the popular indicators of economic growth, leaving behind Punjab. Even though its share in the national population is a little above 2 per cent, its contribution to national income is close to 4 per cent.

However, a closer look at the social and economic life on the ground in the state presents a rather disheartening picture. Despite being among the prominent states, it lacks a sense of its cultural self. Most of its urban population is concentrated in the National Capital Region (NCR). While Gurugram may figure among the top happening cities of South Asia, it has very little to do with the social and cultural life of Haryana. Likewise, the new private universities near Sonapat are beginning to be ranked among the institutions of academic excellence by global ranking agencies. Still, they contribute very little to the educational well-being of the state.

For Haryana, such urbanisation has only created a class of real estate agents and a

small number of individuals/households with a large volume of wealth acquired through the sale of agricultural land, but with no meaningful economic engagement.

Unfortunately, there are not many people who speak up for Haryana and articulate the aspirations of its youth and the ordinary people. Like most other regions, its political elite has, strangely, mostly been indifferent to such cultural and social needs of the state.

The most critical reason for such a fragmented nature of the regional social and political elite has been the absence of a capital city, a centre of social and political life where such a voice could have been articulated and heard.

Whether Chandigarh remains a union territory or is transferred to Punjab does not benefit the long-term interests of Haryana. Instead of wasting its energy on resisting such a transfer, Haryana needs to negotiate with the Union government for a capital city of its own, which houses its legislative Assembly, offices of the state government and a high court of its own that could enable the state to acquire an identity for itself.

Despite being among the prominent states of the country, Haryana lacks a sense of its cultural self.

What do they know of AI who only AI know



RAJAT KATHURIA
PROFESSOR OF ECONOMICS, SHIV NADAR UNIVERSITY, NCR

CLR JAMES, the Trinidadian sociologist and intellectual, famously posed a rhetorical question in his seminal work, *Beyond a Boundary*: "What do they know of cricket who only cricket know?" Professor James argued that to truly grasp the essence of cricket, one must explore the intricate connections with society, history, politics and culture. The game, for Professor James, was a prism through which to understand the human condition, colonial legacies and the struggle for identity. In the same spirit, one might provocatively ask: "What do they of AI know who only AI know?"

To understand artificial intelligence (AI) solely through its algorithms, data sets and computational power is to miss the profound societal, ethical and economic implications it engenders. This article argues that a narrow, purely technical understanding of AI is insufficient, particularly when confronting the complex interplay between rapid AI innovation and pressing ethical concerns. These include the rise of monopolies and challenges to antitrust frameworks, especially in the context of India's burgeoning Big Tech landscape.

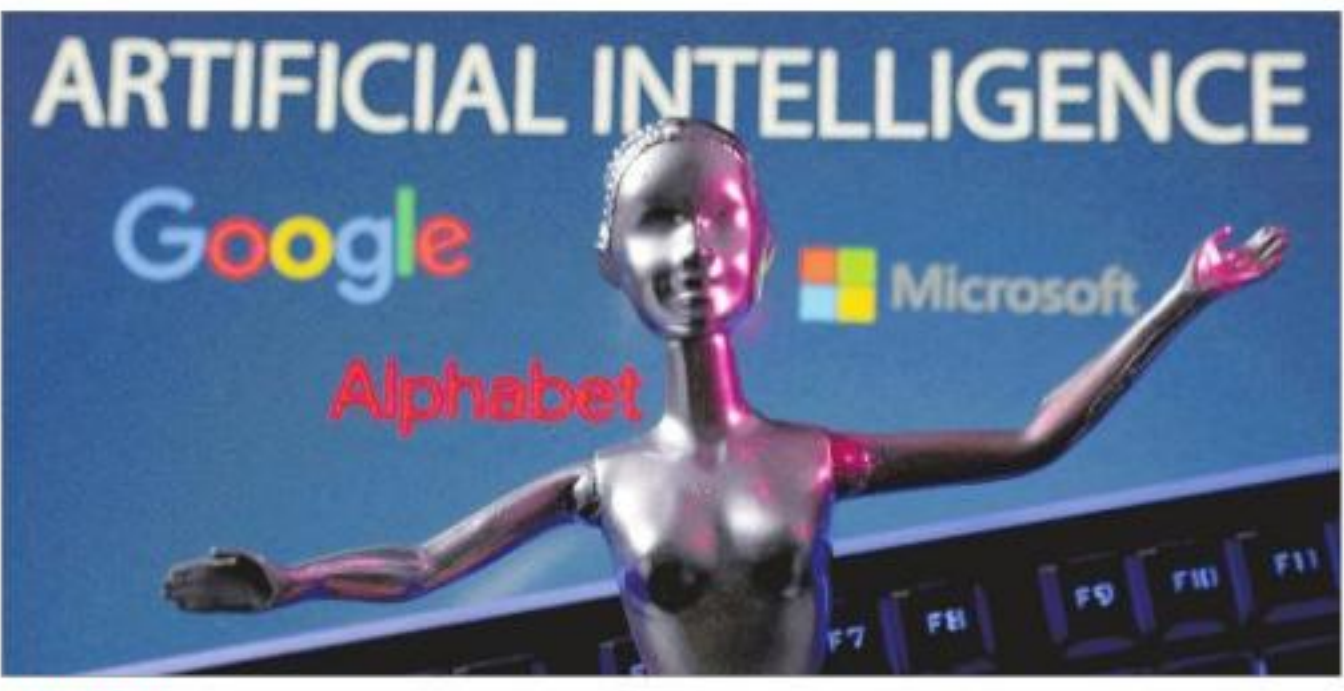
AI innovation is undeniably a powerful engine for progress. From revolutionising healthcare diagnostics and drug discovery to optimising supply chains and personalising consumer experiences, AI promises unprecedented efficiencies and capabilities.

In India, AI is poised to help leapfrog growth in various sectors — from agriculture to finance — offering solutions to longstanding developmental challenges. With the sheer scale of data available in India, combined with a burgeoning digital infrastructure and a vast talent pool, the possibilities are mindboggling.

However, the very nature of AI innovation inherently favours market concentration. Modern AI models, especially large language models (LLMs) and complex neural networks, require immense computational power, vast datasets and highly specialised talent. These resources are not evenly distributed. Big Tech companies — such as Google, Amazon, Meta and Microsoft globally, and their dominant counterparts in India — possess unparalleled access to these critical inputs. They own the cloud infrastructure, control massive user data ecosystems and can attract top AI talent through substantial investments.

This creates a self-reinforcing cycle: more data leads to better models, which attract more users, generating even more data, further solidifying their market position. In other words, what economists refer to as 'network effects' become even more profound in an AI ecosystem.

This dynamic creates significant barriers to entry for



ANTITRUST: A purely technical understanding of AI is insufficient when confronting ethical concerns. REUTERS

smaller firms and startups. It becomes very, very hard for a new entrant to build, deploy or distribute a competitive AI product without relying on the infrastructure and resources provided by these incumbents. This inbuilt advantage, driven by the scale and capital intensity of AI development, naturally leads to monopolies.

We have in the past heard self-serving arguments by giants that natural monopolies are good because they reduce cost for customers. AT&T, before its divestiture in 1984, spent millions in legal fees over decades arguing against structural reorganisation. The rise of AI-driven market concentration threatens a recurrence of litigation-intensive regulation for Big Tech. The combined market capitalisation of the world's largest technology companies, including Apple, Microsoft, Alphabet (Google), Amazon, Nvidia and Meta, now collectively is around the size of the world's second-largest economy. This immense economic power presents novel and

complex challenges for competition regulators.

Concepts such as algorithmic collusion, where pricing algorithms can tacitly coordinate market behaviour without explicit human agreement (eg, dynamic pricing on e-commerce platforms leading to synchronised price hikes), are difficult to prove under existing laws requiring overt collusion. Killer acquisitions, like Facebook's acquisition of Instagram when it was a nascent competitor with no revenue, eliminate future competitive threats and stifle innovation, often falling below traditional merger review thresholds.

Lastly, self-preferencing and bundling, where dominant platforms favour their own products or services (eg, Google promoting its shopping results or apps like YouTube in search rankings or Apple favouring its own App Store and services), leverage their market power to disadvantage rivals and limit consumer choice. These practices create novel and complex issues for regulators

worldwide as they were not designed for the unique dynamics of digital markets and AI-driven economies.

India's antitrust watchdog, the Competition Commission of India (CCI), is actively grappling with these challenges. While the Competition Act of 2002 provides a framework for investigating anti-competitive agreements and abuse of dominant position, the unique characteristics of digital markets and AI necessitate new approaches.

Thus, the Ministry of Corporate Affairs (MCA) released a draft Digital Competition Bill in 2024, proposing to introduce ex-ante regulations — rules designed to prevent anti-competitive behaviour before it occurs — for "Systemically Significant Digital Enterprises (SSDEs)." This proactive approach, inspired by global efforts like the EU's Digital Markets Act, sought to ensure fair competition in digital markets without stifling innovation. However, the government was compelled to withdraw this Bill after vehement opposition by the Big Tech, among others, that the 'ex-ante' or pre-emptive regulatory approach is overly broad, vague and it duplicates existing provisions. What's more, the Bill inter alia risked stifling innovation and investment and raising consumer costs, they said. To those in the know, this is an all too familiar playbook.

The Parliamentary Standing Committee on Finance, in its report 'Evolving Role of CCI in the Economy, Particularly the Digital Landscape', submitted this month, recommended that the CCI strengthen its technical capacity, establish a

specialised digital markets unit, shift towards an evidence-based framework and examine a nuanced ex-ante regulatory approach to address anti-competitive practices by large digital enterprises more effectively.

So, the government has decided to conduct a comprehensive market study before drafting a new legislation, aiming to balance curbing anti-competitive conduct with fostering innovation and economic growth.

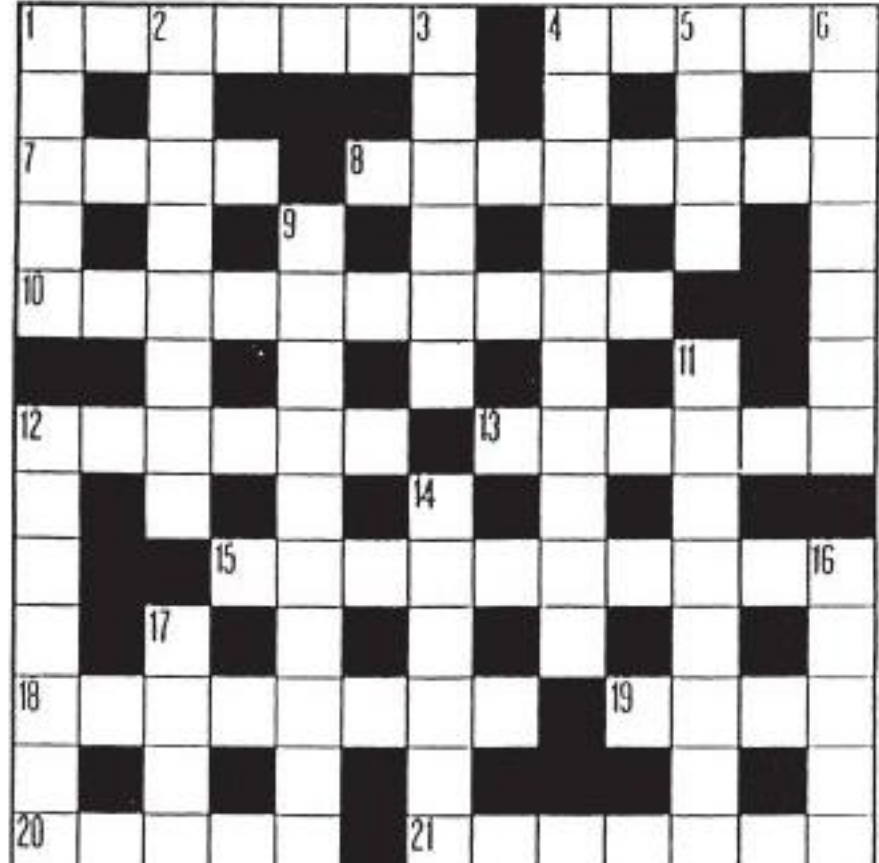
India, like other countries, faces a delicate balancing act. On the one hand, there's a strong desire to foster domestic AI innovation and achieve technological self-reliance, aligning with initiatives like 'Make in India'. On the other hand, allowing unchecked market concentration by the Big Tech, whether foreign or domestic, could stifle nascent Indian startups and limit consumer choice. The CCI has already scrutinised the conduct of giants like Google and Meta on the alleged abuse of dominant positions in app distribution and online advertising, signalling a determination to address these issues.

CLR James's challenge to understand cricket beyond its boundaries serves as a powerful metaphor for the AI era. To truly harness AI's transformative potential for national development, we must move beyond a purely technical understanding. The tension between innovation and ethical concerns, particularly the rise of Big Tech monopolies and the challenges to antitrust, underscores the urgent need for a holistic approach.

Views are personal

Allowing unchecked market concentration by the Big Tech, whether foreign or domestic, could stifle nascent Indian startups and limit consumer choice.

QUICK CROSSWORD

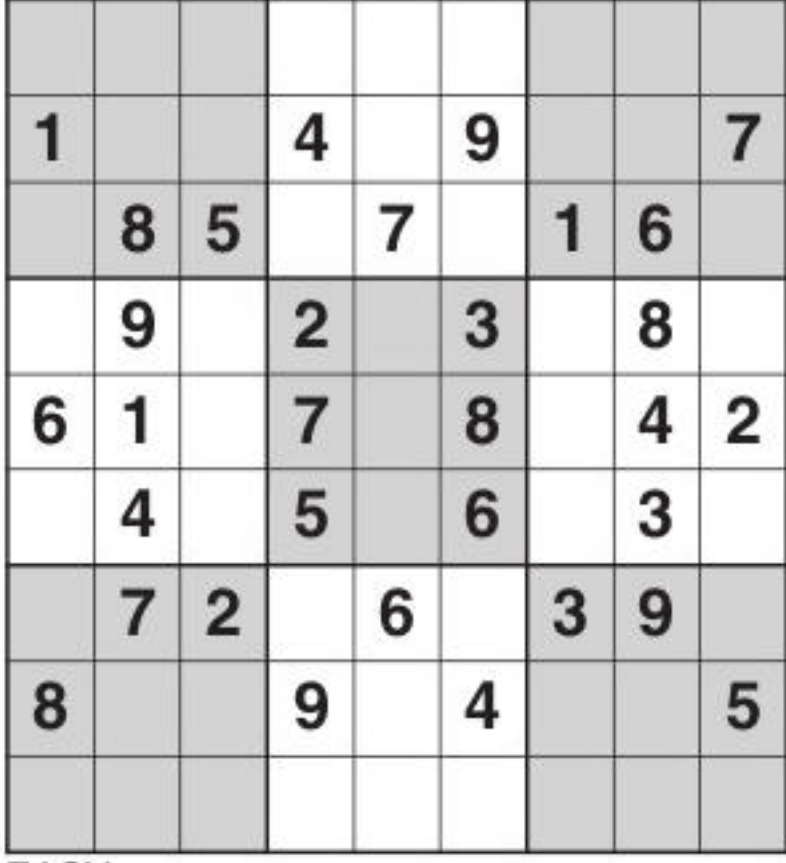


ACROSS
1 Vividly descriptive (7)
4 A culinary herb (5)
7 A set piece of work (4)
8 Bothersome (8)
10 Instigator (5,5)
12 Considerable (6)
13 Peculiar trait (6)
15 Ready to act and waiting (2,3,5)
18 Strict disciplinarian (8)
19 Continue (2,2)
20 Follow to its origins (5)
21 Zealous supporter (7)

DOWN
1 Style of clothing (3-2)
2 Patronage (8)
3 Very large American vulture (6)
4 Worn out by use (6-4)
5 Bias in interpretation (4)
6 Within the law (7)
9 Heir apparent (4,2,4)
11 Direction indicator (8)
12 Plunge headlong (7)
14 Canny (6)
16 Bum superficially (5)
17 Operatic song (4)

Saturday's solution
Across: 1 Go great guns, 9 Insight, 10 Moron, 11 Hate, 12 Proutide, 14 Unseen, 16 Come up, 18 Fanciful, 19 Aura, 22 Inert, 23 Profuse, 24 See eye to eye.
Down: 2 Onset, 3 Rage, 4 Artery, 5 Gumption, 6 Nurture, 7 With-out fail, 8 In deep water, 13 Belittle, 15 Sincere, 17 Supply, 20 Usury, 21 Solo.

SU DO KU



EASY

FORECAST

SUNSET:	SUNRISE:	MONDAY	TUESDAY	18:53 HRS	05:56 HRS
CITY		MAX	MIN		
Chandigarh		32	25		
New Delhi		31	22		
Amritsar		32	26		
Bathinda		32	25		
Jalandhar		32	26		
Ludhiana		31	25		
Bhiwani		32	25		
Hisar		34	25		
Sirsa		32	27		
Dharamsala		27	18		
Manali		23	16		
Shimla		24	17		
Srinagar		30	16		
Jammu		32	22		
Kargil		28	16		
Leh		27	13		
Dehradun		31	24		
Mussoorie		21	17		

CALENDAR

AUGUST 25, 2025, MONDAY

- Shaka Samvat 1947
- Bhadrapad Shaka 3
- Bhadrapad Parvishite 10
- Hijari 1447
- Shukla Paksha Tithi 2, up to 12.35 pm
- Siddha Yoga up to 12.06 pm
- Uttaraphalguni Nakshatra up to 3.50 am
- Moon enters Virgo sign 8.29 am

TEMPERATURE IN °C

THE ASIAN AGE

25 AUGUST 2025

Will new US envoy help to repair ties under threat?

With suspended trade talks, penal tariffs, which were revealed to be sanctions rather than a tax on imports, and the deadline for the application of those sanctions for importing Russian oil (August 27) approaching, India-US ties can be said to be in rocky waters. Coming amid this climate of disagreements is the nomination by Donald Trump of his close aide Sergio Gor as the next US Ambassador to India.

To say the appointment of an official whom Elon Musk had only recently described as “a snake” is unusual would be to invite scorn for an oxymoron. Given Trump’s sustained campaign against illegal immigrants, it may also sound a bit unusual that Gor is himself an immigrant who came through Malta to the US to become a naturalised citizen.

The US President, Trump, tends to tear up the rule book and toss conventions and traditions out of the window in most things he has been doing. Gor’s appointment to a key post as envoy to India in these diplomatically tough times as geopolitics is being churned would have to await Senate clearance, which might take time, but the intent to keep India on the hook is clear enough.

Gor’s appointment to a key post as envoy to India in these diplomatically tough times as geopolitics is being churned would have to await Senate clearance, but the intent to keep India on the hook is clear enough

whose trade with Russia is far higher than India’s has been stressed. But the response has only been hostile, as evidenced in the use of phrases like “profiteering from oil” and “maharaja of tariffs” even as they are accompanied by India being described as the “road to peace” and “prized free and democratic partner” with a special place in America’s strategic outreach.

External affairs minister Jaishankar has minced no words in pointing out the incongruities in Trump’s jaundiced approach to India, emphasising that there are red lines India will not cross in any negotiations on trade with the US. The Indian dairy sector is one in which millions of small stakeholders make a living off a few cattle and the bigger agriculture segment is India’s pride as purveyor of food security for the world’s largest national population.

