

EDITORIAL

India, EU review strategic partnership roadmap

India and the European Union (EU) reviewed the full spectrum of their political, economic and security partnership during two high-level meetings held in Brussels on November 18 and 19, as both sides prepare to move beyond the India-EU Strategic Partnership Roadmap 2025. According to a joint statement released by the Ministry of External Affairs, the 11th India-EU Foreign Policy and Security Consultations and the 6th Strategic Partnership Review Meeting examined the "full spectrum of the bilateral relationship". They reviewed the implementation of the 'India-EU Strategic Partnership: A Roadmap to 2025', which is reaching completion this year. Both sides "welcomed the very positive momentum in EU-India relations," noting the EU College of Commissioners' visit to India in February, the first EU-India Strategic Dialogue in Brussels in June, and the EU's adoption of the Joint Communication on the Strategic Agenda on India in September. The joint statement further noted that the discussions also covered a broad range of topics, including economic security, resilient supply chains, trade and investment, the Global Gateway, the India-EU Connectivity Partnership and India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), as well as cooperation in the fields of innovation, science and technology, and opportunities to deepen people-to-people contacts in education and research. The statement said New Delhi and Brussels "reaffirmed the shared ambition to conclude negotiations on the Free Trade Agreement by the end of this year," while also accelerating talks on the Investment Protection Agreement and the Agreement on Geographical Indications. The two sides underlined the need for continued dialogue on supply chain diversification and noted progress under the India-EU Trade and Technology Council. "They underlined the importance of cooperation at the multilateral level and of continued dialogue on economic issues, including on supply chain diversification. Both sides also noted the progress in the India-EU Trade and Technology Council (TTC) and looked forward to the next TTC Ministerial Meeting in Brussels in 2026," the statement said. Discussions covered economic security, resilient supply chains, the Global Gateway, the India-EU Connectivity Partnership and the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC). Both sides also explored deeper cooperation in innovation, science and technology, education and research. India and the EU "unequivocally condemned terrorism and violent extremism in all its forms and manifestations, including cross-border terrorism." "They took note of India's upcoming BRICS Chairship in 2026 and noted substantial points of convergence on global issues to be further explored. Both sides unequivocally condemned terrorism and violent extremism in all its forms and manifestations, including cross-border terrorism. They also looked forward to the next edition of the India-EU Human Rights Dialogue, MEA said. Both sides reiterated their commitment to a "free, open, inclusive, peaceful and prosperous Indo-Pacific," highlighting respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity and the rules-based international order. They underscored the need for a "comprehensive, just and lasting peace in Ukraine in accordance with international law and the principles of the UN charter" and reiterated support for the Peace Plan for Gaza, calling for early restoration of stability. The consultations acknowledged shared security challenges and reaffirmed the mutual interest in strengthening dialogue in maritime security, counterterrorism, cyber issues, space, and defence industry cooperation. India and the EU said they "look forward to constructive negotiations aiming at the timely and successful conclusion of a Security and Defence Partnership and a Security of Information Agreement."

A National Resolve: Whole of government and society driving bal vivah mukt bharat



Annpurna Devi

In a nation where women and children form the foundation of over a billion lives, their empowerment is not just a policy choice—it is the path to Bharat's destiny. Under Hon'ble Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visionary governance, Bharat is experiencing a historic transformation that combines global ambition with human-centric progress. The story of New India is being shaped not only through economic milestones and global presence, but in the classrooms where young minds grow, the Anganwadi centres that nurture our children, and the homes where aspirations take root. The Prime Minister's unwavering commitment to 'Beti Bachao Beti Padhao' has become a guiding force for the Ministry of Women and Child Development anchoring our collective mission for Viksit Bharat@2047. A significant step in this journey has been the launch of the Bal Vivah Mukti Bharat campaign at Vigyan Bhawan, New Delhi, on 27th November last year. With our bold and unwavering vision, we have reaffirmed our national commitment to end child marriage by 2030, so that every girl and boy can

grow up safe, continue their education, and shape their future with pride and confidence. From the very beginning, we embraced a 'Whole of Government and Whole of Society' approach, recognizing that this challenge cannot be overcome through policy alone. It requires a collective strength - families, communities, frontline workers, institutions and the government standing shoulder to shoulder to break a centuries-old practice and protect the aspirations of every child. As a powerful reflection of our shared resolve, crores of people in villages and towns have come forward to take pledge to end child marriage. 'Whole of Government' Comes Together for a Bal Vivah Mukti Bharat Child marriage is one of the most deeply embedded challenges our nation has inherited over generations. It often takes hold in communities facing limited access to education, resources, and awareness. These gaps—created by scarcity and unequal opportunity—have enabled the practice to persist, restricting countless children from realising the futures they deserve. Today, that reality is transforming—decisively and for the better. Under the Modi Government, we are addressing the very roots that once nurtured this practice. With clear policy direction, well-designed schemes, and the renewed trust of communities in governance, the Ministry of Women and Child Development is at the forefront, dismantling the conditions that had enabled child marriage to persist. The progress we are witnessing is deliberate and determined, shaped by a governance model that places women and children at the heart of national development. Our initiatives are designed to address root causes of vulnerability. We

are committed to ensuring that every entitlement reaches the last mile—touching the life of the most vulnerable child in the remotest village and hamlet of our nation. Each intervention is crafted to handhold women and children through every stage of risk, ensuring that from the unborn child to the adolescent girl, every stage of life is safeguarded, prioritised, and empowered. From Poshan Tracker and Poshan Bhi Padhai Bhi to Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan, and from the National Means-cum-Merit Scholarship Programme to the PM Vidyalaxmi Scheme, every initiative serves as a protective shield and a pathway towards a safe, dignified and equitable future for every child. Leveraging technology as a catalyst for inclusion, The Poshan Tracker - Ministry's flagship digital platform seamlessly connects 14 lakh Anganwadi centres with lactating mothers, children under six and adolescent girls. It has already created a robust safety net for more than 10.14 crore beneficiaries across the country. Complementing this digital enablement, Poshan Bhi Padhai Bhi stands as a transformative early childhood care and education initiative, ensuring that every pre-primary child receives holistic, high-quality early stimulation that builds the foundation for lifelong learning. Our policies reflect not only intent but action. By anchoring reforms in real, sustained budgetary commitments and targeted investments, the Modi Government has made it unequivocally clear that protecting our children—particularly from vulnerabilities like child marriage—remains a national priority. The National Means-cum-Merit Scholarship Programme, with an allocation of 1,827 crore for 2025-26 alone, ensures that no child drops out of school due to poverty, one of the most

persistent drivers of child marriage. Meanwhile, the PM Vidyalaxmi Scheme provides crucial financial support to young women pursuing higher education. The Pradhan Mantri Kaushal Vikas Yojana has further strengthened this safety net by equipping young people with industry-relevant skills and providing them financial incentives and recognised government certification. Similarly, PM-DAKSH scheme empowers marginalised communities, especially SC, OBC and EWS youth who remain most vulnerable to child marriage. By equipping them with skills and opportunities, we are creating pathways for enriched, independent lives and setting a new precedent for generations to come. The Impact: Closer to Bal Vivah Mukti Bharat A few years ago, the idea of ending child marriage would have seemed distant, even unrealistic. But India has proved otherwise. Through clear policies, sustained action, focused grassroots efforts and measurable progress, we have challenged that belief and shown that change is not only possible but already underway. This unprecedented shift is the outcome of thousands of small and big determined efforts. Our Child Marriage Prohibition Officers (CMPOs) have emerged as the backbone of this mission. In the past year alone, we have strengthened our frontline by appointing more than 37,000 CMPOs across the country. By equipping Anganwadi workers, empowering panchayats and strengthening district administrations with knowledge of child protection laws, we are ensuring that even the most marginalised families are linked to government schemes, children are brought back to school, and

communities are made aware of the grave violation that child marriage represents. So far, we have identified over 6,30,000 out-of-school girls and re-enrolled them in classrooms. From silence to reporting, from stigma to support—India is choosing Change. Today, we are leveraging the latest technological advancements to address this with greater precision, transparency, and impact. The Bal Vivah Mukti Bharat portal embodies this progress—a publicly accessible, centralised platform that brings together information on Child Marriage Prohibition Officers across the nation, provides an effective mechanism for reporting cases, and strengthens awareness among stakeholders and citizens. For the first time, the dream of a child-marriage-free India has evolved into a unified national mission. Every arm of the Government of India and every segment of society is moving together with shared purpose and determination. Guided by the visionary leadership of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, we are not only protecting our children today but also laying the strong, confident and empowered foundations of Viksit Bharat. As India approaches a decisive tipping point in its collective fight against child marriage, we offer the world a new model of how governance and community can work together to protect every child and end the global menace of child marriage with urgency and certainty. After all, these children are the torchbearers and the true 'Sarathi' of Viksit Bharat we all aspire to build. (The author is the Union Minister of Women and Child Development, Government of India).

Nepal's Janakpurdham gets filled with festive splendor



Nepal's historic city of Janakpurdham came alive as thousands of devotees gathered for the main day of the week-long Bibah Panchami festival, which reenacts the divine wedding of Lord Ram and Goddess Sita. The ancient city, mentioned in the Ramayana, hosted the symbolic "swayambar" ceremony at the Barha Bigha Rangabhoomi ground, where the marriage of Ram and Janaki is believed to have taken place during the Treta Yuga. In the afternoon, two grand processions, known as "dolas", set out from the Ram Temple and the Janaki Temple with idols of Ram and Sita. Led by sadhus, saints and devotees, the processions featured traditional tableaux, hymns and

musical groups playing dhol-pipahi, shehnai, band music and panche baja. "Lord Ram is coming to Janakpur from Ayodhya. We have all been waiting to welcome him," a Nepali devotee told. Both processions converged at the Barha Bigha ground, where priests performed the ceremonial swayambar. Ram and Janaki exchanged garlands as per Vedic rituals, marking the central moment of the festival. Flowers were also showered from a helicopter as crowds cheered. A saint travelling with the Barat from Ayodhya said the celebrations reflect the deep cultural ties shared between the birthplaces of Ram and Sita. "We are Sanatani, this ritual has been continued to be

followed for ages, this also relates to Roti-beti relations, the relation of Kishori Jee's birth place with the birth place of Ram Ji's birth place in Ayodhya. This is of high religious significance. This Bibah Mahotsav not only gives joy, but it is a bliss," a saint, who came along with the Barat of Lord Ram, told ANI. A massive crowd of devotees lined the route from Janaki Temple to Barha Bigha to witness the procession and the "swayambar". During the ceremony, flowers were also showered from a helicopter. After the "swayambar", both "dolas" are carried around the city for a circumambulation. Once they return to Janaki Temple, Vedic wedding rituals will continue throughout the night.

Obesity, related chronic diseases costing Indian economy \$28.9 billion annually

Obesity and related chronic diseases account for a growing share of India's health burden, costing the economy an estimated \$28.9 billion



annually, said a report by Tony Blair Institute for Global Change (TBI). The report titled 'Building on Success to Secure India's Future Health' said that with nearly one in four Indian adults now obese and rising childhood obesity rates, without action, this could become one of

the defining health and economic challenges in the coming decades. Further, the report asserted that India has the foundations to lead globally on prevention. With strong digital infrastructure, a growing network of primary care centres, and world-class pharmaceutical manufacturing capacity, the country can move faster than others to build a prevention-first health system. By creating a distinct Indian prevention model, India can avert millions of preventable illnesses, boost productivity, and extend healthy life expectancy, the report noted. The report also called for four key actions to tackle the menace. These include strengthening food environment regulation to reduce the consumption of high-fat, sugar, and salt products. It suggested scaling digital risk identification through platforms such as Ayushman Arogya Mandirs and e-Sanjeevani and incentivising healthy living using digital rewards linked to the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission. It also suggested planning for affordable anti-obesity medicines as India's pharmaceutical industry prepares for the rollout of generics.

POEMS

My Father Gave Me a Gift

When I was young  
my father brought me a gift,  
a yellow bird  
with orange spots, a little bird that sang  
right by my mouth  
and taught me the names of things.  
We, we, we  
ore, ore, ore  
wik, wik, wik.  
When I was young,  
a yellow bird taught me to sing in Zoque,  
opened up the world to me,  
showed me the universe's language.  
If you give your word, you must honor it.  
If you lie, you dishonor yourself.  
That is why we are called Orepat̃, Oreýomo.  
We are men and women of our word.  
There in the mountains the weve grows,  
a yellow flower with orange spots,  
a bird that sings  
and teaches the Zoques to sing  
we, we, we ore, ore, ore  
wik, wik, wik.  
By Mikeas Sánchez

India's GDP growth numbers for first half of FY26 expected to touch 7.6%

The domestic GDP growth in the first half of the current financial year, FY26, is expected to come in at 7.6 per cent, higher than the 6.1 per cent recorded during the same period last year, as highlighted in a report by ICICI. The report noted that economic activity has remained strong through the first two quarters of the year, supported by robust manufacturing, services and continued government spending. It stated "India's GDP growth in H1FY26 is now estimated at 7.6 per cent YoY compared with 6.1 per cent YoY in H1FY25". It added that while growth momentum in the



second half of FY26 may moderate to 6.4 per cent year-on-year due to lower exports and a slowing pace of government capital expenditure, overall consumption is likely to remain resilient. The report also said that the Centre has fiscal room to maintain spending if it is able to undertake some divestments and raise additional resources. On this basis, ICICI expects GDP growth to be 7.0 per cent in FY26 and 6.5 per cent in FY27. For the July-September quarter, the report stated that India's real GDP is expected to grow at 7.5 per cent year-on-year, while Gross Value Added (GVA) growth is

estimated at 7.3 per cent. This expansion is expected to be driven mainly by the manufacturing and services sectors. Front-loaded government expenditure and buoyant goods exports are also likely to support growth in the second quarter. The report observed that after a strong GDP performance in Q1, the economy appears to have maintained its momentum in Q2. This can be seen in seasonally adjusted indicators across consumption, industry and services. On a year-on-year basis, industry and services continue to show positive momentum, followed by consumption. ICICI pointed out that the GST rate reduction announced

during the middle of the second quarter, and implemented toward the end of the quarter, had a temporary impact on consumption demand. Part of the consumer spending appears to have been deferred to the next quarter, as reflected in improved retail sales across several segments in Q3. The report outlined that India's growth outlook remains strong, supported by broad-based economic activity and resilient domestic demand, even as external headwinds and a slower pace of government capex may weigh slightly on growth in the coming months.



## Requiem for Russian oil

US sanctions will definitely force a diversification of supplies

**INDIA WILL FIND** it difficult to continue buying cheaper Russian oil after US sanctions on Moscow’s two biggest oil producers, Rosneft and Lukoil, kicked in this month. Such supplies met 36% of its requirements of five million barrels a day since 2023 and eased pressure on its external accounts. Fresh loadings headed to India from Russia have fallen sharply by 47% to 982,000 barrels per day this month from 1.86 million barrels in October, indicating that such flows are set to significantly decline especially from December-January 2026. India’s state-owned refiners and private ones like Reliance may have paused direct purchases of Russian oil but it is unrealistic to expect that our dependence would go down to near-zero as discounts for Russian Urals crude against dated Brent for December loadings and January arrivals have doubled to \$7 a barrel from \$3 a barrel before the sanctions took effect. Discounts against the Oman/Dubai benchmark, too, have widened to over \$6 a barrel. This may lead to near-term demand for limited quantities of oil from non-sanctioned Russian entities as supplies other than from Rosneft and Lukoil remain legal. That apart, sanctions are bound to result in diversification.

Looking ahead, all of this implies greater reliance on alternative supplies of crude from West Asia, Latin America, West Africa, and the US and Canada. On the face of it, a favourable conjuncture exists for accessing non-Russian energy options as the global oil market is awash with supplies and prices are heading to lower levels. Brent crude spot prices have been falling from \$79 a barrel in January to \$64 a barrel in October and stabilising at these levels since then. Forecasts are of a further drop to \$62.5 a barrel in the October-December quarter and \$54 in the first three months of 2026, according to the US Energy Information Administration (EIA). But the outlook on prices is also clouded by the sharply conflicting estimates on global oil demand from the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, EIA, and the International Energy Agency. US President Donald Trump, for his part, is convinced that a lower price of oil will bring Russia’s war in Ukraine to an end and has initiated a fresh peace proposal. But if that effort fails and the war continues, there will be more sanctions on Moscow that can tighten the global oil market and raise prices.

For such reasons, a degree of caution is warranted on India’s part as it looks beyond Russia for its energy requirements, and geopolitics influences oil prices. These are indeed challenging times for India’s energy security due to its massive import dependence which is as high as 88%. On a priority basis, the steady slide in domestic output that has been happening for various reasons—low investment due to obstructive regulations, high taxation, declining output from mature fields—must be reversed. We also lack the technology for deep water exploration. These are interesting times for deep-sea drilling as the global oil major, Chevron, is using new technologies and equipment that can operate at ultra-high pressures, about a third higher than previously deployed, in the Gulf of Mexico to access previously unobtainable resources, according to the *Financial Times*. Improving relative self-sufficiency must be taken up in a mission mode by incentivising global oil majors to prospect for oil with the latest technologies in our offshore basins and boost domestic output over the medium term.

## Google puts a crack in fortress Nvidia

**JENSEN HUANG DIDN’T** earn the nickname “Godfather of AI” for nothing.

With demand for chips made by Nvidia greatly outstripping supply, the company’s chief executive officer has been able to name his price for them. Through a web of investments, AI companies big and small are firmly in his pocket. Even to the world’s wealthiest men, Huang’s the don. “I would describe the dinner as me and Elon begging Jensen for GPUs,” Oracle Founder Larry Ellison said of one meeting in 2024.

That’s why news of Google’s discussions to sell “billions of dollars” of its own AI chips to Meta Platforms had the feel of a plot; not to ambush Huang at the grocer but to demonstrate his grip on the AI hardware sector could be under threat.

A deal with Meta could lead Mark Zuckerberg’s company to install Google’s chips in its own data centres by 2027, *The Information* reported on Monday, and rent them from Google Cloud as soon as next year. Google’s coup would follow a similar move to provide up to one million of its chips—known as Tensor Processing Units—to leading AI start-up Anthropic, creator of the Claude chatbot.

The following day’s stock reaction—a pullback of 2.6% for Nvidia and a 1.6% gain for Google parent Alphabet, which is already up almost 70% this year—was recognition of AI builders’ eagerness to find an alternative to Nvidia’s chips and the sky-high prices that allowed it to post gross margins of 76% in the last quarter.

The central shift in sentiment is this: Last week, Nvidia investors worried most that demand for AI hardware might fall. Now they also worry some of that could be poached.

Meta may be only one of Nvidia’s customers, but any shift in client behaviour is a significant warning sign for the company’s growth. Just four hyperscalers (Google and Meta likely among them, though this isn’t confirmed) make up 61% of Nvidia’s total revenue, according to its most recent quarterly earnings report.

Several of Nvidia’s biggest clients are trying to reduce their reliance on its chips by designing their own. After Google, Amazon.com is the next furthest along: It’s Trainium and Inferentia chips are vying for business on the same terms as a cheaper and more readily available alternative.

Where Google has the upper hand on Amazon, however, is that it is walking the walk: Its Gemini 3 model, which was trained and runs on Google’s own chips, topped most industry benchmarks when it was released this month. “The reason why everyone believes Google’s chips are comparable to Nvidia,” *Bloomberg Intelligence*’s Man-deep Singh explained to me, “is because they have an LLM (large language model) that’s comparable to OpenAI and Anthropic in performance.”

Amazon lacks a flagship AI model of its own, though Anthropic is already building some of its models on Amazon-designed chips. Amazon’s re:Invent conference, the showcase for its AWS cloud unit, is being held in Las Vegas next week. Any announcements with more big names could place even more pressure on Nvidia stock as we head toward the end of a dizzying year.

In 2026, Huang will be forced to do something he hasn’t had to worry so much about for a while: jockey for business. He’s been preparing. Much has been written about the “circular” investments Nvidia has made to lock down future demand, such as a \$100-billion investment in OpenAI. After Google announced its Anthropic deal, Nvidia followed up with its own to have Anthropic develop on Nvidia chips. The cut and thrust underlines that no one expects this to be a winner-takes-all scenario. Every piece of hardware sold will count.

As its stock price took a tumble on Tuesday, Nvidia was moved to post on X that it was “delighted by Google’s success” but called its own chips “a generation ahead of the industry”. It argued that its hardware was more versatile than TPUs and other similar chips designed only for specific tasks.

But at risk of declaring it prematurely, the power dynamic has shifted in the AI trade. The AI builders have clamoured for Nvidia chips. They still do and will for some time. But the Google-Meta talks speak to the battles to come for chipmakers, which must fight to make sure the top models are made on their infrastructure. For Nvidia, that’s no longer a given.

**BRAZILIAN PRESIDENT LUIZ** Inácio Lula da Silva had declared the 30th Conference of Parties (COP30) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) as the “COP of truth”. And truth, indeed, was unmistakable in Belém. The meeting made it clear how fragmented and fragile the global consensus on climate action has become. Decisions that countries had once celebrated as historic achievements were rejected outright. Commitments that were hailed as breakthroughs only a few years ago suddenly appeared to have evaporated.

The most prominent example was the decision to “transition away from fossil fuels”, which had been agreed at the Dubai COP in 2023. That phrase—hailed then as a diplomatic triumph—did not even appear in the final text at Belém. Countries that had supported it earlier refused to accept it now. A similar retreat occurred on deforestation. At COP26 in Glasgow, over 130 nations pledged to halt and reverse deforestation by 2030. At COP30, a road map to achieve this was quietly dropped. The symbolism was striking: a climate summit held at the edge of the Amazon was unwilling to reaffirm the world’s most widely supported forest pledge.

The question, then, is what COP30 actually achieved. The honest answer is: very little. Ten years after the Paris Agreement, instead of accelerating climate action, the world found itself postponing decisions and shifting difficult conversations away from the UN climate process. The most contentious issues were not resolved; they were simply moved elsewhere.

Confronted with the deadlock, the Brazilian COP presidency took a significant step. It removed the two most sensitive matters—the phase-out of fossil fuels and the road map to halt deforestation—from the formal negotiation track. Brazil now intends to craft road maps for both issues outside the COP process and present them at the next summit. This marks a profound acknowledgement: the world’s central climate negotiation forum no

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longer has the capacity to broker consensus on the most important questions. The UNFCCC is signalling that some of the hardest decisions must be made elsewhere.

This pattern extended to other unresolved issues. Climate-related unilateral trade measures, such as the European Union’s Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), were among the most divisive. CBAM will apply a carbon price on imports of carbon-intensive goods like steel, cement, and aluminium starting January 2026. Many developing countries see it as protectionist, inequitable, and imposed without genuine consultation. But at Belém, countries could not agree on a collective position or a negotiating route. Instead, the final decision merely launched three dialogues involving governments and institutions such as the WTO, stretching until mid-2028—long after CBAM has begun affecting global trade flows.

Adaptation—the issue of greatest urgency for the developing world—was no exception. Developing countries had demanded a trebling of adaptation finance from rich nations. The headline outcome seemed to meet this demand, but the substance fell far short. The additional funds are not new; they will be drawn from the \$300-billion pledge announced last year. Worse, the financing will only be available after 2035, even though developing countries had sought support by 2030. For nations already enduring increasingly destructive floods, cyclones, droughts, and

sea-level rise, money arriving more than a decade from now will offer little relief.

One of the few bright spots at COP30 was the agreement to create a Just Transition Mechanism. Its purpose is to provide support to regions undergoing transitions away from fossil fuels and other carbon-intensive sectors. If the mechanism becomes operational and well-funded, it could provide substantial benefits to coal regions of India. Yet a mechanism on paper is only the first step. Making it effective—designing its functions, ensuring financing, defining eligibility, and delivering real outcomes—is the true test. COP30 has created a container, but its contents remain undefined.

The broader truth emerging from COP30 is that the UNFCCC is struggling to adapt to the current phase of climate action. The UNFCCC is fundamentally a treaty negotiation body. For 33 years it has done what it was built to do: deliver international agreements such as the Kyoto Protocol, the Cancun Agreement, the Paris Agreement, and hundreds of smaller decisions.

But the global climate challenge has shifted from negotiation to implementation. The world is no longer debating broad goals; it now faces the far harder task of transforming energy systems, restructuring industries, reforming trade rules, mobilising finance, and conserving ecosystems at scale. These are deeply political, economic, and sector-specific tasks. Yet the COP still operates as though stronger

The COP should evolve into a high-level political stocktake held once every two to three years to assess progress, identify gaps, and provide direction



### DINESH KANABAR ABHISHEK MUNDADA

Respectively Chairman and CEO & Partner, Dhruva Advisors

**BEFORE ALGORITHMS TOOK** over and artificial intelligence (AI) began to decode tax, tax professionals mastered their craft through files, forms, and notes. There was a time when tax meant towers of files, often dusty, ink-blotted notes in margins, paper challans obtained after standing in long queues at banks, and an indexed paper book. Those who lived them still remember the rustle of paper, the smell of ink, and the possession of physical order with a sense of nostalgia.

Tax as a profession generally rests on three aspects: (i) compliance/reporting—routine but critical; (ii) technical expertise and judgement impacting interpretation, risk assessment, and decision-making; and (iii) tax assessment and litigation—everything around preparation and presentation has changed.

The pace of digital transformation, amplified by the effects of AI/machine learning (ML), has rewritten how tax is administered and more importantly how professionals prepare to deliver solutions. Staying relevant today means keeping pace with not just the law, but also the manner in which the tax is being implemented both at the level of the income tax department and taxpayers.

India has moved rapidly towards a tech-driven tax system. Its digital tax journey began over two decades ago with electronic filing of tax returns. What began as a modest approach to digitisation has evolved into a fully integrated data ecosys-

tem—in the nature of income data reporting in the annual information statement, cash deposits in bank accounts and reporting other financial transactions, faceless assessments, etc.

Thus far, tax professionals and their team used to spend a substantial time and resources on tax compliances and filings that were done manually, albeit with the help of technology. Today, they are embracing technology (and reducing human involvement) to prepare, compile, and undertake tax reporting functions—such as automatic extraction of data from accounting software, processing, reduced manual efforts on filling and review. The focus should be more on value-added and productive aspects to improve efficiency. For instance, better income estimation for discharging advance tax, real-time reconciliation of income mismatch between accounts and tax records to avoid discrepancies and mitigate potential addition/litigation, consistency in undertaking reporting under different legislations (related-party disclosures in accounts, tax, company law, etc.).

Today, technology, especially with the use of AI/ML, plays a crucial part in sharpening the technical expertise that tax professionals imbibe while dealing with routine and complex matters. AI and

automation support research, summarise content, monitor tax notices, and speed up drafting—but judgement remains human. However effective AI tools may be, they are not 100% accurate. The role of professionals becomes crucial in critically evaluating factual/legal aspects along with practical experiences of potential challenges. AI’s current capabilities are limited here.

Further, tax professionals are operating in an environment where data trails are real-time, scrutiny selections are algorithm-driven, and taxpayer behaviour is analysed at scale with sophisticated technologies. Platforms or tools like GSTN, Project Insight, statement of financial transaction reporting, Financial Intelligence Unit 2.0/Suspicious Transaction Report and the Advanced Analytics in Indirect Taxes analyse behaviour at scale, track patterns, and identify mismatches almost instantly. Tax administration has shifted from periodic checks to real-time monitoring. It is thus imperative for tax professionals to be cognisant of these aspects for better risk assessment and decision-making. In fact, tax is one area where the government has moved far ahead in adopting technology and digitisation, and it is now for the professionals to catch up with the digital architecture in place.

Tax controversy has transformed as well. In-person representation and courtroom presence once played a large role. Now, in a faceless environment, clarity of thought and precision in written submissions assume more importance. Digital submissions must be accurate, self-explanatory, well-supported, and watertight. However, the concerning area in litigation is too much dependency on the results thrown by AI tools—that remain unverified—during tax assessments. It is widely seen that AI hallucinates (throwing up results/judicial precedents that are non-existing) and thus its conclusion can be misleading and detrimental which makes human oversight indispensable. Recently, the Bombay High Court criticised the reliance placed by a tax officer on results thrown by AI—based on non-existing cases—during assessments against the taxpayer. So, unverified AI output has no place in judicial/quasi-judicial reasoning.

The opportunity is significant, but so are the challenges. The future belongs to professionals who combine smart technology with strong ethics, sound training, and unwavering professional judgement. Far from replacing, technology empowers professionals by automating routine tasks and freeing up experts to focus on complex, value-added services. What defines a true tax professional is unchanged—clarity, technical depth, and the ability to navigate complexity. What has changed are the tools at hand: sharper, faster, and infinitely more connected.

wording in a negotiation text will somehow cut emissions or save forests. It cannot. This is not a failure of ambition or diplomacy; it is a structural reality. The UNFCCC lacks both the authority and the tools to make decisions on critical issues like fossil fuels, trade, finance, forests, or industrial transitions. Nor can it enforce or implement the decisions it does take.

To move forward, the world must recognise that the next phase of climate action requires specialised implementation platforms that focus on real-world levers of change. For instance, a fossil fuel phase-out road map should be negotiated among the largest producers and consumers who regulate fossil energy. Trade and carbon border measures should be handled by institutions such as the WTO and national trade ministries, which already negotiate tariffs, subsidies, and regulatory alignment.

Halting deforestation should be discussed at a platform of major forest- and biodiversity-rich countries, along with indigenous groups and forest alliances. Industrial decarbonisation should similarly be pursued at platforms driven by major producing countries. For example, 15 countries produce more than 90% of the world’s steel and cement; a road map developed and agreed at this platform will yield quicker and more substantive results than negotiations among nearly 200 countries at a COP. This doesn’t mean we are jettisoning multilateralism; we will instead strengthen it.

In this new architecture, the COP should evolve into a high-level political stocktake held once every two to three years to assess progress, identify gaps, and provide direction. It should remain the moral anchor for global climate action.

The truth revealed at COP30 is uncomfortable but unavoidable: the climate crisis has outgrown the UNFCCC system. It now demands rapid implementation and hard political choices. For this, multiple specialised and implementation-driven platforms are essential. The sooner we build and activate them, the faster we can move from words to action.

## When tax meets technology

Tax is one area where the govt has moved far ahead in adopting technology and digitisation. Professionals must catch up with the digital architecture in place

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### Invest in data collection

Apropos of “Flawed forecasts” (*FE*, November 26), it is troubling to read how poor data quality is hindering the decisions of policymakers, particularly the Reserve Bank of India. The editorial rightly points out that when foundational data—like inflation and GDP numbers—is flawed, the resulting forecasts and policy moves are bound to miss the mark. This isn’t an acad-

emic problem; it directly impacts citizens through incorrect monetary policy that might affect everything from interest rates to employment. For a democracy like India, reliable statistics are a public good, essential for informed debate and economic stability. The government should urgently invest heavily in improving data collection methods, expanding the scope of surveys, and adopting modern tools like artificial intelligence

and satellite imagery to build a statistical architecture that reflects economic reality, ensuring better outcomes for all.

—K Sakunthala, Coimbatore

#### Lack of credibility

The lack of data or distorted data hinders planning. Aspiring to grow without reliable data is like navigating a ship without a compass. It may take the ship somewhere, but not to the

planned destination. The lack of quality and timely data speaks of the sorry state of affairs. Doing away with planning in a bid to enforce a market economy could result in the survival of the mighty. The absence of credible data may be a conscious attempt to misguide the public. But in the long run its consequences will be harsh.

—AG Rajmohan, Anantapur

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## Policy expectations

Food prices will be critical in MPC's decision

Market expectations for a policy interest-rate cut have increased, and several entities are reported to have postponed their fundraising plans in anticipation. Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor Sanjay Malhotra, in his remarks this week, has noted that the possibility of rate cuts, as indicated in the October meeting of the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC), remains intact. However, he also underlined that whether the committee decides to act in the upcoming meeting would depend on its assessment at that time. The next MPC meeting is scheduled for December 3-5. Inflation outcomes are also fuelling market expectations. The consumer price index-based inflation rate declined to 0.25 per cent in October, as against 1.4 per cent in the previous month, and is running significantly below the central bank's target of 4 per cent.

The MPC reduced the policy repo rate by 100 basis points this year, and its decision in the December meeting will depend largely on how it expects the inflation rate to evolve in the coming quarters. It is worth noting that the decline in the inflation rate has been driven largely by food prices. The core inflation rate (non-food, non-oil) is running around 4 per cent. The food-price inflation rate declined to (-) 5.02 per cent and has been falling consistently over the past year. The food-price inflation rate in October last year was over 10 per cent. Thus, essentially, it's the expectation of food prices that would play a major role in the MPC's decision. Given the favourable monsoon and reservoir levels, it is reasonable to assume that food prices will remain supportive in the coming months, though to what extent this will change the headline inflation projection will be worth watching. In the October policy, the MPC expected the inflation rate to average 4 per cent in the last quarter this financial year and 4.5 per cent in the first quarter next financial year. These projections will have to change favourably, which is a possibility, to enable the MPC to further reduce the policy repo rate.

However, to what extent a 25 basis-point rate cut will help boost growth would be difficult to determine. The second-quarter gross domestic product (GDP) numbers are due later this week. In the first quarter, growth at 7.8 per cent surprised most forecasters, including the RBI. A similar outcome in the second quarter could reduce the marginal impact of a potential rate cut. It is being reported that the reduction in goods and services tax rates has given a big boost to consumption. However, it will be worth watching if the momentum sustains for a reasonable period. From the growth perspective, the conclusion of the trade deal with the United States will be more crucial than a policy rate cut. Trade negotiations with Canada have also been resumed. Its early conclusion will support growth.

A possible rate cut could affect foreign debt-capital flows. There are concerns about the rupee's depreciation. However, given the near-term comfort on the inflation front, this should not worry policymakers, and the rupee should be allowed to depreciate. Although it cannot fully offset the American tariff disadvantage, a favourable currency will help exporters in other markets and, to some extent, compensate for the loss of the US market. In sum, the recent inflation outcomes will provide strong reasons for the MPC to reduce the policy repo rate. But monetary policy needs to be forward-looking. Thus, the key will be how the projections change.

## Securing India's children

Stronger systems can build the future

The report "State of the World's Children (SWOC) 2025" — by the United Nations Children's Fund (Unicef) — states that while global extreme child poverty is declining, India still carries one of the largest burdens of multidimensionally deprived children. About 206 million Indian children experience at least one deprivation, and one third of them (62 million) face two or more, reflecting gaps in education, health, housing, nutrition, sanitation, and water. Climate change now exposes four of five of the world's children to at least one extreme climate hazard annually. Conflict, too, affects childhood more than ever: About 19 per cent of the world's children lived in conflict-affected areas in 2024, double the share in the mid-1990s. Further, development-aid cuts could lead to 4.5 million additional under-five deaths by 2030 and push six million children out of school by next year.

Given this context, it is important to embed child rights in policies. In India, although the 2025-26 Union Budget allocates ₹26,890 crore for the Ministry of Women & Child Development, including ₹21,960 crore for Saksham Anganwadi & POSHAN 2.0, and ₹1,500 crore for Mission Vatsalya — the ministry's share in central expenditure has fallen from 0.96 per cent in 2015-16 to just 0.5 per cent in 2025-26, indicating that children's welfare has not gained greater priority in the overall framework. The level of programme implementation also affects outcomes such as delays in upgrading anganwadi infrastructure and shortages of trained staff. These systemic shortfalls dilute the impact of even higher budgetary allocations. Structural inequities further complicate the picture. Digital exclusion continues to leave millions of children without access to online learning, information, or skill-building opportunities.

Urban slums face the toughest combination of malnutrition, unsafe housing, pollution, and interrupted schooling. Climate vulnerability disproportionately disrupts services and displaces the poorest families. In this regard, states can play a crucial role in translating central policies into tangible outcomes. For example, Kerala, leveraging its panchayati raj institutions and strong decentralisation efforts, has been a frontrunner in establishing community-based organisation (CBO) at the level of anganwadis. Over time, these committees actively engaged ward members and local communities. Kerala's model demonstrates how community-owned and -led committees can foster a supportive social environment, strengthen child rights, and enhance child welfare outcomes across the state.

To align with Unicef's five-point framework, India must treat child poverty as a national mission. This requires universal digital access, stronger social protection, and public services that can cover the last mile. It also calls for closer coordination across ministries and states. Strengthening frontline workers, ensuring timely fund disbursement, maintaining fully functional anganwadis, and conducting regular on-the-spot inspections are essential. Technology-driven intervention and real-time monitoring systems can improve accountability and service delivery. India's demographic dividend can materialise only if today's children are healthy, educated, and safe. Without deeper reforms, millions of children will remain outside the arc of opportunity in the country's progress — unseen, unheard, and unserved.

# Recent US trade deals: A flavour

The risk of renegotiation and reset haunts US trade deals

ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA



Even as the United States Supreme Court began hearing the case on the validity of the President's powers to impose tariffs under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA), there has been a flurry of trade announcements by the White House trade team. Apart from a reversal of reciprocal tariffs on agricultural items ranging from tomatoes and avocados to beef and some fertilisers — announced soon after the Democrats' victory in key US states and cities in the first major election in Trump 2.0 — negotiations towards several trade deals were also stated to have been concluded.

Prominent among these are two final trade deals on reciprocal trade with Malaysia and Cambodia and two framework trade deals with Thailand and Vietnam, which were finalised at the end of October by President Trump during his trip to Association of Southeast Asian Nations and East Asia. This has been followed in November with framework agreements with Switzerland and four Latin American countries — Argentina, Ecuador, Guatemala and El Salvador. While two trade and investment agreements with Japan and Korea were announced in July, the details of the US-Korea trade deal were finalised and released only last week. Prominent features of the major trade deals may be worthy of note.

The final trade deals have been concluded after a substantial time lag since the initial announcement of the deal, while framework trade deals remain open for further negotiations. However, both framework and final trade deals have been concluded through executive orders and, unlike free trade agreements (FTA), are not legally binding. Therefore, renegotiation or resetting the constituent provisions remains a potential possibility even for final trade deals. This has, in fact, been evident most recently when the US, not satisfied with the slow implementation progress by the European Union on

the trade deal finalised in August, initiated discussions on renegotiating the trade deal.

So, while the inherent uncertainty cannot be discounted, the trade deals do not necessarily appear to be entirely one-sided, particularly for the export-oriented Southeast and East Asian countries. As is well-known, all trade deals involve a reduction of reciprocal tariffs as announced by the US on April 2 and a corresponding concession by the partner country to import all or a majority of US goods duty-free. However, given that the average applied most-favoured nation (MFN) tariffs are in the range of 5-10 per cent in the Southeast Asian and East Asian economies, the preferential margin granted to the US by these economies may not be really significant.

Also, across these economies, a substantial range of tariff lines is already in the duty-free category. Malaysia, for example, allows almost 83 per cent (by import value; 65.6 per cent tariff lines) and 65 per cent (by import value; 74.5 per cent tariff lines) in the duty-free category in the manufacturing and agriculture sectors, respectively. Japan, a major export market for the US, has an average applied MFN tariff of only 2.4 per cent in manufactured goods, while even in agriculture, where its average applied MFN tariff value is in the 0-5 per cent tariff category. The much-highlighted concession granted for import of rice from the US, under the recent deal, remains within the pre-existing duty-free cap for Japan.

In comparison, the inclusion of the provision on keeping the reduced reciprocal tariff as a tariff cap for goods currently being investigated by the US under Section 232 in trade deals with Korea and Japan is quite partner-country friendly, given their export composition. Korea, for example, has been granted a cap of 15 per cent and hence parity with its revised reciprocal tariffs on some of its major exports to the US currently under Section 232 investigation, such as



STRAIGHT TALK  
AMITA BATRA

unconditionally. In fact, one state has moved from being revenue-surplus to revenue-deficit. Given the broader context, it is only a matter of time before similar schemes are introduced in other states as well. This raises some economic and political questions.

Let's first look at the economic aspect. At the aggregate level, state government debt stock is worth over 27 per cent of GDP, which is on the higher side. The Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management



REAL TERMS  
RAJESH KUMAR

Review Committee (2017) had recommended a debt ceiling of 20 per cent of GDP for states. Besides, some states are borrowing to meet their revenue expenditure. Given the overall fiscal position, it can be argued that states should refrain from such schemes. However, this may not be practically possible now. Cash transfer schemes are popular among both the political class and the electorate. Considering the increasing appeal of this instrument, the debate perhaps needs to be framed differently. Is cash transfer the best way to empower women in India? Do their lives change meaningfully after getting enrolled in such a scheme? Answers to such questions can determine if cash transfer schemes can be leveraged to attain wider socio-economic objectives.

A recent National Bureau of Economic Research paper, "Maternal Cash Transfers for Gender Equity and Child Development: Experimental Evidence from India", studied the impact of cash transfer to new mothers through a large-scale randomised evaluation. It found that treated households witnessed 9.6-15.5 per cent increase in calorie intake for mothers and children. Gains were also noticed in terms of the diversity of diet. Further, gender disparity in food consumption declined. India needs many such studies.

wood, auto, pharma, and semiconductors. The provision is also significant in view of the likely substitution, however imperfect, of the reciprocal tariffs by tariffs under Section 232 in the case of an adverse Supreme Court decision on the President's IEEPA powers to impose tariffs.

Interestingly, Korea has also been able to negotiate competitive parity in the semiconductor sector by pre-empting any tariff disadvantage in a potential trade deal by the US with its main competitor — Taiwan. In return, Korea has committed to eliminate the 50,000-unit import cap for US-originating and safety standards-compliant automobiles. This, however, may not mean much as Korean car imports from the US have been around 30,000 and so well below the erstwhile limit. Similarly, Malaysia has secured tariff exemptions on over 1,700 tariff lines covering some of its major exports to the US.

In the case of Vietnam, the provision of imposing a higher 40 per cent tariff on transshipments to the US may have had a significant impact on its exports. However, the situation remains fluid in the absence of a clear specification of rules of origin by the US in this context. As for Cambodia, its expanded market access for the US is irrelevant, given its paltry \$200 million imports. Importantly, its commitments on compliance with global environment and social governance norms, particularly those related to labour conditions, included ostensibly to prevent rerouting of Chinese goods, are rendered ineffective as the trade deal remains wanting on the specification of an appropriate enforcement mechanism.

There has been much commentary on the investment commitments by Japan and Korea. Korea has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on investment commitments with the US. The MoU includes clearly specified annual capital outflow and timeline of total investment. Notably, though, there are also some carve-outs in the investment provisions. There is scope for reconsideration of both the amount and timing of the outflow under certain conditions, such as economic emergencies, in the MoU. However, the absence of selection criteria for investment projects implies continued uncertainty and a potential return to the negotiating table.

The investment deal with Japan appears far less fleshed out. Unlike the Korean case, where a joint fact-sheet with details of the trade deals has been issued, in the case of Japan, separate factsheets have been released by the US and Japan. A more cautious Japanese interpretation of the likely increase in US state influence on business decisions and partaking of profits in the joint investment projects may lead to its undoing in the longer term.

So, even while much negotiating capital is being expended by several nations in extracting a not-so-imbalanced trade deal with the US, the inherent scope for renegotiation and reset in these bilateral trade deals prevents any semblance of stability in trade relations with the US.

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

# The economics and politics of cash transfers

The Mukhyamantri Mahila Rojgar Yojana was widely seen as a key factor behind the National Democratic Alliance's (NDA's) thumping victory in Bihar this month. Under the scheme, eligible women were given ₹10,000 to start a business, with the possibility of another ₹200,000 worth of assistance. Chief Minister Nitish Kumar deserves credit for taking several steps to empower women over the years, and it would be unfair to conclude that a single scheme, announced at the last minute, tilted the balance in NDA's favour. In fact, according to one analysis, three of the five Assembly seats with the highest women voter turnout were won by the All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen, which was not part of either of the two major competing alliances. There is often a combination of factors that determines election outcomes, and it is difficult to gauge the extent to which each one influences voter choice, particularly in a large state like Bihar.

Nevertheless, the idea of cash transfers to women is gaining wider acceptance, and the last-minute scheme in Bihar reflected this trend. According to a recent report by PRS Legislative Research, the number of states providing largely unconditional cash transfers to women has gone up from two in 2022-23 to 12 in 2025-26. It estimates that states have allocated about ₹1.68 trillion, or 0.5 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP), in the current financial year for such schemes. Some states have substantially increased allocation this year. Notably, out of the 12 states, six are expected to run a revenue deficit in the ongoing year. Differently put, states that are unable to raise enough revenue to meet their recurring expenditure are also distributing cash

unconditionally. In fact, one state has moved from being revenue-surplus to revenue-deficit. Given the broader context, it is only a matter of time before similar schemes are introduced in other states as well. This raises some economic and political questions.

Let's first look at the economic aspect. At the aggregate level, state government debt stock is worth over 27 per cent of GDP, which is on the higher side. The Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management



REAL TERMS  
RAJESH KUMAR

Review Committee (2017) had recommended a debt ceiling of 20 per cent of GDP for states. Besides, some states are borrowing to meet their revenue expenditure. Given the overall fiscal position, it can be argued that states should refrain from such schemes. However, this may not be practically possible now. Cash transfer schemes are popular among both the political class and the electorate. Considering the increasing appeal of this instrument, the debate perhaps needs to be framed differently. Is cash transfer the best way to empower women in India? Do their lives change meaningfully after getting enrolled in such a scheme? Answers to such questions can determine if cash transfer schemes can be leveraged to attain wider socio-economic objectives.

A recent National Bureau of Economic Research paper, "Maternal Cash Transfers for Gender Equity and Child Development: Experimental Evidence from India", studied the impact of cash transfer to new mothers through a large-scale randomised evaluation. It found that treated households witnessed 9.6-15.5 per cent increase in calorie intake for mothers and children. Gains were also noticed in terms of the diversity of diet. Further, gender disparity in food consumption declined. India needs many such studies.

Intuitively, additional cash flow to poor households is most likely to improve the quality of life. Once there is ample evidence, some of the subsidies can also be converted into cash transfers, enabling larger consolidated amounts to be transferred to women in eligible households. At some stage, the central and state transfers can also be consolidated. There are various possibilities.

However, it will be important that fiscal discipline is not compromised. Given the developmental needs and the fiscal position of states, part of the budget that can be spent on subsidies and cash transfers can be determined. Ways will need to be devised to implement strict fiscal rules. States should not be borrowing additionally to finance cash transfers, irrespective of the merits, because such a path is simply unsustainable. As things stand, 19 states are carrying debt above 30 per cent of their GDP, while Punjab and Himachal Pradesh have outstanding liabilities above 40 per cent. A special dispensation might be needed for these states. There are also states where the growth in interest payments is higher than the growth in revenue collection.

Now, the political aspect. It has been noted that state governments often announce such schemes on the eve of elections and ensure that the transfers begin before polling. Clearly, the idea is to influence voters. Whether the scheme makes a difference is a different matter. But even if it makes only a minor difference, it can disrupt the level playing field in tight contests. Addressing this will be tricky because the government of the day is free to announce and implement any scheme till the model code of conduct comes into force. Thus, overall, addressing the economic aspects of cash transfer schemes for women or other target groups would be much easier than dealing with the political facet.

# How to spend it, wisely



SANJAY KUMAR SINGH

Personal finance literature typically focuses on topics like saving, debt reduction, investing, and wealth accumulation. Morgan Housel, whose first two books collectively sold more than 11 million copies, has chosen a topic for his third that is highly relevant amid growing prosperity: How to spend money wisely.

People, says Mr Housel, rarely make grave spending mistakes when trying to meet basic needs. Misjudgments arise once they graduate to the realm of discretionary spending.

Even after leaving deprivation far

behind, many engage in a mindless, unending scramble to accumulate and consume more, assuming this will translate into greater happiness. The author warns that such an approach risks leaving people in their later years with regret at having neglected the pursuits that might have nourished their souls and brought lasting fulfilment. The panacea, he suggests, is to make well-thought-out choices that minimise regret at the end.

A central theme of the book is that most people do not use money as a tool to acquire a happy, contented, and comfortable life. Instead, some turn it into a yardstick to measure how successful they are vis-à-vis others.

Many spend in a manner they believe is in keeping with society's expectations. As a young valet at a luxury hotel in Los Angeles, Mr Housel watched someone pay \$21,000 in an auction for a chair. Seeing the disbelief on the faces of the valets, the man responded, "That's what

you are supposed to do when you are rich." Mr Housel warns against falling into such conformity traps.

Using money to elicit admiration is another futile pursuit. A newly purchased luxury car may attract attention — more likely envy — from colleagues on the first day a person drives it to office. But within a month, the vehicle evokes a yawn. Inevitably, after a while, someone else drives in with a swankier model that becomes the cynosure of all eyes. The pursuit of validation through possessions is, thus, a game that can never be won. Moreover, those closest to us — our parents, spouse, children and close friends — are hardly likely to hold us in higher esteem for possessing a more expensive car. The author advocates spending on goods for their utility and the joy they bring us, instead of trying to acquire status through them.

Early-life experiences shape spending behaviour. The author cites the

example of a businessman who grew up poor. Once he had made it, he encouraged his daughter to select the most expensive college among the ones to which she had gained admission. To him, the high fee felt like a social trophy that he could display and wash away any shame he felt about his earlier impecuniosity.

Another case the author cites is of a former teacher turned financial educator who suffered from what she called "post-traumatic broke syndrome". She had suffered grinding poverty for so long, and that experience had been so painful, that she lived in constant fear of reverting to the same status. This made it difficult for her to spend despite her affluence.

The two stories illustrate how deeply embedded emotional scripts dictate financial decisions long after circumstances have changed. One needs to be conscious of them and try to overcome



The Art of Spending Money: Simple choices for a richer life  
by Morgan Housel  
Published by Harriman House  
254 pages ₹318

their subliminal influence with logic and objectivity.

The book discusses the concept of the "hedonic treadmill". People overestimate how much happiness a new possession will bring. After an initial bump, pleasure wanes and attention shifts to acquiring the next big material prize. Happiness, according to the author, is the gap between current reality and expectations. Instead of relentlessly striving for more, he advocates that people learn to dial down expectations if they are to ever experience contentment. They must train themselves to enjoy their current possessions and stop pegging happiness to the next grand purchase.

Mr Housel reminds readers that beyond a certain threshold, income ceases to be the primary determinant of well-being. Good health, restful sleep, a loving spouse, well-behaved

children, meaningful friendships, and a sense of belonging and purpose contribute far more to lasting happiness. But these cannot be bought off the shelf. They must be earned by investing time and effort. Alas, the relentless pursuit of financial success often crowds out these goals.

Another significant insight the author offers is the need to reframe saving and investing. Rather than viewing them as deferral of consumption, he suggests treating them as deposits towards earning financial independence, which he defines as the freedom to spend one's time on work that is meaningful and in the company of people one cherishes.

As India turns more prosperous, many of the spending pitfalls Mr Housel highlights are becoming increasingly visible. His book, which advocates moderation, balance, and the need to focus on internal benchmarks rather than external comparisons, comes as a timely reminder that money must work for us instead of dictating our life choices.





OPINION

The  
Hindustan Times  
ESTABLISHED IN 1924

{ OUR TAKE }

In the guise  
of anonymity

Big Tech bears a duty of care to the societies it shapes. X's record is a failure of that responsibility

When Elon Musk acquired Twitter in October 2022, he promised to eliminate bots and restore trust. Within weeks, he fired half the workforce, slashed the trust and safety team that monitored hate speech and foreign influence operations, and dissolved the advisory council of civil rights organisations. By December, a single staffer was handling all child sexual abuse material for Asia-Pacific. The 150-person curation team that added context to trending news vanished. Then came paid verification. Previously free and reserved for confirmed identities, the blue check became available to anyone paying \$7.99 monthly. The dismantled trust and safety team had warned in internal documents about impersonation risks. Their advice went unheeded. Within 48 hours of launch, fake accounts impersonating Eli Lilly, Tesla, and major brands flooded the platform. The chaos forced Musk to suspend the programme after just three days, but the damage was done — verification, once a mark of authenticity, became legitimacy for sale.

But the programme returned, and in 2023, X launched a creator monetisation model. It began paying users based on engagement from other paid subscribers — typically \$10 minimum every two weeks. For many, the math was compelling: A Nigerian creator earning \$800 monthly via outrage content made a hefty income; a Bangladeshi farm earning \$400 could fund an entire team. What had operated in the shadows — Russian troll farms, influence operations documented since the 2016 US polls — now had three advantages: Depleted oversight, purchased credibility through blue checks, and direct financial incentive. The Internet Research Agency's playbook from 2016, where operatives posed as Americans to organise rallies and spread disinformation, found fertile ground. Accounts that once struggled for reach could now buy verification, earn revenue from divisive content, and operate with minimal platform scrutiny.

Last week, X rolled out an “About this account” feature showing where users operate from. Within hours, accounts with hundreds of thousands of followers claiming to represent American patriots or anti-India influencers were revealed to be operating from Turkey, Nigeria, Bangladesh, and Pakistan. The backlash was immediate as users and journalists began checking prominent accounts across the political spectrum, discovering how thoroughly X had been compromised by coordinated deception.

Big tech platforms wield immense influence over public discourse. They bear a duty of care to the societies they shape. X's trajectory represents a failure of that responsibility — dismantling protections, monetising division, allowing foreign influence operations to thrive behind purchased legitimacy. The location feature wasn't about transparency triumphing; it was a platform accidentally exposing the rot its own decisions had cultivated.

Why India failed the  
South Africa Test

The late great Peter Drucker once said that the purpose of an organisation is to enable ordinary people to do extraordinary things. Given the Indian Test cricket team's recent track record of ordinariness, including its worst ever loss on Indian soil on Wednesday, despite possessing some individuals with extraordinary abilities, this may be the right time to look at organisational issues — including the abilities of the current coach Gautam Gambhir, and the decisions of the selectors.