The grip of the trade imbroglio is such that India is currently helpless to pursue any remedial action in the absence of any forum to put its point of view across to Trump. Unlike China which has control over rare earth minerals, besides holding a lot of US Treasury paper, and Russia, whose hypersonic weaponry has the clout to keep the US on guard, India has no leverage to persuade a relook at the sanctions, leave alone the base 25 per cent tariff on all Indian imports that kicked in earlier.

“Cajole, don’t confront” must be the watchwords as India grapples with the trade complication. It would be a get out of jail card for India if the Ukraine war is paused or ended by Russia. Until then, the vibes will be cold with the US regardless of old strong ties.

Fair rolls onus on EC, not voter

The Supreme Court’s latest instructions to the Election Commission of India (EC) with respect to the special intensive revision (SIR) of the electoral roll in Bihar will help make the process more voter-friendly and transparent.

As per the directives, the EC will have to accept Aadhaar card as one of the documents to prove a voter’s eligibility for being retained on the electoral roll. The EC has also been directed to accept the documents submitted electronically. Aadhaar numbers have no solid legal backing yet, but most Indians possess one, and hence it will help many retain their voting right while the facility to submit the documents electronically will help those who are outside the state, especially the migrant labour, meet the EC’s requirements.

The EC has of late announced that it has received the documents 98.2 per cent of the electors in the draft voters list; it is expected that it will touch 100 per cent with several days to go for the publication of the final list on September 30. While the news is welcome, the concern most people have raised is not about those who have been retained on the draft list but about the 65 lakh people who have been removed from the rolls. The two measures the SC has announced will help many of them to get back to the rolls. The SC has also asked the political parties to be part of the process and help the electors submit the documents.

The crucial issue, however, is about the power of the EC to remove a voter from the list without giving the affected person a chance to state his case. It is only with the intervention of the court that the EC has even published the list of “evictees”.

While none should object to the attempts of the EC to sanctify the electoral roll, there must be legal protection for the citizen to retain his name on the list unless the EC can prove that a name needs to be removed from the rolls as per the law. In other words, the revision being just and fair must be the responsibility of the EC, and not the voter.

THE ASIAN AGE

KAUSHIK MITTER

Editor

K. SUDHAKAR

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 BFL Infotech Ltd., C-9, Sector-III, Noida -201301.

London: Quickmarsh Ltd, 8th Floor, Block 2, Elizabeth House, 39 York Road, London, SE1 7NQ.

RNI Registration number: 57290/94

Pradeep S. Mehta & Purushendra Singh

Why tariff threats by Trump’s USA could be wake-up call for New Delhi

When US President Donald Trump announced his intention to impose a 50 per cent tariff (25 pc plus 25 pc penalty) on Indian imports, it triggered predictable alarm bells in trade and business circles. Mr Trump’s transactional, “day-trader” approach to diplomacy often prioritises headlines over holistic strategy, and has a history of using tariffs as blunt instruments.

But while many view this as a looming crisis for Indian exports, it could in fact be the jolt India needs to accelerate overdue economic reforms, diversify its trade relationships, and strengthen its role in global value chains.

Strategic relationship: India and the United States share a multi-dimensional partnership. The relationship spans defence and space cooperation, technology partnerships, climate collaboration, educational exchanges and shared geopolitical concerns in the Indo-Pacific. Initiatives like the Quad, IMEC and bilateral dialogues on critical and emerging technologies all point to the reality that Washington and New Delhi are strategic stakeholders in each other’s futures.

In other words, while tariffs might grab the headlines these days, they are not the sum total of US-India relations. Even under a Trump presidency, it is unlikely that cooperation in defence, counter-terrorism or Indo-Pacific security would suddenly be abandoned. The challenge, and the opportunity, lies in insulating the broader relationship from the volatility of trade dynamics, as Mr Trump thinks.

Adding to the debate, US trade representative Jamieson Greer recently argued in an article “Why

We Remade the Global Order” that such aggressive measures are necessary to reshape trade for America’s benefit. This framing is a wild mischaracterisation. The global order is not America’s to remake unilaterally, and certainly not through punitive economic measures that disregard the mutual benefits of open, rules-based trade. Such rhetoric alienates partners, fragments supply chains and risks accelerating the very instability it claims to prevent.

If history is any guide, steep tariffs will hurt US consumers and businesses as much, if not more, than Indian producers. Tariffs are effectively a tax on imports, raising costs for businesses and households in the US. India’s share in US imports includes pharmaceuticals, textiles, auto parts, IT services and specialty goods, all of which have few immediate substitutes at the same quality and price. This means that the cost burden of a 50 per cent tariff will land largely on American buyers.

For India, the near-term pain may be concentrated in specific export sectors, but long-term damage is avoidable — if we act decisively and uniformly.

Need radical, not incremental, reforms: India has been talking about integration into global value and supply chains for years. The 2025 Union Budget included discussions about deregulation. This is the moment to shift from incremental tinkering to radical reform. We need to:

- Simplify trade procedures to make export and import processes more efficient.
- Address logistics bottlenecks by upgrading ports, warehousing and multimodal transport links.
- Deregulate deeply so that businesses, especially

SMEs, can operate at global standards without drowning in paperwork.

■ India becomes not just a low-cost producer but a hub of innovation and high-value manufacturing.

■ Create a national compact comprising all states, political parties, civil society and trade unions to work together to achieve the goals.

By doing so, India can move its GDP growth rate from the current six per cent towards the ambitious 8.5-9 per cent range, which is necessary for becoming a developed country.

One of the biggest lessons from any trade discord is the danger of over-reliance on a single market. The US remains a crucial partner, but India should deepen trade ties with other nations, including in Southeast Asia, Latin America and Africa. These regions present growing demand for Indian goods and services, and building these linkages now would reduce vulnerability to unilateral actions by a single country. Groupings such as Brics and reviving the Russia-India-China (RIC) alliance are other routes.

We must also capitalise on the ongoing reconfiguration of global supply chains. The US-China trade truce, extended by 90 days, is driven by Washington’s inevitable reliance on Beijing’s control over critical minerals — the bedrock of EVs, semiconductors, and other advanced technologies.

The US use of unilateral, punitive measures against third countries undermines the very rules-based international order it claims to champion. Such actions erode trust, distort markets and weaken the World Trade Organisation’s authority. India, as a key voice among developing countries, should

continue to push for fair, more transparent trade rules and multilateralism. This is India’s vision of “Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam” (world is one family).

Playing the long game: President Trump’s mercurial approach to trade policy should not distract India from its long-term objectives. Engaging the US on strategic and technological fronts, while simultaneously insulating our economy from policy shocks, is the way forward. Government-to-government engagement on defence, space, health, education and climate will and should continue uninterrupted.

Rather than respond to tariffs with retaliatory measures that escalate tensions, India should focus on strengthening its competitiveness, diversifying its markets and leveraging global partnerships. It has started taking action on this in various manners: pushing deregulation; creating a support fund of ₹20,000 crores for affected SMEs and accelerating efforts to find new markets. In the bigger picture, the best thing any country can do for the world economy is to take care of its own economy and society. Strong, stable, prosperous countries make for a stronger, more resilient global economy. For India, that means realigning and repurposing its role in global value chains, not as a passive participant, but as a proactive shaper of the future trading system. We can do it only if all parties in the country decide to come together.

Pradeep S. Mehta is the secretary-general of CUTS International, a 42-year-old leading global public policy research and advocacy group. **Purushendra Singh** works for CUTS International.

Subhani



India’s foreign policy is in need of fresh stewardship



Bharat Bhushan

With its dream of reaching greatness by hanging on to the coattails of the United States going bust, India needs to radically rethink its foreign policy. Rather than the ongoing tentative recalibration, it needs to be redesigned from the ground up.

Although Indian political leaders value loyalty to a fault, this cannot be done by the same actors who were till recently bending over backwards to please Washington. The shock of the punitive tariffs imposed by US President Donald Trump has led to Indian ministers and officials making a bee-line to Moscow and Beijing. This 180-degree flip is being presented as strategic agility.

However, both Moscow and Beijing will not fail to see the outreach as damage control although they will welcome it as a step towards a broader multipolar realignment. An India that is spurned by the US fits into their play on the larger global chessboard. Indeed, Moscow has even suggested revival of the trilateral Russia-India-China (RIC) dialogue, a potential building block of a non-Western alliance.

India, which because of its democracy, pluralism and rule-of-law had far greater credibility than the authoritarian regimes amongst the nations of the Global South, is now forced to make common cause with them.

India may claim that it is doubling down on its “special and privileged strategic partnership” with Russia, but its foreign policy establishment still has one leg firmly in the American camp. India’s love-fest with the US, especially with Mr Trump, was also facilitated by the same actors.

Recent invocations of India’s sovereignty were absent when they pushed India into the US camp,

while continuing to nod timidly towards Moscow for the sake of form. They also facilitated India’s role as the cat’s paw of the US against China.

China, earlier than most other countries, understood the shallowness of the Indian strategic vision. It also had a good measure of the personalities leading India’s foreign policy. They were fully aware, even while engaging with them, that they could not walk the talk. This was evident in India’s refusal to even publicly acknowledge China’s belligerent incursions across the Line of Actual Control in Ladakh, including in the summer of 2020.

China has responded to India’s current attempts to pivot by condemning the punitive US tariffs as “bullying” and invited India to join its stance as defender of a rules-based system of trading under the World Trade Organisation.

Having till recently urged the boycott of Chinese goods, including the purchase of “small-eyed” Ganesha idols, the Indian government will now have to re-position China as a cooperative partner rather than a strategic threat.

Meanwhile, China has already begun to take advantage of India’s perceptibly weakened position. Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi’s recent visit to New Delhi marked a movement forward from stalemate to tactical engagement, but two developments stood out — India agreed to an “early harvest” approach to border settlement, and the Chinese claimed that India had recognised Taiwan as a part of China.

India had earlier preferred a comprehensive border settlement but under Chinese insistence it seems to have agreed to settle the border along Sikkim under the “early harvest” proposal.

Recall the jamboree of South Asian leaders who attended Mr Modi’s oath-taking in 2014. Ten years later, India’s relationship with its immediate neighbours has never been as fraught as it is today.

This would isolate the Sikkim boundary from the other disputed sectors — western, middle and eastern — on China’s border with India. Experts believe that this will help China to settle its border with Bhutan “with an eye towards the Doklam plateau”, with India gaining little.

On Taiwan, China claims that India has recognised it as a part of China, and India has clarified that while it supports “one China policy”, it remains focused only on Taiwan’s “economy and culture”. China has said that this was contrary to what had transpired at Mr Wang Yi’s meetings in New Delhi.

Much of the reengagement with China appears transactional — restarting direct flights, promoting trade and holding summits. Core disputes like the standoff in eastern Ladakh and China’s active intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance support to Pakistan during Operation Sindoor have not been addressed effectively. Clearly, ties are nowhere near normal and suspicions persist.

India is essentially buying time through tactical recalibration with Russia and China, hoping that meanwhile things will improve with the US. However, India-US relations henceforth will be marked with caution, if not distrust, even if the US tariffs are reduced.

Nearer home, the foreign policy missteps are even starker with Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s “neighbourhood first” approach being reduced to mere rhetoric by the foreign policy establishment. Recall the jamboree of South Asian leaders who attended Mr Modi’s oath-taking in 2014. Ten years later, India’s rela-

tionship with its immediate neighbours has never been as fraught as it is today. Leaving Pakistan aside, India’s failure to improve ties with other South Asian countries is a shocking testament to the failures of the architects of its foreign policy. Meanwhile, suspicion of India in multilateral forums of the Global South, because of its close alignment with the US, is likely to persist.

Some blame India’s failure on the global stage on Prime Minister Modi’s faith in personal diplomacy — focussing on high-profile summits, his personal rapport with world leaders, his frequent foreign visits and support from the social media. While these factors shaped India’s and Mr Modi’s international image briefly, they fell short of achieving substantive foreign policy outcomes.

However, much of the present failure lies on the heads of those who encouraged him on the path of “prestige diplomacy” and convinced him that India’s road to greatness passed through Washington DC. They accelerated the strategic alignment with the US through the “Quad”, defence deals and cooperation in the Indo-Pacific (a term coined by the US to pandor to Indian egos). They did not foresee that none of this would shield India from economic coercion. The tilt towards the US has also come at the cost of underinvesting in other relationships.

Those who showed lack of economic foresight in foreign policy by not recommending diversification of markets, failed to secure exemptions for Indian goods, actively promoted appeasement of Donald Trump and delayed pushback against the US need to be held accountable.

They have eroded India’s position, making it vulnerable through its strategic miscalculations. Verbal gymnastics about strategic autonomy may have their value in diplomacy but those responsible for India’s foreign policy predicament need to make way for others to allow the nation a fresh start.

The writer is a senior journalist based in New Delhi

LETTERS

UNJUST EVICTIONS

This refers to the news report “SC orders status quo on eviction in Assam” (August 24). It is a matter of deep regret that the Assam government is set on evicting and demolishing the properties of bona fide settlers in Assam. This arbitrary action of the government is in violation of the Constitution.

How can an eviction be effected without due process of law? We are, after all, not living in jungle raj. There are Bengali speakers, too, who are original residents of Assam, such as the Muslims of Barak Valley. The borders were drawn such that the valley became part of Assam at the moment of inception. How unjust to crack down on them and others!

Arun Gupta
Kolkata

EPFO PENSIONERS

THERE ARE millions governed by the Employees Provident Fund scheme 1995. The minimum pension under the scheme was revised to ₹1,000 some 20 years ago. There has been no increase thereafter. But the inflation index has gone from 167 to 365 from 2010 to 2025. So factoring this, they are getting only ₹457 monthly for the last 20 years or so. All are over 75 years and one can imagine their plight. They more than deserve a raise in their pension and the government must consider their case sympathetically.

D.B. Madan
New Delhi

UNFAIR TRADE

THE RECENT US move to halt postal parcels worth over \$100 is another setback to Indo-US trade ties. Despite declining usage in the digital age, India Post remains a dependable and affordable service, often more trustworthy than private couriers that overcharge customers. For millions, it is not only a livelihood but also a cultural legacy built over centuries. Also, India Post ensures wider reach, especially in rural areas. India should diplomatically counter the US decision, protecting fair trade.

R.S. Narula
Patiala

₹500 for the best letter of the week goes to Sujit De (August 21). Email: asianage.letters@gmail.com.

Lines of Power

Texas has once again become the epicentre of America's recurring struggle over electoral fairness. The state's newly approved Congressional map, engineered to carve out several Republican-leaning districts, is not just about drawing lines on a page. It is about the balance of power in Washington, the meaning of representation, and the health of democracy itself. Redistricting, by law, occurs every decade after the census.

In practice, it has become a high-stakes political game. Legislatures controlled by one party routinely manipulate district boundaries to secure long-term electoral advantages, a tactic now so normalised that it is often treated as routine politics rather than democratic distortion. The Texas case, however, shows how far that practice can stretch, transforming cartography into an instrument of exclusion.

Supporters of the new map insist that the changes simply reflect population shifts and that lawmakers acted within their authority. Their critics counter that the exercise was less about demography and more about entrenchment, carried out at the expense of minority communities whose growing presence in the state has yet to translate into political influence.

The heated debates, police escorts for lawmakers, and threats of lawsuits underscore the depth of distrust surrounding the process. When representation is reduced to a partisan chessboard, communities become pawns, and the democratic ideal of fairness steadily loses ground.

Beyond Texas, the ripple effects are national. Partisan redistricting in one state invariably sparks countermoves in others, fueling a cycle of political one-upmanship. In California, proposals to redraw lines in favour of Democrats have been framed explicitly as retaliation.

This tit-for-tat approach turns representation into a zero-sum battle, where the ultimate losers are citizens whose votes are strategically diluted.

The courts will once again be asked to adjudicate whether the maps cross legal lines, particularly on racial grounds. Yet even if the judiciary intervenes, the underlying problem remains: the system permits politicians to choose their voters rather than the other way around. Litigation may correct the most egregious abuses, but it does little to rebuild public trust in the fairness of elections.

What is at stake is not only the composition of the next US Congress but also the legitimacy of the democratic process. When large swathes of the electorate come to believe that their voices have been engineered out of relevance, alienation and polarisation deepen. Faith in institutions erodes. Cynicism replaces participation.

There are solutions - independent redistricting commissions, stronger federal protections for minority voters, or uniform standards to guide the drawing of maps. But these require political will that is currently scarce. Until such reforms gain traction, every new round of redistricting will be less about fair representation and more about partisan manoeuvring.

Texas has drawn its lines. Other states are drawing theirs. What remains unclear is whether anyone is still drawing the line on principle.

Narrative War

The guns may have fallen silent along the Thai-Cambodian border, but the battle has not ended. Instead, it has shifted to a different front - one where perception, rhetoric and propaganda are the decisive weapons. The fragile ceasefire now holds not because the two neighbors have found common ground, but because both are seeking to win the argument in the court of global opinion and in the hearts of their own citizens.

In this contest, Cambodia appears to have seized the initiative. With a tightly controlled political system, centralised leadership, and a commanding voice on social media, Phnom Penh has portrayed itself as both victim and defender of sovereignty.

Images, allegations and emotional appeals have flooded the information space, often regardless of factual accuracy. What matters is not the truth of each claim but the speed and resonance with which it is delivered.

Thailand, in contrast, has been on the back foot. Its government, weakened by internal political divisions and an uneasy relationship with its military, has struggled to project a coherent message.

While Cambodian voices sing in unison, Thailand's statements have been scattered across different ministries and military units, often dry and technical in tone. In an era where narratives travel faster than facts, this slow and fragmented approach has cost Bangkok dearly.

At the heart of this confrontation lies history. The disputed territory is not just about lines on a map but about memories of humiliation and national pride.

Cambodia recalls an empire fractured and diminished by neighbours and foreign powers. Thailand remembers the concessions it made to colonial powers in the last century and still bristles at the 1962 international ruling over the Preah Vihear temple. These stories have become inseparable from questions of sovereignty, ensuring that compromise is framed as betrayal.

The stakes, however, are not limited to symbols. Border clashes have displaced communities, injured soldiers, and endangered livelihoods. Landmine accusations and artillery exchanges have left scars both physical and political. Meanwhile, the mass departure of Cambodian workers from Thailand highlights how quickly nationalist fervour can spill into economic pain.

What makes the present situation so perilous is the widening gap between perception and reality. Cambodia has successfully internationalised the conflict, taking it to global institutions, while Thailand insists it must be resolved bilaterally. Each step deepens the stalemate, hardening nationalist positions on both sides.

Ultimately, this conflict illustrates how modern wars need not be fought only with bullets and bombs. The real struggle is over legitimacy, narrative and identity. Unless leaders in Bangkok and Phnom Penh find the courage to rise above historical grievances and nationalist pressures, the ceasefire will remain fragile, the distrust will deepen, and the "silent" war of words will continue to carry the seeds of future violence.

Active Bystanders

Modern psychology explains that people are more likely to help when they are alone rather than in big groups - this is called the Bystander Effect. Groups create diffusion of responsibility, where each person in a group feels less personally responsible, thinking 'someone else will help.' Another barrier, Pluralistic Ignorance, says people look at others' calm faces and think nothing is wrong, even if everyone inside feels worried

Floods hit the Kashmiri village of Chosoti on August 14, where pilgrims were on their way to the shrine of Machail Mata. Arif Rashid, an ambulance driver, plunged into mud and chaos to rescue the stranded. Over three relentless days, this ordinary man saved more than 60 pilgrims.

Terrorists stormed India's Parliament on 13 December 2001: Constable Kamlesh Kumari spotted a suspicious car heading for an open Gate No.11. Unarmed, she ran to raise the alarm, taking bullets in her chest; that saved Parliament and democracy itself.