When a team has allrounders who aren't treated as such (perhaps because they are not good enough), it stands to reason that the selectors would have done better by picking specialists (batters or bowlers). Playing a specialist wicketkeeper as a batsman despite the presence and availability of enough specialist batters betrays a lack of imagination (even common sense). And what of the spinners? An Indian team being outbatted in India is bad enough, but this team also managed the unique feat of being outspun by the South African spinners who did far better.

A team in transition such as this one needs a coach who is inspirational, strategically sound, and who possesses excellent communication and inter-personnel skills. The wise men who run Indian cricket should ask themselves whether Gambhir does — simply because two home series whitewashes in consecutive years and numbers that show the team has lost half the Tests it played under him suggest otherwise.

After US-Saudi pact, new  
West Asia in the making

For India, the era of viewing the Gulf solely through the prism of energy and diaspora is over, it is now a high-stakes theatre of national security

The recent visit of Saudi crown prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) to Washington marks a definitive turning point in both the regional and global order. Coming at a period of intense geopolitical flux, the visit did more than restore the *de facto* Saudi leader's diplomatic standing in the West, dented by the 2018 Jamal Khashoggi affair; it fundamentally redefined the US-Saudi alliance.

Hosted with full ceremonial honours by President Donald J Trump, including a South Lawn arrival, a State dinner, and Oval Office bilateral, this was MBS's first White House engagement since 2018. It signals a sharp return to transactional realism in US foreign policy, prioritising shared security imperatives and economic interdependence over ideological constraints. In an era of great-power competition and Middle Eastern volatility, the visit underscores Riyadh's enduring centrality to Washington's regional architecture. Geopolitically, the summit represents a robust reaffirmation of the US-Saudi axis as the lynchpin for containing Iranian revisionism and countering Beijing's inroads in the Gulf. Under the Biden administration, ties had deteriorated to

a “managed estrangement,” pushing Riyadh toward alternatives like the 2023 China-brokered détente with Tehran and deeper Brics engagement.

The Trump-led reset dispels any notion of US retrenchment. By designating Saudi Arabia a Major Non-Nato Ally (MNNA) and signing the Strategic Defence Agreement (SDA), Washington has elevated Riyadh's status without the encumbrances of a formal treaty. This framework embodies a pragmatic evolution of the 1945 Quincy Pact: It facilitates US defence industry operations in the Kingdom, while securing Saudi financial contributions to offset basing and training expenses, ensuring flexibility amid US congressional scepticism.

The Washington summit delivered multifaceted outcomes, blending hard security with transformative economic pacts. On defence, approvals for the sale of F-35 stealth fighters (with limitations to preserve Israel's Qualitative Military Edge) and nearly 300 Abrams tanks mark a quantum leap in Saudi capabilities. These transfers address vulnerabilities exposed by the Houthi drone attacks and emphasise interoperability with US systems, reducing Riyadh's reliance on European or Russian suppliers.

Economically, Saudi Arabia escalated its US investment pledge to nearly \$1 trillion over a decade. At the US-Saudi Investment Forum, attended by tech titans like Elon Musk and Jensen Huang, agreements were struck to channel funds into AI, semiconductors, health care, and infrastructure. Crucially, Memoranda of Understanding

(MoUs) on civil nuclear cooperation — focusing on firms like Westinghouse — advance Saudi Arabia's plan for 16 reactors under strict non-proliferation safeguards. The AI agreement provides controlled access to US systems, while frameworks for critical minerals diversify supply chains away from China. These deals support Vision 2030 by localising high-tech industries, creating US jobs, and fostering interdependence beyond oil volatility.

The implications for peace in West Asia are profound. Enhanced Saudi deterrence reduces the asymmetry exploited by Iran and its proxies, potentially curtailing disruptions in the Red Sea. A militarily confident Riyadh is less likely to resort to unilateral adventurism. Furthermore, the SDA positions Saudi Arabia as the fulcrum for expanding the Abraham Accords. However, this comes

with caveats. While the new security guarantees incentivise normalisation, MBS signalled that relations with Israel remain contingent on a clear pathway to Palestinian statehood. Consequently, the Trump administration's push for immediate normalisation was not fully achieved, leaving a rare chance for a sweeping détente in the Levant on hold.

For Tehran, this pact is an “act of encirclement”, likely to fuel an arms build-up and strengthen calls for conventional and nuclear countermeasures. Yet, the visit's emphasis on stability over democratisation aligns with the post-Arab Spring reality, where authoritarian resilience has proven more durable than fragile transitions.

For India, the Washington summit



Ausaf Sayeed



The Washington summit delivered multifaceted outcomes, blending hard security with transformative economic pacts.

AFP

presents a complex mix of strategic opportunity and acute security anxiety. The solidification of US-Saudi ties breathes new life into the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), a project vital to India's connectivity ambitions but paralysed by regional instability.

Explicitly prioritised by both leaders, the revival of this project positions New Delhi as the eastern anchor of a US-backed connectivity axis rivalling China's Belt and Road Initiative. Additionally, Saudi capital may now flow more freely into Indian infrastructure and renewable energy, while new tech partnerships could open avenues for Indo-Saudi collaboration.

The immediate cause of concern for India's defence establishment is the potential porosity of the new US-Saudi security architecture. With Riyadh having signed a “Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement” with Pakistan just months prior, the influx of F-35s and advanced US radar systems into Saudi Arabia creates a nightmare scenario: The transfer of operational know-how or sensitive technology to Pakistani forces, who frequently train the Saudi military.

To mitigate this risk, New Delhi must now leverage its strategic partnership with Washington to insist on specific End-Use Monitoring (EUM) protocols.

India will likely demand ironclad guarantees that Pakistani personnel are legally and technically barred from accessing sensitive F-35 avionics or encrypted data links during joint exercises in the Kingdom.

With the US also moving to mend ties with Pakistan, India faces a delicate balancing act: Navigating its longstanding US partnership while adjusting to these shifting strategic realities in West Asia. Concurrently, this heightens the urgency for India to modernise its air defence grid, fast-tracking the deployment of multi-layered air defence shields to counter the qualitative edge Pakistan might indirectly gain.

Ultimately, the summit forces New Delhi to play a sophisticated dual game: Deepening economic embraces with Riyadh to secure its western flank, while simultaneously working with Washington and Tel Aviv to erect guardrails against the unintended militarisation of Pakistan. The era of viewing the Gulf solely through the prism of energy and diaspora is over; for India, it is now a high-stakes theatre of national security.

Ausaf Sayeed is a former ambassador of India to Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and high commissioner to Seychelles.

The views expressed are personal

MAGA vs America First  
threatens Trump's agenda

Nearly 10 months after returning him to the White House, Donald Trump's MAGA coalition is beginning to show signs of strain. For the first time, the President, who kept his movement unified through four years out of power, is struggling to constrain divisions within his own ranks. A growing and diverse group of right-wing pundits, activists, and lawmakers is now challenging key elements of his agenda, emphasising America First. Trump's MAGA movement was born in June 2015, when he rode down the golden escalator of Trump Tower to announce his presidential run. The core themes of his movement are economic nationalism, anti-immigration sentiment, cultural conservatism, and hostility toward political elites.

Until recently, MAGA and America First were largely interchangeable. But in recent months, the two have begun to diverge, evolving into distinct factions within the movement. The America First faction comprises different groups breaking from Trump on three key issues: His administration's initial refusal to release the Epstein files, his support for Israel, and — more quietly but no less significantly — his shifting stance on H-1B visas and deportation of undocumented immigrants.

In the past few months, this vocal but not unified faction of the conservative movement and the so-called alt-Right has openly defied the President, advancing counter-narratives that directly challenge his authority. Leading this separation from MAGA are figures as varied as 27-year-old white nationalist Nick Fuentes, former Fox News and CNN anchor Tucker Carlson, and two Republican members of Congress, Marjorie Taylor Greene of Georgia and Thomas Massie of Kentucky. Trump first encountered this break in his base over the failure to release the Epstein files, a trove of previously sealed court documents, flight logs, depositions, and investigative records tied to Jeffrey Epstein, the disgraced New York financier who died by suicide in federal custody in 2019 while awaiting trial on sex-trafficking charges.

Epstein's extensive ties to powerful figures in politics, business, academia, and entertainment — including Donald Trump who once had a close relationship with Epstein — have long fuelled speculation on the right that the documents contain explosive revelations. On the campaign trail in 2024, Trump stated he was open to releasing the files. Once in office, however, his attorney general Pam Bondi, declined to release them. For months, Trump dismissed the controversy over their release as a “Democratic hoax”. This deepened distrust within his base, and pressure for their release mounted.

The charge to force the release of the files was led by Kentucky Republican representative Thomas Massie and Democratic representative Ro Khanna of California who were joined by representative Marjorie Taylor Greene in public protests with Epstein-related sexual abuse survivors. The bill to release the files passed with near-unanimous support, driven by a groundswell so strong that even Trump ultimately asked Republicans to back it.

If the Epstein files controversy shook Trump's credibility among some loyalists, his unwavering support for Israel exposed other fissures within his base. Israel's war in Gaza, which has resulted in tens of thousands of Palestinian deaths, has ignited a national debate over how far the US should go in backing its closest West Asian ally.

The conflict has prompted many influential

commentators on the right to question, often loudly, whether US aid to Israel should continue. Carlson, once a darling of the Trump world, has given his platform to several anti-Israel voices on his podcast, including some considered openly anti-semitic. Among them is Fuentes, who has positioned himself as a leading figure in the America First movement through livestreaming and social media.

The third issue is Trump's backtracking on two immigration issues, especially on H-1B visas. As this column detailed earlier, the programme has become a lightning rod for the right. Trump's position has shifted notably from September, when he announced a \$100,000 fee for all new H-1B petitions, much to the disappointment of both the tech industry and Indian IT professionals, the programme's primary beneficiaries.

Since then, he has softened his stance, most visibly in a surprisingly contentious interview with Fox News host Laura Ingraham, a critic of the visa programme, in which he offered a full-throated defence of H-1B workers. The reversal has infuriated many MAGA activists, who have now gone

into open war mode against the programme.

Similarly, his administration has softened its stance on deporting undocumented immigrants employed in certain sectors such as agriculture and hospitality. The America First faction believes Trump's reversal on both fronts was driven by industry pressure (tech companies and agriculture and hospitality businesses, respectively).

What enabled Trump to hold a vice-like grip on the Republican Party from the beginning was his mastery of social media, which amplified his influence far beyond traditional party structures and kept his supporters constantly mobilised. He routinely targeted, or “primaried”, any candidate who failed to show absolute loyalty. For years, Trump-endorsed candidates almost never lost a primary.

That grip, however, is loosening. True to form, Trump has endorsed a challenger to Massie in next year's midterms and has taken aim at Greene, once one of his most loyal allies, dubbing her Marjorie “Traitor” Greene. He also withdrew his endorsement of Greene for re-election. Massie is resigning in the race. Greene announced she will be staying from Congress effective January 5, 2026. Among her reasons for leaving office are Trump attacking her for disagreeing with him and threats on her life she has received from some MAGA supporters.

For now, Trump still maintains control over the Republican Party. But the cracks are definitely showing. A poll this week put his approval rating at just 35%, and the economy he promised to revive remains mired in inflation. In recent elections, including the Virginia and New Jersey gubernatorial races and the New York mayoral contest, voters overwhelmingly rejected the Republican Party and candidates he had endorsed.

The challenge ahead for Trump is not just defeating the Democrats, but reconciling a base increasingly divided between loyalty and ideology, grievance and governance. Whether the MAGA coalition can survive — or whether the America First resistance coalesces and becomes its successor — may determine not only Trump's political fate, but the future direction of the Republican Party itself.

Frank F Islam is an entrepreneur, civic leader, and thought leader based in Washington DC. The views expressed here are personal



Frank F. Islam

{ DROUPADI MURMU } PRESIDENT, INDIA

Our Constitution makers wanted our collective and individual self-respect to be ensured through the Constitution

On the occasion of Constitution Day 2025

Maoists need to answer  
Bastar's betrayed tribals

The Maoist insurgency is unravelling in its last bastion — the tribal heartland of the Dandakaranya region (DKR). A large section of the divided Maoist leadership, through recently released press notes, has apologised to people saying that, in the process of revolution, the leadership made several tactical mistakes. The report card of the nearly half a century of Maoist action in DKR vis-à-vis tribal welfare is rather grim. This has all been about the exploitation of tribal aspirations for the ulterior motives of the Maoists.

The Maoist cadres entered DKR in the early 1980s, after suffering setbacks in Andhra Pradesh (AP). Their aim was to secure a safe haven and not to involve the local tribal population in the political struggle. Since the situation in AP did not become favourable again for the Maoists, they were compelled to stay on in DKR. The Maoists then started taking up tribal issues as they vied for the support of the local tribal population for sustenance.

The first issue taken up centred on the wages paid by contractors for the collection of tendu *patta* (leaf of tendu tree), which is used to make *beedis*. They started to negotiate better rates for the collection of tendu *patta* — tribal livelihood in the area depended on this. Along with that, they also started extorting from the tendu contractors, with a cascading effect that diminished the earnings of the tribals. The Maoists also began extorting from mining corporations operating in the area. In the process, they started spending most of their time running their organisation, launching attacks, and preserving cadres — thereby deviating from their promise to fight for the tribal cause.

The Maoists used to generate a sizeable amount of revenue from their industry of protection, extortion, kidnapping and indirect taxation. It is reported that more than 50% of the income generated was allocated for military capability building, obviously at the cost of other developmental agendas — establishing the priorities in the name of revolution.

The overthrow of the democratic polity in India forms the roots of Maoist ideology. They undermine and reject the enabling function of democracy, irrespective of fault-lines, which empowers the marginalised. By exhorting the tribal population to boycott elections, the Maoists deny people their only instrument of exercising and expressing power. Similarly, the Maoists often indulged in controlling the elections and functioning of the village body, the *gram sabha* (GS), to suit their own require-

ments. Although the government's record on empowering the GS is no better, the rebels weren't transparent in their conduct here. Rather, they preferred to govern the areas under their control through arbitrary kangaroo courts.

The tribals form the backbone of the Maoist organisation in terms of the rank and file under a non-inclusive leadership. The non-tribals from AP, till today, have occupied the outfit's policy-making positions, with foot-soldiering left to the tribal cadres. It is this exclusive class of leaders that is in news these days, be it Basavraj, Venugopal Rao, Rupesh, Bhaskar, Devuji, and Chandranna, among others. (The recently slain Madvi Hidma, an adivasi leader, is more of an exception.) These leaders had a vast pool of tribal people at their disposal and were determined to ensure that the fight against the government continued down to the last tribal.

The conflict gave impetus to the weaponisation of tribal society. The tribal, as part of District Reserve Guard (DRG) or the Bastariya battalion, is now killing the Maoist tribal. In all this, no one is engaging the tribal to ascertain his mind. The middle ground for the tribals has continuously shrunk, confining them to the binary of being either with the Maoists or with the State. The tribals have no stakes in the Maoist ideology; they were lured to participate in the insurgency to protect their *jal-jangal-zameen* (water, forests and land) and ended up with suffering, displacement, and a lack of development.

As per media reports, over the past 25 years, Chhattisgarh has seen 3,404 armed encounters, in which 1,541 Maoists, 1,315 security personnel and 1,817 civilians (mainly tribals) were killed. The data underlines the stories of uprooted families and scorched villages. Although the culpability of the State behind the sordid saga of destruction cannot be overlooked, it is the unreasonable ideology of Maoism in a democratic setup that cannot escape scrutiny. The Maoists have to be held accountable to the tribal society for the lives and the years lost — all to maintain an illusion of revolution. How history remembers the Maoists is too early to say; however, it is also a fact that, had it not been for them, the much-needed focus on the hinterland of DKR would never have manifested.

Shashank Ranjan, a retired colonel with experience in counter-insurgency operations, teaches at OP Jindal Global University, Haryana. The views expressed are personal



Shashank Ranjan





## Limited room

### India must reduce dependence on oil imports to stabilise the rupee

Between late November 2024 and now, the rupee has depreciated about 7%, sliding from roughly ₹83.4 a dollar to about ₹89.2. This is not unprecedented as in 2018, it slid 11%-12% against the dollar. The comparison is instructive because the political and trade backdrops have echoes of that earlier period. In 2018, during the first term of U.S. President Donald Trump, global dollar strength, rising U.S. interest rates and trade tensions pressured emerging market currencies, including the rupee. The RBI used its first longer-term currency-swap as a systemic liquidity check. In 2019, it completed a \$5 billion three-year dollar/rupee swap. And in February 2025, it carried out a \$10 billion dollar/rupee buy-sell swap auction to infuse long-term rupee liquidity into the banking system under global stress. Such swaps are a standard tool by central banks to supply liquidity, shore up forex reserves and prevent disorderly currency depreciation when the dollar surges or capital flows reverse. The steep rupee slide in November arises in a context of external pressures – a widening current-account deficit, driven partly by higher imports of bullion, as a hedge in uncertain times, and exporters scrambling to maintain competitiveness amid high U.S. trade tariffs. In such a hostile global macro-environment, the RBI’s mandate is limited: under the floating-but-managed regime, it can only ‘smoothen volatility’ rather than fix the exchange rate.

Between November last year and now, the RBI sold a net of roughly \$50 billion in forex to stabilise the rupee. Even so, the slide has proceeded, highlighting the external pressures. That said, there is room for cautious optimism. India’s foreign exchange reserves are comfortable – close to \$693 billion. On the domestic front, retail inflation has slumped: headline CPI inflation came in at just 0.25% in October 2025, well below the RBI’s target-band of 2%-6%. This gives the RBI space to tolerate modest currency depreciation without triggering aggressive rate hikes especially as India transitions from cheaper Russian crude to relatively costlier U.S. oil imports. With crude accounting for over a fifth of total imports in FY25, rupee depreciation combined with costlier oil imports could exert upward pressure on inflation. Given this environment, monetary stabilisation alone cannot suffice. The Centre must address India’s long-standing vulnerability: heavy dependence on oil. Steps such as faster transport electrification must be treated as strategic imperatives and pursued with urgency. These must be done with a well thought-out trade policy, as opposed to a raft of bilateral trade deals that India has focused on, in the hope that these would diversify trade routes. If anything, trade agreements with Japan, the UAE and ASEAN have tilted the trade balance against India.

## Fighting the fire

### COP30 sought to change the narrative by focusing on ‘implementation’

The 30th edition of the Conference of Parties (COP) concluded in Belem, Brazil, a city chosen for its proximity to the Amazon rainforest. The symbolism was high this year. It is 10 years since the Paris Agreement was signed by 195 countries – a pact to ensure that the globe did not heat up beyond 2°C of pre-industrial times and, as far as possible, contain it to 1.5°C. That was a goal easier stated than done; 2024 ended up being the first time that temperatures breached the 1.5°C territory though it will require several more such transgressions for 1.5°C to be the ‘new normal’. In all the years since, COPs have been about systematically getting all countries to move on the path of restructuring their economies away from their fossil-fuel hardwiring; apportioning responsibility – and finance – in ways to actualise these goals, and finally work towards addressing the damage that climate change had already done to societies, livelihoods and ecologies. While there has been success, in that most countries – even the United States – recognise that renewables are the future of energy, it has been challenging for countries to execute the transformation while also growing their economies and keeping their competitive edges sharp. This has led to the formation of the two broad blocs – one led by developed countries and affiliated allies that has pushed for hard targets and road maps to phase out fossil fuels, and the other by developing countries or petro states who reject such prescription and demand more money and action from the developed countries.

The Brazil COP sought to bring a change in the narrative by stressing ‘implementation’, and reminding the world that multilateralism and ‘mutirão’ (coming together) were indispensable to the Paris Agreement. While the absence of the U.S. weakened the developed country blocs, this year saw greater thrust on topics such as ‘adaptation’ and ‘just transition’ – concepts that acknowledge the everyday effects of climate change and stress practical preparatory steps and finance pledges to help countries burnish climate defences. India, which has been one of the prominent voices for developing country coalitions, was welcoming of the Brazil Presidency’s acknowledgement of concerns but did not declare its updated Nationally Determined Contributions (actions on adopting clean energy). The COP’s negotiation process often leaves one wondering about the net gains made, given that pollution, deforestation and climate denialism seem more voluble and visible but, as it is often said, this is humanity’s only opportunity to mitigate a cataclysm of its making.

In the journey of every nation, there comes a moment where institutions must stand up as solid guardrails to defend what is intrinsic to the foundational values of the nation-state. Because, if the foundational principles are allowed to crumble, the remaining structure will wither away. Further, the institutions which sanction such an obliteration of core ideas, almost always meet the same end. Once the tree falls, the branches cannot survive.

The Supreme Court of India has done just that, while answering the 16th Presidential reference on the powers of Governors and the President of India. The core philosophy of federalism, ingrained in India’s Constitution, lies eroded and buried. The States will gradually become shadow Union Territories with Legislatures but dependent on the dictates of those in power in the central government. Federalism is a vital safeguard in addition to being part of the basic structure of the Constitution. Sounding the death knell for federalism would precipitate the absolute dominion of the Government of India over the remaining institutions that seek to control, regulate and quash arbitrariness and the autocracy of those in power at the Centre.

### Equal partners

Under the constitutional scheme, the Union and States are equal partners, with the Government of India being only ‘first among equals’. States are not subservient to the Union Government, nor are they secondary appendages, bound by the diktats of the Government of India. In fact, in all areas in the State list (such as land laws and law and order), they enjoy complete autonomy. Any other understanding of federalism in the Indian context would disrupt and violate the constitutional scheme envisaged by the framers of the Constitution.

If Bills/laws passed by the State Legislature are going to be kept pending by the Governor for months and then returned to the Legislature for ‘reconsideration’, and on reaffirmation by the Legislature then reserved for the assent of the President, it would effectively mow down an ‘elected Legislature’ before the whims of an ‘unelected Governor’. This is the very anti-thesis of democracy.

Governors are appointees of the ruling party at the Centre, who, more often than not, act on the whims of those in power in the Government of India and even actively accommodate their political agendas. This is a reality that cannot be ignored or wished away.

Therefore, the scales of federalism and democracy must be weighed between what the Supreme Court calls the “unwritten and undefined powers” of an unelected Governor, acting to serve the political agenda of the



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The 16th Presidential reference could endanger the will of the people

Government of India vis-à-vis the mandate of an elected State Government and Assembly reflecting the will of the people of that State. How then can Governors be permitted to overrule the will of the people of the State?

Once the Legislature has passed a law, a timeline on the exercise of the powers by the Governor, under Article 200 of the Constitution of India, has to be read therein to bring it in conformity with the principle of federalism, which is part of the basic structure. This is not just harmonious but also imperative in the current climate of unprecedented administrative excesses. The two-judge Bench in the Tamil Nadu Governor’s case (the decision which led the President to seek an opinion) understood this and prescribed finite and reasonable timelines accordingly.

### What the touchstone is

The power of the Governor has to be tested on the touchstone of reasonableness, i.e., a reasonable time to think through and decide on the Legislation. If this timeline is not read, the Governor will become an unelected despot over an elected Government.

Let us not forget that fairness, reasonableness and non-arbitrariness are the threads that run through the veins of our Constitution, and especially Part III which protects citizens against a wayward state. If you anoint unelected Governors or even the President of India as unbridled monarchs over elected governments, the entire edifice of the Constitution will start to crumble.

“Judicial Review” is also a part of the basic structure of the Constitution. No authority, howsoever high it may be, including Parliament, can ever say that its actions will not be tested by judicial review.

The exercise of powers by the Governor or the President of India cannot remain alien to the principle of judicial review. The office of Governor or the President of India is not bigger than Parliament. Even Parliament cannot escape judicial review for its actions. So how can the Governor or the President of India claim immunity from judicial review, especially when they are creations of the same Constitution?

The theory of ‘limited direction’ propounded by the Court goes against the grain of the constitutional scheme, the doctrine of federalism, the doctrine of reasonableness enshrined in Article 14, the doctrine of judicial review and the principles of fairness and justice.

To give such unbridled power to the Governor and the President to keep important pieces of legislation pending for long periods of time, so as to defeat the very purpose thereof, cannot be accepted. This is tantamount to giving Governors

a pocket veto and holding States captive to the whims of Governors (and the President) and also keeping States perpetually embroiled in litigation before the courts in order to get a direction for giving assent to every legislation. Ultimately, such an arrangement is constitutionally unsustainable and democratically indefensible.

### A weakening of the federal structure

The other problem with the opinion is that it does not take into account the broader context of the series of designed attacks by the Centre on the federal structure in recent times. Here are some examples. First, the refusal by the central government to provide compensation to producing States for loss of Goods and Services Tax, thereby effectively disincentivising efficiencies, revenue generation and good governance.

Second, cess collected exclusively by the central government being used as an excuse to deny sharing of its revenue with the States.

Third, refusal by the central government to fully implement the devolutions recommended by the Finance Commission.

Fourth, forcing States to adhere to a ‘one-size-fits-all’ conditions to central schemes and making them conditionally applicable to States only on States agreeing to contribute up to 50% of the schemes budgeted expenditure. This puts unprecedented pressure on their already stressed finances.

Fifth, weaponisation of money in the central kitty by providing financial support as a quid pro quo for advancing the political agenda of the party at the Centre. The recent transfer of ₹10,000 to 1.21 crore women in Bihar very close to the Bihar Assembly election 2025 or the grant of a special financial package for Andhra Pradesh in the last Budget are two recent examples.

Sixth, misuse of the Central Bureau of Investigation/Enforcement Directorate/Income-Tax Department to raid, browbeat, arrest Chief Ministers and Ministers and bring down Opposition governments.

And, finally, to top it all, central control through the Governor’s fiat, which will be the ‘straw that broke the camel’s back as far as federalism is concerned.

If this deep distortion of federalism is permitted to take root, the Union Government will command unrestrained authority while States are reduced to mere administrative outposts. Democracy cannot survive where the will of the people is held hostage to the whims of unelected constitutional functionaries. It is imperative that citizens take notice, institutions reflect, and the Supreme Court reconsiders. Because the preservation of federalism is the preservation of India itself.

# The way to reconciliation in Jammu and Kashmir

The bomb blast in New Delhi that claimed the lives of innocent civilians and injured many others saddened me deeply. No one who values humanity can remain untouched by such loss. As Kashmiris, we have lived through the pain of violence for decades and, therefore, understand better than most what it means for families to lose loved ones, suddenly and brutally. Every act of violence against the innocent is unacceptable and no cause or ideology can ever justify it.

### The rush to judge

Yet, while we mourn, it is troubling to see how quickly such tragedies are converted into sensational narratives. Even before investigations establish facts, sections of the media are quoting “inside sources” and are ready with headlines that cast suspicion on a particular community and religion. This rush to judge not only misleads the public but also places an entire population under scrutiny – especially Kashmiri students and professionals living across India, who suddenly find themselves being treated as suspects. Fear replaces safety, and anxiety grips families back home.