Such courage is timeless but rare. When Ravana abducted Sita, it was not Rama's army that came first. It was Jatayu, an old vulture. He knew he could not win, but he still fought to protect her. His courage is remembered even today, not as a defeat, but as a victory of dharma - doing what is right ~ over fear.

In the Mahabharata, when Draupadi was insulted in full court, many great warriors and elders chose silence. That silence is remembered as a great moral failure. It shows that when people see wrong and stay quiet, they are not neutral - they are standing with adharma. Silence is never innocent. When bystanders witness injustice, there is no neutral ground: either they support the survivor by intervening, or by keeping silent they support the perpetrator.

According to the National Crime Records Bureau, crimes against women rose by 15.5 per cent in 2021 and another 4 per cent in 2022, crossing 4.45 lakh cases ~ over 1,200 every day. Crimes against children rose by 16.2 per cent in 2021 and 8.7 per cent in 2022, touching 1,62,449 cases ~ 445 daily.

Many of these crimes happen on streets where bystanders remain mute spectators. It is often alleged that citizens have lost empathy, but this is only partly true. Bystanders can be divided into two groups. The first group is unconcerned or fearful, held back by fears for personal safety, legal trouble, or uncertainty about the situation. The second group is concerned and empathetic but fails to act due to hidden psychological barriers.

Modern psychology explains that people are more likely to help when they are alone rather than in big groups - this is called the Bystander Effect. Groups create diffusion of responsibility, where each person in a group feels less personally responsible, thinking "someone else will help." Another barrier, Pluralistic Ignorance, says people look at others' calm faces and think nothing is wrong, even if everyone inside feels worried.

The good news is that this inaction can be overcome. For many, simply being aware of these psychological barriers can increase their willingness to intervene. A 2023 meta-analysis showed that with brief training, 70 per cent of people feel confident enough to intervene, and 54 per cent act in real scenarios.

Bystander Intervention Training (BIT) teaches a five-step



process: notice something wrong, define it as requiring intervention, decide how to help, choose a method, and act ~ always prioritizing personal safety.

The intervention itself can be of different forms, known as the four Ds. One can Distract by diverting attention from the situation, perhaps by asking for the time or dropping



SRINIVAS
MADHAV



ANNAPURNA
GADEPALLI

The writers are, respectively, a Transparency and Equality Advocate, and a Life Skills educator

something. One can Disrupt by interrupting directly if it is safe, for example by asking "Are you fine?". One can Delegate by involving others, like alerting other bystanders or authorities by calling helplines or using Emergency Response Support System App like '112 India'. Lastly, one can Document by recording events confidentially if required.

Even small words can break harm. Consider an e-rickshaw driver in Delhi, Brahm Dutt, who noticed something was wrong with a man and two nervous girls. He asked a simple question: "Who are you to each other?" The answers didn't match, and that one question prevented a kidnapping. There was no fighting, no chasing ~ just a calm voice and timely presence.

A small talk between two scientists saved millions of lives; they met by chance at a photocopy machine in their University. Katalin Karikó, a biochemist, was frustrated. Her research on mRNA was not getting the attention it deserved. She was facing rejection after rejection. Then came the small, casual chat with immunologist Drew Weissman. That conversation led to a partnership. That partnership gave the world the mRNA vaccine during the Covid-19 pandemic. In 2023, both scientists won the Nobel Prize in Medicine.

These are life skills that save lives. Let us tell our children

The Korea Herald

Health care in a precarious world

Health care is pivotal for human well-being. Yet, in today's precarious world, it is pressured by diminishing resources, demographic variables, warfare and violence, and environmental degradation. Sustaining health care thus requires insightful planning and implementation, no less for Thailand and the ASEAN region. The motivating factor is the global recognition that every person has the right to the highest attainable standard of health, with the state under an obligation to respect, protect and fulfill such rights geared to maximum commitment of its resources. This is enhanced by a global treaty on the issue, the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, to which Thailand is a party. That right does not imply that the state must guarantee that everyone is healthy, but the state is obliged to adopt a variety of measures to ensure that health care services are generally available to the population, with assurance of accessibility, affordability,

acceptability and quality. This is now encapsulated by the global Sustainable Development Goals 2015-2030.

Thailand has been much lauded globally for its exemplary "universal health care scheme," which provides a medical safety net for the population based on three components: the "30-baht" or "gold card" universal health coverage, the bureaucracy's medical-cum-pension scheme and the social security scheme. The first element draws from the national budget. The second is a civil service-based savings mechanism, while the third depends upon tripartite contribution from the state, employers and employees.

The 30-baht scheme covers the broadest spectrum of the population, and it is now over two decades old. It has been much appreciated by the general public for facilitating access to health services at little or no cost. It is administered by the National Health Security Office with

flexibility, and this helps to avoid much of the bureaucratic paperwork that would hamper service delivery. The large number of community health volunteers was also rightly commended by the UN Special Rapporteur on Health, who visited Thailand recently. Yet, various storm clouds are looming. First, in just over ten years from now, Thailand will become a superaged society, with over 30 percent of the population over 60 years old. This will be an enormous burden on the health system. Second, there is already a shortage of health personnel, particularly doctors and nurses, and this core group will also be aging. Third, the budget might be reduced, especially when the economy splutters amidst a global downturn. Fourth, there is the enigma of "how universal is universal?"

The fourth question deserves clarification. At present, the health care scheme can be described as "universal for Thais" rather than "universal for everyone in

Thailand." Some non-Thais fall between the different stools, thus being unprotected, and this is most visible among undocumented migrant workers and displaced persons along the border.

The preferred approach is voiced by the UN-backed International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, which advocates access for all to (at least) urgent health care. Compromise can also be reached by enabling them to buy medical insurance irrespective of their immigration status. Most poignantly, some 80,000 displaced persons from Myanmar have been sheltered in Thailand in recent decades. The current crisis is linked to the stoppage of aid from key foreign sources, which also affects access to medical care. While the Thai authorities can be commended for trying to fill in gaps, a complementary approach is to enable them to work, earn their living and contribute to the cost of medical services.

Letters To The Editor

 editor@thestatesman.com

Fraught with risk

Sir, This refers to today's editorial "Uneasy partners," in *The Statesman*. The evolving contours of India-China relations reveal a tenuous and intrinsically uneasy bonhomie, propelled less by genuine rapprochement than by exigent geopolitical compulsions. Washington's punitive tariffs on Indian exports and its recalibrated economic posture have compelled New Delhi to explore pragmatic, if uncomfortable, avenues of engagement.

For Beijing, confronted with slowing growth and mounting strategic isolation, courting India offers a tactical hedge against American predominance in the



Indo-Pacific.

Yet, this convergence is inherently fragile. The unresolved border imbroglio, China's entrenched nexus with Pakistan, and persistent competition for regional primacy render trust elusive.

India's engagement with Beijing is therefore less an embrace of partnership than a calibrated response to economic duress and shifting global alignments. Conversely, China perceives India not as an equal interlocutor but as a useful counterweight in its strategic chessboard against the United States.

The resultant relationship will oscillate between transactional cooperation and simmering antagonism. Temporary dividends may accrue, but without structural trust, this contrived bonhomie risks entangling India in strategic vulnerabilities even as it maneuvers to preserve sovereignty and autonomy amidst volatile global currents.

Yours, etc.,
N Sadhasiva Reddy,
Bengaluru, 22 August.

Public safety

Sir, The Supreme Court's revised directive on stray dogs may aim for balance, but let's be clear ~ public safety must take precedence. Compassion for animals is admirable, but not at the cost of human lives, particularly those of children, the elderly, and pedestrians who live in daily fear of being attacked. Rabies is not a philosophical debate ~ it is a deadly reality in India.

Releasing dogs back onto the streets, even after vaccination, assumes perfect enforcement, which is a fantasy in our overburdened civic systems.

While sterilization and vaccination are long-term solutions, they are no substitute for immediate action where human safety is compromised.

The idea that lakhs of strays can

be "managed" through community participation and goodwill is dangerously naïve. In overcrowded cities, where public spaces are already under pressure, aggressive strays are a real and rising threat. Sheltering all dogs may be impractical, but selective removal of dangerous ones must be non-negotiable.

This is not a war on animals ~ it is a call for accountability. Until human lives are treated with as much urgency as animal rights, we fail as a society.

Coexistence should not mean constant risk. Compassion must walk hand in hand with responsibility ~ and right now, public safety is being left behind.

Yours, etc.,
K. Chidanand Kumar,
Bengaluru, 22 August.



ECI’s initiatives must earn public trust

SUBHAS SINGHA ROY AND
RIYA KONER

The Election Commission (ECI) has played a crucial role in institutionalizing democratic procedures in India and continues to enjoy public trust and respect. Even with its recent popularity, the ECI faces criticism from opposition parties regarding the revision of electoral rolls. However, it has been accused of being susceptible to EVM manipulation on numerous occasions.

On 24 June, 2025, the ECI revealed plans for a Special Intensive Revision (SIR), which includes conducting door-to-door checks to update voter lists by removing those who are ineligible or deceased, relocated, and possibly ‘illegal migrant’ voters. Bihar is the first testing ground for this SIR; nearly 6.6 per cent of voters’ names, totaling 65 lakh people, were struck off the electoral rolls. This omission opened the door to criticism, and Bihar’s opposition sought help from the Supreme Court, which dismissed the complaints, citing constitutional and legal reasons for the project.

Opposition parties like RJD, TMC, Congress, and others took to the streets of Delhi to protest against the ‘alleged conspiracy of disenfranchising the poor, migrant, and marginalized people’ in connivance with the BJP. The conspiracy theory behind the ECI drive served as a unifying force for them, although they differ in the importance they attach to the issues.

The TMC has criticized a supposed hidden plan to bring in the NRC through voter list revisions, while the RJD fears that many legitimate

voters from disadvantaged and migrant groups could lose their right to vote. Some state government employees in Bihar and West Bengal faced punitive action for dereliction of their official responsibilities, drawing criticism from the political establishment. The rhetorical refusal by the state government to act against the deputed officials for dereliction of responsibility prompted the ECI to take a proactive stance.

The opposition’s wrath over the SIR necessitates an examination of the issue through the lens of constitutional provisions.

The mere conduct of elections does not amount to democracy; it requires transparency and fairness of the entire electoral process. Although the Constituent Assembly firmly upheld the principle of universal adult franchise, the institutional mechanism for conducting free and fair elections was the pivotal issue.

The Assembly rejected the imperial practice of entrusting elections to the central executive because such an arrangement would carry a high risk of manipulation and undermine the democratic ethos and integrity of the election. An autonomous constitutional body, the Election Commission of India, was created to conduct elections to the offices of President, Vice President, members of Parliament, and the State Legislatures.

Article 324 explicitly vests the superintendence, direction, and control of elections in the Election Commission (ECI), while Article 326 grants the right to vote to every citizen of India. The Representation of the People Act (RPA) in 1950 and 1951 laid down

detailed provisions for the smooth conduct of elections. RPA essentially deals with the preparation of electoral rolls and the delimitation of constituencies for the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies.

Article 15 of the RPA empowers the Commission to prepare an electoral roll for each constituency. In contrast, Article 16 provides for striking off names on three grounds: non-citizenship, unsoundness of mind as declared by a competent court, and disqualification from voting under electoral laws. The Commission can initiate revisions of electoral rolls, including special revisions, at any time.

While such revisions typically occur before elections, the Commission, under Section 21(3) of the Act, is empowered to conduct special drives for this purpose whenever it deems necessary. Historical evidence suggests that officials have revised electoral rolls since the 1960s, and Andhra Pradesh provides a striking example: in 2004, authorities deleted 93.42 lakh voters, citing various reasons.

Under the RPA 1950, the Election Commission requisitions the services of government officials for electoral duties; such officials, once deputed, function under the control, supervision, and discipline of the Commission (article 13CC). Moreover, Article 32(1) categorically provides for penal action in the event of negligence or misconduct in the discharge of responsibility by the concerned officials. On several occasions during or before the election, the ECI took penal measures against the alleged misconduct or negligence of duty.

Even if the MCC (Model Code of Conduct) is not active, the law says the Election Commission



can still act against officials who shirk their electoral duties, despite questions raised about suspending them. The EC can take action against any official who is negligent in her or his electoral duties. Amidst denials and controversy, the Chief Secretary of West Bengal recently updated the ECI on the actions taken by the government against officials the Commission wants to take action against.

Officials play a crucial role in the democratic process when they prepare the list of eligible voters, and by doing it carefully, they win half the battle. Usually, the ECI revises the electoral rolls before any election; however, the RPI Acts mandate undertaking a special drive in this direction. Opposition parties act understandably, as their hopes of returning to power after two consecutive defeats at the Centre have not materialized.

The frustration of Congress is reflected visibly in the statements and behavior of the top brass, while the ruling parties in different states want to utilize the controversy to regain lost ground or strengthen their constituencies. The non-BJP state governments allege that the ECI works at the behest of the Central government to disenfranchise

potential voters. Amidst the ongoing mudslinging, the ECI has found itself in a catch-22 position while revising electoral rolls.

The pertinent issue that haunts Indian citizens is the requirement to collect and preserve valid documents, which has silently crept into the public psyche, fostering fears of loss of citizenship and possible deportation. The ECI was directed by the apex court to expand the list of required documents and to publish the details of deleted voters in Bihar, along with the reasons for their deletion. Its recent compliance with these directives reflects its discomfort.

The SIR offers the opposition parties a golden opportunity to regain their credibility. At the same time, the ECI must adopt credible initiatives to preserve its public trust. Fairness, integrity, and independence from external pressures are the hallmarks of the institution, which have helped it earn public trust and respect. Safeguarding this reputation requires prompt, well-articulated, and appropriate measures, which are the need of the hour.

(The writers are, respectively, a teacher of Political Science at Chandidas Mahavidyalaya and a Research Scholar at Burdwan University.)

100 Years Ago



Front page of The Statesman dated 25 August, 1925

OCCASIONAL NOTE

The late Dr. Dunn, who shortly after being appointed Director of Public Instruction was drowned near Chinsurah, was for some years Inspector of Schools for the Burdwan Division with headquarters at Chinsurah, and there endeared himself to all engaged in education. It was therefore fitting for more than one reason that when the teachers of Government schools decided to erect a memorial they should choose the river bank at Chinsurah as the site. There on Sunday Mr. Oaten, the present Director, unveiled an obelisk, and in an appropriate address referred to Dr. Dunn’s great qualities and to the loss that education had suffered through his death. The obelisk, bearing a simple and dignified inscription, will remain a record of a great tragedy and of an attractive personality.

News Items

POLITICAL NOTES

EUROPEAN GIRL AND MAN WITH KNIFE

(From Our Correspondent.)

Rangoon, Aug

The Subdivisional Magistrate to-day ordered a man named Amir Ali Mahomed Lai to be detained in the lunatic asylum. He had attacked a European girl, Miss Hunter, with a knife and a crowbar while she was walking in Sule Pagoda Road. Since then he has been detained at the asylum, and though lie protested that he was sane, there were, said the asylum authorities, moments in which he was liable to attack and, in fact, had attacked persons.

RELIGIOUS FANATICS

VILLAGERS AND POLICE KILLED

Cape Town, Aug.

A telegram from Elizabethville says that a native religious fanatic and a number of his followers are attempting to make forcible conversions in the Sakania District. It is reported that they slaughtered 50 natives in one village alone. A patrol of native police sent to investigate into the affair was driven off with the loss of a number of killed and wounded. The Belgian authorities have dispatched troops from Elizabethville. — Reuter.

MEJLISS UPROAR

FIGHT FOLLOWS APPEARANCE OF NEW MINISTERS

Teheran, Aug.

Prince Nosrah Dowlati Firooze the newly appointed Minister of Justice, and Chavam Dowlat, Minister of the Interior, were introduced yesterday in the Mejliiss by the Premier. Suliman Mirza, leader of the Socialists opposed the appointment of the former on the ground of his treachery to the constitution, whereupon an uproar ensued and the President was obliged to adjourn the House. There occurred hand to hand fighting between the Socialist Party and the Government Party, but the combatants were soon separated by other members.—Reuter.

BAN ON GERMANS

EXPECTED REMOVAL IN BRITISH DOMINIONS

Berlin, Aug.

In official quarters it is expected that the restrictions preventing Germans from taking up domicile in foreign colonies, particularly in the British Dominions, will be abolished within the next eight months. It is stated that the restrictions here already been removed in Ceylon, Tanganyika and South West Africa, whilst, Australia and New Zealand are expected to follow suit by the end of the year.—Reuter.

IT CAME TO MIND | MANISH NANDY

Cay is for charisma

It was part of Cayenne’s magic that she thrilled me when she said, “I’m going to kill you.” She said it when I was recovering in a hospital from a serious car accident. Somebody had carelessly left what looked like a large and heavy bag on a traffic lane, and, in trying to avoid it while returning from dinner at midnight, I crashed into a traffic barrier. The car was totaled, and I was nearly totaled too. With no safety belts those days, the steering wheel just plowed through my chest and struck the sternum.

Cayenne, a colleague’s wife, was returning late too from dinner and luckily passed my crashed car a minute or two later. She saw me lying unconscious. Cayenne stopped her car, got her chauffeur to help her lift me into her car and rushed me to the Emergency. I lay on the back seat, my bruised head on her lap. She also cajoled a doctor she knew to leave his bed and come to the hospital to check on me.

The next morning, she came again to check on me. I was happy, as ever, to see her remarkable face and made the mistake of smiling.

“Don’t smile,” she chided severely, “First you drive like a maniac and try to kill yourself. Then I must spend the night to take you to a hospital and get the right doctor.

And I find this morning that my best dress is ruined because of your caked blood on it. I should kill you.”

That was Cayenne par excellence. She could be tender and trenchant, caring and caustic in the same breath. She came to see me every week, with books and fruits, awed every doctor and nurse – and periodically bullied them into giving me more apples and pears.

Cayenne – we called her Cay – was diminutive and dynamic, virtually a dynamo. With her well-coiffed long hair, sparkling eyes and quivering lips, she was quite a presence. She had a deeply melodious voice, both caressing and commanding. If she asked you to do something, you would have to be adamantine not to do it. Her dad, a Porsche lover, had named her, correctly I thought, after his favorite car. She was no less spirited and memorable than cayenne pepper.

Her husband, who began as my colleague, had become a close friend. I started seeing a lot of him and Cay. They lived an active social life with a large bevy of friends. They began including me in their goings-on; I joined spasmodically, for I had myriad other interests besides parties. Cay loved a drink, I noticed, but so did several of their friends. I loved her wit and warmth and

basked in her effervescence. Whatever else their parties had, it had Cay, and that was enough for me.

Three years later I took a different job, got busy with my new work and saw much less of Cay. One of my new colleagues mentioned that his wife is the head of a non-profit organization dedicated to children’s diseases and was searching for a new public relations officer. When he described the job, I thought of Cay. I said candidly that Cay did not have any analogous experience, but I believed she might be an appropriate fit.

My suggestion went further than I had expected. In six weeks, Cay started working for the group and in six months she became a valued member of its staff. My new colleague mentioned how much his wife appreciated Cay’s work and ideas. I again saw Cay periodically at private and public dinners; she was as warm and vivacious as ever. The only thing that troubled me was a snide remark by one of the group’s directors about the amount Cay imbibed at a party.

That was one of the last occasions I met Cay and her husband; I went abroad shortly afterward. I was traveling for work and living in different countries. Cay and her husband weren’t great correspondents, but at yearends

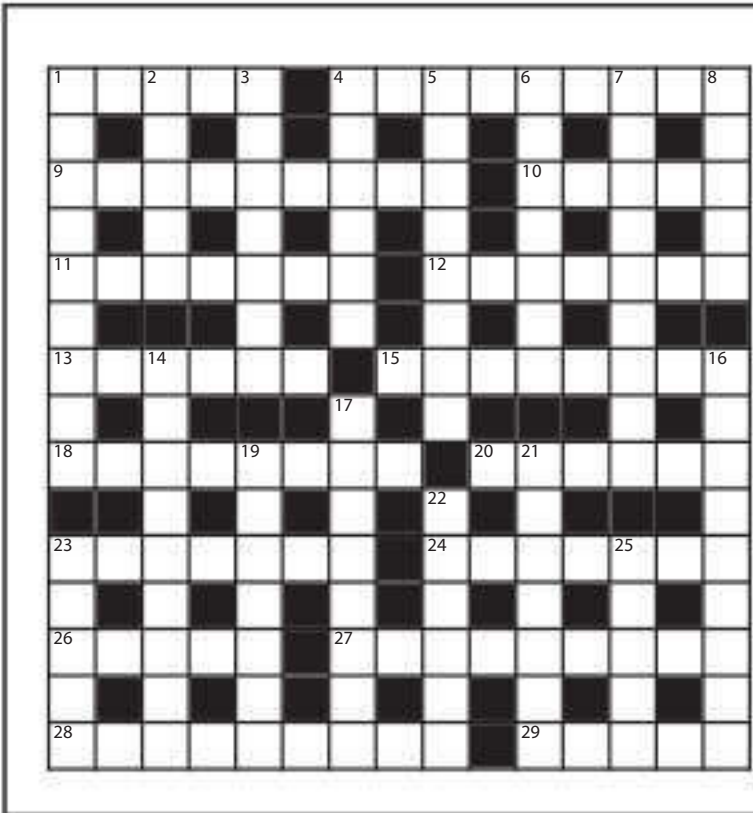


I received their holiday cards occasionally with a photograph. There was Cay’s luminous face putting everything else to shade.

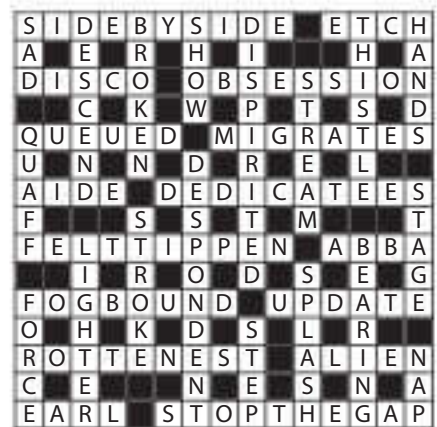
Seventeen years later I was finally back in the town where Cay lived, and I wrote in advance to make sure that I met my old friends. Her husband came to my hotel; I was disappointed to see him unaccompanied by Cay. Over a meal we exchanged news and then he explained that Cay could not come as she was not well.

“What’s wrong?” I asked. “For nearly twelve years she has been an alcoholic. We have tried different things. Including clinics and detoxification. Nothing has worked. She has cirrhosis of the liver.”

Crossword | No. 293227



Last Saturday’s Solution



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



Editor's
TAKE

Charting India's Road to
Development by 2047

With strong fundamentals and rising exports, Indian story is going strong though it needs to address issues of reforms, inclusivity and consensus

The world may be in turmoil with several conflicts disrupting supply chains and schism between the developed and developing nations widening but Indian growth remains steadfast, isolated from these global headwind. It is not only maintaining its momentum but also helping other nations to follow suit. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent declaration that India is poised to become the world's third-largest economy and is firmly on track to achieving developed nation status by 2047 reflects both optimism and determination of a nation in transition. He invoked the mantra of "Reform, Perform, Transform," underlining that India is not just going strong but can also uplift other economies from their sluggish cycles. His assertion are not rhetoric but based on hard facts as India outperforms most major economies.

The country's macroeconomic outlook provides ample support for this confidence. Inflation is under relative control, banks are strong, the fiscal deficit is projected to narrow to 4.4 per cent, and foreign exchange reserves remain healthy. Domestic investors are showing unprecedented faith in India's future course. Manufacturing and exports are picking up momentum – automobile exports, for instance, have more than doubled since 2014, while India is expanding its reach by exporting locomotives, metro coaches, and soon electric vehicles to nearly a hundred countries.

But ambition alone is not enough to transform India into a developed nation by 2047. Sustaining high growth will demand persistent reforms and a business environment that is predictable, efficient, and globally competitive.

The strength of a nation also lies in its people, and India's demographic advantage will translate into a dividend only if its youth are empowered through education and skill-building else it can lead to widespread unemployment and unrest. Ensuring vocational training and improving public health systems must therefore form the core of development strategy. Infrastructure, too, will be decisive. Faster urbanisation, more efficient logistics, and greener energy systems are indispensable for sustaining momentum.

Modi's repeated emphasis on speed, scale, and scope underscores the urgent need for capacity building. Challenges remain formidable. Informal employment continues to dominate the labour market, income inequality persists, and regional growth is uneven. Policy unpredictability, bureaucratic hurdles, and political disruptions risk undermining investor confidence despite the rhetoric of reform. Ultimately, achieving developed nation status by 2047 requires more than strong GDP growth. It demands a model of development that raises living standards, ensures social mobility, and delivers opportunities across all sections of society. The challenge is to steer with vision, resilience, and endurance so that by 2047, the dream of a truly developed India is achieved.

Indian succor for Sudan

As Sudan begins its fragile transition, India must evolve from first responder to long-term partner, leveraging expertise in digital infrastructure, agriculture, energy, and MSMEs to aid reconstruction



RAO NARENDER
YADAV

On July 29, 2025, India handed over a consignment of 2,000 MT of rice to the acting Humanitarian Aid Commissioner of Sudan. This follows India's assistance of 25 tons and 2 tons of life-saving medicines in May 2023 and March 2025, respectively. India's humanitarian aid to the people of Sudan reaffirms its age-old tradition of being a reliable first responder in times of crisis, reflecting the enduring solidarity between India and Sudan.

Traditionally, India's engagement with conflict-hit and politically unstable African countries has been rooted in deep humanitarian solidarity and a commitment to peacekeeping. From sending food, medicines, and emergency relief to joining the United Nations Peacekeeping Operations (UNPKO), India has built a rich legacy of prioritising humanitarian efforts over political interests.

However, the scale and complexity of modern conflicts, such as in Sudan, which has hollowed out the nation's institutions, depleted its economy, and devastated over 13 million people, necessitate that India's efforts expand beyond emergency relief and transition to a comprehensive, multi-sectoral role in reconstruction and development.

Sudan has witnessed an unending spiral of widespread and brutal violence since April 2023, when fighting erupted between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF). The political leadership in Sudan has also accused the United Arab Emirates (UAE) of backing the RSF with arms and logistical support. Entire cities, from Khartoum to Geneina in Darfur, have been vastly devastated, making Sudan a tragic epicentre of conflict and humanitarian despair.As Sudan's crisis continues to unfold, its new Prime Minister, Kamil al-Taib Idris, first since the conflict erupted in April 2023, officially assumed office on 31 May 2025, marking the formal start of the internationally recognised transitional government and the much-needed economic reconstruction plan for Sudan.

The recent developments offer India a critical opportunity to play a significant role in Sudan's post-civil war reconstruction, as the stakes extend beyond humanitarian goodwill and align with India's strategic, economic, and geopolitical interests.

Sudan's strategic location, at the crossroads of the Horn of Africa, the Red Sea, and North Africa, makes it pivotal for regional maritime security. A stable Sudan would strengthen India's footprint in Africa. With its unique combination of technological prowess, low-resource



development experience, and South-South solidarity, India is exceptionally well placed to be a strong and reliable partner in Sudan's journey of redevelopment.

India's proven strengths in solar energy, agri-tech, digital public infrastructure (DPI), health services, MSME development, education, and biofuels can assist in building long-term resilience based on strong foundations. As most of these interventions have already been operated at scale at home and, increasingly, expanded in other parts of Africa, the next task could be to package them into a coherent "Sudan Reconstruction Plan" that can deliver impact even in an unstable security environment. India's DPI systems (digital identity, digital payments, and data exchange) offer Sudan a well-tested blueprint to embrace a digital mode of development. Aadhaar-style digital ID systems can be locally adapted to verify beneficiaries.

Unified Payments Interface (UPI) technology – already in use for cross-border payments with several African and Asian partners – can enable instant, low-cost transactions as and when required.

Also, the Open Network for Digital Commerce (ONDC) provides a neutral, open-protocol marketplace where Sudanese traders, transporters, and service providers can connect with customers without relying on a single corporate entity.

Agriculture has been Sudan's economic backbone. The country has the largest proportion of arable land in Africa. Yet, conflict, lack of irrigation, and outdated farming methods have immensely reduced productivity. India's agricultural expertise – spanning low-cost irrigation systems, solar-driven pumps, drought-resistant seeds, mechanisation, and farmer

cooperatives like FPOs – can be immensely transformative for Sudan.

Facilitating value addition through small-scale milling, oil pressing, and packaging units – backed by MSME finance – would also be required to be gradually integrated into the agrarian sector. This would not only enhance domestic food security but could restore Sudan's agricultural export capacity, bringing in foreign exchange and enhancing livelihood opportunities.

However, none of this could succeed without a coherent financing and governance structure. Financing could be in a blended form through multiple streams, viz, International Solar Alliance (ISA), Africa50, LoCs through the EXIM Bank, multilateral grants, carbon finance, etc. By enhancing the role of the Indian private sector – MSMEs, affordable healthcare providers, EdTech firms, and renewable energy companies – Indian industries could also find long-term markets in Sudan.

India now stands at a pivotal moment to translate its support for Sudan into targeted, transformative action. By actively engaging in Sudan's recovery process, India can demonstrate effective partnership through concrete initiatives in development, infrastructure, agriculture, and digital public goods. It is imperative for India to collaborate with Sudan's transitional government and international stakeholders to design and implement a comprehensive Sudan Reconstruction Plan.

Strategic support now will not only aid Sudan's transition but also ensure India's lasting influence as a responsible and committed partner in Africa's development. India should seize this moment to lead by example, championing peace, stability, and sustainable progress in the Global South.

The Pioneer
SINCE 1865

BY ACTIVELY
ENGAGING IN
SUDAN'S
RECOVERY, INDIA
CAN SHOWCASE
EFFECTIVE
PARTNERSHIP
THROUGH
TANGIBLE
INITIATIVES IN
DEVELOPMENT,
INFRASTRUCTURE,
AGRICULTURE, AND
DIGITAL PUBLIC
GOODS

The writer is Director of
the African Centre of India
(ACOI)

@acofindia
@AcofIndia
AfricanCentreofIndia

Resilient and Responsive Bharat



MANOJ
TIWARI

THE PIONEER
2ND OPINION

When S&P Global Ratings reaffirmed India's sovereign credit rating at BBB with a stable outlook, it signalled more than just a data point, it was a recognition of India's fiscal discipline, reform, driven policy choices, and resilience in navigating global turbulence. At a time when advanced economies are grappling with stagnation and many emerging markets are facing instability, India has held its ground as the world's fastest-growing major economy, with GDP expected to expand by 6-6.5 per cent in 2025. This momentum is no accident. It reflects decisive governance backed by a clear reform agenda. Flagship initiatives like PM Gati Shakti and the National Infrastructure Pipeline, coupled with fiscal innovations such as the GST and the widespread adoption of digital

public goods , UPI, Aadhaar, ONDC have together redefined India's development model.

Trade Winds and Strategic Autonomy

The recent decision by the United States to impose 50 per cent tariffs on select Indian exports is a reminder of the volatility in global trade. Yet, India's economic resilience ensures the macro impact remains marginal - estimated at no more than 0.3 percentage points of GDP. More importantly, the government's diversification strategy with FTAs under way with the UK, advanced negotiations with the EU, and deeper partnerships in Asia, Africa, and the Middle East highlights India's pursuit of strategic autonomy in trade. By combining PLI schemes, 'Make in India,' and new export markets, India is both cushioning itself against shocks and building long-term self-reliance.

If infrastructure and fiscal reform are India's foundations, deep technology is its future. The Government of India's forthcoming National Deep Tech and Scientific Research Policy marks a pivotal step toward securing technological sovereignty.

This policy will target frontier domains such as:

1. AI for governance, healthcare, and education.
2. Semiconductors for resilient supply chains.
3. Quantum technologies for secure communication.
4. Biotechnology for genomics and pharma innovation.

5. Space & defence technologies for national security.
6. Advanced manufacturing— robotics to 3D printing. The goal is clear: India must not only participate in, but also lead the next wave of scientific innovation.

The pioneering work of Dr Pawan Goenka, Chairman of INSPIRE, in opening the space sector to private participation is already showing what this future could look like. India's development journey is anchored in the Prime Minister's vision of Viksit Bharat - a developed India by 2047. This is not just an economic milestone; it is a civilizational commitment to self-reliance, sustainability, and global leadership.

Conclusion

From infrastructure to space reforms, from trade diplomacy to the forthcoming Deep Tech Policy, the government is steering the nation with clarity and foresight. As an Institute of National Importance, IIM Mumbai stands committed to contributing to this journey - through research, policy engagement, and thought leadership. India's path to 2047 will not be shaped by external commentary, but by the sovereign choices it makes today - choices that place national interest at the centre while contributing responsibly to global progress.

The writer is Director, Indian Institute of Management
Mumbai. He is Professor, Industrial and Systems
Engineering, Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur

SUPREME COURT ORDERS HUMANE
TREATMENT FOR STRAY DOGS

The Supreme Court's latest order mandating the return of dogs to their capture sites after following a due process of sterilisation and vaccination will be welcomed with a resounding "woof" by the animals and all who care for them.

Imagine what would have happened to over ten lakh dogs had they been rounded up and confined in hastily constructed "shelters" – a euphemism for cruelly restricted spaces. Beyond the physical discomfort, such treatment would have broken the spirit of these animals.

As with humans, the process of rounding up strays and transporting them with a punitive mindset would itself have been worse than the punishment of confinement in unhygienic spaces. The earlier

Supreme Court order exemplified judicial overreach and would have been a remedy worse than the disease.

George Graham Vest rightly said, "A dog is man's best friend." The Apex Court's course correction could not have come a day too soon. It demonstrates the nation's commitment to compassion.

In conclusion, Gandhiji's words remain apt: "The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated."

This decision will also encourage local authorities to implement more humane practices and ensure the welfare of all strays in urban and rural areas. It is a reminder that compassion must guide every policy concerning living beings.

AVINASH GODBOLEY | DEWAS

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Pujara announces retirement

Cheteshwar Pujara, on Sunday August 24, surprised every Indian cricket fan by announcing his retirement from all formats of the game. Following Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma's Test retirements, Pujara's decision has sent shock-waves across the cricketing community.

On social media, he wrote, "Wearing the Indian jersey, singing the anthem, and trying my best each time I stepped on the field – it's impossible to put into words what it truly meant.

All good things must come to an end, and with immense gratitude I have decided to retire from all forms of Indian cricket. Thank you for all the love and support!"He thanked the BCCI and Saurashtra Cricket Association, as well as mentors, coaches, and his spiritual guide. In 103 Test matches, he scored 7,195 runs at an average of 43.60, including 19 centuries. In 278 first-class matches, he scored 21,301 runs at 51.82, including 66 centuries. He also played in the IPL for Kolkata Knight Riders, Royal Challengers Bangalore, and Punjab Kings, leaving a remarkable legacy of consistency and resilience. Pujara's dedication and discipline have set a benchmark for aspiring cricketers across the nation. His career exemplifies the virtues of patience, perseverance, and unwavering commitment to the game.

BHAGWAN THADANI | MUMBAI

India's internet growth concerns

Our country ranks first in the world in monthly internet data usage, with an average of 32 GB per user. By 2030, data traffic per smartphone user is expected to rise to 62 GB per month. According to the Ericsson Mobility Report, until 2024, 4G accounted for 53 per cent of subscribers. Now, with the growing use of 5G, affordable smartphones, and the increasing reach of video and digital services in both urban and rural markets, internet traffic is set to grow rapidly.

As of December 2024, 5G subscriptions in the country reached 290 million, or 24 per cent of total mobile subscribers. This figure is expected to rise to 980 million by 2030, representing 75 per cent of all mobile subscriptions. The crucial question is: As internet users increase, how many will use it productively – to develop skills or enhance the quality of their work? Currently, most young people primarily use mobile phones and the internet to create reels or stay active on social media, activities with little productive value. Excessive usage is also causing negative psychological effects across all age groups. Technology requires wisdom and discretion. If we fail to understand this, we risk forming a population dependent on devices for even basic tasks. The choice is ours: Become dumb users or smart users.

JITESH MORI | GUJARAT

Strengthening India's tech future

Trump is unable to weaponise tariffs on China, as Beijing commands an enormous hold over manufacturing, critical resources, and the advancement of frontier technologies. We, by contrast, have little with which to hold back an assertive United States. The tariff episode should nudge us to identify our strengths rather than lament their absence. In the realm of information technology, we still retain the potential to sharpen our capabilities.

We have relied too heavily on our diaspora of exported IT talent but have done little to create an equally magnetic pull for world-class researchers and innovators to our soil. We must aspire to leap into the ranks of true knowledge economies and look beyond producing talent for others. There is a pressing need to attract superior global minds through generous research grants and world-class infrastructure.

Combining India's vast talent base with imported expertise could catalyse the creation of advanced technologies, placing us at the forefront of global innovation rather than at its periphery. Even China has recently envisaged a liberal K-visa to lure top tech talent, recognising immense possibilities therein. We too must recalibrate: No longer the mere supplier of services, but the innovation hub of the future.

R NARAYANAN | NAVI MUMBAI

Israel’s search for legitimacy amid mounting pressure

From the echoes of its precarious birth under invasion to the present challenges of battlefield intensity, international scrutiny, and internal dissent, Israel’s struggle is no longer confined to securing territory. It is about safeguarding its identity and ensuring that survival is matched by legitimacy on the world stage

PRASHANTO BAGCHI

In the long arc of Israel’s statehood, August 2025 stands as another crucible. The war in Gaza, once framed as an act of necessity, has hardened into a complex mix of battlefield intensity, democratic contestation, and external scrutiny. Beneath the artillery fire and diplomatic exchanges, Israel is grappling with a question less visible but more profound: the legitimacy of its very right to exist. Israel’s history provides a lens to understand the current moment.

In 1948, independence was declared in Tel Aviv under the looming threat of regional invasion. The new state, still absorbing refugees and lacking resources, was forced to defend its very right to exist against multiple Arab armies. The paradox of that moment remains instructive: a society fragile in numbers and means nevertheless prevailed militarily while simultaneously entrenching parliamentary institutions. For Palestinians, 1948 was remembered as rupture, displacement, and loss. Yet for Israel, it was the founding crucible of resilience—a demonstration that sovereignty would rest not merely on battlefield strength but also on building a functioning democratic polity.