Condemnation of acts of terror must not be allowed to transform itself into collective punishment. Unfortunately, this has become a recurrent pattern in Jammu and Kashmir. In recent years, we have seen houses, the homes of aging parents, spouses and children, being blown up or demolished because a family member was accused of supporting militancy.

A house is not just a structure. It represents dignity, belonging and memories. Destroying it punishes those who have committed no crime.



**Mirwaiz Umar Farooq**

is Chairman, Hurriyat Conference

Condemnation of acts of terror must not be allowed to become collective punishment

Similarly, detaining or harassing relatives and the acquaintances of suspected militants is neither justice nor strategy. It spreads anger and pain further. Young people do not turn to violence, that too educated professionals if they feel heard and hopeful. They do so mostly when they feel oppressed, humiliated and disempowered. While the larger issue remains unaddressed, there is also the curtailment of civil liberties, constant police surveillance, fear of arbitrary dismissals from government service, and attachment of properties by investigative agencies and frequent raids and arrests. Combined with shrinking employment avenues and the unjust reservation and recruitment policies that leave local educated youth feeling excluded even from the limited jobs that exist, all these have created a deep sense of suffocation among them.

### Furthering alienation

This alienation is further intensified by the abrogation of constitutionally guaranteed Article 370, the withdrawal of land and job protections, and the widespread fear of demographic change through policies that encourage outsider settlement and domicile rights. These steps and measures – however, they may be defended officially – are experienced on the ground as attacks on identity, dignity, and ownership of one’s homeland. Such measures do not foster integration. They reinforce the feeling of dispossession. And the stronger that feeling, the more extreme the retaliatory violence.

Highlighting these realities is not justification of violence – it is an attempt to prevent it. Peace cannot be built on the denial of wounds. If peace is the goal then the causes that lead to violent

extremism must be addressed. Security operations may *suppress* symptoms, but only justice and empathy can heal the root.

### The path to pursue

I have also always urged the youth not to resort to violence or extremism measures. It is totally unjustifiable, completely against religious tenets, destructive and self defeating. To me, the best way to redress issues among people is dialogue, rooted in compassion and mutual respect. Guns, demolitions, collective punishment, and blanket suspicion will not bring peace. They produce resentment, distrust and alienation. But when dignity is protected, aspirations are addressed and rights are respected, hearts open and reconciliation becomes possible.

I, therefore, urge policymakers in India to view Jammu and Kashmir not merely as a law-and-order issue, but as a human and political reality that requires engagement, redress and confidence building. The framework once articulated by former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee – *insaniyat* and *jamhooriyat* – still holds the promise of a dignified future for all.

Whether those in power choose that path or ignore it, is for them to decide. As for us, the pulpit of Jama Masjid will continue to advocate for peace, condemn injustice and violence wherever it occurs. We will not give up on hope fostered by our faith in the belief that hope is the strength that sustains societies through their most difficult moments and leads them toward better days.

(This article is an elaboration of the Friday Sermon delivered by the writer at the Jama Masjid, Srinagar)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Polygamy Bill

The Assam Prohibition of Polygamy Bill, 2025 (Front page, November 26) opens an inevitable constitutional debate. While the State invokes women’s protection and social order, criminalising polygamy raises clear tensions with Muslim personal law, which still permits limited polygamy under the Shariat Act, 1937. A State law overriding a protected personal law regime will almost certainly invite judicial scrutiny under Articles 14, 15, 21 and 25. Moreover, carving out exemptions for Scheduled

Tribes and Sixth Schedule areas weakens the Bill’s claim to universality and exposes it to an Article 14 challenge on reasonable classification. Until a nationwide Uniform Civil Code democratically resolves such divergences, Assam’s unilateral move risks being seen as legislative overreach. The Chief Minister may present this as social reform, but the Bill stirs up a hornet’s nest.

**Gopalaswamy J.,**  
Chennai

**Dismissal of officer**  
I was shocked to read the

report, “SC upholds dismissal of Christian officer from Indian Army” (Inside pages, November 26). As a Christian priest in a garrison church, Wellington Barracks, The Nilgiris, I have been asked to carry the Bible before Christian soldiers who had just finished their rigorous nine-month training programme at the attestation parade, before they left for different parts of the country. It was the same with Muslim soldiers with the Koran. Every religion was honoured and respected, secularism was safeguarded and the

sentiments of every soldier were protected.

**S.C. Jayakumar,**  
Coimbatore

Religion is a very sensitive personal matter and the top court could have been more empathetic to the officer. In a pluralistic and secular nation like ours, the situation could be remedied if the higher-ups in the Army try to reinstate the officer by making an appeal before the top court.

**D.D. Vayanan Thomas,**  
Palayamkottai, Tamil Nadu

**Clinical Proteas**  
The shocking and

embarrassing series defeat of the Indian team places Indian cricket at the crossroads. It is wrong to bay for head coach Gautam Gambhir’s blood as he is only partially responsible for the poor showing. The foremost reason for the debacle is the Indian batsmen’s inability to play quality spin bowling on turning tracks. Team selection is wrong. If Ravindra Jadeja is the first option all-rounder, there is no place for players such as Washington Sundar and Axar Patel. If Rishab Pant is an automatic choice, there is no place for Dhruv Jurel.

Specialist bowlers and batsmen must be selected in their places. Batsmen who can also bowl and bowlers who can also bat should not find a place in Test matches. Playing six bowlers was questionable. The retirement of Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli and Shubman Gill’s injury have impacted the team balance. Now that youngsters are getting moulded for limited overs games, there will be a dearth of specialists.

**V. Lakshmanan,**  
Tiruppur, Tamil Nadu

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



# The INO that wasn't and the JUNO that is

China has finished building its Jiangmen Underground Neutrino Observatory (JUNO), a bittersweet development given that the India-based Neutrino Observatory (INO) has been in limbo for years. Both JUNO and INO were designed to study subatomic particles called neutrinos, which are very hard to catch because they rarely interact with matter. This is why both INO and JUNO are huge: the more matter there is, the more interactions there will be between neutrinos and matter, and thus more opportunities for study.

**Progress on JUNO**

However, this size was perhaps the original trigger of the INO's downfall, so to speak, in India. Because the INO detector was so massive (weighing 50 kilotonnes), it could not be operated from inside a lab nor could scientists situate its detector in an existing facility. Instead, the INO collaboration had planned to install the detector inside a mountain in Theni in Tamil Nadu, together with other research facilities. The mountain's rock was to serve as a natural shield for the detector, obviating the need for a separate structure, which would have been expensive.

However, the scale of the construction activity in the area and the involvement of the Department of Atomic Energy, which was helping fund the project, spooked the locals and spurred local leaders to draw political mileage from that. The INO collaboration also erred (in hindsight) by not following procedure and by not estimating how controversial the project could become, which, if it had done, would have helped it respond to and manage certain public sentiments better.

In the late 2010s, these delays were painful as China moved in leaps to realise JUNO. The 'pain' was because the INO collaboration was hoping to secure a limited pool of grants and investments from foreign governments to



Vasudevan Mukunth

India had the wherewithal in the previous decade to help crack an important scientific mystery, but now China has surged ahead

operate the detector. China expected to complete JUNO by 2020 but that turned out to be five years too soon. If it had said it would aim for 2025, would the INO have had a better chance by no longer having a tight deadline? Maybe not but it wouldn't have been implausible either.

While the INO remains stalled, JUNO has released its first analyses. The team uploaded two preprint papers on November 18. One reported the "initial performance results of the JUNO detector". Its author list reveals the sort of international collaboration India was hoping for, with researchers from Russia, the U.S., the U.K., Chile, Armenia, Belgium, Brazil, Taiwan, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Pakistan, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Thailand participating.

It is not clear why there are no researchers from India. Journalist Jatan Mehta has documented a similar issue in the space science sphere: researchers from India were conspicuous by their absence in the (first) list of applications to access the rocks China had brought back from the moon on its Chang'e-5 mission in 2020. India has a long history in neutrino physics and analysing lunar samples, and boasts of many excellent scholars in these fields.

The second preprint paper reported the object of INO's study. Even though neutrinos are so elusive, physicists have discovered that they come in three types, or flavours, and that they can oscillate between these as they travel through space.

Figuring out how the three neutrino masses are ordered is an important open question – and it is related to neutrino oscillations, which are in turn described by three figures called  $\theta_{12}$  ("theta one two"),  $\theta_{13}$ , and  $\theta_{23}$ . Previous experiments have pinned down  $\theta_{13}$ , and JUNO and INO were conceived to use this prior knowledge to determine the neutrino mass ordering. In the second paper, the JUNO collaboration reported that it had measured  $\theta_{12}$  very precisely, in a

way broadly consistent with previous findings.

On the back of this, Institute of High Energy Physics scientist and JUNO project manager and spokesperson Yifang Wang had said, "With this level of accuracy, JUNO will soon determine the neutrino mass ordering, test the three-flavour oscillation framework, and search for new physics beyond it."

**Rising bar**

While we can debate the way the INO collaboration (at times), bureaucrats, political leaders, and some activists conducted themselves during the saga, one must acknowledge that in this domain, missing the bus on one occasion does not mean you can catch the next one; it means the next one has to be something more sophisticated than a bus for your efforts to mean anything. India had the wherewithal in the previous decade to help crack an important scientific mystery. But if JUNO helps surmount this challenge, India may not have the resources to take a shot at the next big mystery because it will be more specialised and need more sophisticated technologies. Then again, only a fool would bet against the ingenuity and resourcefulness of young scientists to come up with a way.

What grates more is the spectre of "resource constraints" – sometimes all too real, sometimes a bogeyman that administrators invoke to not fund research or, crucially, the skills and materials required to manage its consequences for local communities. Still, there is no room for the notion that India is not ready for a Big Science project. Both the large ground-based telescopes of astronomy and the protected areas of conservation constitute Big Science, and India has many. Perhaps the bigger lesson is that we should not attempt such a project solely by whether scientists alone are ready; we should also check whether the conditions beyond science and on the ground are ready as well.

# Appointments that led to annoyance

The selection of District Congress Committee presidents exposes old tensions

## STATE OF PLAY

**R. Ravikanth Reddy**  
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The recent appointment of District Congress Committee (DCC) presidents in Telangana has triggered an intense internal debate. It has exposed long-standing differences among senior leaders, and thrown up questions over adherence to organisational norms as well as concerns about the party's strategic direction as it prepares for the crucial local body and Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation elections.

While the Congress high command framed these appointments as an exercise in social engineering and organisational restructuring, the selections have left several leaders dissatisfied, particularly in politically sensitive districts.

Broadly, the list of new DCC presidents has raised eyebrows because several of the appointees are neither widely known nor influential in their respective districts. The leadership has claimed that the selections were aimed at strengthening Backward Classes representation and ensuring a gender balance.

A major flashpoint arose with the appointment of Kailash Netha as DCC president of Nalgonda. Congress Minister Komatireddy Venkata Reddy gave a written complaint to Chief Minister Revanth Reddy demanding his removal. He reminded the party that Mr. Netha had abused him during the Munugode bypoll when the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) was in power.

Also, Nalgonda district, known for its long tradition of strong Reddy leadership and Scheduled Tribe population and historically significant



Congress figures, reacted strongly to the choice.

Similar ego and seniority issues are seen in other districts as well. Some appointments have angered the sitting MLAs who feel that those working against them were made DCC presidents.

Senior leaders argue that while the party may have intended a symbolic social engineering move by elevating leaders from various castes with little political experience, it should not have come at the expense of experience, internal harmony, and electoral strategy.

Senior party members have also questioned the disregard for organisational guidelines set earlier by the Congress high command. According to the norms, MLAs were not to be given DCC roles, former DCC presidents were not to be renominated, and leaders holding higher organisational responsibilities were to be excluded from these posts. These rules appear to have been ignored in several cases. In addition, the appointment of those who already serve as PCC vice presidents or general secretaries has annoyed leaders who believe that this will only widen internal inequality and demotivate aspirants at the district level.

Insiders point to the strong influence of AICC in-charge Meenakshi Natarajan in the final list, suggesting that even the recommendations of TPCC president Mahesh Ku-

mar Goud were bypassed. Senior leaders feel that local political dynamics were not adequately considered. Given the fragile organisational balance in many districts, decisions perceived as externally imposed may create more issues.

Concerns extend to urban constituencies as well. For instance, Deepak John has been appointed for Secunderabad district and Mothe Rohit for Khairatabad district ahead of the GHMC elections. While Mr. Rohit is young and energetic, Mr. John is already chairman of a corporation. Questions are being raised about whether they can effectively lead the party in a city where senior leaders, established networks, and community-specific dynamics play a critical role. The worry is that inexperienced leaders may struggle to manage competing factions or build momentum among urban voters.

More broadly, these appointments highlight a recurring dilemma in Congress politics: the tension between promoting new faces and retaining seasoned leadership. While the party's attempt at social engineering is politically necessary, its execution seems to have disregarded ground realities in key districts.

At a time when the Congress government in Telangana is preparing for a series of electoral battles, internal coherence and organisational strength are crucial. Instead, the new appointments have led to another round of factionalism and public disagreements. Ultimately, the success of the DCC presidents will depend not just on their social background but on their ability to mobilise cadres, manage factions, and inspire confidence among senior leaders and grassroots workers.

# Trade, defence tensions surge in Japan-China clash over Taiwan

The kerfuffle over Sanae Takaichi's remarks arrives just as Japan faces significant domestic headwinds

## DATA POINT

Sambavi Parthasarathy  
Vignesh Radhakrishnan

Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi sparked a controversy when she said that a Chinese assault on Taiwan could be deemed a "survival-threatening situation" – a legal justification allowing Tokyo to exercise collective self-defence. China claims sovereignty over Taiwan, a position Taipei firmly rejects.

Ms. Takaichi's refusal to retract the statement caused bilateral ties to unravel at an alarming speed. The dispute has become the region's biggest crisis in recent years, characterised by Chinese military sorties, economic coercion against seafood imports, and a blanket freeze on cultural exchange. Having failed to force a retraction, Beijing has escalated the issue to the United Nations, framing Japan's stance as a threat to the post-war international order.

Japan's post-war Constitution forbids it from using force as a means of settling international disputes but a 2015 law, passed when Ms. Takaichi's mentor, Shinzo Abe, was Prime Minister, permits it to exercise collective self-defence in certain situations, even if it is not directly under attack.

The brouhaha over Ms. Takaichi's remarks comes just as Japan faces significant domestic headwinds. The world's fourth-largest economy is facing a slow economic growth (Chart 1) and persistent inflation. The Prime Minister is attempting to solve these issues with new stimulus measures. Further compounding these challenges is a long-term fertility crisis, with the country's population growth turning negative since 2011.

Against this backdrop, a prolonged rift with China could be problematic, given that Beijing is Japan's largest trading partner. China accounted for 20% of Ja-

pan's imports and exports each, between 2018 and 2024 (Chart 2). Bloomberg notes that Japanese manufacturers rely heavily on Chinese critical materials. Reuters reports that China provides 60% of Japan's rare earths – key components for cars and electronics. The power of this monopoly was demonstrated recently when China used its rare earth dominance to successfully pressure the U.S. into lowering tariffs. China has told tourists not to visit Japan, stopped approvals of new Japanese firms, and restricted Japanese seafood.

Ms. Takaichi's suggestion that Japan might intervene in a Taiwan Strait conflict underscores the importance of this maritime route to Tokyo. Chart 3 illustrates the total trade volume by country passing through the Strait in 2022 (excluding China). Japan stands out significantly, with over \$440 billion in trade relying on this waterway.

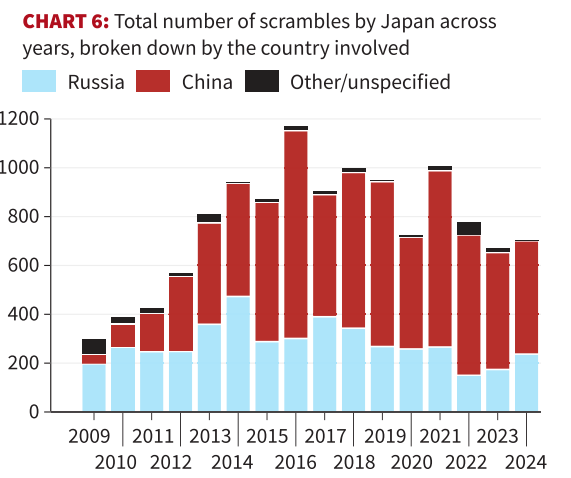
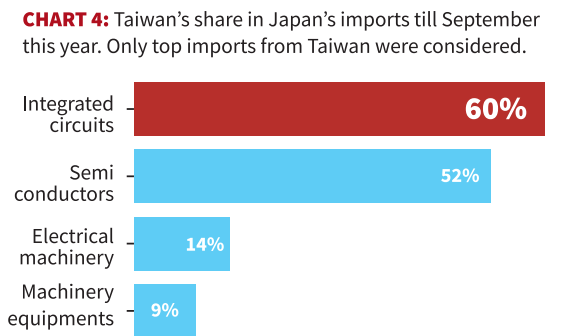
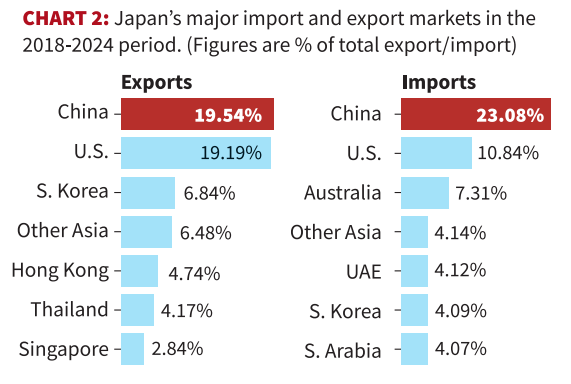
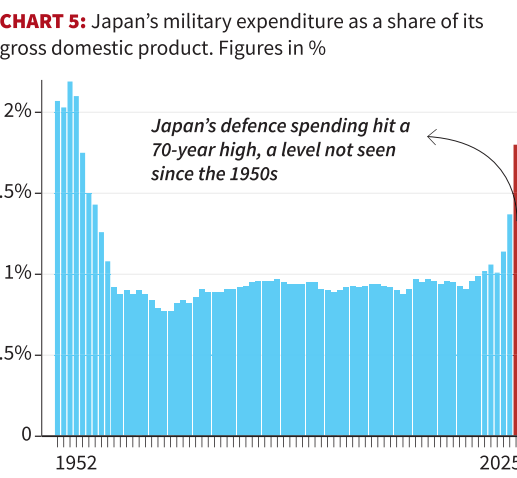
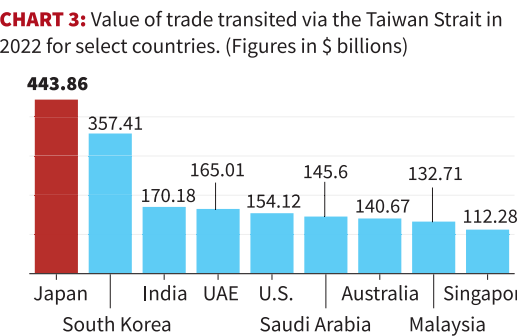
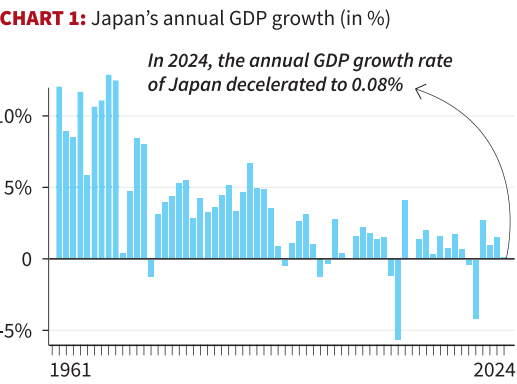
Much of the trade between the two neighbours would be disrupted if tensions in the Strait rise. Taiwan is a vital trading partner for Japan, particularly for critical technology. In 2025 (till September), Japan sourced 60% of its integrated circuits and over 50% of its semiconductors from Taiwan, along with significant volumes of electrical machinery (Chart 4).

Tensions are also mounting over the military implications of Ms. Takaichi's remarks. In 2025, Japan's defence spending hit a 70-year high of 1.8% of GDP, a level not seen since the 1950s (Chart 5). On Wednesday, Taiwanese President Lai Ching-te said that his government is going to propose \$40 billion in additional defence spending in the coming years.

In 2024, Japan's forces 'scrambled' over 700 times in response to Chinese and Russian aircraft violations (Chart 6). A 'scramble' refers to the emergency dispatch of aircraft by the country's Air Self-Defence Force when an unidentified aircraft is suspected of violating Japanese airspace.

## Souring relations

The data for the charts were sourced from the World Bank, the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), UNCOMTRADE, SIPRI, Defense of Japan 2025, and e-Stat: a portal site for Japanese Government Statistics.



## FROM THE ARCHIVES

### The Hindu

FIFTY YEARS AGO NOVEMBER 27, 1975

## World Bank expert calls for expansion of coal and power

New Delhi, Nov. 26: A study of India's energy problem by a World Bank economist calls for strengthening the competitive position of substitute fuels, particularly coal and electricity, besides expansion of oil exploration "as far as practicable".

The study by Mr. P.D. Henderson says it will not be strictly correct to say that India is a victim of the "energy crisis" although the increases in the petroleum import bill has been "damaging" India's economic prospects.

A substantial part of India's consumption of energy still comes from non-commercial sources such as firewood, vegetable waste, and cow dung.

Most of India's commercial energy requirements are met from domestic sources with the exception of oil.

About 70 per cent of the total consumption of petroleum products is supplied from imports, chiefly of crude oil. These imports probably account for 20 to 25 per cent of total consumption of commercial energy and perhaps 10 per cent of total energy uses.

India has large and easily accessible coal deposits and there has been a substantial rise in production in 1974-75 after a long period of stagnation. Secondly, a number of thermal power stations have been showing better results. Recently, the results of the third well in the offshore Bombay High structure has been highly encouraging. Despite these welcome improvements, the energy situation remains difficult, Mr. Henderson notes.

The need to improve the performance of the energy industries is fully recognised in India and this has been reflected in a variety of policies and specific measures.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO NOVEMBER 27, 1925

## Chinese civil war

Peking, Nov. 26: General Kub Sung-Ling's attempt to seize Mukden and capture Chang-Tso-Lin has not yet succeeded but he has taken prisoners several of Chang-Tso-Lin's most reliable Generals. He now commands a hundred thousand men compared with Chang-Tso-Lin's fifty thousand.



# Text & Context

THE HINDU

NEWS IN NUMBERS

Cost approved for expanding the Pune metro under Phase-2

**9,858** In crore. The Union Cabinet approved expanding the Pune Metro network at a cost of ₹9,858 crore. The approval covers Line 4 and 4A under Phase-2, spanning 31.6 km with 28 elevated stations linking major IT hubs and residential clusters. PTI

The monthly aid promised to poor women in New Delhi

**2,500** In ₹. Delhi Chief Minister Rekha Gupta reiterated that her government will deliver all poll promises, including the ₹2,500 monthly assistance and LPG cylinders for ₹500 for poor women along with one free cylinder during Holi and Deepawali. PTI

Value of meth tablets seized near India-Myanmar border

**13.33** In ₹ crore. Meth-amphetamine tablets worth ₹13.33 crore were seized near the India-Myanmar border in Mizoram's Champhai district, the Assam Rifles said on Wednesday. Around 4.44 kg of banned meth tablets were recovered. PTI

The worth of the alleged Andhra Pradesh liquor scam

**3,500** In ₹ crore. The Supreme Court on Wednesday granted interim protection from surrender to three accused in the alleged ₹3,500 crore Andhra Pradesh liquor scam. The court questioned the need for custody given the lengthy witness list. PTI

Number of people killed in Thailand-Malaysia floods

**34** Severe flooding across Thailand and Malaysia has killed at least 34 people and displaced tens of thousands. Thailand declared a state of emergency in Songkhla, where rains submerged homes, forcing over 10,000 residents to evacuate. AFP  
COMPILED BY THE HINDU DATA TEAM

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## How to navigate a complex global paradigm

In the tense relationship between the United States and China, Hong Kong emerges as a middle space — a vantage point from which to imagine a way forward. The city's unique position offers a metaphorical middle ground for dialogue, emphasising the need for new frameworks to navigate today's complex rivalries



**A city of multitudes:** The Hong Kong skyline in 2019. REUTERS

WORLD INSIGHT

Nirupama Rao

**I**n November 17 and 18, 2025, Hong Kong hosted the sixth meeting of the China-United States Exchange Foundation (CUSEF), titled ‘Circles for Peace’. Even though the U.S. and China remain locked in a tense, mistrustful relationship, they are also tied together more tightly than either side likes to admit. Here, Hong Kong, which has always lived between worlds, offers an uneasy middle space; a vantage point from which to imagine a way forward.

Complex rivalries

The discussions at the sixth U.S.-China Hong Kong Forum showed that trust had thinned, and that both the U.S. and China now operate as if expecting sudden shocks. Participants spoke with candour, and with a sense of fatigue. Old frameworks such as engagement, “guardrails”, and managed competition no longer felt adequate for today’s complex rivalry.

A persistent theme was the shrinking room for nuance. Strategic anxieties that once belonged to specialists have entered the public sphere, shaping domestic politics and narrowing the range of acceptable positions. It has also seeped into the human dimension of the relationship. American student numbers in China are far below pre-COVID-19 pandemic levels, and Chinese student enrolments in the U.S., once well above three lakh, have also declined. The deeper loss is familiarity — younger generations are encountering each other through narratives shaped by fear rather than through lived experience. Even though Presidents of both the nations anchor the relationship, personality-driven diplomacy is not enough in today’s world.

Further, technology, and Artificial Intelligence (AI) were the biggest topics of conversations. It was observed that AI now resembles an international public good — too consequential to be monopolised or monetised by any single country. A credible governance regime, participants said, must rest on equity, transparency and accountability. This, however, brought up broader concerns about the overlap between civilian innovation and defence applications, especially in parts of the private sector. There would be an eventual need for an international governance mechanism for AI, and possibly for space (“the galaxy”) as well. For if competition moves beyond the earth, who determines the rules?

The wider diplomatic climate also featured in the discussions, with the Taiwan question being a key issue. China argued that the discussion had become overwhelmingly militarised, and warned that American policy appeared to be drifting towards what Beijing views as a “one China, one Taiwan” (a position which advocates for the independence of Taiwan) posture. New mechanisms and a new vocabulary are needed to deal with the issue before it hardens into confrontation by default. One question discussed was whether the U.S. and China are prepared for another EP-3 incident (in 2001) — an accidental collision at sea or in the air that could escalate before political systems can respond. The region needs a crisis-prevention mechanism insulated from political swings.

Singapore’s former Defence Minister Ng Eng Hen offered the broadest frame. He described this period as a “dialectic moment”, where competing pressures reshape the global order but outcomes remain uncertain. The U.S., Europe and China will inevitably influence the emerging structure, he said, but the rest of the world should not allow the global commons to become collateral damage in major-power rivalry. The world does not need another hegemon, it needs powers

**Hong Kong’s future depends on preserving its cosmopolitan function — its connectivity, and cultural hybridity that allow ideas to cross borders even when politics cannot**

capable of co-organising the future.

Hong Kong’s role

Throughout the forum, Hong Kong was in focus. While the city’s liminal geography stands out as a metaphor for the wider planetary condition, it is also becoming more China-centric, even as it tries to remain globally fluent. Its future depends on preserving its cosmopolitan function — its transparency, connectivity, and cultural hybridity that allow ideas to cross borders even when politics cannot. Hong Kong reminds one that the world’s middle spaces still matter, revealing pathways that pure geopolitics often miss.

People-to-people ties emerged as a gentle theme of hope in the meeting. Participants noted that official relations may be strained, but human contact remains the ballast that prevents larger relationships from capsizing.

Hong Kong, despite the pressures of recent years, continues to make such exchanges possible.

Lessons for India

The conversations in the forum were a reminder that great-power relations may determine the climate of the world, but the weather is shaped by everyone else. India cannot control the forces buffeting the U.S.-China relationship, but can decide how to navigate them, and how to ensure that its own future is not written by default. Rigid binaries are unsustainable. India’s task is not to imitate U.S. rhetoric nor to accept Chinese narratives at face value. It is to build domestic strength — technological, economic and institutional — to navigate a

fractured world without losing strategic autonomy. The forum’s emphasis on youth, cultural ties and the social contract around technology offered reminders that relationships are not made or unmade by summits alone. They are shaped by steady habits of engagement.

The shape of a new order

The clearest insight from the forum was that the U.S.-China relationship will not be restored to its old shape. The political atmospherics will remain turbulent. But the alternative to managed rivalry is not victory; it is a world of cascading risks — climate stress, pandemics, fragile supply chains, and polarised societies.

One participant put it simply that this was “A story we have to write together”. The phrasing carries weight. It shifts the conversation from competition to stewardship, from ideology to survival. The next order, if it emerges at all, will depend less on grand bargains and more on practical cooperation on energy, health, finance, and AI governance.

As the forum ended and one stepped out into the evening, the view from the conference venue stayed, of a South China Sea almost motionless, and meditative, in quiet contrast to the anxieties that shape the region — a reminder of how places, like people, survive by embracing complexity and allowing themselves room to rethink. The U.S. and China will continue to compete, sometimes fiercely. The future needs steady hands to shape it.

India has its own long arc with China, marked by caution and conviction. Yet, in this moment of global uncertainty, the challenge for all three countries is the same: to choose responsibility over reflex, and to widen the narrow spaces where dialogue is still possible.

Hong Kong, in its imperfect, resilient way, showed that those spaces still exist.

*Nirupama Rao is Foreign Secretary (retired) and Founder-Trustee, The South Asian Symphony Foundation*

THE GIST

▼ The discussions at the sixth U.S.-China Hong Kong Forum showed that trust had thinned, and that both the U.S. and China now operate as if expecting sudden shocks.

▼ Hong Kong reminds one that the world’s middle spaces still matter, revealing pathways that pure geopolitics often miss.

▼ The clearest insight from the forum was that the U.S.-China relationship will not be restored to its old shape. The political atmospherics will remain turbulent.



BIBLIOGRAPHY



**Clear contrast:** A view of the snow covered Himalayas, as seen from Shimla, in 2022. PTI

# Why telling stories from the Himalaya is ‘an argument against extinction’

Stephen Alter, who recently won the Himalayan Echoes Nature Prize, has often put the young, fold mountains at the centre of his writing. Other chroniclers, from Peter Matthiessen to Namita Gokhale, have written about the reality of living in a region which inspires both awe and fear

**Sudipta Datta**

Writer and naturalist Stephen Alter has been honoured with the inaugural Radisson Himalayan Echoes Nature Prize 2025 for his contribution to Himalayan literature and conservation. Alter has often put the Himalaya at the centre of his books, and it’s the perfect time to read up on the world’s tallest mountain range on earth, and why as Alter contends, the focus must not be on altitude alone.

In his *Wild Himalaya: A Natural History of the Greatest Mountain Range* (Aleph), he says that at times, “these mountains seem almost alive for they are always changing.” The Himalaya, he notes, contains places of terrifying beauty, vertiginous terrain and extremes of weather that inspire both awe and fear. Alter maps the Himalaya, which spans a distance of roughly 2,500 kilometres in length and between 350 and 150 kilometres in breadth and stretches across five nations – China, Bhutan, India, Nepal and Pakistan.

Over eight sections, Alter goes through the origins of the range, its weather systems, flora and fauna, expeditions of other mountaineers and travellers, and myths and legends associated with the mountains. For him, the simple act of retelling these stories becomes an affirmation of nature’s diversity and an argument against extinction.

**Goat dung ‘soft as a mattress’**  
In the section, ‘Flora Himalensis’, he “stalks” the carnivorous sundew or the Drosera peltata at the Jabarkhet Nature Reserve near Landour in Uttarakhand.

Drosera means “dew of the sun” and it gets this name, says Alter, because the mucilage on its leaves is similar to tiny drops of dew. The saliva-like substance traps insects, and after the victim is captured, the leaf closes around it and consumes the insects.

He writes about encountering a tiger barely 10 metres away on the banks of the Ram Ganga river in Corbett National Park and sleeping on a “layer of goat dung, 15 cm deep and soft as a foam mattress” at Shingo La in Ladakh while trekking through Zaskar Valley.

On the eastern flank of the mountain range, he spots blood pheasants in Kanchenjunga, the takin, an animal related to goat antelopes, in Bhutan, and black-necked migrating cranes at Phobjhika. Amid the treasure trove, are photographs, say of the magnolia blooming in Arunachal Pradesh and the Machapuchere at sunset, and the books trail he leaves, from George Schaller’s *Tibet Wild*, Maharaj K. Pandit’s *Life in the Himalaya: An Ecosystem at Risk*, D.N. Wadia’s *Geology of India, Asia ke Peeth Par* (On the Shoulders of Asia) by Shekhar Pathak and Uma Bhatt and many others.

Alter mentions Schaller’s “special affinity” for snow leopards, the highest roaming of the big cats. Schaller had once come face-to-face with a snow leopard that left him with a “haunting sense of its elusive beauty and the way in which it seemed to dissolve into rocks and snow.”

**Elusive leopards**  
Leopards find place in Janhavi Prasada’s wonderful new book, *Nainital Through Memory, Stories & History* (Roli Books). Walking in the scenic hillsides across the Himalaya region “calls for the alertness of

a leopard,” she says. In the forest, keep talking – even if it means talking to yourself, she advises, because the murmur keeps lurking wild animals at bay. “Unlike the tiger which kills in daylight, leopards fear humans in the day, but after dark they prowl in search of prey.” In the hills, not a day goes by without mentioning a leopard.

In ‘Faces of Nainital: Past and Present’, we run into Corbett, the Bakshis who came from Pakistan, four prominent Parsi families, Mrs. Bastien, the last Anglo-Indian in town, others from the Christian community, the women from the mountains, icons like Sundar Lal Bahuguna, and Shekhar Pathak who has “dedicated his life to understanding the past, present and future of the Himalaya.” He is trekking the same trail for the third time to catalogue the river paths of the Himalaya, “an exercise done every decade to study the impact of climate change over the years.” Digvijay Singh’s illustrations add to this profile of a town’s layered history and culture.

The many raconteurs of the Himalaya, from Peter Matthiessen, Bill Aitken, Ruskin Bond to Anuradha Roy, Namita Gokhale, Manjushree Thapa and Bulbul Sharma, have written about the reality of life in the mountains. In *Himalaya: Adventures, Meditations, Life* (Speaking Tiger), edited by Bond and Gokhale, Bond writes in the Preface that living in the mountains is not a romance for everyone. “Even so, the mountains have become very personal to me, as they have to other writers who have made their homes here [in the Himalaya].” The Himalaya’s foremost teaching? Bond says it’s perhaps humility; “We know that just living, and helping our fellow creatures through life,

is enough; it is greater than any art.”

**Women of the hills**  
The last in the excellent Zubaan series on lives of women in the Northeast features writings from Sikkim and Darjeeling Hills. *Beneath Magnolia Skies*, edited by Mona Chettri and Prava Rai, includes the voices of homemakers, students, teachers, professionals, artists who ask pertinent questions, as articulated by the editors. “As Himalayan women move between tradition and modernity, how do culture, tradition, and patriarchy reconcile with their futures?; What shapes and forms do inequality, violence, and prejudice take? How do culture, politics, and society make them invisible? How do women claim space, agency, and voice within a society that keeps them marginalised?”

Anshu Chettri wonders why we seldom see women loitering around alone, as she goes walking around the Himalayan town of Kalimpong. She relishes her freedom to walk at her own pace. The town made her aware of its struggles like the water scarcity in almost every household.

Talking to *The Hindu* about his book *Himalaya: Exploring the Roof of the World* (Bloomsbury), John Keay said the Himalaya region is a distinct eco-zone and must be protected. Alter is disturbed at seeing hundreds of greater adjutant storks perched on huge piles of burning rubbish on the outskirts of Guwahati. “...the grim birds look like creatures out of an apocalyptic image.”

Learn from the mountains, urges Gokhale. “...what remains in the end is the sense of intimacy, the exhilaration, and yes, the desolation, of these rugged mountains, the ‘self born mockers of man’s enterprise’.”



FROM THE ARCHIVES

## Know your English

**S. Upendran**

“Why the long face? Did your school lose yesterday?”

“Yes. It was so disappointing. We were so close to winning. In fact, we were neck to neck, but unfortunately, we...”

“... you were not ‘neck to neck,’ but ‘neck and neck.’ Do you know what the expression means?”

“I think I do. Doesn’t it mean ‘level’ or something like that?”

“The expression is used when you are talking about a race or a contest of some kind. When you say that the two contestants are neck and neck, it means that neither has the advantage nor the lead. The two...”

“... have equal chances of winning.”

“Exactly! Here’s an example. It’s difficult to say who will win the election. The two candidates are neck and neck with 400 votes each.”

“Gopa and Sal were neck and neck.”

“... ah Gopa! That boy can really run.”

“Yes, he is really fast.”

“But he is dead from the neck up.”

“Dead from the neck up? How can anybody be dead from...”

“... when you say that somebody is dead from the neck up, it means that he/she is really stupid. It’s an informal expression.”

“I see. There are times when I think that some of my cousins are dead from the neck up. Can I say that?”

“I haven’t met too many of your cousins. But I guess your example is O.K. I am sure that many of your friends think that you are dead from the neck up.”

“They would have to be dead from the neck up to think that!”

“My! My! If your friends come to know what you think of them, you will get it in the neck.”

“Get what in the neck?”

“The expression ‘get it in the neck’ means to receive punishment or criticism. For example, I got it in the neck for being late to office this morning.”

“Meaning that your boss scolded you for being late?”

“That’s right!”

“I got it in the neck for breaking the neighbour’s window. Does it sound O.K.?”

“Sounds fine. Here’s another example. Our Accounts Officer is likely to get it in the neck pretty soon.”

“Why? What has he done?”

“He’s been very irregular. He says his daughter is in hospital. But I don’t...”

“... before I forget, did you manage to meet Sujatha yesterday?”

“No, I didn’t. But I did call her up this morning. She sounded terrible. She told me that her nose was gummed up.”

“Her nose was gummed up? You mean that she applied gum to her nose?”

“No, no. When you say that your eyes and nose are gummed up, it means that your eyes and nose are full of mucus.”

“... that sounds terrible. If your eyes are full of mucus, you will have problems opening your eyes.”

“Exactly! And if your nose is ‘gummed up,’ you will have problems breathing. I didn’t call my parents last week because my nose was gummed up.”

“The child was breathing through his mouth because his nose was gummed up. Does that sound O.K.?”

“Sounds fine.”

*Published in The Hindu on October 19, 1998.*

## THE DAILY QUIZ

### A quiz on Indians who have had features on extraterrestrial bodies named after them

**Vasudevan Mukunth**

- QUESTION 1**  
This week, the International Astronomical Union decided that a 3.5-billion-year-old crater on Mars will be named for the first Indian who served as the director of the Geological Survey of India. He was also the first director of the Indian School of Mines. Name him.
- QUESTION 2**  
This Indian physicist from Hooghly district was known for his studies of light under C.V. Raman’s guidance and on radiophysics with Camille Gutton. He was instrumental in including wireless science as a higher education subject in India, and has a crater on the moon’s far side named for him. Who is he?
- QUESTION 3**  
Homi Jehangir Bhabha has a 64-km-wide crater named for him on the moon’s far

- side. The crater is of scientific interest because the impact that formed it penetrated deep into the floor of the basin its located in. Name this famous basin.
- QUESTION 4**  
This astronomer hailed from near present-day Patna in Bihar and is noted for estimating the value of pi with an accuracy high for his time; for his study of Diophantine equations; and for his studies of the epicycles of motion governing the planets, among others. For his efforts, he has both a (human-made) satellite and a lunar crater in the Mare Tranquillitatis. Name him.
- QUESTION 5**  
This physicist born in Varanasi in 1929 was best known for founding and developing the field that uses isotopes produced by cosmic rays, for example, in rocks and ice, to trace rates of erosion, sediment transport, and other planetary processes over long periods. In 2024, a 65-km-wide crater on Mars was named in his honour. Name him.



**Visual question:**  
Name this physicist; a crater named for him on the moon is one of the proposed locations of a future lunar radio telescope.

- Questions and Answers to the previous day’s daily quiz:**
- The date on which the Constituent Assembly first met. **Ans: December 9, 1946**
  - The President of the Constituent Assembly when the Constitution was adopted. **Ans: Dr. Rajendra Prasad**
  - The number of members who signed the handwritten original of the Constitution of India. **Ans: 284 members**
  - The time taken for the Constituent Assembly to draft and adopt the Constitution. **Ans: 2 years, 11 months, and 18 days**
  - The reason why January 26, 1950 is significant in relation to the Constitution. **Ans: It was the date chosen for the Constitution’s commencement, honouring the 1930 Purna Swaraj declaration**
- Visual: Identify the image and its location in the original Constitution. **Ans: The zebu bull, a Mohenjodaro seal from the Indus Valley Civilisation, reproduced at the head of Part I of the Constitution, which deals with the Union and its territories**
- Early Birds:** Siddhartha Viswanathan| Mohan Lal Patel| Suchit Narottam| Erfanally Oosmany| Dodo Jayaditya

## Word of the day

- Esoteric:**  
confined to and understandable by only an enlightened inner circle
- Usage:** *This is a compilation of esoteric philosophical theories.*
- Pronunciation:** newsth.live/esotericpro
- International Phonetic Alphabet:** /iː.səʊˈtɛɪ.ɪk/

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Clash over cars

Proposed CAFE norms for automakers need relook

The proposed Corporate Average Fuel Efficiency (CAFE) norms for 2027-32 have stirred up a debate between two camps of automakers — one led by Maruti and Renault which sells small cars and the other led by Tata Motors and Mahindra which sells more SUVs and EVs. These norms, introduced in FY18, spell out five year targets for auto makers with respect to mileage and carbon dioxide emissions.

The existing standards were introduced in 2022. Broad metrics for fuel efficiency per 100 km and carbon dioxide emissions per kilometre are imputed into a respective automaker’s fleet by means of a formula that uses the average weight of the fleet to arrive at a norm for that company. The formula is such that it ends up favouring large cars — in the sense that the mandated reduction in emissions in percentage terms over time works out to be less than it is for small cars. On this, there is no debate, as the mathematics is clear. The debate is over whether this bias is merited or not. To begin with, the goal of the policy is to promote fuel efficiency, emissions control and transition to EVs. Here, small car makers need to account for their relative disinterest in entering the EV market. That said, these cars are obviously more fuel efficient than large cars by virtue of weighing less and having less powerful engines; they probably deserve relief, given a formula that does not really recognise this and mandates relatively hard targets. Therefore, CAFE 2027 or CAFE 3 proposes a minor relaxation in emission norms for small cars — those below 909 kg and an engine capacity of less than 1200 cc.

While this may not alter the relative disadvantage, small cars will have to invest in cleaning up their act. However, they are wrong in citing ‘affordability’ as an excuse for not doing so, when fuel and emissions efficiency have to be achieved. Big car makers, on the other hand, are equally at fault for citing safety as a factor in their vehicles’ favour – as this too is a digression from the objectives of CAFE norms. Both sides are shifting goalposts here. On the issue of promoting EVs, CAFE 3 is flawed. CAFE 3 (as well as its earlier avatars) offers ‘super credits’ to auto makers for selling hybrids and EVs. A super credit of three for EVs would mean that a sale of one such vehicle would be counted as three. So, a producer of an SUV with poor fuel efficiency, can average that out with the high fuel efficiency count of EVs (megajoules of electricity are converted into fuel used) to meet the mandated norm. Ironically, a high super credit for EVs merely encourages the sale of inefficient large vehicles over EVs, and therefore this must be reduced.

Finally, CAFE norms should be viewed against a larger hierarchy of priorities in transport and energy policy. Broadly speaking, mass transport should be promoted over private vehicles. And, within the private vehicles space, EVs should be promoted over fuel-driven vehicles. Finally, the less energy efficient fuel driven vehicles should be penalised.

POCKET

RAVIKANTH



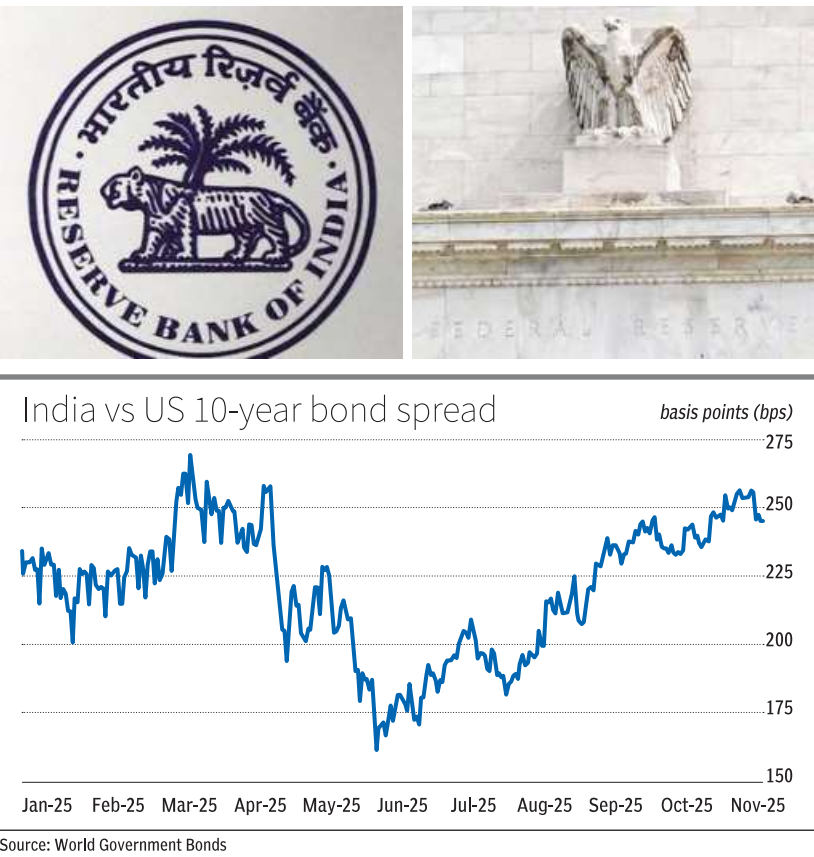
G-Sec yields, and forces at work

TACTICAL SUPPORT. RBI intervention seems to have controlled the rise, but macro forces point to a softening trend



As 2025 draws to an end, a high-stakes battle is underway to keep the yield on India’s benchmark 10-year government security (G-sec) in check. After nearing 6.6 per cent, the yield stabilised around 6.53 per cent in late October — lower than recent peaks, yet still elevated. This figure is essentially the price tag on the nation’s long-term public borrowing, influencing everything from mortgage rates and corporate finance to equity market valuations. But is this stability a sign of market health, or simply the result of unprecedented central bank management? To answer this, we must look at both domestic and global forces shaping the market.

**THE DOMESTIC DILEMMA**  
The current stability is not organic; it is a direct consequence of the RBI’s heavy lifting. This includes tactical interventions like the cancellation of a ₹11,000 crore, 7-year bond auction, and consistent buying activity under the ‘others’ category (like secondary market operations), which signals the central bank’s discomfort and helps cap market pricing. However, this intervention is necessitated by more than just general discomfort; it is driven by structural supply imbalances. The biggest domestic source of current yield pressure is the State Government Securities (SGS) market, where the yield spread over G-Secs has widened from a historical 25-50 basis points (bps) to nearly 100 bps at times. This gap results from States front-loading their borrowing and issuing large volumes of ultra-long-tenure papers (15-30 years), which forces investors to demand higher returns and transmits structural pressure directly to the G-Secs. This dynamic exposes a critical flaw: institutional investors are growing cautious about holding too many long-dated securities due to duration risk. This aversion in the “belly” of the yield curve (the 5-15 years) is precisely what led to the RBI’s cancellation of the 7-year auction. This interventionist approach risks blurring the line between monetary (price stability) and fiscal (debt management) objectives, though the RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra recently notes that measures on primary



G-Sec and SGS tenor are being contemplated to ensure better policy transmission.

**THE GLOBAL ANCHOR**  
Yet, domestic interventions have their limits. India’s yield trajectory is exposed to external forces, notably the US Federal Reserve. The key metric is the spread — the yield difference between India’s G-Sec and the US Treasury — currently around 240-250 bps. This difference is the risk premium investors require to hold Indian debt over safer US alternatives. As illustrated in the Chart, the volatility of this spread throughout 2025 confirms its fragility, climbing back towards 250 bps in the final quarter. This is compounded by persistent US

**Domestic savers have become the market’s anchor (vis-a-vis FPIs), driving stability and providing the RBI with significantly more autonomy in managing the domestic yield curve**

Treasury yields above 4 per cent, which anchor global rates higher, and domestic currency vulnerability, with the rupee hovering near ₹89 a dollar. These risk factors limit the RBI’s room for unilateral policy easing. These macro dynamics have direct consequences for everyday citizens. When G-sec rate drifts up, banks quickly re-price home loans, and households with variable-rate loans face higher EMIs. The Finance Ministry itself has warned that higher bond yields make government borrowing “unaffordable”. On the other hand, the elevated SGS-G-Sec spread creates a marketable opportunity for conservative savers. Because the widening spread is due to supply dynamics rather than default risk (SGS are virtually risk-free), investors can access sovereign-level safety with enhanced returns. For instance, recent SGS auctions have offered yields in the 6.9-7.1 per cent range for 6-9-year maturities — a rate higher than comparable bank deposits. The RBI’s Retail Direct platform now allows individual investors to access these instruments, making the current bond market behaviour an unprecedented, risk-free income opportunity for savers.

**THE PATH FORWARD**  
While the market remains dependent on RBI support, there are signs the yield may genuinely soften. The primary driver is the record-low October CPI, which eased to 0.3 per cent year-on-year in October. Further, there has been a profound shift in India’s capital markets, where the steady surge of domestic household savings is replacing foreign institutional money. Recent data confirms this: FPI ownership in NSE-listed companies dropped to a 15-year low of 16.9 per cent as of September end, while the share of domestic mutual funds (MFs) has been rising sharply. Individual investors now own nearly 19 per cent of NSE-listed entities — the highest in over two decades. The message is clear: domestic savers have become the market’s anchor, driving stability and providing the RBI with significantly more autonomy in managing the domestic yield curve. This increased flexibility has set clear market expectations. It is now anticipated that the 10-year G-Sec yield could thaw towards the 6.40 per cent level before the December MPC outcome, with prospects of declining further to 6.30-6.35 per cent if the anticipated policy easing and a US tariff agreement materialise. However, this potential requires sustained policy commitment. What should policymakers do? First, clarity matters. The RBI must clearly distinguish between durable monetary easing and tactical support operations to anchor term premia. Given its consistent secondary market activity, clear communication is essential to avoid blurring the line between monetary and fiscal objectives. Second, fiscal discipline is essential; the Finance Ministry must deliver on its deficit target, as any perceived slippage will be punished by the market with a higher risk premium. Finally, policymakers must expand the pool of long-term domestic investors in the debt segment, mirroring the success achieved in equities, to further reduce reliance on the volatile foreign portfolio flows. Ultimately, the government and central bank must monitor both the yield level and the spread to the US as twin indicators of bond-market confidence and capital-flow stability, recognising that the long-term solution lies in structural credibility, not reactive, tactical management.

Bhaduri is Professor, and Anand is PhD Scholar, Madras School of Economics, Chennai

Green hydrogen needs blue thinking

The challenge is to produce green hydrogen without depleting water reserves. Using seawater could be a viable alternative

Sovini Mondal  
Sanjib Pohit

It is not often that a single molecule captures the imagination of an entire nation. But hydrogen — the lightest element on Earth — is suddenly carrying the heaviest expectations of India’s clean-energy transition. In global climate conversations, it is no longer a whisper; it is a thunderous promise. As India races to unlock vast renewable capacity and industries chart their decarbonisation paths, green hydrogen is emerging as the fuel that could power factories, clean up refineries, and propel long-haul transport without carbon emissions. At the centre of this vision is the National Green Hydrogen Mission, led by MNRE with support from key ministries, which targets five million tonnes annually by 2030, backed by hydrogen valleys, industrial parks, and electrolyser manufacturing. Confidence is high that India can meet its climate goals and shape global supply chains — yet beneath this excitement lies a quieter, more fragile reality. India’s green hydrogen ambition faces a stark water-energy paradox. Electrolysis demands nearly nine litres of purified water per kilogram of hydrogen, far more when accounting for

cooling and purification losses. Yet, India already extracts one-quarter of the world’s groundwater (more than China and the US combined), with aquifers falling by up to four metres due to subsidised farm pumping. Several States blessed with intense solar radiation — ideal for powering electrolyzers — are simultaneously cursed with extreme water stress. This includes Rajasthan, Gujarat, Odisha and Tamil Nadu. Hydrogen plants are rapidly emerging — from Kandla and Kutch to Gorakhpur, Bikaner, Mangaluru, Thoothukudi, Gopalpur and soon Andhra Pradesh, alongside inland sites in Hisar and Baddi. But geography matters: producing six million tonnes of hydrogen could demand 132-192 million tonnes of water annually, rivalling major cities’ drinking needs. Therefore, the challenge then is not whether India can produce green hydrogen. It is whether it can produce it without taxing the water on which lives and livelihoods depend.