Caroline Glick has argued that Israel’s founding experience continues to shape its approach today, linking its right to self-defense with its very existence. Einat Wilf emphasises that the conflict goes beyond borders, touching on the question of accepting Jewish sovereignty. Tzipi Livni notes that legitimacy relies not only on military strength but also on maintaining democratic institutions, even under severe threats. These perspectives illustrate how the challenges faced in 1948 still influence Israel’s present situation. On the southern front, the Israel Defense Forces’ advances into Rafah and Khan Yunis have unfolded with military precision. Yet every operation now takes place under real-time international observation. Each strike resonates beyond its immediate target; every civilian death becomes part of a wider narrative. The costs of war are measured not only in territory or security but also in reputation. Glick has long warned that Israel’s most acute struggle is not only with



rockets or missiles but with the erosion of its legitimacy in international law. “Once you accept the premise that self-defense is illegitimate,” she has observed, “you’ve accepted the premise that the state itself is illegitimate.” Her words frame Jerusalem’s refusal to embrace international frameworks that appear to condition Israel’s security on moral approval. For Glick, the core struggle is not in Gaza or Lebanon but in the perception of Israel’s sovereignty itself. At home, the endurance of Israel’s institutions remains both its strongest assurance and its most fragile asset. Livni, one of the country’s most respected voices on democracy and governance, has cautioned against bending democratic norms under the stress of conflict: “The majority cannot decide tomorrow that there will be elections every ten years... there are limits.” Her reminder is clear: democratic resilience cannot be suspended even under existential threat. Weakening courts, freedoms, or accountability would concede more than any military reversal could impose. The tension between survival and democratic fidelity is visible not only in parliamentary debates but also in Israel’s public squares. In Tel Aviv, dissent remains visible — from protests over hostages to demonstrations against judicial reform. Even as Israel’s internal foundations are tested, its regional environment is shifting rapidly. Washington remains its indispensable ally, but US patience has been stretched under the weight of humanitarian alarms

FOR ISRAEL, ACCUSTOMED FOR DECADES TO BIPARTISAN REASSURANCE, US DOMESTIC POLITICS NOW SHAPE THE PREDICTABILITY OF ITS MOST VITAL ALLIANCE

The writer is an international relations scholar at JNU and a columnist

dailypioneer

@TheDailyPioneer

dailypioneer

and mounting domestic political pressures. Republicans have rallied behind Israel with unqualified backing, while Democrats navigate a more complex landscape — balancing traditional support with rising progressive dissent. American Jewish communities reflect these divisions, with synagogues, civic forums, and university campuses becoming stages for fierce debates on the meaning of solidarity. For Israel, accustomed for decades to bipartisan reassurance, US domestic politics now shape the predictability of its most vital alliance. Policy choices within Israel sharpen the question of permanence. Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich’s push to advance settlement construction in the E1 corridor east of Jerusalem — more than 3,000 units designed, in his words, to “bury the idea of a Palestinian state” — exemplifies this fault line. For supporters, such measures are an assertion of strategic clarity in the absence of a viable peace partner. For critics abroad, they risk deepening Israel’s isolation. Yet, as Einat Wilf has often emphasised, the core of the conflict is not geographical but existential. “For the Jews,” she has explained, “the essential point is the creation of a sovereign Jewish state. For the Arabs, it is to resist to the last the very existence of Jewish sovereignty.” In this analysis, territorial compromises alone cannot end the war; recognition remains the missing piece. The consequences of prolonged conflict are also playing out in Israel’s institutions of gov-

ernance. The resignation of centrist figures from the emergency war cabinet has narrowed the Government’s margin for error. Victory in Gaza, should it be secured, cannot be considered separately from the preservation of Israel’s democratic core. Governance and strategy, in this crucible, are inseparable: one cannot endure without the other. Economic strain compounds the challenge. Israel’s technology sector has long been its strategic engine, a source of global prestige and internal cohesion. Yet mobilisation costs, expanded war budgets, and uncertainty about post-war security have weighed on public finances. The shekel has wavered, and investment flows have slowed. The economic question is not merely material but social: cohesion itself is tested when prosperity is fragile. Here too, the state’s resilience lies as much in maintaining confidence in its institutions as in securing its borders. History offers precedents of endurance. Israel has faced existential wars before — 1948, 1967, 1973 — and emerged intact. But this juncture is distinctive because multiple pressures converge simultaneously. Diplomatic patience is narrowing, internal protests are sharpening, economic strain is visible, and the global narrative is more contested than at any point since the Second Intifada. What marks the present is not the intensity of one front but the acceleration of all. These voices highlight the stakes Israel faces. Some stress that

challenging its right to self-defense is, in effect, questioning its very existence. Others note that military success alone cannot secure legitimacy without upholding democratic norms. A further perspective sees the conflict as fundamentally ideological, explaining why no territorial settlement has brought lasting peace. Taken together, these ideas underline the key challenges for Israel: defending sovereignty, maintaining democratic norms, managing internal dissent, and affirming national identity. They offer a guide for navigating the pressures of war, diplomacy, and public opinion. The humanitarian dimension of the war, particularly in Gaza, cannot be bracketed out. It is not simply a moral consideration but a strategic reality that shapes Israel’s ability to maintain international alliances and legitimacy. Yet framing this challenge as one imposed from outside misreads its nature. For Israel, the humanitarian aspect of conflict is part of the strategic environment in which sovereignty itself must be secured. Recognition of that reality is not a concession but a calculation: legitimacy abroad influences the freedom to defend at home. Nina Slama, an expert on Israel’s political culture and India–Israel relations, says the conflict highlights both Israel’s anxieties and its regional resilience. She notes that while October 7 exposed security vulnerabilities, the war has not broken Israel’s pragmatic partnerships with Arab states seeking stability. Slama sees a similar trend in Israel’s ties with India, where defence and technology links have grown through shared security concerns. At the same time, New Delhi emphasises restraint and dialogue, mindful of its historical solidarity with Palestine. For Israel, India represents an ally that strengthens resilience while reminding it that legitimacy depends on balancing force with responsibility. While the Iron Dome protects Israel on the battlefield, thinkers and analysts emphasise that sustaining the state also requires balancing security with democratic values, internal cohesion, and principled governance. Israel today stands on the brink but remains unbowed. Its challenge is not only to endure but to emerge from this passage with its institutions, cohesion, and narrative intact. Listening to the insights of its thinkers can help guide its path. That measure — survival with legitimacy — will define whether this moment becomes another chapter in resilience or a turning point of deeper consequence.

Paradigm shift: G7 trio joins push to recognise Palestine, challenging Netanyahu and Trump

SUKHDEV SINGH

In the face of widespread criticism of Israel and its western allies for the inhuman devastation of life and expansionist agenda in Gaza by the right-wing Government of Netanyahu, Canada, France, and Britain have announced their plan to recognise the Palestinian State at the 80th General Assembly of the United Nations in September 2025.

In a statement on July 30, 2025, Canada has held Israel responsible for “rapidly deteriorating humanitarian disaster in Gaza” and its “annexation of the West Bank”, saying that “international action to support peace, security and the dignity of all human life” cannot be further delayed, while condemning HAMAS for its “heinous terrorist attack of October 7, 2023”.

The plan to recognise Palestine State has received a mixed response, yet overwhelmingly favourable. It has been described as ‘significant’ but ‘largely symbolic’ unless it means a major practical action on the ground.

The significance of the paradigm shift in the policy can be measured in two ways: one, it can potentially isolate both the Netanyahu-led Israeli Government and the Trump-led US administration diplomatically; two, it can create strategic space and consolation for the Palestinian population. The policy change by the three G7 member States adds legitimacy to the ICJ and UN reports and verdicts, and strength to the policy position of 147 of the 193 member states of the UN who have already formally recognised the Palestinian State. Now four (France, UK, Russia, and China) of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council will agree on the recognition of an independent Palestinian State. The move is viewed ‘symbolic’ because France, the UK, and Canada have not proposed any punitive sanctions against Israel if it does not stop using ‘hunger as a weapon’ and a war forcing the Palestinian population to vacate the region. Yet the recognition plan is not ‘an empty pipe’; it, at least morally, strengthens the UN position for an immediate ceasefire. The move can embolden the domestic voices against Netanyahu not only in these countries but in the USA too, embarrassing the Trump administration for its support of the one-sided Israeli war against the innocent Palestinians. The move may also prompt other countries to follow the suit if these countries act together. As a follow up, Australia too have joined the trio to recognise



the Palestine State in the September UN meeting. Fen Hampson, a professor of international affairs at Carleton University, has acknowledged that Canada’s intention is “part of a pressure tactic on Israel,” creating a new political axis among France, the UK, and Canada in the region. It is, according to him, a “major decision” reflecting “frustration with the Netanyahu Government”. According to the former Canadian ambassador to Israel from 2006 to 2010, Jon Allen, “recognising Palestine is sending a signal to Israel, to the United States, to the world, and to Palestinians” that the two-state solution is important. The move can help Palestine as a sovereign State to claim their legal rights over its territory, territorial waters, and air space. Supporting the move, a progressive Jewish group, J Space Canada, has called it a “significant and courageous step” as being “shared by the majority of Canadian Jews”. On the other side, reacting to the move, Israel’s Ambassador to Canada has labelled the move as a “reward to Hamas” and has warned: “Israel will not bow to the distorted campaign of international pressure against it”, although the power of the move reflects in Israel response in deploying air drops of aid and relaxation in restrictions on food entering Gaza. The lesson is that even the strongest desire to continue the war and destroy the opponent to bow’ can not be sustained if opposed with an equally strong antidote for it.

But for any immediate concrete gains, the effort should be cumulative in the realignment of the US stake and role in the geopolitics of the region. This is necessitated in view of the reality construed in the Netanyahu-led Government and the Trump-led administration statements: “From Israel’s perspective,” the Israeli ambassador has commented, “there is one external opinion that matters and it’s that of the US” It means that the US will block the Palestine State recognition in September using its veto power in the UN. Trump himself has taken the offence and warned to block the trade negotiations with Canada for its Palestine recognition plan.

But the question is who Trump is supporting

between ‘Netanyahu or the Jews’ and ‘Netanyahu or the US warfare and oil corporations’. Its answer can be searched in the profit reports of the US war corporate and Israeli companies. Francesca Albanese, a UN representative, concludes in her report: “Arms companies have turned over near record profits by equipping Israel with cutting-edge weaponry”. According to Times of India news report: “The arms industry, driven by geopolitical tensions and conflicts, has become a major economic force, with US-led companies taking the lion’s share of revenues”. The Stockholm Peace Research Institute 2024 report says that in 2023, the global arms revenue rose 4.2 per cent over the previous year, with the US companies like Lockheed Martin, RTX, Northrop Grumman, Boeing, Caterpillar and General Dynamics sharing half of the global total of \$632 billion; the shares of these companies are reportedly on the rise. The Israeli companies, Elbit Systems and Rafael, too, have substantially profited from the war and entered the international market. These companies are using the Gaza war as a testing ground, helping to market their products as “battle-tested”.

By supporting Netanyahu, Trump, therefore, is promoting warfare corporate, US, and his cult, not the Jews of Israel. Although he projects himself as a ‘peacekeeper’, his interests and actions are war like: unilateral trade war. Netanyahu, supported by Trump, is in a unilateral military war determined to finish the target population, while Trump himself is in a trade war threatening every country with trade tariffs. According to news reports, Netanyahu is pushing forward, though his military chief of staff pushes back, his proposal to seize the remaining areas of Gaza while Trump is escalating trade war with Canada, Brazil, India, China, Russia and others for failing to recognise what Trump desires: the world is watching the Chess Game of military and economic might.

The writer is Reitred Professor from Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar

dailypioneer

@TheDailyPioneer

dailypioneer

GST Reset: Bold, populist, and potentially transformative

KS TOMAR

Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s push for the most ambitious Goods and Services Tax (GST) reform since its launch in 2017 is not merely an economic adjustment. It is a consumer-first gambit aimed at cooling inflation at home, boosting middle-class purchasing power, and signaling to global partners that India remains committed to structural reforms despite fiscal stress. By lowering levies on everyday essentials, small cars, and household durables, Modi seeks to deliver immediate relief to families while recalibrating India’s trade and growth posture in a turbulent global economy — particularly in the wake of former US President Donald Trump’s tariff squeeze on Indian exports.

The move carries a dual purpose. Economically, it is a reset to stimulate consumption and growth. Politically, it is a maneuver to consolidate middle-class support, blunt Opposition criticism, and underscore India’s readiness to reform even in difficult times.

When GST was introduced in July 2017, it was hailed as India’s most sweeping indirect tax reform — “one nation, one tax, one market.”

The goal was simplicity: replacing over a dozen state and central levies with a uniform system. But simplicity soon gave way to complexity. Four slabs — 5 per cent, 12 per cent, 18 per cent, and 28 per cent — plus additional cess on luxury goods created confusion, litigation, and public discontent.

The Fiscal Trade-Off

India collected ₹18.6 lakh crore (\$224 billion) in GST revenues last year. Analysts at IDFC First Bank estimate the proposed cuts could trim about ₹1.66 lakh crore (\$20 billion) annually. The GST Council — chaired by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and comprising state finance ministers — will be the true battleground. No reform of this scale can pass without state consent, setting the stage for intense federal negotiations.

Relief for Consumers

For ordinary households, the arithmetic is straightforward: lower GST equals cheaper goods. Processed foods, dairy products, dry fruits, fruit juices, and bakery items will move to the 5 per cent bracket.

According to some estimates, a family of four could save between ₹12,000 and ₹15,000 annually on their consumption basket.

The Politics Behind the Tax

With global trade tensions and tariff wars

casting shadows, showcasing India’s reformist credentials bolsters its image as a stable investment destination. At home, it arms the Government with a tangible, pocket-friendly policy achievement to counter narratives of unemployment, rural distress, and economic slowdown.

The States’ Dilemma

For state Governments, however, the math looks grim. A ₹1.66 lakh crore shortfall is not easily absorbed. States already wrestling with debt and high welfare spending — such as Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and West Bengal — are likely to resist. North-Eastern and BJP-ruled states, heavily dependent on central transfers, may acquiesce, but reluctantly. This sets up a classic clash between populism and fiscal realism. Cooperative federalism, the very foundation of GST, will be tested like never before.

Risks and the Road Ahead

The risks are significant. A widened fiscal deficit looms if the Centre borrows more to offset states’ losses. The benefits of the reform will also be uneven — the poorest Indians, who spend mainly on untaxed essentials like rice and vegetables, will see little relief compared to middle-class families. Moreover, unless accompanied by a clear roadmap, new anomalies could arise, reigniting old disputes. For the reform to succeed, the Centre may need to devise a temporary compensation mechanism for states — perhaps reviving a GST Compensation Fund. Longer term, India must move toward a simplified two-slab structure, such as 5 per cent and 18 per cent, to eliminate ambiguity and litigation. The reform should also be leveraged to stimulate domestic manufacturing under Make in India, ensuring that lower prices do not merely encourage imports.

It promises cheaper goods, lower inflation, and stronger consumption, bolstering both economic growth and political support. But it also comes with a steep fiscal cost, borne largely by states whose finances are already strained. If consensus can be forged in the GST Council, the reform may go down as a landmark moment in India’s tax history — a step that truly makes GST consumer-friendly and growth-oriented. If divisions persist, however, it risks becoming another stranded reform, weighed down by the contradictions of federal politics. The GST was conceived as a symbol of cooperative federalism. Whether Modi’s bold gamble strengthens or strains that federal fabric will define the legacy of this ambitious reset.

The writer is a strategic affairs columnist and senior political analyst

dailypioneer

@TheDailyPioneer

dailypioneer

CORE VS HEADLINE: INDIA'S INFLATION DEBATE DEEPENS

THE RBI's Flexible Inflation Targeting (FIT) framework will turn 10 next year, and the central bank believes it has met its expectations. Over the last nine years, India experienced a hump-shaped performance, with inflation behaving like an obedient child in the first and last three years. The middle three years saw retail prices breach the upper tolerance band, mainly due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war. If average inflation hovered around 4 percent from 2016 to 2019, it stayed above 6 percent for five quarters from the first quarter of Financial Year 2022 to the fourth quarter of Financial Year 2023. With a review slated for next March, key questions arise: Should core inflation replace headline inflation as the anchor for monetary policymaking, as suggested by the Economic Survey, 2025? Or should the government re-examine the 4 percent target and consider establishing a tolerance band?

Those championing core inflation argue that the food component is outside the RBI's purview and, therefore, core inflation should guide policy. They reason that stabilising core inflation leads to better economic outcomes. However, RBI maintains that persistent food inflation can spill over to core inflation through higher wage costs, higher rents, and higher markups. Which is why its expert committee in 2014 insisted that since food and fuel constitute more than 50 percent of the consumption basket, inflation based on less than half the basket would not be representative. As former Governor Shaktikanta Das noted, eliminating food from the target would amount to having no target at all. "It will make no sense to the average citizen, as it is the headline inflation that the common person understands and should remain that way." Even as the debate over core vs headline remains unfinished, there's another view that the inflation target itself needs to be reset.

However, the central bank may not be in agreement. In its recent discussion paper, it noted that changing the target now, when the global economy is confronted with geopolitical uncertainty, can be interpreted by international investors as a dilution of the IT framework, thereby undermining policy credibility. It reasoned that the current tolerance band of 2-6 percent allows headroom to account for deviations from temporary food and fuel price shocks. That said, price stability is a shared responsibility between the government and RBI, and hence needs effective monetary-fiscal coordination to prevent second-round inflationary effects.

FERTILISER DEMAND, POOR SUPPLY STIR FARM CRISIS

A crisis is simmering in Telangana, and the farmers are at the receiving end. Serpentine queues at the Primary Agricultural Cooperative Society centres for hours on end, at places even from early morning, have become the norm—something not witnessed in years. The reason is an acute shortage of urea.

The Centre has allotted 9.8 lakh metric tonnes (LMT) to Telangana for this Kharif, but the state has received 5.42 LMT so far. The situation is largely the same in other states. Reasons are many. There are global supply chain disruptions and lower-than-expected imports due to factors such as China halting its exports. Still, India has agreements with the Saudis, UAE, Nigeria, and other countries to import urea. It's not that we are entirely dependent on imports; we are the world's third-largest producer of fertilisers. However, as the second-largest user in the world, the country is not yet self-reliant. It is clear that something has gone wrong, and the sooner the Centre and states acknowledge it, the better. Domestic production isn't on expected lines. The Ramagundam Fertilisers and Chemicals Ltd went out of action for some time. The urea stock with the Centre at the beginning of this month was about half of what it was last August.

Furthermore, the increased cultivable area in Telangana is taking its toll. Farmers in the state use about 170 kg per acre. When we consider that the sown area increased to 118.69 lakh acres from 91 lakh acres last year, the picture becomes clearer. Additionally, paddy cultivation has grown significantly, resulting in increased demand for fertilisers. A closer examination raises pertinent questions. Granted, we have import constraints. What have the Centre and states done to keep pace with the demand? There are programmes to promote natural farming and fertilisers other than the widely used ones. However, much more needs to be done to raise awareness among farmers. Importantly, domestic production must be freed from the 'inspector raj' as industry bodies demand. Currently, the Centre must expedite imports, ramp up domestic production, and improve distribution. Both the ruling and opposition in the state have turned the crisis into a boxing match, with the result that panic is spreading. The onus is on both to see reality for what it is, rather than confusing the farmers.

QUICK TAKE

COURTING MARRIAGE

RECENTLY, the Chhattisgarh High Court ruled that mocking a husband for being jobless is cruelty, while the Bombay High Court said that mocking a wife's complexion is just a domestic quarrel. Different circumstances, different interpretations. This contrast raises a question: why let things reach this stage at all, with love reading like a charge sheet? An eminent sociologist suggests that today's couples share a greater sense of individuality. The Supreme Court also states matter-of-factly that a forced union runs contrary to the purpose of matrimonial law, which envisions companionship and shared responsibilities. Ultimately, a relationship isn't a test of who wounds the other deeper.