**HYDROGEN WITHOUT REGRET**  
The answer to this dilemma is not to slow the hydrogen mission — but to site it smarter, design it wiser, and power it circularly. Coastal hydrogen hubs can draw seawater rather than freshwater. Global footprints are turning to the ocean to fuel the hydrogen revolution —



TAPPING SEAWATER. A sustainable way to produce hydrogen ISTOCK

from Scotland’s EMEC, which has produced hydrogen from tidal energy and seawater since 2017. Other projects in Australia, Singapore, Norway, and France that integrate seawater electrolysis with offshore renewables. These initiatives demonstrate how coastal and marine energy systems can enable sustainable hydrogen production without depleting scarce freshwater reserves. India should follow these footsteps, creating an innovative method to produce hydrogen from alkaline seawater using low-cost, corrosion-resistant bimetallic catalysts — a breakthrough that circumvents the chloride corrosion typically associated with saltwater electrolysis. A novel

global experiment has demonstrated that replacing the traditional, high-cost metallic positive electrode with a non-metallic, low-cost alternative is feasible. This low-cost, high-performance solution could redefine the future of seawater electrolysis, with the capacity to produce green hydrogen at an industrial level. This would enable India to scale up its coastal hydrogen plants sustainably, transforming its vast shorelines into hubs of green innovation. Scaling such coastal hydrogen systems demands evolved policy: coordinated MNRE-Jal Shakti planning, hydrological budgeting, water-use audits, and incentives for non-freshwater inputs. Ports such as Kandla, Paradip, and Thoothukudi could become hubs for green ammonia exports, while inland plants should rely on treated wastewater rather than groundwater. India’s hydrogen story is a rare convergence of industrial ambition, climate necessity, and geopolitical opportunity. If India pulls too hard on the “hydrogen rope” without easing the “water knot,” the transition risks swapping carbon scarcity for water scarcity.

Pohit is a Professor, and Mondal is a Research Associate at the NCAER. Views are personal

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**Climate finance shortfall**  
This refers to ‘A bank for G20’ (November 26). The writer has lucidly put forth the need to have a separate financial institution for developing and poor countries in meeting their financial requirements relating to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The finance gap under SDG, at \$4 trillion, is burgeoning every year. With rich nations like the US making sudden exits from many global level forums, chances of raising funds or sponsoring activities are getting bleaker. Existing institutions such as the IMF, ADB, AIB, etc., appear to be recovery-centric and assign least priority to the needs of developing

countries. The concept of Multilateral Development Bank, promoted in 2023, is yet to take shape. With this tempo, climate mitigation activities would take a severe beating and continuing the annual Conference of the Parties (COP) would become a mere ritual without achieving any purpose.  
**RV Baskaran**  
Pune  
**Controlling inflation**  
Apropos ‘Exercise caution over rate cuts’ (November 26), inflation control would need deft handling. The first instinct is to hold rates steady while watching domestic prices and global signals. A stable

government with fiscal restraint gives the RBI room to contemplate a gradual 25-50 bps easing. Yet, should pre-election spending promises widen deficits, the rates need to stay tight longer. Keeping inflation expectations anchored while navigating both economic and political cross-currents remains the key challenge for the next two or three quarters.  
**R Narayanan**  
Navi Mumbai  
**Flexibility of work**  
Apropos ‘Flexibility and workers’ rights in a platform set-up’ (November 26), the ruling dispensation cannot afford to turn a

Nelson’s eye to the growing number of unorganised sector workers and their woes as their contribution to the GDP is growing and indispensable. The government’s optimism about the labour codes, to help regulate the unorganised workers and attend to their grievances, is misplaced as it is unable to even address the grievances of the organised workers, who form hardly 6 per cent of the total workforce. That the productivity of the workers and their physical-mental-social well being are closely related to each other is a fact that should be kept in mind.  
**AG Rajmohan**  
Anantapur, AP

**Attracting NRI deposits**  
This refers to ‘NRI deposits dip 40% in H1 as India-US interest gap narrows’ (November 26). Foreign Currency Non-Resident (Bank) deposits play a significant role in enhancing the foreign exchange earnings of India and also strengthening its balance of payments position. The RBI, one feels, should offer better rates of interest for attracting the aforesaid deposits, whose inflows fell 87 per cent y-o-y in the first half of FY26. A one-size-fits-all approach will not work.  
**S Ramakrishnasayee**  
Chennai













## India must choose digital sovereignty or submit to the new, subtle digital raj



**THAROORTHINK**  
BY SHASHI THAROOR

**T**HE TECTONIC plates of global power have shifted. No longer is control over oil fields or naval chokepoints the principal determinant of geopolitical pre-eminence; data is the new currency of the realm. A nation's digital footprint is now the primary source of wealth and the most effective tool of diplomacy. For a burgeoning economic power like India, this reality presents a stark, defining choice. We must navigate a trilemma of digital governance: Digital ascendancy, digital capitulation, or genuine digital sovereignty. Our future prosperity, and indeed our national dignity, hangs in the balance.

The current global digital order is dominated by the digital ascendancy model, wielded almost exclusively by the United States. This model is characterised by the near-total control of the world's fundamental information, data, and financial highways. The weaponisation of this technological hegemony is a demonstrable fact, witnessed in the expulsion of both Iran and Russia from the global financial system, facilitated by control over systems like SWIFT, the international messaging service for financial transactions. For nations outside the Western sphere of influence, this control acts as a Damocles' sword, forcing compromises and pre-empting sovereign action.

India is not immune to this pressure. Our ability to secure cheap Russian crude was curtailed because no company wished to risk the commercial paralysis that being shut out of the dollar-denominated financial architecture would entail. Equally egregious were the pre-emptive concessions made on digital taxation and digital trade, where the subtle but persistent pressure from Western negotiating partners compelled us to withdraw provisions designed to secure revenue from mega-firms operating within our borders. This pervasive pressure underscores a simple truth: The ascendancy model demands acquiescence from the rest, and drives deep, often invisible, inroads into the digital sovereignty of other

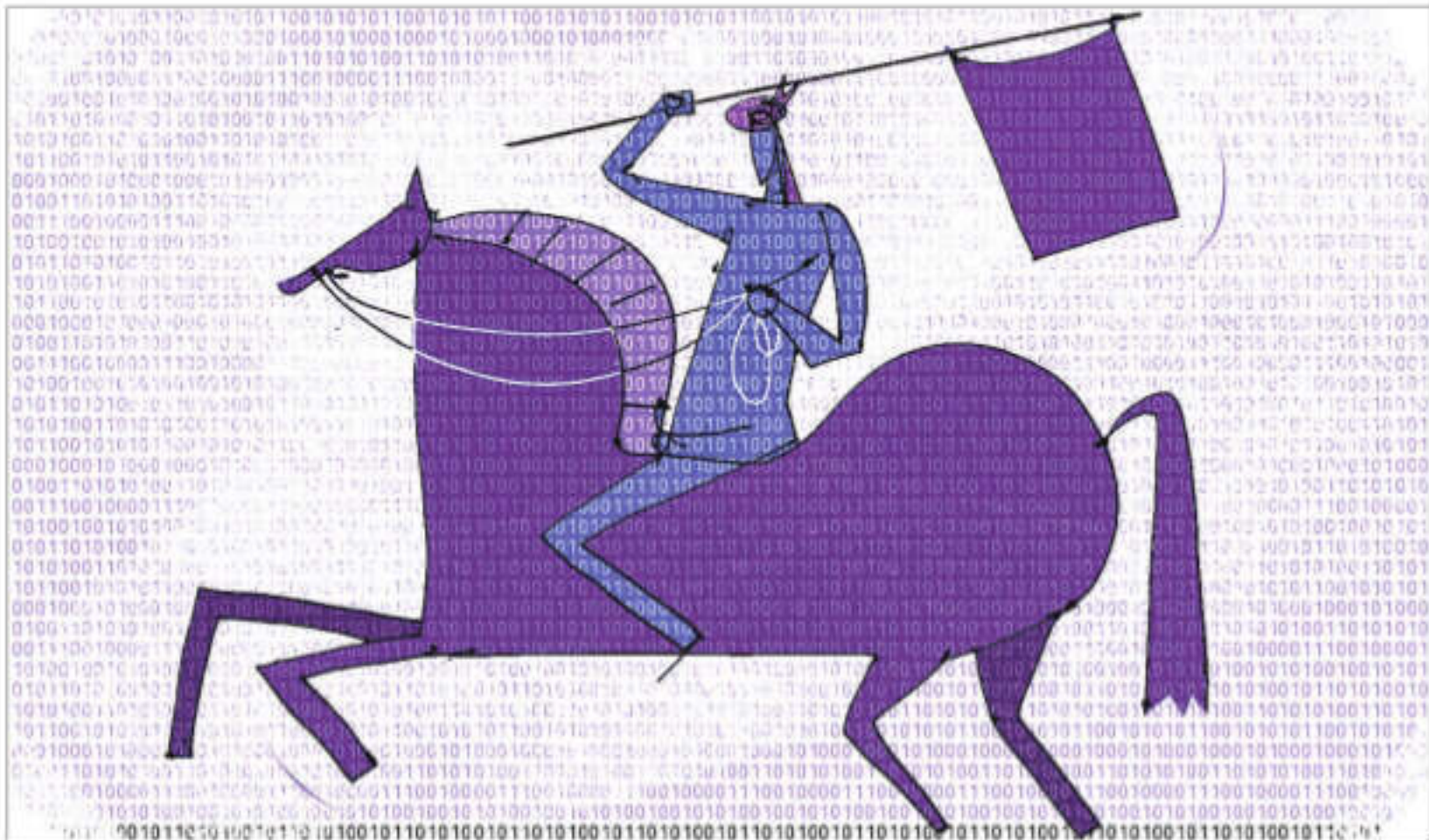


ILLUSTRATION: C.R SASIKUMAR

nations to maintain its status.

This brings us to the second, and arguably most perilous, option for India: Digital capitulation. The recent actions of Indonesia and Malaysia serve as a cautionary tale. These nations, in their haste to secure trade agreements, have traded away digital autonomy for immediate (and often ephemeral) commercial gains. Indonesia, for instance, has committed to an unconditional, permanent moratorium on customs duties on data flows at the WTO and guaranteed the free export of personal data.

Reports suggest that Malaysia, too, has made alarming commitments not to impose digital services taxes, to refrain from discrimination against US digital services, and, most critically, to discard its right to demand access to "US technology, production process, source code, or other proprietary knowledge". These are not mere technical clauses; they are the legal scaffolding that precludes a national digital industrial policy. Further, the commitment to consult with the United States before entering into any digital trade agreement that might "jeopardise US interests" is a clear surrender of national sovereignty over this vital area.

The double standard inherent in these dynamics is evident in the US's forced divestiture of TikTok, demands including mandatory data localisation, majority US

**US mega-firms are deeply entrenched across our national digital landscape and Indian consumers are accustomed to them. The correct approach is not exclusion, but digital industrialisation driven by a strong national policy framework**

ownership in the restructured entity, and US control over the source code — the very provisions that Malaysia has seemingly sacrificed. Clearly, digital trade agreements are not about free trade; they are about cementing digital vassalage.

Self-respecting and self-reliant India must, therefore, resolutely choose the third path: Digital sovereignty. This model involves creating legal and regulatory structures that ensure sovereign control over data exports and unhindered rights to regulate the national digital space. India is a democracy, unlike China; but China's decision to largely exclude Big Tech from its market, while often criticised, provided the fertile soil for companies like Alibaba, Tencent, and Didi to flourish into multi-billion-dollar global entities. Through deliberate domestic procurement and industrial policy, China built a sovereign compute stack, from hardware to cloud services, that today powers a digital economy accounting for an astonishing 40 per cent of its GDP, valued at over \$7 trillion.

Contrast this with India's \$224 billion in software exports. While valuable, this revenue often fails to create the commensurate feedback loops of high-value job creation, sovereign data capital, and proprietary AI development within our own economy. Our exceptional pool of software and semiconductor design engineers has con-

tributed significantly to the creation of trillion-dollar valuations and explosive global growth abroad. Instead of merely pleading for relaxed immigration controls in trade negotiations, we should be leveraging this digital talent as our most powerful negotiating chip to secure our interests.

However, as a democracy with open interactions with the free world, India cannot simply replicate the Chinese model. US mega-firms are deeply entrenched across our national digital landscape and Indian consumers are accustomed to them. The correct approach is not exclusion, but digital industrialisation driven by a strong national policy framework. The notification of the Digital Personal Data Protection Rules—even if some of us may quibble over their details—is a welcome development, ensuring that domestic law prevails over international commitments. Furthermore, the foundations for a sovereign digital future have already been laid through initiatives like the Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI), the Aadhaar system, the India Stack, and strategic focus on AI, semiconductors, and quantum computing.

These indigenous capabilities must be protected fiercely. Any attempt in ongoing free trade agreement (FTA) negotiations to insert clauses that mandate "refraining from adopting or maintaining measures that discriminate against digital services or products of the other party" will be tantamount to digital self-sabotage. Such a commitment would immediately halt every nascent measure currently promoting indigenous digital capabilities, forcing us back into the quagmire of dependency.

India's path to *atmanirbharta* in the digital domain requires a clear, unambiguous stance. We must emerge from negotiations in the category of a truly digital sovereign, empowered to promote our own digital giants and capture the wealth generated by our own data. A flourishing, sovereign digital economy promises to unlock trillion-dollar growth and create millions of high-quality employment opportunities, a necessary bulwark against the looming threat of AI-driven layoffs. The choice is clear: Secure our digital future as a sovereign power, or risk becoming a highly digitised, economically consequential, but ultimately subaltern state under a new, subtle digital raj.

*The writer is MP, Thiruvananthapuram (Lok Sabha) and chairman, Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs, and former Chairman, Parliamentary Committee on IT*

## Temba Bavuma stands tall but we will still short-change him



SANDEEP DWIVEDI

**U**NDER TEMBA Bavuma, South Africa has made history again. After the World Test Championship title, Bavuma has helped his team cross what was once called the "final frontier"—beating India in India. It was a Test where the 5'3" skipper had faced casual heightism on the field and now even in praise there were those who couldn't help but throw what they thought was a smart line: "Smallest player on the field having the biggest heart". This insensitivity is common practice in cricket.

Before leaving England, opener Ben Duckett seemed to have resigned himself to the dispiriting eventuality that awaited him in Australia. "I know what they are going to call me. I've had it my whole life. I only have to stand by the Western Terrace [at Headingley] and the English fans are at me for being small. We'll see how that goes—probably not well," Duckett would tell former England captain and present cricket correspondent at *The Sunday Times*, Michael Atherton. Bavuma, too, might be taking the cricket field with that same not-too-pleasant, "we'll see how it goes...probably not well" feeling. Actually, his trauma is deeper, and longer. In a society with a history of racial discrimination, the 35-year-old, since the time he made sense of his surroundings, would have been brutally made to realise the two big disadvantages he was born with in a racist society: Being Black and being small. For him, skin colour would have resulted in prejudice from birth, height-shaming might have kicked off around adolescence.

Growing up in the Black township of Langa, a Cape Town suburb, Bavuma didn't let taunts or systemic segregation hinder his pursuit of becoming a top batsman. It is where 35 Black people were killed in the 1985 Langa massacre. Bavuma's runs would knock down most hurdles; he would prove to the world that boys from townships aren't born just to run in and bowl fast. They can be graceful batsmen, and more importantly, well-respected and loved leaders of a diverse nation. But still, when the bowler and wicket-keeper are furiously debating a DRS call against him,

wondering if the ball that has impacted the pads would have hit the wicket, with the stump microphone invading the privacy of a team huddle, Bavuma gets referred to as a *bauna*—dwarf in Hindi. This happened during the Guwahati Test.

It can be argued that it wasn't a sledge but an instinctive reference to the batsman's short stature. Many will say it was bad-word selection and not a conscious derogatory utterance. But it is still an irony, make it a tragedy, that the unfortunate event happened in a Test where Bavuma towered over every batsman in the game. It was a match where he added many metres to his stature as a batsman who delivers in big games, but he still couldn't alter his image of a 5'3" male. It is anybody's guess how many more such monumental innings Bavuma will have to play to uncouple his height from his identity. He has been doing this for a while. In 2016, in his seventh Test, he became the first Black South African to score a Test hundred. In the match where England's Ben Stokes called him "absolute shit", there were jokes about his height. When will the world get over its juvenile "*lambu-chhotu*" caricaturing of humans with varying heights?

Research on height discrimination takes one to a fascinating book titled *Shortchanged* by American author Tanya Osensky. It explains the failure of human evolution to wipe out the disturbing tall-short prejudice. Osensky mentions how language has also dutifully chronicled this age-old bias. She writes how "we look up" to those who are tall and attribute positive personality characteristics to them while we ascribe negative traits to those "we look down on". Other casual height-discrimination references have silently snuck into spoken English and stayed there: Shortchanged, getting the short end of the stick, small-minded, and belittling are words that give a whiff of negativity. While a "bigger person", "riding high" and "making it big" are all laudatory attributes in a human.

Sports could have done better; it should have got over heightism long ago. There are enough 5-something legends to prove that greatness isn't the virtue of 6-somethings. Sunil Gavaskar, Sachin Tendulkar, Virat Kohli or Diego Maradona, Lionel Messi, Andres Iniesta—none were ever called tall but they were larger-than-life figures, hailed as Little Masters. Why can't they just be seen as Masters? If age is just a number, why can't height be the same?

*The writer is national sports editor, The Indian Express*  
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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Smartphone addiction

THIS REFERS to the editorial, 'Beginning of the end of the free-range internet era' (*IE*, November 26). Children's growing addiction to smartphones has become a serious concern. Excessive screen time is affecting their mental health, weakening their concentration, and causing behavioural issues. It also harms their physical well-being, disrupts their studies, and hinders their overall growth and understanding. Parents must set clear limits on smartphone usage and ensure that children engage in healthier activities.

*Arshad Bastavi, Mumbai*

### Constitutional values

THIS REFERS to the editorial, 'Constitution's vision of rights was ahead of its time' (*IE*, November 26). As the nation observes November 26 as Constitution Day, we gratefully remember Dr Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, whose unmatched wisdom shaped a Constitution rooted in justice, liberty, equality, and fraternity. He envisioned an India where rulers serve the people, remain answerable to the law, and protect democratic rights. Sadly, today, political behaviour often reflects power struggles, intolerance, and disregard for constitutional ethics.

*Bhoraniya Muhammad, Mumbai*

### What AI can't do

THIS REFERS to the editorial, 'Funny thing about AI: LLM can't LOL' (*IE*, November 26). It rightly highlights that while AI can imitate intelligence and perform extraordinary tasks, it still fails to understand something as simple yet deeply human as humour. As industries rush towards automation, we must protect the value of real human skills and originality, because technology may copy the structure of a joke, but only people can feel the joy in it. For all its power, AI still cannot laugh—and that should reassure us.

*Rachita, Chandigarh*



ANIMA ANJURI

A FEW developments have recently taken place in Indian courts in relation to the right to mental health. First, the Supreme Court in *Sukdeb Saha vs State of Andhra Pradesh* read mental health as an integral component of the right to life and personal liberty. Second, the Delhi High Court overturned an order allowing abortion on the ground of grave injury to mental health in the case of a 16-year-old rape survivor. And third, a PIL was filed before the Punjab and Haryana High Court, praying that Section 3(2) of the Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act, 1971, which states that abortion may be provided on the ground of "grave injury" to mental health, be declared unconstitutional.

Treating mental health as negotiable in case of pregnancy, and treating injury to mental health as imaginary unless medically proven, raises concerns around the failure to respect the right to equality and reproductive justice. This is especially so because data suggests that one in three to one in five women in India suffer from mental health problems during pregnancy and after childbirth. A pregnancy is a health incident and is affected by social determinants like financial stability, nutrition, education, culture, caste and gender-based violence. Viewing

**Needing women to become mentally ill to be able to seek abortion violates their constitutional rights to life and personal liberty, health and dignity. And denying women the opportunity to preserve their mental health violates their right to autonomy and privacy**

mental health in isolation from systemic and cultural issues like son preference, early marriage, intimate partner violence, including marital rape, and contraceptive sabotage undermines its significance in promoting maternal well-being. The issue becomes more layered in cases when a pregnancy is unwanted. Such a pregnancy has a lasting effect on women's physical and mental well-being. While quantifying mental anguish may be difficult, negating its presence in the case of an unwanted pregnancy suggests a lack of sensitivity to women's lived realities.

A 2025 report by the Centre for Health Equity, Law and Policy highlights how, despite judicial recognition of mental health as a state of general well-being, multiple courts deny abortion by citing the absence of mental illness. It highlighted that a substantial number of the cases filed exclusively on the ground of injury to mental health between 2019 and 2024 were denied. This raises concerns around how mental health is perceived by the courts.

The Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act itself requires that a woman's actual or reasonably foreseeable environment should be accounted for to determine whether continuance of a pregnancy would involve risk of injury to health. However, this consideration is often re-

placed with the pathologisation of mental health. Needing women to become mentally ill to be able to seek abortion violates their constitutional rights to life and liberty, health and dignity. And denying women the opportunity to preserve their mental health violates their right to autonomy and privacy. WHO defines mental health as "a state of well-being in which every individual realises his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and can contribute to his or her community". This definition has been relied upon by courts in multiple cases. Therefore, reducing women's mental health to the presence or absence of illness is being blind to a robust understanding of mental health, and is discriminatory.

Recognising mental health as integral to reproductive rights is essential for advancing gender equality and public health. This must begin by challenging the lens of familial ideology through which pregnancies are seen and replacing it with women's lived experiences and autonomy. Safeguarding women's mental health is not merely about permitting abortion; it is about affirming their right to dignity, choice, and the highest attainable standard of health guaranteed under the Constitution.

*The writer is research fellow, Centre for Health Equity Law and Policy, ILS, Pune*

## In Bihar, caste has moved, caste experts haven't



SANTOSH K SINGH

ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS in Bihar this year were preceded by Durga Puja, Diwali and Chhath Puja. Sitting in Delhi, I was curious about who was making the Durga idol this time in my village. Earlier, I was told that the people of the Kumhaar caste, who traditionally did this, had left the occupation. Apparently, the young man who was making the idol this time came from one of the traditionally/erstwhile "untouchable" castes of the village.

His story goes like this: Years ago, he migrated to West Bengal in search of a job, and

ended up in Kumortuli in North Kolkata, famous for idol making. This is where he learnt the skill. As he returned to his village, this man from the Dash-tola, as we used to call it around four decades ago, silently broke the purity-pollution model.

Caste and its structures are intimately tied to this land. Its locality and power relations work in perfect sync. However, things changed with the migration of not just the non-landed castes but also the castes whose dominance stemmed from their ownership of land. The new generation of the land-owning castes preferred the comforts of corporate offices in a distant Bengaluru or Chennai. The rugged, rural and communitarian grid seems to have lost out to the anonymous, private, cosy cocoons in a dis-

tant metropolitan land.

This eventually led to the loosening of the grip of the dominant caste. Caste seems to have left the moribund and straitjacketed ideological framework. This facilitated the caste-neutral possibilities in terms of job opportunities, career op-

**Caste seems to have left the moribund and straitjacketed ideological framework. This facilitated the caste-neutral possibilities in terms of job opportunities, career options and political choices**

tions and political choices.

The Bihar verdict, in this sense, announces the eclipse of caste supremacists. It questions the herd mentality. Herds are predictable. Individuals are experimental, aspirational and logical. The transition from collective to individual identity, particularly in the context of caste, has been undermined or underplayed in our understanding of Bihar. A state long known for the politics of social justice and empowerment of the people on the margins gradually became a fiefdom of a few families. The emancipatory agenda of caste politics was sidelined once the likes of Karpoori Thakur left the stage.

The Bihar verdict calls for a new matrix to examine the role of caste in politics. That matrix must not read rural and urban in bi-

naries, and should factor in the impact of migration, technology, social media and the aspirational new generation of youths, for whom, more often than not, Champaran is about Champaran handi meat rather than Gandhi's satyagraha. The thing is, caste has moved; not the caste experts. They are still doing armchairism and looking at caste through M N Srinivas's Sanskritisation model. The election verdict of Bihar invites the caste specialists to hit the ground and meet the young man who made the Durga idol in this Dussehra in my village in Bihar.

*The writer teaches Sociology at Dr B R Ambedkar University, Delhi. His recent book is The Deras: Culture, Diversity and Politics*



● ENVIRONMENT

# How Delhi’s air quality monitors work, and why their readings can falter

Sophiya Mathew  
New Delhi, November 26

LAST WEEK, the Supreme Court asked authorities to explain whether the equipment used in Delhi air-quality monitoring stations is suited to the city’s conditions. The timing of the question is significant, given Delhi’s heavy reliance on AQI readings to gauge daily exposure to pollution.

The city’s network comprises 40 Continuous Ambient Air Quality Monitoring Stations (CAAQMS), which are compact, temperature-controlled cabins functioning as automated laboratories. Spread across the city for representative measurement, each station must track eight pollutants: PM2.5, PM10, nitrogen dioxide, sulphur dioxide, carbon monoxide, ozone, ammonia and lead.

They operate under Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) guidelines issued in 2012, which specify the principles, calibration steps and quality-control procedures all instruments must follow.

Each air-conditioned, dust-proof station contains racks of analysers, pumps and data loggers, with sampling inlets mounted on a mast above the roof.

## How monitors measure each pollutant

Particulate matter is measured using Beta Attenuation Monitors (BAM), which rely on the beta ray attenuation principle, which measures the concentration of dust by passing a beam of beta rays through a filter and calculating how much the signal is weakened or attenuated by the collected particulate matter. Optical methods are used for gaseous pollutants, considering gases absorb or emit specific wavelengths of light.

These methods are approved under the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) of 2009, which list “gravimetric, wet-chemical (for manual stations) and automatic instrument-based techniques” to ensure comparable data across India.



Air Quality Monitoring Station in Vivek Vihar. SOPHIYA MATHEW

## What affects the accuracy of these readings

AQI quality depends on both equipment performance and the amount of validated data recorded. CPCB requires at least 16 hours of reliable daily data for at least three pollutants, one of which must be PM2.5 or PM10. If instruments shut down due to calibration, power issues or extreme weather, a station may miss this threshold.

A CAG report tabled this year showed that many DPCC stations failed to generate adequate, valid data each month, and several did not measure pollutants such as lead, limiting how complete the AQI picture is on any day. Technical and operational issues can also affect accuracy. High humidity can interfere with particulate monitors, causing particles to absorb water and appear heavier. Instruments may drift if not calibrated frequently enough. Station location matters too: if installed too close to buildings, trees or exhaust vents, distorted airflow can skew readings. Power fluctuations or data-transmission failures can interrupt real-time updates.

## What studies say about accuracy

Recent scientific studies have examined the reliability of particulate measurements in Delhi, including a 2021 analysis of BAM performance under the city’s extreme meteorological conditions. Researchers from CSIR-National Physical Laboratory and AcSIR found that biases in beta gauge readings “vary with ambient high RH (relative humidity), particle mass loading, boundary layer height and ventilation coefficient”.

When relative humidity or RH exceeded 60 per cent, the study noted that more than 30% overestimation was observed. “PM2.5 measurements by beta gauge method show more deviation... leading to high mass concentration”, it said, noting a rise in overestimation in winter and post-monsoon periods.