THE surest way to throttle democracy is to weaponise laws and target those opposing the government. This government seems to have converted this into an art.

I recall the day the amendment to the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 (UAPA), was taken up for discussion in Parliament. The Home Minister openly stated that this was necessary, for none could oppose the inclusion of terrorists and terrorist organisations in the First Schedule of the UAPA, seeking to destabilise our Republic. I intervened and expressed my fears that these laws are likely to be used against our citizens; it has turned out to be a reality. The prosecution of young students, like Umar Khalid and Sharjeel Imam, under those laws has resulted in them languishing in jail for years without a trial. Such laws have been used against journalists, academics, and members of religious communities in this country. The obvious intent was to silence them.

The weaponisation of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002 (PMLA) is evident in its widespread use against political opponents, including chief ministers and ministers from opposition-ruled states, such as Arvind Kejriwal, Manish Sisodia, Satyendra Jain, Hemant Soren, and Farooq Abdullah, among others. Valiant attempts were made to move against Siddaramaiah, but they came to nought. These laws have also been used to instil fear in several leaders who were once part of the opposition but have been persuaded to join the BJP to save themselves from prosecution and imprisonment. The BJP has, particularly in Maharashtra, rewarded opposition leaders against whom serious allegations of corruption were publicly made for causing a split in their erstwhile parties. They are now part of the coalition ruling Maharashtra.

The latest example of weaponisation of laws is the introduction of two Constitution (Amendment) Bills in Parliament on August 20, 2025. It is claimed that this is being done in public interest, for the welfare of the people and to uphold the principles of constitutional morality, and good governance—concepts that are alien to the functioning of this government. What is likely to serve is not public interest, but the political interest of the ruling dispensation. This is clear from the fact that the proposed law provides that the chief

The growing use of laws like UAPA and PMLA to pin political opponents and dissenters reveals a disturbing trend of abuse of legal frameworks. The latest Bills pave the way for a new form of dictatorship

DEMOCRACY ON TRIAL: FROM THE RULE OF LAW TO RULE BY LAW

KAPIL SIBAL

Senior lawyer and member of Rajya Sabha



SOURAV ROY

ministers and ministers being investigated for offences punishable for more than five years and being in custody for more than 30 days will, on the 31st day, if they have not resigned, be dismissed by the governor of the state.

The principle of law that our Republic has embraced is that a person is innocent till proven guilty. In this case, a minister or a chief minister can be removed on a mere allegation without any proof. We are all aware that many such cases have been pending trial for over a decade and that the conviction rate in several of these prosecutions is abysmally low. If the proposed constitutional amendments become law, it is most likely that trumped-up allegations will be made to target sitting chief ministers and ministers, and after 30 days

in custody, they will be dismissed from those positions. Such allegations in the past have served the political interests of the BJP. The present establishment seeks to utilise these laws for its own political purposes.

This weaponisation is also evident from how laws such as PMLA or UAPA have been used against influential ministers seeking to coerce them to join the BJP, or even public servants not belonging to any political party, in opposition-ruled states. Ironically, since 2014, these laws have never been invoked against any minister in any of the BJP-ruled states, or, for that matter, against any minister within the ruling establishment at the Centre. Obviously, the selective use of such laws serves the political interest of the party in power.

WHEN WISDOM TOOK THE CROWN

RENUKA NARAYANAN

FAITHLINE



ited Jwalamukhi in 1815 and covered the temple spire with gold. The Katoch also fought the British. In 1847, Raja Parmodh Chandra fired a 101-gun salute, a practice later reserved by the British Crown for itself, to inform his people that their king was on the throne. He led an army of 8,000 Katoch across the Beas against the British forces stationed in Pathankot for the Second Anglo-Sikh War. Parmodh Chandra was betrayed by a person named Pahad Chand, defeated, and deported to the hill town of Almora, where



WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Raja Hari Chand's tale highlights the power of humility and inner peace. His decision not to challenge his brother is a product of his emotional intelligence, a quality essential for navigating life's challenges

he died in 1851. Kangra was subsumed in the British Empire. Today, any number of Katoch fight in the Indian armed forces. To follow the annals of the Katoch clan is to unspool the history of North India in one skein, for they appear in every epoch—sturdy warriors who repeatedly fought forces greater than theirs. Their fortunes foundered, but they went on. No other noble house seems to have had quite that continuity.

Although the princely order was abolished by modern India in 1971, a Katoch raja by name still exists today, and there are four branches of Katoch: Jaswal, Guler, Sibaia and Dadwal.

MAILBAG

WRITE TO: letters@newindianexpress.com

India's pendency

Ref: A governance quiz missed at monsoon session (Aug 24). Our administrative ecosystem is brimming with propaganda and less substantive output. India has become the pendency capital of the world. From pending litigations to unfilled vacancies and unspent budget allocations, our lacklustre efforts paint a gloomy picture.
Rajaroo Kumar, Bengaluru

National degradation

Ref: Vice precedence (Aug 24). The column sheds light on the nuances through which citizens have been kept in the dark. It is a serious matter that the politico-ideological scape of the nation has undergone tremendous change—as far as the cultural plurality and its underlying unity is concerned.
Krishnaprasad S, Palakkad

Industries pollute

Ref: The right to clean environment (Aug 24). A stark difference has been seen after the early 1990s when our economy opened up and the pollution of water bodies increased. Even though pollution control boards—central and state—took measures to control water pollution, industrial pollution has been rampant.
P Narasimhan, Dharmapuri

Judicial authority

Ref: Level playing field (Aug 23). Disqualification must remain tied to convictions by the judiciary; shortcuts that eject elected representatives upon mere detention will corrode the presumption of innocence and federal checks. A 'level playing field' would ideally consist of fast-track trials with safeguards and statutory oversight of enforcement agencies—not summary removals.
Sanjeev Jha, Delhi

Pan-global reach

Ref: Postal service to US first to take hit (Aug 24). Despite declining usage in the digital age, India Post remains a dependable and affordable service, often more trustworthy than private couriers that overcharge customers. Unlike courier firms, India Post ensures wider reach, especially in rural areas where alternatives are scarce.
RS Narula, Patiala

Overlooked fatalities

Ref: They are not strays, they are ours (Aug 24). The article is weighing heavily in favour of our canine community. Neither the administration nor the activists come forward to think of the plight of the hapless living victims of dog bites leading to immense physical/mental suffering and even death.
AM Chakravarty, Hyderabad

THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS

Chairman of the Board: Manoj Kumar Sonthalia Editor: Santwana Bhattacharya

Resident Editor (Kerala): Kiran Prakash* Printed and Published by R K Jhunjhunwala on behalf of Express Publications (Madurai) Private Limited at Oruma Printers And Publishers Limited, X536, Sreesankara Industrial Estate, Chiyaram Post, Thrissur - 680026. Thrissur, Vol. 9, No.199, RNI Reg. No. KERENG/2017/72693. * Responsible to decide the matter under the PRP Act. Copyright: Express Publications (Madurai) Private Limited. All rights reserved. Reproduction in any manner, electronic or otherwise, in whole or in part, without prior written permission is prohibited.

Integrated Air Defence Weapon System: Another feather in DRDO cap

The successful maiden flight tests of the Integrated Air Defence Weapon System (IADWS), a multi-layered air defence platform, by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), add another dimension to our military capability. Incidentally, this capability was made abundantly clear in the post-Pahalgam conflict with Pakistan when our armed forces were able to protect our territory from aerial attacks and degrade its air defence substantially. That episode underscored the pressing need for India to further indigenise its air defence capacity, reduce dependency on imports, and develop layered platforms that can counter a variety of threats simultaneously. IADWS is a natural extension of this strategic thinking. According to DRDO, IADWS is unique because

it brings together three indigenous components into a single, integrated platform. The first is the Quick Reaction Surface-to-Air Missile (QR-SAM), designed to engage multiple targets at medium ranges with high accuracy and reliability. The second is the advanced 'Very Short-Range Air Defence System (VSHORADS)' missile, which protects low-flying aircraft, helicopters, and drones at shorter distances. The third component is the high-power laser-based Directed Energy Weapon (DEW), which uses concentrated energy to neutralise aerial targets with unprecedented speed and precision.

The seamless integration of these three systems makes IADWS a formidable multi-layered shield capable of addressing both conventional and asymmetric aerial threats. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh highlighted the significance of this achievement, noting in a social media post that the successful test has established the country's multi-layered air defence capability and will strengthen area defence for critical facilities against enemy aerial threats. His remarks reflect the confidence that India's political and military leadership now repose in indigenous innovation, a shift from the past when dependence on foreign suppliers often left India vulnerable to delays, cost escalations, and geopolitical pressure. The broader message of the IADWS success is also about self-reliance. In the past decade, the Narendra Modi government has insisted on Atmanirbhar Bharat in defence production, encouraging public sector laboratories and private enterprises alike to innovate and de-

liver cutting-edge technologies. The IADWS flight test is therefore more than a military breakthrough—it is also an affirmation of the country's scientific and industrial capacity to design and execute complex systems that were once thought to be beyond reach. That said, India cannot afford complacency. While this achievement strengthens deterrence, the regional security environment remains fraught with challenges. China, despite a recent thaw in relations, continues to be an unpredictable neighbour. Its strategic embrace of Pakistan remains intact. With Field Marshal Asim Munir, Pakistan's assertive and pugnacious army chief, consolidating power, the Beijing-Islamabad axis poses a dual threat to India's security. Both countries have a history of coordinating

strategies to keep India under pressure, and neither has given New Delhi reasons to extend unqualified trust. Therefore, even as India celebrates the IADWS milestone, policymakers must focus on the larger picture. It is vital to accelerate production, ensure rapid induction of these systems into the armed forces, and continue iterative upgrades in response to evolving technologies. Development of counter-drone systems, expansion of cyber resilience for air defence networks, and integration of artificial intelligence for real-time threat assessment are the pressing priorities. Towards this India must deepen cooperation with friendly powers to secure access to advanced sensors, surveillance tools, and satellite-based systems that can complement indigenous capabilities.

LETTERS

Spread space knowledge among students

This refers to news reports that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has expressed that space exploration is the next goal for India. Astronaut Subhanshu Shukla is keen that students must hone knowledge about space exploration. In fact, a similar sentiment was echoed by ISRO Chairman Dr Narayanan, when he was being honoured with a Doctorate by Osmania University recently. He stated that his goal and dream was to design a 40-storey tall rocket with a 75-tonne payload. We wish that these would be translated soon. After his meeting with the Prime Minister, Shukla said that Modi had assured that India will build a pool of 40 to 50 astronauts. This is a thrilling development. I urge Modi, the ISRO chief and Shukla to depute a team of experts in batches across schools. They can explain about the role of ISRO, the astronauts, goals, focus areas and about the basic technology needed to make rockets. Many students can certainly get motivated to pursue a career in the exciting field.

G Murali Mohan Rao, Secunderabad-11

Soaring beyond frontiers

The historic initiative in space technology marks a remarkable leap forward for Indian space ambitions. With the launch of an extensive Earth observation satellite constellation, Indian firms, under INSAPC's guidance, are showcasing innovation, self-reliance, and a bold vision for the future. This pioneering collaboration will not only fortify the country's leadership in global space technology but also foster invaluable solutions for agriculture, disaster management, and national security. All those involved in setting up this stellar example of scientific excellence and forward-thinking partnership should be lauded.

S. Rahamathulla, Kadapa-516003

Revanth blames KCR 'law'

Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy has mentioned that the law enacted by the KCR government to restrict total reservations in the state to 50 per cent has emerged as a big hurdle for the Congress government's proposal to implement 42 per cent reservation for backward classes (BCs) in the state. Revanth Reddy asserted that the Congress was bent on helping BCs in this regard as Rahul Gandhi had made the promise. He opined that with the present state of reservation, BCs would not get even one per cent reservation in local bodies, among others. This needs to be pondered on a broader scale.

S Lakshmi, Hyderabad

Our egos are too big

This refers to the article 'Small people big egos' (THI Aug 22) by K Krishna Sagar. It is a masterpiece that rightly dwells deep into the malaise that affects human relations at every level, including family relations, workplace connections and our societal responsibilities. We place our egos so high that we turn a blind eye to our real growth as human beings. This is a downward trend for our society. We come across as being arrogant, self-centred and all-knowing individuals with no time for healthy and meaningful conversations with people around us. The fake lives we lead today are full of social media gratifications and likes. This is more evident among the restless younger generation, who seem to carry their ego on their sleeves. They refuse to take advice from their seniors at the workplaces but are hooked on social media influences, who often mislead them. We hardly care to introspect our behaviour, mannerisms and interpersonal communication. Our egos are so big that today we don't feel the necessity to sit down and settle our differences, which is quite worrying. The writer has rightly stressed on the need to cast aside our egos and adopt simplicity and develop respect for our elders and seniors. To lead a fulfilling life, we must make our egos small and ourselves big. Only then can there be real growth for us as human beings. That way, we can contribute in a big way towards building a healthy and a happy society.

Parimala G Tadas, Hyderabad-50

thehansreader@gmail.com

BENGALURU ONLINE

'Political Ganesh idols' leave artisans struggling in Channapatna

RAMANAGARA: As Ganesh Chaturthi approaches, anticipation fills the air in Channapatna, famed as the "Toy Town." However, the festive spirit is overshadowed by an unexpected political storm. Local politicians, seeking publicity and voter influence, have begun distributing free Ganesh idols, severely impacting the livelihood of traditional idol artisans who depend on this season for their income.

The festival of Ganesha, celebrated with immense devotion across homes and streets, has traditionally been a crucial economic period for idol makers. This year, however, politics has intruded. MLA CP Yogeshwar (Congress) and JDS Taluk President HC Jayamuthu are actively offering free idols to residents. Their teams are registering names across villages and towns in the taluk, handing over idols at no cost to anyone who signs up.

This political strategy, aimed at garnering goodwill and visibility ahead of potential elections, has backfired catastrophically on local artisans. Traders who invested heavily months ago, commissioning or crafting thousands of idols, now face a deserted market. Customers who pre-ordered idols months in advance are now demanding refunds, opting instead for the free political handouts. The sudden, large-scale free distribution has completely dried up demand.

"The politicians have stabbed us in the stomach," lamented Vinay, a distraught idol trader. "If they had announced this free distribution two or three months ago, we wouldn't have invested lakhs of rupees in preparing or procuring these idols."

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



RAULAPATI SEETHARAM RAO

The police system in our country has to undergo changes to emerge from its shadows. It is time for them to perform their duties with dignity—not out of fear, pressure, or impatience to get quick results, but with true values, accountability to the law, and professional ethics. This is not meant to criticize or teach morality to today's police or to say that what they are doing is wrong.

However, if this system continues to operate under stress, fear, and disrespect, treating their profession merely to pass time, the society will be mute spectators to the complete collapse of this crucial department.

First and foremost, there is a need to understand for whom the police serve and uphold their professional ethics. The law grants them the authority to file cases and conduct investigations. Furthermore, they must arrest suspects and gather evidence. It is precisely in this evidence-gathering process that police find themselves caught in a helpless position.

There is growing pressure—often from governments desperate to maintain

their existence—that imposes time limits like "resolve this case by this evening," thereby placing the department in a vulnerable state. Only when the police system breaks free from this helplessness can it perform duties to the required levels and with respect and integrity. It is easier said than done, but why are the police not trying to step out of these shadows and sincerely work to solve cases?

Analysing the reasons reveals some important facts. Democratically elected governments—legitimate representatives chosen through elections—end up focusing only minimally on welfare and development. After power struggles are settled, they spend the rest of their term preparing for the next elections, leading to a cycle of stagnation.

Earlier, politicians of every hue adhered to values that ensured government institutions functioned with discretion—knowing what each branch should or should not do—and avoided misusing power for personal gain. Governments never brazenly forced the police to break laws through undue pressure, insisting that whatever the government said was law. That is why democracy was able to take root in our nation, even if only for a few years.

In other democratic countries, corruption within the police system is quite rare. This is because everyone—senior government officials, opposition leaders, politicians, and citizens alike—adhere to democratic values,



respect the law, and uphold the principle that no one is above the law. The meanings and awareness of crime, criminals, and criminal justice are shared not only by the media but also by intellectuals and community leaders, which helps prevent criminals from being honoured, protected, or given official positions. However, recently, especially in countries like the United States, values have been eroding. The leadership has changed direction. When the Watergate scandal was exposed, the then-president became a laughingstock. Until a few years ago, there was a culture in the U.S. of holding any president accountable in public, no matter their weaknesses.

But when businessman Donald Trump became a political leader, the concept of 'diplomacy' lost its meaning, and 'tariffs' became the primary weapon. How long

and to what extent Trump, who makes an announcement every minute, will drag down America and other countries is something only time will tell.

Setting aside the police systems of other countries for now, experts, police specialists, and constitutional scholars can carefully discuss and agree on implementing certain measures in our country in accordance with the law.

Police must not hesitate even a bit to register the First Information Report (FIR). In cases where the offense is not legally recognized as an FIR-worthy crime, some suggest closing the case. Sending the final report to the court will reduce pressure on the police by half, while delays caused by police in registering FIRs will only increase the pressure. Unfortunately, police have sometimes sidelined FIR registration. The reasons are well known. Continuous su-

pervision by higher authorities on this crucial matter can help marginally improve the situation at the police station level. Supervision by higher authorities must become a continuous process.

Following the police manual should be mandatory. Material evidence needed to be submitted to courts must be sent immediately! The DSP should constantly check whether these tasks are being carried out properly. When case registration and notings in the general diary are done regularly and in the right manner, cleansing will begin right at the police station level. Mention of whoever is held in lockup must be recorded in the general diary. At present, the need to resort to third-degree methods has decreased. Keeping detainees in lockup (illegally and unauthorisedly) has caused the police to overstep their boundaries and become mere puppets in the hands of leaders.

It is, after all, the responsibility of the police to uphold the law. According to which suspects must be sent for remand within 24 hours without fail. If the police intend to interrogate suspects, they can conduct the process in a designated room at the police station. When the police carry out everything transparently and responsibly, it is difficult to find fault with them. The enforcers of the law are accountable to the lawmakers (legislators) and to the judges who interpret the laws, at least until they themselves take the law into their own hands. Anyone who manipulates the

Wings of progress or peril? Need for a rethink on Indian civil aviation

DR SREERAMULU GOSIKONDA

INDIA'S civil aviation sector has been a symbol of technological progress and global integration, enabling mobility, trade, and connectivity. With a history that dates to February 18, 1911, when the first commercial airmail flight took off between Allahabad and Naini, India has grown into the third-largest domestic aviation market in the world.

According to the Ministry of Civil Aviation, the country has over 150 operational airports, while in 2023-24, more than 350 million passengers traveled by air within and outside the country. The civil aviation sector contributes significantly to India's economy, generating employment for over four million people directly and indirectly while contributing around \$72 billion annually to the GDP. It has accelerated tourism, regional development, and medical emergency services while enhancing India's global connectivity.

However, the potential of civil aviation is marred by an emerging crisis of safety and accountability, exemplified by the tragic Ahmedabad plane crash on June 12. The Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau

(AAIB) report revealed preliminary evidence of hydraulic system failure coupled with possible sensor malfunction, raising critical concerns about the 787 Dreamliner's technical reliability and emergency response protocols.

The woes of passengers:

Boeing, one of the world's largest aircraft manufacturers, has faced significant scrutiny over the years regarding its technological integrity. Founded in 1916, Boeing produced iconic aircraft, from the Boeing 707 to the 787 Dreamliner, which have revolutionized air travel. However, its safety record has been increasingly under question - the Boeing 737 MAX was grounded worldwide in March 2019 after two catastrophic crashes (Lion Air Flight 610 and Ethiopian Airlines Flight 302) killed 346 people, with investigations revealing software malfunctions in the MCAS system and insufficient pilot training and the Boeing 777 and 787 models have faced complaints regarding engine failures, cracked fan blades, and fuel system leaks, leading to multiple emergency landings globally.

The Ahmedabad incident adds to this troubling narrative, underscoring the press-



According to the Director General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) data, over 1,500 people have died in plane accidents in India since independence. Besides, the tragic deaths of Dr. YS Rajasekhara Reddy (the then Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh in 2009) and actress Soundarya (2004) in helicopter crashes continue to evoke suspicions of technology failures or possible conspiracies. While no conclusive evidence has emerged to confirm foul play, these incidents highlight the

systemic challenges in aviation safety governance and the opaque nature of high-profile accident investigations in India.

Technology is meant to make human life simpler, easier, faster, and smarter. Yet when it fails, it must not translate into a death sentence, as seen in aviation tragedies. What we need is technology with a human face where systems that place human safety, dignity, and control at their core, ensuring that machines remain tools in the service of life, not masters of fate. Civil aviation, as a high-risk sector, demands robust managerial and technical checks, regular audits, independent safety inspections, and transparent disclosures.

It is unacceptable that cost-cutting and competitive pressures compromise the safety of millions. The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) has consistently

recommended that human factors, crew training, and technology maintenance receive equal priority in safety frameworks.

Aviation authorities must ensure: 1. periodic comprehensive system checks on all critical aircraft components are enforced; 2. advanced simulation training for handling rare but catastrophic failures is mandated for pilots and 3. maintenance records are transparently reviewed by independent safety boards.

What Indians can do now?

The Ahmedabad crash has instilled fear among Indian travelers, with many families' expressing reluctance to let their loved ones travel by air, particularly for non-essential reasons. The collective trauma of such incidents erodes public confidence, forcing a re-consideration of the necessity of air travel.

Given the availability of advanced virtual platforms, Indians should consider limiting air travel to unavoidable circumstances while preferring online meetings for business and academic purposes. This not only reduces personal risk but also contributes to environmental sustainability by lowering aviation emissions.

To ensure aviation serves society responsibly, the fol-

lowing steps should be taken.

- Boeing and other manufacturers must conduct exhaustive tests and introspect on technological failures.
- The DGCA and Ministry of Civil Aviation should enforce stricter airworthiness checks, enhance transparency, and establish passenger compensation mechanisms in cases of negligence.
- Airlines should disclose maintenance and safety audit results to the public regularly to build trust.
- Passengers must weigh the necessity of air travel and consider alternatives, prioritising safety until systemic changes assure reliability.

Unless aviation manufacturers like Boeing introspect on their failures and regulatory agencies enforce uncompromising safety protocols, the promise of air travel will remain overshadowed by its perils. As India navigates its journey toward becoming a global aviation hub, the guiding principle should remain clear that "technology must have a human face. It must protect, not endanger, lives."

(The writer is Assistant Professor (Sociology) at Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi. Views expressed are his personal)

DECCAN Chronicle

25 AUGUST 2025

Will new US envoy help to repair ties under threat?

With suspended trade talks, penal tariffs, which were revealed to be sanctions rather than a tax on imports, and the deadline for the application of those sanctions for importing Russian oil (August 27) approaching, India-US ties can be said to be in rocky waters. Coming amid this climate of disagreements is the nomination by Donald Trump of his close aide Sergio Gor as the next US Ambassador to India.

To say the appointment of an official whom Elon Musk had only recently described as “a snake” is unusual would be to invite scorn for an oxymoron. Given Trump’s sustained campaign against illegal immigrants, it may also sound a bit unusual that Gor is himself an immigrant who came through Malta to the US to become a naturalised citizen.

The US President, Trump, tends to tear up the rule book and toss conventions and traditions out of the window in most things he has been doing. Gor’s appointment to a key post as envoy to India in these diplomatically tough times as geopolitics is being churned would have to await Senate clearance, which might take time, but the intent to keep India on the hook is clear enough.

It is more than likely that this storm caused by Trump’s tariff and sanctions tantrum would either have blown over by the time Gor comes to New Delhi, or it could still be raging much to India’s discomfiture as trade of around \$190 billion has had such uncertainty thrust into it. Addressing the immediate crisis in the relationship may not be so much that of the new envoy — who will also be Special Envoy for South and Central Asian affairs — as that of Trump and his closest circles in which India has become a target.

The unfairness of punitive sanctions in the absence of any such action against China as the biggest buyer of Russian oil nor against Europe whose trade with Russia is far higher than India’s has been stressed. But the response has only been hostile, as evidenced in the use of phrases like “profiteering from oil” and “maharaja of tariffs” even as they are accompanied by India being described as the “road to peace” and “prized free and democratic partner” with a special place in America’s strategic outreach.

External affairs minister Jaishankar has minced no words in pointing out the incongruities in Trump’s jaundiced approach to India, emphasising that there are red lines India will not cross in any negotiations on trade with the US. The Indian dairy sector is one in which millions of small stakeholders make a living off a few cattle and the bigger agriculture segment is India’s pride as purveyor of food security for the world’s largest national population.

The grip of the trade imbroglio is such that India is currently helpless to pursue any remedial action in the absence of any forum to put its point of view across to Trump. Unlike China which has control over rare earth minerals, besides holding a lot of US Treasury paper, and Russia, whose hypersonic weaponry has the clout to keep the US on guard, India has no leverage to persuade a relook at the sanctions, leave alone the base 25 per cent tariff on all Indian imports that kicked in earlier.

“Cajole, don’t confront” must be the watchwords as India grapples with the trade complication. It would be a get out of jail card for India if the Ukraine war is paused or ended by Russia. Until then, the vibes will be cold with the US regardless of old strong ties.

Fair rolls onus on EC, not voter

The Supreme Court’s latest instructions to the Election Commission of India (EC) with respect to the special intensive revision (SIR) of the electoral roll in Bihar will help make the process more voter-friendly and transparent.

As per the directives, the EC will have to accept Aadhaar card as one of the documents to prove a voter’s eligibility for being retained on the electoral roll. The EC has also been directed to accept the documents submitted electronically. Aadhaar numbers have no solid legal backing yet, but most Indians possess one, and hence it will help many retain their voting right while the facility to submit the documents electronically will help those who are outside the state, especially the migrant labour, meet the EC’s requirements.

The EC has of late announced that it has received the documents 98.2 per cent of the electors in the draft voters list; it is expected that it will touch 100 per cent with several days to go for the publication of the final list on September 30. While the news is welcome, the concern most people have raised is not about those who have been retained on the draft list but about the 65 lakh people who have been removed from the rolls. The two measures the SC has announced will help many of them to get back to the rolls. The SC has also asked the political parties to be part of the process and help the electors submit the documents.

The crucial issue, however, is about the power of the EC to remove a voter from the list without giving the affected person a chance to state his case. It is only with the intervention of the court that the EC has even published the list of “evictees”.

While none should object to the attempts of the EC to sanctify the electoral roll, there must be legal protection for the citizen to retain his name on the list unless the EC can prove that a name needs to be removed from the rolls as per the law. In other words, the revision being just and fair must be the responsibility of the EC, and not the voter.

DECCAN CHRONICLE

KAUSHIK MITTER
Editor

R. MOHAN
Resident Editor

K. SUDHAKAR
Printer & Publisher

DECCAN CHRONICLE offices are located at:
Chennai: SP 3 Developed Plot, Industrial Estate, Guindy, Chennai 600032. Phones: (044) 22254747, 22254748
Coimbatore: No. 2/22 Sengalipalayam Road, N.G.G.O. Colony Post, Kurudampalayam Village, Coimbatore-641022. Phone: (0422) 2231255, 2231256
Hyderabad: 36, Sarojini Devi Road, Secunderabad 500 003. Phone: (040) 27803930-4. Fax: (040) 27805256
Visakhapatnam: Survey No. 1/3A Beach Road, Near Kailasagiri Ropeway, Sector-9 MVP Colony, Visakhapatnam - 530 017. Phones: (0891) 2552333/2552334, Fax (0891) 2755285
Vijayawada: No. C 3 & 4, Patamata, Industrial Estate, Auto Nagar, Vijayawada (A.P.). Phones: (0866) 2555284/ 2555287, Fax (0866) 2555234
Rajahmundry: Vemagiri, Dhauleswaram Rd, Rajahmundry 533125. Phones: (0883) 2417208, 2417618
Anantapur: Thapovan Colony, Bangalore Bye-Pass Road, Anantapur 515004. Phones: (08554) 276903, Fax: 08554-276904
Nellore: Survey No. 527/2, Burrampur Village, Venkatachalam (M), Chemudugunta Panchayat, Nellore. Phone: (0861) 2348581/ 82, Telefax (0861) 2348580
Karimnagar: H. No. 1-21-12/1, Cheralabhturk Road, Mugudhumpur Village, Karim Nagar - 505186 Phone : 9121181123

Subhani



India’s foreign policy is in need of fresh stewardship



Bharat Bhushan

With its dream of reaching greatness by hanging on to the coattails of the United States going bust, India needs to radically rethink its foreign policy. Rather than the ongoing tentative recalibration, it needs to be redesigned from the ground up.

Although Indian political leaders value loyalty to a fault, this cannot be done by the same actors who were till recently bending over backwards to please Washington. The shock of the punitive tariffs imposed by US President Donald Trump has led to Indian ministers and officials making a beeeline to Moscow and Beijing. This 180-degree flip is being presented as strategic agility.

However, both Moscow and Beijing will not fail to see the outreach as damage control although they will welcome it as a step towards a broader multipolar realignment. An India that is spurned by the US fits into their play on the larger global chessboard. Indeed, Moscow has even suggested revival of the trilateral Russia-India-China (RIC) dialogue, a potential building block of a non-Western alliance.

India, which because of its democracy, pluralism and rule-of-law had far greater credibility than the authoritarian regimes amongst the nations of the Global South, is now forced to make common cause with them.

India may claim that it is doubling down on its “special and privileged strategic partnership” with Russia, but its foreign policy establishment still has one leg firmly in the American camp. India’s love-fest with the US, especially with Mr Trump, was also facilitated by the same actors.

Recent invocations of India’s sovereignty were absent when they pushed India into the US camp,

while continuing to nod timidly towards Moscow for the sake of form. They also facilitated India’s role as the cat’s paw of the US against China.

China, earlier than most other countries, understood the shallowness of the Indian strategic vision. It also had a good measure of the personalities leading India’s foreign policy. They were fully aware, even while engaging with them, that they could not walk the talk. This was evident in India’s refusal to even publicly acknowledge China’s belligerent incursions across the Line of Actual Control in Ladakh, including in the summer of 2020.

China has responded to India’s current attempts to pivot by condemning the punitive US tariffs as “bullying” and invited India to join its stance as defender of a rules-based system of trading under the World Trade Organisation.

Having till recently urged the boycott of Chinese goods, including the purchase of “small-eyed” Ganesha idols, the Indian government will now have to re-position China as a cooperative partner rather than a strategic threat.

Meanwhile, China has already begun to take advantage of India’s perceptibly weakened position. Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi’s recent visit to New Delhi marked a movement forward from stalemate to tactical engagement, but two developments stood out — India agreed to an “early harvest” approach to border settlement, and the Chinese claimed that India had recognised Taiwan as a part of China.

India had earlier preferred a comprehensive border settlement but under Chinese insistence it seems to have agreed to settle the border along Sikkim under the “early harvest” proposal.

Recall the jamboree of South Asian leaders who attended Mr Modi’s oath-taking in 2014. Ten years later, India’s relationship with its immediate neighbours has never been as fraught as it is today.

This would isolate the Sikkim boundary from the other disputed sectors — western, middle and eastern — on China’s border with India. Experts believe that this will help China to settle its border with Bhutan “with an eye towards the Doklam plateau”, with India gaining little.

On Taiwan, China claims that India has recognised it as a part of China, and India has clarified that while it supports “one China policy”, it remains focused only on Taiwan’s “economy and culture”. China has said that this was contrary to what had transpired at Mr Wang Yi’s meetings in New Delhi.

Much of the reengagement with China appears transactional — restarting direct flights, promoting trade and holding summits. Core disputes like the standoff in eastern Ladakh and China’s active intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance support to Pakistan during Operation Sindoor have not been addressed effectively. Clearly, ties are nowhere near normal and suspicions persist.

India is essentially buying time through tactical recalibration with Russia and China, hoping that meanwhile things will improve with the US. However, India-US relations henceforth will be marked with caution, if not distrust, even if the US tariffs are reduced.

Nearer home, the foreign policy missteps are even starker with Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s “neighbourhood first” approach being reduced to mere rhetoric by the foreign policy establishment. Recall the jamboree of South Asian leaders who attended Mr Modi’s oath-taking in 2014. Ten years later, India’s rela-

tionship with its immediate neighbours has never been as fraught as it is today. Leaving Pakistan aside, India’s failure to improve ties with other South Asian countries is a shocking testament to the failures of the architects of its foreign policy. Meanwhile, suspicion of India in multilateral forums of the Global South, because of its close alignment with the US, is likely to persist.

Some blame India’s failure on the global stage on Prime Minister Modi’s faith in personal diplomacy — focussing on high-profile summits, his personal rapport with world leaders, his frequent foreign visits and support from the social media. While these factors shaped India’s and Mr Modi’s international image briefly, they fell short of achieving substantive foreign policy outcomes.

However, much of the present failure lies on the heads of those who encouraged him on the path of “prestige diplomacy” and convinced him that India’s road to greatness passed through Washington DC. They accelerated the strategic alignment with the US through the “Quad”, defence deals and cooperation in the Indo-Pacific (a term coined by the US to pandor to Indian egos). They did not foresee that none of this would shield India from economic coercion. The tilt towards the US has also come at the cost of underinvesting in other relationships.

Those who showed lack of economic foresight in foreign policy by not recommending diversification of markets, failed to secure exemptions for Indian goods, actively promoted appeasement of Donald Trump and delayed pushback against the US need to be held accountable.

They have eroded India’s position, making it vulnerable through its strategic miscalculations. Verbal gymnastics about strategic autonomy may have their value in diplomacy but those responsible for India’s foreign policy predicament need to make way for others to allow the nation a fresh start.

The writer is a senior journalist based in New Delhi

LETTERS

FINE MPS FOR ABSENCE

When an employee under-performs or stays out of the work premises his wages are cut and other disciplinary proceedings are taken and in very serious act like dereliction of duty resulting in the loss of productivity harder punishment like dismissal is handed down. But in the case of elected representatives’ right from Panchayats to Parliament the members indulging in gross indiscipline go without being punished even in a symbolic way. The monsoon session of the Parliament was a total washout with so many bills getting passed without any discussion. The Speaker should recommend salary cuts for all those who brought the House to standstill besides indulging in other acts of indiscipline.

V. Rakesh Kaushik, Coimbatore

NOT A MAOIST

In a self-defeating bid to tarnish the Opposition’s Vice-Presidential candidate Justice B. Sudershan Reddy’s reputation, Union Home Minister Amit Shah has described the retired Supreme Court judge as ‘pro-Maoist’. By holding the judgment that he authored with Justice S.S. Nijjar in 2011 leading to the disbandment of Jalwa Judum against him instead of praising the verdict for ending the bloody massacre of innocent tribal people and upholding the inviolability and paramountcy of human rights, Amit Shah has lent legitimacy to an outfit notorious for its ruthless killings in the tribal belts.

G. David Milton, Maruthancode

GOING OVERBOARD

The Kerala government and the Travancore Devaswom Board have gone overboard by sending Minister V.N. Vasavan to personally invite the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, M.K. Stalin, to attend the Global Ayyappa Sangamam to be held in Pamba on Sept. 20. There is no gainsaying the fact that this move is pointedly aimed at the Hindu vote bank. I am afraid the TN CM will not be present at such a congregation. Why invite an atheist to a religious event, especially one related to a Hindu God, just for the sake of invitation?

S. Vaithianathan, Madurai

Pradeep S. Mehta & Purushendra Singh

Why tariff threats by Trump’s USA could be wake-up call for New Delhi

When US President Donald Trump announced his intention to impose a 50 per cent tariff (25 pc plus 25 pc penalty) on Indian imports, it triggered predictable alarm bells in trade and business circles. Mr Trump’s transactional, “day-trader” approach to diplomacy often prioritises headlines over holistic strategy, and has a history of using tariffs as blunt instruments.

But while many view this as a looming crisis for Indian exports, it could in fact be the jolt India needs to accelerate overdue economic reforms, diversify its trade relationships, and strengthen its role in global value chains.

Strategic relationship: India and the United States share a multi-dimensional partnership. The relationship spans defence and space cooperation, technology partnerships, climate collaboration, educational exchanges and shared geopolitical concerns in the Indo-Pacific. Initiatives like the Quad, IMEC and bilateral dialogues on critical and emerging technologies all point to the reality that Washington and New Delhi are strategic stakeholders in each other’s futures.

In other words, while tariffs might grab the headlines these days, they are not the sum total of US-India relations. Even under a Trump presidency, it is unlikely that cooperation in defence, counter-terrorism or Indo-Pacific security would suddenly be abandoned. The challenge, and the opportunity, lies in insulating the broader relationship from the volatility of trade dynamics, as Mr Trump thinks.

Adding to the debate, US trade representative Jameson Greer recently argued in an article “Why

We Remade the Global Order” that such aggressive measures are necessary to reshape trade for America’s benefit. This framing is a wild mischaracterisation. The global order is not America’s to remake unilaterally, and certainly not through punitive economic measures that disregard the mutual benefits of open, rules-based trade. Such rhetoric alienates partners, fragments supply chains and risks accelerating the very instability it claims to prevent.

If history is any guide, steep tariffs will hurt US consumers and businesses as much, if not more, than Indian producers. Tariffs are effectively a tax on imports, raising costs for businesses and households in the US. India’s share in US imports includes pharmaceuticals, textiles, auto parts, IT services and specialty goods, all of which have few immediate substitutes at the same quality and price. This means that the cost burden of a 50 per cent tariff will land largely on American buyers.

For India, the near-term pain may be concentrated in specific export sectors, but long-term damage is avoidable — if we act decisively and uniformly.

Need radical, not incremental, reforms: India has been talking about integration into global value and supply chains for years. The 2025 Union Budget included discussions about deregulation. This is the moment to shift from incremental tinkering to radical reform. We need to:

- Simplify trade procedures to make export and import processes more efficient.
- Address logistics bottlenecks by upgrading ports, warehousing and multimodal transport links.
- Deregulate deeply so that businesses, especially

SMEs, can operate at global standards without drowning in paperwork.

- India becomes not just a low-cost producer but a hub of innovation and high-value manufacturing.
- Create a national compact comprising all states, political parties, civil society and trade unions to work together to achieve the goals.

By doing so, India can move its GDP growth rate from the current six per cent towards the ambitious 8.5-9 per cent range, which is necessary for becoming a developed country.

One of the biggest lessons from any trade discord is the danger of over-reliance on a single market. The US remains a crucial partner, but India should deepen trade ties with other nations, including in Southeast Asia, Latin America and Africa. These regions present growing demand for Indian goods and services, and building these linkages now would reduce vulnerability to unilateral actions by a single country. Groupings such as Brics and reviving the Russia-India-China (RIC) alliance are other routes.