During high-pollution episodes, the bias could increase “by a factor up to ~5 when particle mass loading also becomes high.” The authors recommended “site-specific correction factor approaches... to get better results of beta gauge monitors,” noting that applying such corrections reduced measurement bias from 46% to under 2%.

The US Environmental Protection Agency’s operating procedure for PM2.5 also notes that “high filter loading can lead to flow perturbations,” meaning excessive particulate accumulation can disturb airflow inside the instrument and destabilise measurements. Such data blackouts occurred at Delhi’s AQI stations on Diwali night (October 20 this year), when pollution spiked suddenly.

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● ECONOMICS

# After cash, what Bihar’s women need from Nitish

Siddharth Upasani  
New Delhi, November 26

NITISH KUMAR took oath as Bihar’s Chief Minister for the 10th time last week, after the National Democratic Alliance’s big victory in the recent Assembly elections.

And while the poll win may have cemented Nitish’s status further in the annals of Indian politics, it also confirmed — if a confirmation was still needed — that cash transfer schemes for women are the go-to political strategy at the state level.

In August, the incumbent Nitish government announced the Mukhyamantri Mahila Rozgar Yojana, aimed at providing financial support to “one woman from every household” across Bihar to start an income-generating activity of her choice.

Under the scheme, a total of Rs 7,500 crore — or Rs 10,000 for 75 lakh women — was deposited into women’s bank accounts in late September, with the promise of more to come. An additional financial support of up to Rs 2 lakh has been promised to those showing good progress in their area of employment.

This is a lot of money.

According to a June paper by Sunaina Kumar, Senior Fellow at the Observer Research Foundation, even small targeted and unconditional cash transfers to women protect them from shocks such as diseases, help better the well-being of their household, improve food security, contribute to the education of children, and promote savings.

All in all, women are empowered. But more is needed in the long run.

“On its own, however, targeted basic income cannot lift women and families out of poverty. For the country to achieve inclusive growth and sustained poverty reduction, cash transfers must be complemented with sustained investments in robust social protection systems and expanded access to employment, education, and skills development — particularly for women,” Kumar wrote.

## Women and work in Bihar

While the intention of the Mukhyamantri Mahila Rozgar Yojana is to improve employment opportunities for women, just handing out a few thousand rupees is not going to achieve the objective given the current dire situation.

According to the latest data from the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) for July-September



Nitish Kumar taking oath as Bihar CM at Gandhi Maidan in Patna last week. RAHUL SHARMA

2025, the Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) for young women (15-29 years) in Bihar was a lowly 8.8% — not just far below the all-India average of 21.4% for women of that age but also the lowest in the country. The next lowest is Uttar Pradesh at 11.2%, with Himachal Pradesh the highest at 44%.

The situation is hardly better if one considers all females aged 15 years and above. Yes, Bihar’s female LFPR does rise considerably to 20.6%, but it remains one of the lowest in the country and well below the all-India rate of 33.7%.

This was just women looking for jobs. What about those who do find work; what do they do?

More than three-fourth — 77.8% — of employed women in Bihar aged 15 years and above worked in the agriculture sector in July-September 2025, significantly higher than the all-India average of 59.1%. Meanwhile, 7.3% worked in the secondary sector, including mining and quarrying, and 14.9% in the tertiary, or services sector. Both these figures are almost half the all-India averages: 14.6% for the secondary sector and 26.3% for services.

The dominance of agriculture for female employment in Bihar is visible in both rural and urban areas.

But surely some employment is better than nothing?

Yes. But the problem is that even with such a low LFPR, women in Bihar have

## What is LFPR?

Labour Force Participation Rate is the percentage of the working-age population that is either employed or actively seeking employment.

rather high unemployment rates. For young women, the unemployment rate is 20.7%, higher than the national average of 17% for that category.

But in urban areas, the female unemployment among young women of Bihar was as high as 52.3% — more than double the all-India rate.

Only Rajasthan, at 53.2%, had a higher urban youth unemployment rate for women.

## Who is creating jobs?

Industry is required to generate jobs. In 2023-24, Bihar had just 3,386 factories, as per the latest Annual Survey of Industries. This was just 1.3% of all factories in the country.

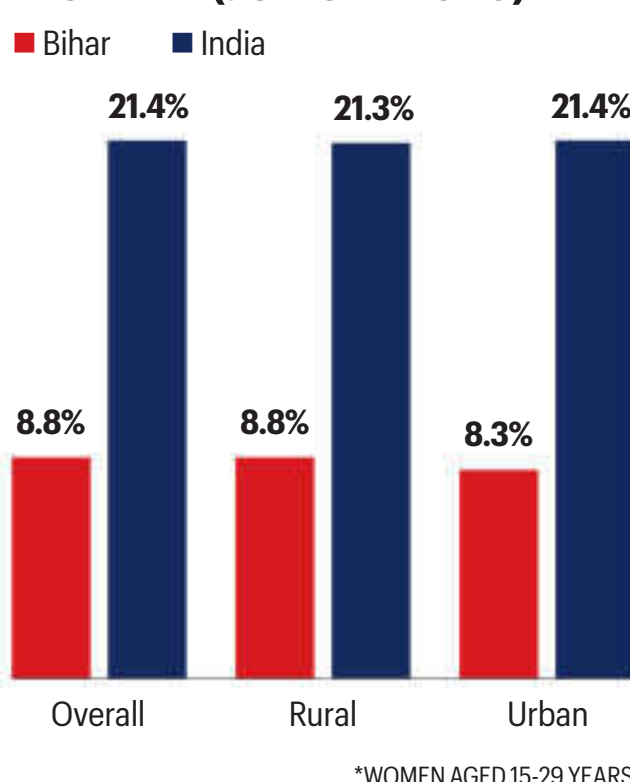
And of the total number of workers employed by the Indian industry, the country’s third-most populous state housed just 1.17 lakh, or 0.75%.

If not industry, what about services, the sector that has powered the rest of the country? Well, it has shrunk in Bihar.

According to MoSPI data, the net value added by Bihar’s services sector reduced as a percentage of the total net state value added to 54.8% in 2024-25 from 61.2% in 2019-20.

The share of the secondary sector (manufacturing, construction, and utilities), meanwhile, rose from 19.2% to 26.6 per cent, while the primary sector (agricul-

## ● LFPR AMONG YOUNG WOMEN\* (JUL-SEP 2025)



\*WOMEN AGED 15-29 YEARS

SOURCE: MoSPI

ture and mining) remained broadly steady around the 19-20% mark.

Cash transfers to women are not going to reverse the industry and services sector trends.

Which is why it is imperative that the fiscal sacrifice of these cash transfers is not in vain. And there has been a massive sacrifice.

## Bihar’s fiscal illusion

States must keep their annual fiscal deficit within 3% of their Gross State Domestic Product. Bihar promised to do so in its Budget for 2024-25. But the revised estimate was an eye-watering 9.2%.

Bihar has promised a fiscal deficit of 3% again in 2025-26. How? By assuming that it’s GSDP — or, its economy — will grow by a massive 22% this year without adjusting for inflation.

It’s worth putting this 22% growth assumption in perspective: Bihar’s economy has never grown by 22% as per the current GDP series. In fact, the highest growth rate of any state in 2024-25 was Tamil Nadu with 14%. Bihar’s GSDP growth has averaged 14.5% over the three years starting 2021-22. Data for 2025-26 is unavailable.

Whatever the growth rate, it will be a tall task for Bihar to achieve its fiscal deficit target. In the first half of 2025-26, the deficit was already Rs 85,814 crore compared to the full-year target of Rs 32,718 crore.

● EDUCATION

# What is Centre’s Bill to constitute single higher education authority

Abhinaya Harigovind  
New Delhi, November 26

THE CENTRE will table the Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) Bill, 2025, which seeks to constitute a single regulatory authority for higher education, in the winter session of Parliament next month. The Bill aims to merge the functions of three statutory bodies — the University Grants Commission (UGC), the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE), and the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE).

The move comes five years after the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 recommended the formation of such a regulatory authority. In 2018, the Centre drafted a similar Bill, which sought to replace the UGC with the HECI. However, it faced pushback and got stalled.

## The proposed HECI

According to officials, the latest Bill is likely to follow the recommendations of NEP 2020. The NEP proposed a single overarching regulator that would subsume the functions of the UGC, AICTE, and NCTE.

While the UGC regulates higher education, the AICTE oversees technical education in engineering and management, and the NCTE sets standards for teacher education.

The NEP proposed four verticals under HECI: the National Higher Education Regulatory Council to regulate all fields except medical and legal education; the National Accreditation Council as an accrediting body; the General Education Council to frame learning outcomes; and the Higher Education Grants Council for funding.

“Each vertical in HECI will be an independent body consisting of persons having high expertise in the relevant areas... HECI itself will be a small, independent body of eminent public-spirited experts in higher education,” said the NEP 2020. However, officials say funding decisions are likely to remain with the government.

The HECI aims to reduce red tape and help higher education institutions become independent, self-governing institutions. Pointing to the “heavy-handed” nature of the current system, NEP 2020 said, “The mechanistic and disempowering nature of the regulatory system has been rife with very basic problems, such as heavy concen-

## Reviving 2018 attempt

● The Bill seeks to set up a single regulatory authority for higher education in India. It will merge the functions of the UGC, NCTE and AICTE.

● A similar Bill was proposed in 2018. However, it got stalled after critics said the Bill would lead to centralisation of power and over-regulation.

trations of power within a few bodies, conflicts of interest among these bodies, and a resulting lack of accountability.”

## The 2018 Bill

The previous Bill from 2018 envisioned a commission replacing the UGC with an HECI that would comprise a chairperson, vice-chairperson, and 12 members appointed by the Centre. Since this version did not subsume AICTE and NCTE, their chairpersons were to be HECI members.

However, the Bill did not empower HECI to disburse funds, leaving that with the then Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD). The commission’s tasks included laying down standards for institutions to award degrees and granting autonomy. It also proposed an advisory council headed by the HRD Minister, with heads of state higher education councils as members.

## Concerns about the HECI

After the draft of the 2018 Bill was released for feedback, it faced pushback as critics argued that the Bill would lead to centralisation of power and overregulation. Critics also raised concerns about the

HECI’s composition, limited stakeholder representation, and the transfer of UGC’s financial powers to the MHRD.

In a letter to PM Narendra Modi, then CPI(M) general secretary Sitaram Yechury said there was “not even a token representation of representatives from disadvantaged sections like women, dalits, adivasis, backward castes, minorities or persons with disabilities in the composition of the Commission, while the Industry and Commercial sector has been singled out as a stakeholder and included in the composition.”

In February, a Parliamentary Standing Committee, headed by Rajya Sabha member Digvijay Singh, said the 2018 Bill could leave state universities caught between national and state-level regulations.

“The draft HECI (which seeks to replace UGC as a single regulator) appears to perpetuate many of these same issues by maintaining a Central Government-heavy composition and insufficient State representation,” the committee said. It added, “The Committee observes that the multiplicity of regulators leads to inconsistency in standards and monitoring, making it difficult for institutions to function effectively.”

## 2 THINGS TO KNOW

# Hayli Gubbi eruption: Why some volcanoes eject lava, others spew smoke and ash

AFTER LAYING dormant for 12,000 years, the Hayli Gubbi volcano in northeastern Ethiopia erupted on Sunday, spewing thick plumes of ash and gases many kilometres into the sky.

Contrary to popular imaginations of volcanic eruptions, all volcanoes do not eject streams of glowing, molten lava. The nature of an eruption is determined by the viscosity of the magma and its dissolved gas content.

Hetu Sheth, Professor, Department of Earth Sciences at IIT Bombay, told *The Indian Express*, “In case the magma is poor in silica, it is more fluid in nature that allows the volatiles to easily escape as opposed to silica-rich magma, which keeps the volatiles trapped.”

The silica content of the magma determines its viscosity, that is, how “sticky” or “runny” it is. “Runny” magma is associated with more gentle, effusive eruptions where lava simply flows or oozes out of a volcanic vent.



Hayli Gubbi erupting, November 23, AP

Sticky, silica-rich magma results in explosive, ash-heavy eruptions. “The explosive nature of any volcanic eruption indicates the accumulation of gas-rich volatiles and pressurisation that has reached the breaking point, leading to a sudden blast. In such cases, the fragmented magma (tephra) gets ejected instead of flowing lava,” Dr Sheth said.

ANJALI MARAR

# How November 26 came to be celebrated as India’s ‘Constitution Day’

ON NOVEMBER 26, 1949, the Constituent Assembly adopted the Constitution of India, which came into effect on January 26, 1950. While January 26 is celebrated as Republic Day, since 2015, November 26 has been observed as the Constitution Day of India, or Samvidhan Divas.

In May 2015, the Union Cabinet an-

nounced that November 26 would be observed as Constitution Day to promote “constitutional values amongst citizens”. That year also marked the 125th birth anniversary of BR Ambedkar, the Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Constitution.

“This year, the country is celebrating 125th birth Anniversary of Dr. B.R. Ambedkar. The ‘Constitution Day’ will be a part of these year-long nationwide celebrations. This will be a tribute to Dr. Ambedkar, who played a seminal role in the framing of the Indian Constitution as the Chairman of the Drafting Committee of Constituent Assembly,” a Press Information Bureau release said in 2015.

The move was formally notified on November 19, 2015. Before that, November 26 was observed as National Law Day. Ambedkar was also the first Law Minister of India.



The Constitution Day celebration at Samvidhan Sadan in New Delhi on Wednesday. ANI



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A thought for today

Fame doesn't fulfill you. It warms you a bit,  
but that warmth is temporary

MARILYN MONROE

Fault In Our Stars

Another study shows stardom can shorten lifespans,  
but the culprits are still bad choices and stress

In the words of a famous American artist, we were all going to be world-famous for 15 minutes. Fifty-seven years on, the quote's paternity is disputed, and even two minutes of fame on social media remains a mirage. Meanwhile, new research is giving us pause, because stardom can seemingly shorten lifespans significantly. The study's German authors picked up the '2,000 Artistes of All Time' list and found these singers only live to 75, on average, but their less famous peers make it to 79. The actual un-rounded difference is 4.6 years. That means, being a very famous singer can be as bad as smoking.

This confirms what another study posited in 2013 – that a public career tends to shorten your time on Earth. Instead of looking at singers, Australian researchers had then analysed 1,000 *NYT* obituaries – the assumption being that you have to be famous to earn a posthumous mention in *NYT*'s pages. They found that actors, singers, musicians and sportspersons lived to 77, on average. Famous writers, however, managed to touch 79, which is a sobering reflection on the nature of writerly fame. Academics, historians and economists – who can't fill a classroom, never mind stadiums – averaged 82. Moral: boring is safe.

So, should you stay away from the kind of virality that's earned from stand-up acts and singing on YouTube, Instagram, etc? It's hard to say because, in 2001, when today's social media stars were toddlers, researchers made a contradictory finding. They compared all 762 nominees for an Oscar (until then) in a leading or supporting role with 887 of their cast members of the same sex and age. And they found that Oscar winners outlived the others by 3.9 years, on average.

The golden mean, then, would be to play, sing, act as you like on social media, only being very careful – as a 2007 study said – for 25 years after you become famous. Because that's when life spirals out of control under the influence of drinks, drugs, stress, and other questionable life choices. Even better would be to do your thing without courting success or fame at all. It's a timeless idea from a timeless text – Gita.

Seeing Is Not Believing

AI-generated visuals should be identifiable  
as such. Fiction is fun, fake news is poison

The so-called \$1tn club has been going walkabout together the past week. In one image, Elon Musk, Satya Nadella, Mark Zuckerberg, Sundar Pichai, Jensen Huang, Sam Altman, Tim Cook, and Jeff Bezos are shooting the breeze in a lux parking lot. In another, at a frat house. There are trademark tees and leather jackets and hands in pockets. There's definitely a masters of the universe vibe – whether it be a grand redemption or ruination that they are planning. But, but, but...none of this ever happened. These are AI-generated visuals.

When these drop anonymously into our feeds, some people consume the images critically, checking for a match with what they know of the real world. Others take it all in at face value.



Humans have, after all, always made sense of life through this precept: Seeing is believing. No more. Great leaps in AI tech have put the ability to 'cook' reality in all our hands. For many of us, it's a fab creative legup. But this doesn't at all mean that collapsing fiction and non-fiction genres is OK. We are not OK with disinformation, erosion of trust, rage baiting. And evermore convincing AI outputs rapidly increase its malicious capacity. A recent example is how Aishwarya Rai's humanist speech about there being only one religion, the religion of love, was swamped by its horribly distorted version.

Platforms need to be marking AI-generated content as such. In public interest. Newspapers do this. But tech bros have for too long kept making excuses. Watermarks can be removed, metadata can be stripped, whine and whimper. Nobody is fooled. If you can make Cleopatra walk around modern Egypt and the manosphere's Jake Paul give makeup lessons, you can call out the AI content your AI algorithm is making viral. It's notable how AI tools are more wary of twerking lawsuit-ready Taylor Swift and Travis Kelce, than Modi and Trump. Left to themselves, AI companies could even end up making truth a luxury product. They have flirted with ideas like making AI images identifiable for 'free' creators, but not paying ones. Authenticity is precious to all and must remain available to all.

COPs and robbers

Pollution-solution? We haven't the foggiest

Bachi Karkaria



What's that Zohrabai Ambalewali golden-oldie? *AQI-aan mila ke, /Stubble Jala ke, /Chaley nahin jana?* Looks like Mumbai and Dilli are playing catch-up, catch-up. FOMO Mumbai is determined to match Dilli's air quality – or lack of it. *Ouff*, how we can do one-SPMship if sea breeze is blowing away our stockpile of vehicular emissions. Don't worry, we will add more-more highways so more-more cars can worsen our 'Very Poor' status.

What you are thinking, Dilli-ji? You have crude stubble burning, we have sophisticated engines combusting. To that add the dust thrown up (and trees cut down) by the crazed construction activity. So what if 'building for tomorrow' might well ensure that there will be no tomorrow? Forget ecology. Remember Bill-bhau's 'It's the economy, stupid.'

However *saddi* Dilli still beats *amchi* Mumbai because it has more political avenues for fouling the air. Ruling party fogs up commission and omission with emission of hype and rhetoric. Opposition goes better. It keeps adding SPM: suspended parliamentary matter.

Recent COP30 reminded us how bad AQI heats up the planet through pollutants. It also reminded me how much our politicians contribute to climate change. Party fossils have always fuelled regression; often with surprisingly renewable energy. Now, thanks to above-mentioned SPM, there's no 'sustainability' of parliamentary discussion; instead, spewed invective further degrades the atmosphere. As a result our netas have achieved net-zero. Naturally India would praise 'adaptability' at the COP30 conference. That's what all our turncoats are so good at.

We have high levels of greenhorn gassers inside Sansad Bhavan. *Achha*, newcomers are still learning that words speak louder than actions, but political 'grey-horns' have always been better at gassing. In both cases, verbal flatulence makes up for the lack of 'factulence'. Yes, *ji*, political climate change is *pucca* needed, else democracy will hurtle into a bozone hole.

True, all are susceptible, but one party especially seems to suffer most wheezing over 'poor heir quality'.

\*\*\*

Alec Smart said, "How about a statutory warning against  
'overprocessed people' laden with preservatives and aura-tives?"



Labour's Still Not Decoded

Two reasons new GOI rules for factory hiring won't produce full impact: retrenchment is still  
constrained by firm size & too much bureaucracy will be involved in deciding multiple minimum wages

Neeraj Kaushal



Professor of  
Social Policy

Pundits have pronounced the four new labour codes, notified by Centre last week, 'revolutionary'. Several trade unions have instinctively marked them anti-labour and vowed to carry out nationwide protests in response.

Both are over-reacting. Surely, notifying labour codes five or six years after enactment cannot be greeted as revolutionary. Surely, if 19 state govts have already increased the threshold of retrenching workers without central govt permission to firms with less than 300 workers from the earlier threshold of firms with less than 100 workers, notifying the same provision under the Industrial Relations Code cannot be revolutionary. 'Finally!' sounds like a more appropriate reaction.

Trade union leaders: note that the sky has not fallen with implementation of Industrial Relations Code in 19 states. Save your rancour and aggression for more important causes, otherwise, the public will start calling trade unions anti-jobs and anti-labour.

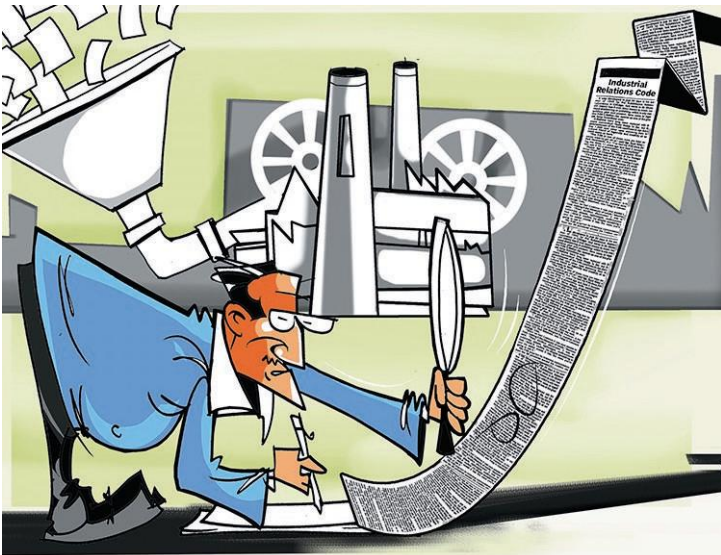
Basing the Industrial Relations Code on retrenchment on firm size creates massive distortions. First, it incentivises companies not to hire. They instead prefer to remain 'dwarf'. In India, according to the Annual Survey of Industries data, 81% of all factories hire less than 100 workers and almost 90% hire fewer than 200 workers. Second, threshold-linked restrictions discriminate against companies that hire more workers.

Under the old rules, employers hiring fewer than 100 workers could sack all their 99 workers, but employers who hired more than 100 workers had to seek permission to sack a single employee – and you can forget that this permission would ever be granted easily. Yet, even the new 'revolutionary' limit of 300 workers is too low. Even if it encourages firms that chose to remain below the old threshold to increase their hiring up to the new threshold, they would remain 'dwarf' compared to their competitors in other countries.

This begs the question: why should retrenchment policies – or other policies for protecting workers – be based on firm size? Firing a single worker in large

companies is not a managerial choice, but an issue of public interest where govt permission is mandatory. No wonder more industries want to either hire contract workers or set up multiple entities, each below the permitted threshold size.

One positive aspect of the new code is that it allows state govts to raise the firm size threshold above the national threshold. It offers states an opportunity to become really revolutionary if they want to attract investment. So, for now, let's reserve the 'revolutionary' tag for state govts that have the courage to increase, or even eliminate, the threshold.



There are aspects of the new labour code that are poor economics and retrograde policy practice. Take the Code on Wages, 2019. The PIB release says: "Appropriate govts will determine minimum wages considering workers' skill levels (unskilled, skilled, semi-skilled, and high-skilled), geographic areas, and job conditions such as temperature, humidity, or hazardous environments."

Seriously? How many minimum wages will each state or city have? Four skill categories with six types of job conditions – high temperature versus low temperature, high humidity versus low humidity; and hazardous versus non-hazardous conditions.

That adds up to 24 minimum wages in every city or state. Since the new code will cover the entire labour force, someone will have to categorise occupations into skill categories. Who will determine 'hazardous conditions' across sectors, occupations, industries and geographies? And who will monitor the multiple minimum wages that 'appropriate govts' are going to set up at the factory level?

Far from improving ease of doing business, if the wage code is actually implemented, it will add multiple layers of govt interventions. But most importantly, the question we should be asking is, is it Centre's job to set wages across skill categories and industries? Will the Code on Wages, 2019 create a new Inspector Raj?

Multiple minimum wages defy the purpose of a minimum wage, which should be easy to implement and it should ensure that no one is hired at exploitatively low wages. It is clearly a subjective choice, but generally societies should choose a minimum wage that is close to the entry wage for unskilled workers who have no experience. If properly implemented, it will ensure that the minimum wage will not act as a disincentive to hire. Let the market determine wages across skills and labour markets.

The key issue in judging the new labour codes is will they nurture an environment conducive to the growth of labour-intensive industries in the formal sector? Many have commented that the Employees' Provident Fund provisions of the new codes will raise the operational costs of hiring workers. That may likely have a dampening effect on creating new jobs. True, flexibility of retrenchment, simplification of the codes, and reduction in returns and licences will lower the cost of new hires, and in turn increase hiring. Yet, the overall impact is more likely to be negative than positive. Hold your cheers.

The writer teaches at Columbia University

28 Ways To Not Ensure Lasting Peace In Ukraine

Trump's plan puts Kyiv in a tight spot. While a modified version may be better for Ukrainians,  
core dangers will remain if a frozen conflict is enforced without real security guarantees

Svitlana Kovalchuk



Columnist  
based in Kyiv

The past several days have turned a secretive 28-point "peace plan" for Ukraine into a fast-moving diplomatic game. What began as a US-branded peace framework now looks more like a multi-actor struggle over who gets to define "peace" and at what price for Ukraine.

The 28-point plan was drafted around Nov 19 and circulated within the Trump administration as a basis for negotiations between Russia and Ukraine. The main elements, as journalists and leaked texts described them, included territorial concessions, neutralisation and limits on Ukraine's army, security guarantees of unclear strength, reintegration of Russia, elections and amnesties.

A Russian wish list

On Nov 20-21, media outlets reported that Trump had pressed Zelenskyy to accept the plan by Thanksgiving. Zelenskyy warned that Ukraine had been placed in an impossible position – sign a deal that sacrifices dignity and territory, or refuse and risk damaging ties with the one partner whose support is essential for survival.

European and Ukrainian officials denounced the 28-point proposal as a de facto Russian wish list. On Nov 22, US secretary of state Marco Rubio called US senators in Halifax, stressing that the text was not an official US plan – it had come from the Russian side and was simply passed on via a US channel. Yet, within a day Rubio reversed course, writing on X that the proposal was "authored by the United States...based on input from the Russian side and...Ukraine."

Europe draws its own red lines

Europe reacted quickly. On Nov 23, UK, France and Germany released an updated counter-proposal that follows the US plan point by point but tries to resolve many of its most problematic parts. Territorial talks would start only after a ceasefire and

from the current line of contact. Ukraine's peacetime army cap is raised. The clause freezing Nato enlargement is removed, keeping future membership open. Security guarantees would take the form of a US commitment "similar to Article 5", rather than a purely political pledge.

For Kyiv, Europe's move mattered: it showed that major EU capitals were ready to push back against provisions harmful to Ukrainian sovereignty. The real test, however, is whether they have enough leverage to ensure those red lines hold when negotiations intensify. For Ukraine, giving up the eastern Donbas region is simply not acceptable. Any territorial negotiations must start from the current line of contact, and that too after a ceasefire. Agreeing to Russian demands on this would be suicidal for Ukraine, as it would effectively create a Russian fortress on Ukrainian soil, laying the foundation for a future Russian offensive. Note also that Russia still doesn't occupy all of Donbas.