We must also capitalise on the ongoing reconfiguration of global supply chains. The US-China trade truce, extended by 90 days, is driven by Washington’s inevitable reliance on Beijing’s control over critical minerals — the bedrock of EVs, semiconductors, and other advanced technologies.

The US use of unilateral, punitive measures against third countries undermines the very rules-based international order it claims to champion. Such actions erode trust, distort markets and weaken the World Trade Organisation’s authority. India, as a key voice among developing countries, should

continue to push for fair, more transparent trade rules and multilateralism. This is India’s vision of “*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*” (world is one family). **Playing the long game:** President Trump’s mercurial approach to trade policy should not distract India from its long-term objectives. Engaging the US on strategic and technological fronts, while simultaneously insulating our economy from policy shocks, is the way forward. Government-to-government engagement on defence, space, health, education and climate will and should continue uninterrupted.

Rather than respond to tariffs with retaliatory measures that escalate tensions, India should focus on strengthening its competitiveness, diversifying its markets and leveraging global partnerships. It has started taking action on this in various manners: pushing deregulation; creating a support fund of ₹20,000 crores for affected SMEs and accelerating efforts to find new markets. In the bigger picture, the best thing any country can do for the world economy is to take care of its own economy and society. Strong, stable, prosperous countries make for a stronger, more resilient global economy. For India, that means realigning and repurposing its role in global value chains, not as a passive participant, but as a proactive shaper of the future trading system. We can do it only if all parties in the country decide to come together.

Pradeep S. Mehta is the secretary-general of CUTS International, a 42-year-old leading global public policy research and advocacy group. Purushendra Singh works for CUTS International.



Sergei Gor: His Master's Voice

Apparently it was an ambush, the way the Ministry of External Affairs learnt of the naming of Sergei Gor as the new putative ambassador to India, a post lying vacant for over half a year. Dr Jaishankar's throwaway reaction that he'd 'read about it' could be both sardonic and genuine. The minister must have read about it in Truth Social, the same way the rest of the world did and almost at the same time. After all, we learnt about the cessation of our brief hostilities with Pakistan from Trump. And only recently the minister was saying what a big problem it is for India that the American president conducts his diplomacy in public. Indeed, if the name of Sergei Gorokhovskiy (that was the moniker Gor went about with for about half his life) and his curious designation had floated up through the usual channels, it was bound to have raised hackles in New Delhi. For Gor is to be a two-in-one appointment, Ambassador to India, as well as Special Envoy on South and Central Asian Affairs. That is a vast swathe of the world for someone whose connection to Central Asia is tenuous at best: Gor was apparently born in Tashkent. His connections to India, or indeed, South Asia, would be even more feeble, having busied himself in making himself useful to Donald Trump by way of his publishing copious amounts of Trump-think. Gor's collected thoughts on India wouldn't even fill a thimble. The last time Washington pulled that designation, Special Envoy, on India, it was met with fierce resistance. Trump himself might have been tempted to exclaim, 'Nasty!' If he had been a South Block mandarin.

Be that as it may, at the ripe young age of 38, Gor still has a lot of teeth that need serious cutting in this part of the world. He is likely to bring a rare messianic zeal into his mission; ergo, New Delhi will have to brace for a much bumper ride ahead as part of the hoi polloi, not as aspirant to the High Table at the United Nations. Gor works for a man who claimed he would solve Ukraine overnight. He works for a man who thinks he has successfully mediated between India and Pakistan. The tendency for meddling is only going to go up with flinty Gor positioned in New Delhi. We can only hope that he is not afflicted with a severe case of Delhi Belly, with all the travelling he will have to do—euphemistically and pejoratively otherwise referred to as shuttle diplomacy—between, let's say, New Delhi and Islamabad, while getting his master's task done. But, as they say, we are Vasudeva Kutumbakam. In other words, Welcome Brother Gor! There is a good book waiting here to be written and published.

If the name of Sergei Gorokhovskiy and his curious designation had floated up through the usual channels, it was bound to have raised hackles in New Delhi

Gor's collected thoughts on India wouldn't even fill a thimble. The last time Washington pulled that designation, Special Envoy, on India, it was met with fierce resistance. Trump himself might have been tempted to exclaim, 'Nasty!' If he had been a South Block mandarin. Be that as it may, at the ripe young age of 38, Gor still has a lot of teeth that need serious cutting in this part of the world. He is likely to bring a rare messianic zeal into his mission; ergo, New Delhi will have to brace for a much bumper ride ahead as part of the hoi polloi, not as aspirant to the High Table at the United Nations. Gor works for a man who claimed he would solve Ukraine overnight. He works for a man who thinks he has successfully mediated between India and Pakistan. The tendency for meddling is only going to go up with flinty Gor positioned in New Delhi. We can only hope that he is not afflicted with a severe case of Delhi Belly, with all the travelling he will have to do—euphemistically and pejoratively otherwise referred to as shuttle diplomacy—between, let's say, New Delhi and Islamabad, while getting his master's task done. But, as they say, we are Vasudeva Kutumbakam. In other words, Welcome Brother Gor! There is a good book waiting here to be written and published.

SC guidelines on stray dogs

The most recent Supreme Court order on stray dogs in Delhi, modifying its order of August 11, is a balanced and humane one on a vexed issue that had, in the past few weeks, pitted people against people. However, it does not bring great comfort to those who see danger or hazard in negotiating public areas with strays loitering unless, of course, the local administration acts swiftly on the court's directions. The three-judge bench, stating that stray dogs should be released in their territories after vaccination and sterilisation, categorically said that dogs with rabies or aggressive behaviour should always be immunised and kept in shelters, that feeding strays in public places is banned, and that dedicated areas should be set up for feeding.

This came as a relief to dog lovers and animal activists, who have been up in arms since the previous order in which the two-judge bench remarked on the rising "menace of dog bites leading to rabies" and ordered all strays in Delhi and suburbs into shelters. Delhi, by one estimate, has over a million strays loitering around. While the strays, often called "indies", are fed and taken care of by charitable organisations, dog lovers, or animal activists, their growing population has meant nuisance for many and life hazards for a few. Stray dogs have attacked and mauled people, especially children, in a number of instances or have caused deadly rabies. India accounts for 36 per cent of the total rabies-related deaths in the world, according to the World Health Organisation.

Parents who have lost little children to a pack of strays, carers to those who were attacked and injured by strays, older or senior citizens who cannot negotiate a street comfortably, and children, especially when they carry food—would still be agitated that the problem has not been sufficiently addressed. Their concern and fear are justified. No one should have to deal with a pack of dogs when they step out on roads, walk on pavements, play and shop. Dog lovers and animal activists, though their hearts bleed for the silent strays, have been unable to offer safety or comfort to fellow human beings, sometimes even their neighbours. Their unwillingness to see the risks posed by strays has been rather baffling.

The SC order has drawn firm lines now—on feeding and on dogs being taken to shelter—and has placed the onus on local administrations. Banning feeding in public places and regulating it to dedicated areas so that strays are not hunting for food all over will bring relief to both sides. But it all depends on how swiftly local administrations now implement the order—on feeding, sterilising, and sheltering strays with rabies or showing aggressive behaviour. The efficacy of the administration will decide, in the coming months, if the SC order has made a real difference or not.



The Road Ahead

JAYAPRAKASH NARAYAN

The Parliament witnessed heated debate on the 130th Constitutional Amendment Bill seeking removal of ministers accused of criminal offences and arrested and detained in custody. Much of the debate is on expected lines in a polarised polity and society. A closer examination will help us look at the issue through the prisms of democratic maturity and public interest.

The Lok Satta movement pioneered the Election Watch movement in 1999. As part of Election Watch, a highly credible, non-partisan, transparent exercise was conducted with public participation to identify prominent candidates for elective office with a criminal record.

A list of 42 candidates with serious criminal records was released. Later the Supreme Court directed that candidates must file an affidavit declaring their criminal record, if any.

All this exercise was undertaken to expose the soft underbelly of our political system; criminalisation of politics is the most egregious symptom of a deeper crisis in our democracy.

That there is a huge problem of criminalisation of politics and undesirable persons ascending to

high office is undeniable. A cursory glance at the affidavits filed by candidates shows that 35% to 45% of the elected representatives face some criminal charge or other. Many of these charges are linked with political agitations and violations of prohibitory orders. Sometimes, cases are registered without any credible evidence.

After excluding such trivial or false cases, it is reasonable to conclude that about 10% to 15% of our legislators face serious and credible criminal charges. This is unacceptable in any democracy. It undermines credibility and trust and seriously erodes quality of governance. The argument that a person is deemed innocent until convicted based on proof beyond any reasonable doubt and, therefore, should have the right to be a minister until conviction is absurd. The standard of proof applies to conviction in a criminal case, not to holding high constitutional office. It is reasonable to expect that our political executive must be above suspicion of criminality.

In recent times, things have become even more brazen and shameless. Lalu Prasad Yadav resigned as Chief Minister of Bihar once charges were framed by a criminal court in the fodder scam

case in July 1997. Lal Krishna Advani set an example when he resigned in July 1993 as a Member of Parliament when implicated in the Jain Hawala Scandal and voluntarily stayed away from contesting elections until he was exonerated by courts.

The decline in standards of conduct now is so precipitous that ministers incarcerated by courts for months without bail are claiming the right to continue as ministers while in jail! This is dysfunctional to democracy and unhealthy in public life. Given the context, it is reasonable that people want politicians facing serious charges to be removed as ministers.

But there are problems with the proposed Bill. First, prolonged incarceration of the accused is rare in our system of justice. The norm applied by our courts is 'bail, no jail'. Wealthy and influential people often get 'anticipatory bail' and avoid arrest even when they face grave charges. Second, in the Arnesh Kumar case, the Supreme Court, in 2014, gave directions which make it very difficult to arrest a person accused of any offence punishable with imprisonment for a term of less than seven years. Therefore, the proposal in the Bill for removal of ministers in prison for

over 30 days for offences punishable with five years' imprisonment is largely infructuous. Third, government employees face automatic suspension if they are in custody for more than 48 hours; a 30-day arrest requirement for a minister to be removed is illogical. Finally, in a system where crime investigation is entirely under the control of the elected government of the day, it is reasonable to be apprehensive that the law will be selectively applied to harass or victimise political opponents while shielding those in power.

Given these realities, what can be done? Doing nothing in the face of increasing criminalisation and erosion of public trust and democratic values is not an option. Perhaps it would be wiser to apply a different standard other than arrest. Sections 8 and 8A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 (RPA), list the offences, which entail disqualification from elective office upon conviction. Conviction is very rare in India; without confession, often obtained by coercion of the weak accused persons without any means, it is extremely low—of the order of 10% to 15%. Even where there is a conviction, it often takes years and decades. But the list of offences in sections 8 and 8A is

reasonable. It will be prudent if any minister against whom a court frames charges involving any offence listed in secs 8 and 8A of the RPA is disqualified from holding the office of a minister until the case is concluded in court. If not convicted, the pendency of charges will not be a bar on contesting elections and becoming legislators, but they cannot hold executive office until they are exonerated.

In order to make sure that charges are not framed in a perfunctory manner, we can institute a safeguard in respect of ministers. Under the National Security Act, any preventive detention should be ratified by an Advisory Board headed by a high court judge within two weeks. In respect of the framing of charges against ministers and incumbent legislators, a similar safeguard can be incorporated.

All this will not end criminalisation; it will bring some measure of dignity and credibility to the political executive in our flawed democracy. Let us begin the process with one small, rational, and acceptable step.

The author is the founder of Lok Satta movement and Foundation for Democratic Reforms. Email: dipjiloksatta@gmail.com / Twitter@jp_loksatta



Brand Banter

SANJEEV KOTNALA

Stray dogs on the street, teenagers hooked on betting apps, the courts hitting the gavel to bring decorum, the government scrambling for leashes, and the opposition? It howls anyway.

Welcome to the grand circus, where foresight is rare, hindsight is abundant, and decisive action is always one headline too late.

I'll admit my biases upfront. I've been a long-standing critic of on-line betting. Never once have I seen it as a "game of skill". It is addiction wrapped in glitter and algorithms. Families have lost peace, kids have lost savings, and we continue to debate whether it was a game of skill or whether it can be considered a sport.

Yes, I'm a dog lover. A pet parent, too. Our family dog, Milo Kotnala, even finds his name printed on my daughter's wedding card. But love aside, I can't deny the problem strays have become in our cities. Packs roaming unchecked, attacks mounting, and emotions clashing. This is no longer about "feed or don't feed". It's a public safety issue—while we

fail to recognise who has been creating this problem. Where are the vaccination and neutering programmes? How many are licensed pets? Why are the designer breeds and aggressive breeds being allowed to breed and be adopted?

So, I, too, have my POVs. They are personal, polarised, and maybe biased. But that's precisely why I expect the government to act contextually. Not with sentiment, but with sense. Because if lawmaking bends to every bias, we might as well govern by a Twitter poll.

The larger problem is the pattern. It never changes. First comes denial. Then, there is a delay; finally, a regulation when the chaos is too big to ignore. By then, the problem is no longer an issue; it's an established ecosystem that needs to be shaken.

Take crypto. For years, experts flagged it as scam-friendly. We weren't sure—was it an innovation or fraud?

The indecision gave fraudsters a free market. Only when ordinary citizens lost lakhs in "guaranteed return" apps did the taxman

swagger in.

Cyber scams? Every family has a story. Money siphoned off via fake links, jobs, and apps. For years, they were brushed aside as "one-offs". Today, it's a nationwide epidemic. The criminals use AI; the state issues advisories. Who do you think is winning?

Same with betting apps. Same with stray dogs. Same with a dozen other festering messes. Governance by crisis is not governance. It's firefighting, with the citizen as the fuel. Now the government has shown it can be bold.

Article 370's removal was decisive, not dithering. Aadhaar now powers welfare and banking. The UPI is Silicon Valley envy. Rural electrification and connectivity schemes have genuinely moved the needle.

When political will aligns with foresight, India delivers. Fast. Big. Bold. So why the inconsistency? Why would a government that rolled out the UPI in record time take decades to leash the betting apps or tackle stray dogs? Why do we show urgency only on the grand stage but lethargy on the

everyday street?

And then, of course, the opposition. In India, dissent is not reasoned; it's reflexive. If the government says white, they must scream black. If the government bans betting, they cry nanny state. If the government curbs strays, they shout cruelty. Constructive criticism? That's passé. Walkouts are easier. Disruption is trendier. Applause for the government is career suicide.

Which leaves a vacuum. And when Parliament refuses to work, the courts step in. Judicial overreach isn't ambition, the courts will tell you; it's compulsion. Somebody has to decide. But this drift is dangerous.

Where does the court stop and the legislature begin? If judges must weigh in on crypto, dogs, exams, and even wedding processions, then what are MPs for? Is Parliament a debating chamber or just a waiting room for court orders? And if this continues, should we start electing judges instead of lawmakers?

Democracy outsourced to PILs is not democracy. It's abdication. This cannot go on. Courts must

remain interpreters of law, not daily managers of policy. Governments must anticipate, not just react. Opposition must do its job in Parliament, not in TV studios.

Yes, there will always be more than one view. Yes, collateral damage is inevitable. But decisive governance means taking the contextual call—even if it hurts some, even if it offends others. Leadership is not about avoiding backlash today; it's about securing stability tomorrow.

India has already proved it can do the big, complicated things. The need now is to extend that decisiveness to everyday crises—crypto scams, cyber frauds, strays, betting and more. Because if Parliament doesn't reclaim its turf, the courts will keep doing the heavy lifting. And we, the citizens, will keep footing the bill.

Until then, the script writes itself. Governments trail the problem. Opposition trails the government. Courts trail both.

And the citizen? Forever led by those who are one step behind.

Sanjeev Kotnala is a brand and marketing consultant, writer, coach and mentor.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Sholay's Original Ending

"Gabbar is back—to die this time." Sholay's 4K restoration with its original ending heads to TIFF, thrilling cinephiles even as Indian fans await screenings. The film's characters—Gabbar, Thakur, Sambha, Soorma Bhopali—are cultural touchstones. A restored print promises cinematic catharsis and renewed debate over censorship's legacy. Let the classic ride again—Dhanno and all.

K. Chidanand Kumar, Bengaluru

Ukraine Talks Needed

The Alaska summit ending without a Ukraine peace deal disappointed, especially after promises of a swift resolution. Excluding Ukraine's president weakened credibility. Negotiations must continue with realistic timelines, security assurances, and humanitarian relief. India can contribute by advocating principled dialogue and de-escalation; this is no era for wars.

N. R. Ramachandran, Chennai

An End To Cyber Gambling

Apropos "Shutting down cyber-casinos" (August 23). The Online Gaming Bill, 2025, finally calls the bluff on cyber-casinos dressed up as harmless "skill games". For too long, these digital dens have exploited hope and desperation, turning clicks into crushing losses. Unlike Vegas, these platforms offered no rules—just endless stakes and silent ruin. Banning all money-based games, regardless of "skill" or "chance", is a much-needed check. Fines and jail time should make fly-by-night operators fold. While e-sports and social gaming get a separate lane, gambling disguised as gaming must end.

K. Chidanand Kumar, Bengaluru

Remote-Controlled Governance

If UPA was seen as influenced by Sonia Gandhi, critics now allege the NDA is steered by the RSS. India needs leadership that thinks independently, governed by constitutional institutions rather than "external" lodestars. True accountability demands transparent decision-making, parliamentary scru-

tiny, and robust federalism—whichever coalition rules.

Avinash Godbole, Dewas

Rain And Resolve

The rain-soaked wraith-laying at the War Memorial—President, Service Chiefs, soldiers—embodied quiet dignity and sacri-

fice. No umbrellas, no theatrics, just steadfast honour. In an age of spectacle, such silence teaches that patriotism is duty lived, not displayed. Citizens should witness moments like this, to absorb the Armed Forces' values: discipline, endurance, and service in all weathers.

Vandana, Chandigarh



Firmness And Reform

The PM's Independence Day address paired a stern warning against Pakistan's nuclear blackmail with economic initiatives: GST 2.0 exploration and a Rs 1 lakh crore jobs push. If executed well, MSMEs and youth could benefit substantially. Emphasis on Atmanirbhar Bharat—seen in indigenous weapons during Operation Sindoor—underscores strategic self-reliance. Delivery rigor will define outcomes.

Sanjay Chopra, Mohali

Debate With Decency

TV debates often devolve into disrespect and theatrics, with panelists trading partisan labels—"your PM," "your HM"—instead of facts. Gestures and jibes replace substance. Broadcasters should enforce standards: data-driven arguments, civil conduct, time-balanced moderation, and penalties for abuse. Public discourse must model democratic respect.

Sunil Okhade, Indore

Before And After

Indian cinema can be read as before-and-after Sholay: panoramic 70mm, stereophonic sound, audacious stunts, immortal dialogues, and a towering ensemble. From the train dacoity opener to the climactic reunion, it fused Hollywood-scale action with Indian sentiment. Marketing, music, and myth-making converged—answering the question "What didn't Sholay have?" with near silence.

PVP Madhu Nivriti, Secunderabad

Ceremony And Statesmanship

The Opposition Leader's absence from the Red Fort ceremony undercut the day's supra-partisan symbolism. Democratic theatre includes rituals that transcend rivalry; presence affirms respect for the Republic, not the ruling party. By skipping, the Leader weakened the Opposition's constitutional gravitas. On Independence Day, the tricolour should eclipse every party flag.

Mohit Rawal, Ujjain