A tactical reset

On Nov 23-24, US, Ukrainian and European officials met in Geneva, Switzerland. Rubio, US army secretary Dan Driscoll and envoy Steve Witkoff sat down with a Ukrainian delegation led by presidential chief of staff Andriy Yermak.



Calvin & Hobbes



The Inner Battle Between Mind And Intellect

Jaya Row

The Gita is not just a scripture of bygone ages; it is a scientific manual that helps manage the most sophisticated equipment known to humankind – the inner personality. It enables you to attain the three things every person longs for: material success, inner happiness, and growth to your potential. Prosperity and happiness often seem mutually exclusive. And tapping into your potential seems like a far cry. Gita seamlessly blends all three to make for a fulfilling life.

Within each of us, an inner battle is constantly raging – between the mind and the intellect, between impulse and clarity. The heart urges you to hit the snooze button; the head nudges you towards your morning exercise. The mind tempts you to the dessert counter; the intellect directs you to the salad bar. This conflict has existed

since time immemorial. Which one do you follow? While it is enticing to follow the mind, it invariably leads you up the garden path. On the other hand, the intellect seems to take you to boring avenues. Who wants to study when a captivating movie beckons? Is there a way to have your cake and eat it, too?

Gita provides the answer: strengthen your intellect. Pass every impulse through the filter of the intellect. A powerful intellect doesn't deprive you of enjoyment – it guides you to enhanced gratification. The intellect will analyse the situation at most times but caution you when it comes in the way of your own interests. For instance, it is perfectly okay to party after an important exam but not the day before! However, when the

mind overpowers the intellect, you sacrifice a lifetime of happiness for a few hours of indulgence.

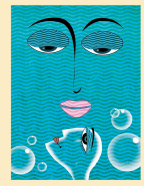
The next essential ingredient for success is a calm mind. A quiet mind sharpens the intellect, enabling brilliant action. When the mind is agitated, even the most learned person fumbles.

What disturbs the mind? Obsession with oneself. Think of yourself, and you are agitated. Unchecked desire is the root of sorrow, intensified today by relentless marketing and advertising. Only a vigilant intellect can keep desire in check. Shift your focus from taking to giving, from profiteering to contributing. Feel grateful for all that you have been blessed with, not one or two things you do not have. When the mind is serene, excellence flows naturally. Gita speaks of *perfection in action*, born of selflessness.

Self-centredness leads to mediocrity. The most successful people were inspired by higher goals beyond self. Don Bradman did not play for money but for the sheer love of the game. Ustad Bismillah Khan was totally dedicated to music. Rabindranath Tagore did not seek the Nobel Prize. When you understand that your talent is a gift bestowed on you by a divine Force, you offer your actions in thanksgiving to the very entity. This makes for Perfection. Then you achieve the impossible.

The highest teaching of Gita is the vision of oneness. Open your heart to the power of unity when the illusion of separateness seems more real. Feel the divine energy within you reflected in everyone around you. Then all feelings of separateness vanish. Unity transforms drudgery to revelry. It builds powerful teams, multiplies happiness, and helps you grow into a towering personality.

Sacredspace



The love of the Spirit, is an all-consuming love. Once you have experienced it, it shall lead you on and on in the eternal realms. That love will never be taken away from your heart. It shall burn there, and in its fire, you shall find magnetism of Spirit.

Paramhansa Yogananda



## The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

### Arunachal row

China shows its true colours yet again

THE harassment of an Indian citizen at the Shanghai airport is an ominous sign. It indicates that India-China relations will continue to face headwinds despite the recent thaw. Prema Wangjom Thongdok, a UK-based woman, was detained by the Chinese immigration authorities during a transit halt and told that her Indian passport was invalid. The pretext was her place of birth, Arunachal Pradesh. Her 18-hour ordeal came to an end when Indian officials came to her rescue. The provocative move was in sync with Beijing's oft-repeated claim that Arunachal, which it calls Zangnan or South Tibet, is part of its territory. New Delhi has repeatedly asserted that the border state is an integral and inalienable part of India, but that has not deterred China from riling its neighbour.

The unsavoury incident comes barely a month after India and China resumed direct air travel, ending a five-year break in an apparent bid to normalise bilateral ties. The flights are expected to boost tourism, business and people-to-people contact. However, the Thongdok case shows that everything is not hunky-dory. Trust deficit persists. China has not helped matters by renaming places in Arunachal time and again. This was last done in May, when India-Pakistan tensions were running high following the Pahalgam terror attack and Operation Sindoor. It was nothing but a mischievous step by Beijing to please and reassure its close ally Islamabad.

China's brazen assertion that it does not recognise the "illegally established" Arunachal is an affront to India's sovereignty. The lesson for Delhi is that it should keep a close watch on Chinese activities and proactively counter their propaganda. There is no scope for the Indian armed forces to let down their guard along the Line of Actual Control. It's obvious that China is in no mood to resolve the long-festering border dispute. Delhi must not rush headlong into commitments and deals with Beijing. The US-China truce gives India another reason to play the waiting game.

### A disturbing trend

Protect Punjab kids from Pak drug lords

PUNJAB'S border belt is witnessing a disturbing and deeply immoral turn in India's enduring fight against narcotics with Pakistan-based drug cartels increasingly recruiting minors as couriers. This is not a minor trend but a dangerous escalation that exploits technological shifts, legal gaps and, above all, the innocence of children. Teenagers from Amritsar, Tarn Taran, Ferozepur and Fazilka — many from families in economic distress — are being lured with a few thousand rupees, a smartphone, or, more insidiously, free drugs.

The teenagers' task is simple but perilous: retrieve drone-dropped packets of heroin or, in some cases, illegal firearms. Their clean records make them nearly invisible to law-enforcement authorities; their age makes them disposable to handlers sitting safely across the border. These children are victims, not 'young criminals'. They are soft targets trapped in a criminal system designed across the border and enabled by vulnerabilities within our own systems. The Juvenile Justice Act is meant to reform and protect minors, but its spirit is being weaponised by organised networks that bank on lenient consequences.

India cannot counter 21st-century smuggling with 20th-century reflexes. Occasional arrests, sporadic raids and polite warnings are woefully inadequate. The response must match the scale of the threat. Border surveillance requires urgent modernisation. Schools, panchayats, community leaders and civil society must build early-warning systems to identify grooming attempts. Parents need awareness; communities need vigilance; and at-risk youth need better education, skills and financial support to address the vulnerabilities that cartels prey upon. This use of minors is an assault on Punjab's social fabric and India's security. It threatens to trap a generation in cycles of crime, addiction and stigma. The vulnerable children must be protected from becoming the courier boys for foreign drug lords.

ON THIS DAY...50 YEARS AGO

## The Tribune.

CHANDIGARH, THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 1975

#### Sweet incentives

HIGHER production of such an essential commodity as sugar is an unexceptionable objective, but opinion will differ on whether the liberal incentives just announced by the Central Government were really indicated at this juncture. The gesture would tend to create the erroneous impression that the sugar industry has been facing difficulties, including financial losses, and that the production has not picked up to the requisite degree for one reason or another. The fact is that the sugar magnates, accustomed as they are to substantial profits, raise a hue and cry whenever their net returns fall below their expectations. They exaggerate their problems and at times even deny the legitimate dues of the cane growers as fixed by the government. But it would be unfair to the cane growers and the vast body of consumers if the authorities accept the mill owners' contentions, for political or other extraneous reasons. In UP for decades there has been a powerful sugar lobby which has managed somehow to mould the viewpoints of leading politicians of various hues and secure concessions through them. In Bihar and Maharashtra also, sugar manufacturers have played a significant role in regional politics. Moreover, sugar production during the last two seasons has been much in excess of the normal. There has been no significant indication either of cane growers switching over to other crops or of new hurdles in mill owners' plans for expansion, or of entrepreneurs feeling reluctant to establish new plants. The costs of production and machinery have risen sharply, but this is true of all industries and all branches of agriculture.

# Junk food needs a strong policy dose

Industry keeps subverting regulation through lobbying, marketing and public relations



DINESH C SHARMA  
SCIENCE COMMENTATOR

THE *Lancet*, a leading medical journal, has published a series of research papers on the rise of ultra-processed food, commonly referred to as junk food, in human diets and how this is undermining public health and giving rise to chronic diseases as well as widening health inequalities.

Most food items we consume undergo some amount of processing — wheat is processed to make *atta*, and rice and *dal* are milled to make them ready for cooking or preservation. The problem arises when agricultural commodities are ultra-processed in industrial factories, packaged, branded and marketed as healthy or natural.

Traditionally used methods of processing and preserving food like drying, chilling, freezing, pasteurisation, fermentation, baking and bottling largely keep intact the natural structure of food and enhance its durability and palatability. On the other hand, ultra-processing methods chemically modify food components, combining them with additives to produce ready-to-consume or long-lasting products. Examples of such ultra-processed food include sugary drinks, packaged snacks, potato chips, instant noodles, reconstituted meat, certain breakfast cereals and flavoured yoghurt.

High consumption of such products pushes out fresh or minimally processed food from diets and increases the risk of obesity, heart disease, diabetes and other health conditions. These products are also hamming planetary health. Their production and transportation involves massive amounts of fossil fuels, and the packaging, mostly plastic, creates waste.



ALARMING: There is mounting evidence linking high consumption of junk food with lifestyle diseases. ISTOCK

The *Lancet* series has analysed evidence from several studies to show that long-established dietary patterns are being displaced by ultra-processed food globally, and this trend is rapidly spreading to regions where junk food is not yet dominant. Second, available evidence strongly supports the observation that exposure to the ultra-processed dietary pattern broadly degrades diet quality. Third, the accumulated evidence shows that the displacement of long-established dietary patterns by ultra-processed food is a key driver of the escalating global burden of multiple diet-related chronic diseases.

Given such mounting evidence linking high consumption of junk food with the rising trend of lifestyle diseases, why are policymakers and governments slow in acting? It is because the junk food industry is so powerful and well entrenched that it keeps subverting regulation and policy-making processes through lobbying, marketing and public relations.

The data presented in *The Lancet* series is mind-boggling. In 2024, three top food corporations — Coca-Cola, PepsiCo and Mondelez — spent a combined \$13.2 billion on advertising. This is almost four times the operating budget of the World Health Organisation. Junk food marketing is aimed at influencing cultural preferences to generate

Junk food marketing is aimed at influencing cultural preferences to generate demand and normalise the consumption of unhealthy products.

demand and normalise the consumption of unhealthy food. Their global manufacturing and marketing provide junk food companies their political muscle. For instance, Coca-Cola produces 2.2 billion daily beverage servings across 200 markets, supplied by 200 partners operating 950 bottling plants. Companies leverage such vast networks to influence government policy decisions by threatening to relocate jobs, investments or input sourcing.

Public health experts have identified the industry's corporate political activity as the most important barrier to the implementation of effective public policies to reduce harm linked to

ultra-processed food. The tactics used by the food giants are similar to those employed by the tobacco, alcohol and fossil fuel industries. Their objective is to counter opposition and block regulation, and they do so through globally coordinated networks of front groups, multi-stakeholder initiatives and some fully-funded research partners. Besides direct lobbying, they infiltrate government agencies, mount flimsy litigation, promote corporate-friendly governance models and regulation, and try to manufacture 'scientific doubt.'

All this is evident in the functioning of food regulatory agencies in India. Junk food industry organisations partner with the food regulator in various advocacy projects, making a mockery of public health. The government and the regulator are dithering on a clear definition of ultra-processed food high in fat, sugar and salt (HFSS) content. The National Multi-sectoral Action Plan on Non-Communicable Diseases of 2017 had called for amending the Advertising Code and Norms of Journalistic Conduct to prohibit advertising of HFSS food products, but it is yet to be implemented. The Ministry of Food Processing Industry was established with the intention of helping farmers, but it has ended up promoting and subsidising the junk food industry.

try. It is time the ministry started differentiating between processing and ultra-processing.

The *Lancet* series emphasises that front-of-pack warning labels are currently the only approach shown to substantially reduce the consumption of unhealthy food products. The food industry in India has been successful so far in preventing harsher labelling on junk food products and lenient rules on marketing junk food to children. The food regulatory authority, under the influence of the food industry, has advocated a more benign star-rating system instead of graphic health warnings. The authority is doing so in the name of consultation with stakeholders, a bulk of whom happen to be directly or indirectly linked with or funded by the industry.

It is well known that the food industry has several paid 'civil society' and 'consumer' organisations which advance its point of view at consultation meetings. The standard and rule-setting bodies also must follow a transparent 'conflict of interest' policy to ward off industry influence on food governance and regulation.

The way forward is clear. Government agencies and regulatory bodies should define ultra-processed food and have a policy framework to regulate it. There should be no confusion between the processed food industry and those making ultra-processed food products. Once the policy based on evidence is formulated, government agencies (ministries of health, agriculture, food processing, consumer affairs, information and broadcasting) and regulators must work in coordination.

There is no point in the health ministry crying hoarse over the rise of non-communicable diseases on the one hand, and the ministry of food processing doling out subsidies to junk food makers. Yes, it is an individual's responsibility to eat right and remain fit, but at the same time, it is the state's responsibility to create an environment in which an individual can make the right choice. The right public policies and pro-consumer food regulation are, therefore, critical to creating a healthy food environment.

#### THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

Junk food isn't cheap; we pay a steep price for it years after consuming it. —Joel Fuhrman

### An institute with its own rhythm

PRIYANKA SINGH

AS I enter the final quarter of my last spell as an Associate Fellow at the Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Shimla, I find myself growing more attentive to the place — to its pauses, its silence, its quiet companionship. What was once familiar now seems subtly fresh. It appears as if the building shifts its expression each day, revealing something I had overlooked earlier.

The institute has its own rhythm. At dawn, the sun rises over the ridge like a golden breath — slow and deliberate. For a fleeting moment, the light touches the lawns and the high windows, and the whole place shimmers. The flowers turn towards the warmth, and the pines — tall and dignified — sway slightly in approval.

In the early hours, when mist floats gently through the cedar and pine trees, it reaffirms my enlightenment. When late at night, the lamps burn softly in the corridors, it seems to dispel the ignorance of the world. The chatter of tourists fades, the offices close, and only a few figures remain — a guard by the gate, a worker leaving the mess, a scholar lost in research. In those hours, the grand structure feels like an abode of goddess Saraswati — watchful, composed and deeply aware.

Sometimes, as I walk along the stone paths, I feel the building walking beside me. Its long corridors hold the weight of memory — voices that once echoed here, footsteps that have come and gone, ideas that linger in the woody fragrance. It feels that the walls have listened to generations asking questions and stored them tenderly in their silence, answering purposefully with the passing time.

There is a kind of composure here that resists the world's hurry. The beauty lies not in the ceremonial structure but in the intellect it nudges. Each walk reveals a new angle, a shadow, the curve of a stone that catches light differently. I try to breathe in the smell — of damp earth, the cold morning air; the deep, old silence that feels almost sacred.

Even after many visits, the institute continues to surprise. It teaches you to listen to the echoes of your heartbeat, to your steps, your thoughts in the mountain air. It draws you inwards, until the realisation dawns that what you are seeking in the long history of this regal campus is also what you are seeking within yourself.

When I leave, I know I will carry a part of the ingrained light of knowledge which I acquired here. In the hustle and bustle of the city, when days begin to rush past, I will remember this hill as my abode of enlightenment — not for what it held, but for how it taught me to pause, to look and to simply be.

#### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

##### Moral courage must guide EC

Refer to 'Why EC was born before the Republic'; the Election Commission must present itself as an unblemished lotus in dirty water. The right to vote gets sullied when the neutrality of the constitutionally independent referee is questioned by the public. The celebration of the Constitution Day becomes more significant when allegations of 'vote chori' and other anomalies are getting highlighted. The responsibility of the election umpires is to let people elect and not select their representatives. Moral and constitutional courage, not political expedience, must guide the Election Commission. Even an iota of tilt towards the ruling regime threatens to undermine the wisdom of our Constitution's founding fathers.

ABHYAM SHARMA, PATHANKOT

##### IPKF heroes deserve honour

With reference to 'Op Pawan braves'; it is better late than never. It is praiseworthy that both the Army Chief and the Defence Minister paid homage to Param Vir Chakra awardee Major Ramaswamy Parameswaran. Any soldier who lays down his life in the line of duty deserves perpetual remembrance and honour. It is unfortunate that if Sri Lanka can have a memorial for the IPKF, including one at Palay (Jaffna) for the 10 Para regiment, why can't we have the same for our soldiers in our country? A dedicated memorial must be built for the heroes of this forgotten war. Op Pawan was no less important than other operations in which soldiers lost their lives during the peacekeeping mission in Sri Lanka.

BAL GOVIND, NOIDA

##### Pakistan fumes at dhawajrohan

Infuriated over PM Modi hoisting a saffron flag at the Ram Temple in Ayodhya, Pakistan says this demonstrates discrimination against minorities in India. Pakistan's Foreign Ministry said, "This new move reflects a larger pattern of pressure on religious minorities in India and a deliberate attempt to eradicate Muslim cultural and religious heritage, largely under the influence of Hindutva ideology." Pakistan,

which is preaching equality, must look at its own record of forced conversion of Christians, Hindus and Sikhs.

RK ARORA, MOHALI

##### No politics in religious matters

Refer to 'A symbolic slip'; a visit by the Prime Minister to Anandpur Sahib would have soothed the Sikh community. There should be no place for politics in religious matters. His participation would have augured well for the BJP to cement its place in Punjab politics. However, the Prime Minister did speak eloquently about Guru Tegh Bahadur at Kurukshetra. A photograph published in newspapers showing Punjab Congress president Raja Warring and AAP MLA Gurmeet Singh Hayer walking hand in hand was a perfect example of bonhomie between two parties.

RAVINDER KUMAR JAIN, LUDHIANA

##### Voters need help desks

The Election Commission's new online voter registration system in West Bengal is a welcome step, but it may unintentionally exclude rural and less tech-savvy citizens who lack stable Internet access or digital skills. For true inclusivity, the commission must strengthen on-ground support through help desks, local outreach and simple easy-to-use offline options so that digital progress does not leave behind the very voters it aims to empower.

PRAGYA PALIWAL, BY MAIL

##### Where AI fails

Artificial intelligence is becoming smarter every day — writing stories, making art and even helping in daily tasks. What is significant here is AI can recognise words, but it cannot feel the emotion or the hidden wit behind them. This reminds us that no matter how advanced technology becomes, it cannot replace the human touch that makes conversations warm and humour meaningful. In a world worried about machines taking over creativity, it is reassuring that genuine laughter, quick wit and shared smiles remain something only humans can create and feel.

PARUL RANA, ZIRAKPUR



# A feasible solution to the imbroglio



TANGLE: Haryana's claim to Chandigarh is devoid of constitutional foundation and territorial rationale. SANDEEP JOSHI

CHANDIGARH emerged after a profound civilisational wound was inflicted on Punjab in 1947, when Lahore — its historical epicentre of culture, commerce, and governance — became a part of Pakistan. After the Partition, Punjab was left bereft of an administrative seat. The response was both pragmatic and visionary: the creation of a new capital city, first conceptualised by Albert Mayer and Matthew Nowicki and later sculpted by Le Corbusier. Chandigarh emerged as a powerful symbol of renewal, encapsulating the spirit of a confident Indian republic.

For nearly two decades, Chandigarh stood as the unassailable capital of Punjab — fully financed, administered and governed by Punjab. The question of territorial rights only surfaced in 1966 with the Punjab Reorganisation Act, which was under Parliament's authority as per Article 3 of the Constitution, allowing for state formation and boundary alterations on the President's recommendation. This Act restructured Punjab into the distinct states of Punjab and Haryana and transferred specific hill territories to Himachal Pradesh. Importantly, Section 4 of the Act designated Chandigarh as a union territory administered under Article 239 and made it a shared capital for Punjab and Haryana, intended as a transitional arrangement to ensure continuity until Haryana could establish its own capital.

Significantly, the Act does not include any provision to assign Chandigarh to Haryana nor does it establish any concept of shared ownership. The Parliament explicitly deferred the question of Chandigarh's long-term governance to future legislation under Article 240, which empowers the President to frame regulations for UTs. This acknowledgment underscores that Chandigarh's final status remains unresolved. The transitional provisions for the Bhakra Beas Management Board were also left to future legislative action under Article 262, further indicating that the reorganisation measures were temporary rather than permanent.

Historical and constitutional practices provide additional clarity. India has never transferred the capital of a parent state to a newly formed state. The federal logic is clear and consistent: the original state retains its capital; the new state establishes its own. Consequently, Haryana's claim to Chandigarh is devoid of constitutional foundation, historical precedent and territorial rationale. Chandigarh was constructed on land acquired, planned and developed by Punjab, and it reflects neither the linguistic nor the cultural identity of the Hindi-speaking region.

Commitments from the Union government reinforce this understanding. The Rajiv-Longowal Accord (1985) stipulated that Chandigarh would be transferred to Punjab on January 26, 1986. This Accord did not envision ceding the



SURESH KUMAR  
FORMER CHIEF PRINCIPAL  
SECRETARY, PUNJAB

## A new capital for Haryana and a fiscally supported Chandigarh for Punjab is the only durable, balanced solution.

city to Haryana; instead, it proposed compensating Haryana with specific Punjabi-speaking areas. Although the Accord has seen partial implementation, its articulation of the Union's position and the consensus among stakeholders remain pivotal. It establishes that Chandigarh's rightful transfer is to Punjab — not Haryana — and underscores a recognised political pathway.

However, a lasting solution cannot rely solely on historical and legal correctness. Today, Chandigarh is an exceptionally high-quality urban ecosystem, demanding substantial financial and administrative resources. Its annual expenditure surpasses the combined budgets of all districts in Punjab. Punjab's financially constrained position raises an urgent question: even if Chandigarh were entirely vacated by Haryana, can Punjab sustain the cost-intensive administration without substantial Central support? Absent innovative financing mechanisms or a special-purpose arrangement, Chandigarh risks becoming an economically burdensome, undermining the very administrative efficiency it was meant to enhance.

The financial and developmental imperatives are critical for Haryana too. Establishing a new capital today is not just feasible; it is economically advantageous. The experiences of Naya Raipur, Navi Mumbai, and the early phases of Amaravati illustrate that greenfield capital cities can become long-term eco-

nommic powerhouses. Haryana boasts extensive land banks in Rohtak, Hisar, Jind and Kamal — areas where a new capital can be developed at a fraction of the costs associated with Chandigarh. Such a new capital would also enable Haryana to diversify beyond its heavy reliance on the NCR region, alleviating demographic, environmental and infrastructural pressures on Delhi.

The Union government stands to benefit as well. A centrally supported capital project is not only administratively logical but also politically stable, aligning with national goals of decentralisation and sustainable urban development. The continued ambiguity surrounding Chandigarh serves neither federal unity nor administrative clarity. A definitive settlement — backed by a statutory framework under Article 240 — would resolve a question that has remained unanswered for nearly 60 years.

While Punjab could theoretically establish a new capital with Central assistance, such a move could ignite linguistic and cultural sensitivities tied to Punjab's territorial integrity. Reopening these issues would be unnecessary and counterproductive, particularly given the compelling legal, historical and political arguments for retaining Chandigarh as Punjab's capital.

Thus, a durable settlement must synthesise history, constitutional principles, political commitments, financial sustainability and contemporary administrative realities. The most pragmatic and forward-looking solution is that Haryana should build a new Centrally assisted capital; Punjab should be relieved of the full fiscal burden of Chandigarh; Chandigarh should remain a UT serving as the capital of Punjab.

This arrangement preserves the quality of governance in Chandigarh under Union administration, respects Punjab's historical and constitutional rights, addresses Haryana's administrative requirements and mitigates the financial risks of transferring full responsibility for the city to Punjab.

Ultimately, the Chandigarh question must return to essential principles. The city was created to compensate Punjab for the loss of Lahore, developed for Punjab's purposes and historically belongs to Punjab. Yet the imperatives of fiscal prudence and modern governance call for a solution that is equitable for both states and rational for the Union. A UT Chandigarh functioning as Punjab's capital — paired with a purpose-built capital for Haryana — constitutes a constitutionally sound, politically feasible, economically viable and administratively enduring solution. This way, we can bring closure to the dispute.

# Why Chandigarh still eludes Punjab



PROMISE BROKEN: As per the Rajiv Gandhi-Longowal Accord, Chandigarh was to go to Punjab. FILE PHOTO

THE proposed Bill of the Central government to put Chandigarh under Article 240 of the Constitution so as to bring it on a par with the other union territories without legislatures has triggered condemnation from across the political class of the state. For Punjab-based political leaders, it is just not a move to reverse the change introduced in 1984 whereby the Punjab Governor was made the Administrator of Chandigarh or merely a step to put the union territory under the Lieutenant Governor, as is the case elsewhere in the country. In Punjab, any move to alter

Chandigarh's governance takes stakeholders back to the question as to why a city built as Punjab's capital has not been returned to it even decades after the 1966 reorganisation.

Let us first understand why the city could not be given to the state of Punjab on the eve of its reorganisation in 1966. It is noteworthy that the three-member Boundary Commission headed by Justice JC Shah, appointed in April 1966, to identify the Hindi and Punjabi regions of the state recommended by majority vote that Chandigarh should go to Haryana. The third member, S Dutt, dissenting with the majority verdict, pleaded that the city should instead go to Punjab. There was an inbuilt problem with the commission regarding its terms of reference.

The commission was asked to take into consideration the Census figures of 1961, which, as was well known, could not be trusted because in the then politically charged atmosphere of the state, a large section of Punjabi Hindus was persuaded to disown their mother tongue, Punjabi. Secondly, instead of the village being taken as a unit, as was the practice in the past, the commission was required not to break up the tehsils. Since Kharar tehsil, in which Chandigarh fell, was shown to have 55.2 per cent Hindi-speaking population as per the 1961 Census figures, it led the two members of the commission to recommend that the city should go to Haryana.



KULDIP SINGH  
EX-HCCR INDIA CHAIR &  
PROFESSOR, GNDU

## Every change in Chandigarh's governance brings Punjab back to the unresolved promise of 1966.

The Central government realised the flaws in the terms of reference of the commission. To come out of the messy situation, which was essentially its own creation, the Central government decided to declare the city a union territory to be shared by both Punjab and Haryana.

Ever since the reorganisation of Punjab, political leaders across parties, with the Akalis being in the forefront, have been proclaiming that the boundaries of the state need to be redrawn along linguistic lines and that Chandigarh should be transferred to Punjab.

Akali Dal leader Sant Fateh Singh was accused of breaking his fast-unto-death or the vow to immolate himself on December 27, 1966, if Chandigarh was not given to Punjab. Darshan Singh Pheruman of the Swatantra Party died for the cause on October 27, 1969, after a 74-day hunger strike.

On January 26, 1970, Sant Fateh Singh began a fast for the transfer of Chandigarh to Punjab, following which Prime Minister Indira Gandhi announced that Chandigarh would be given to Punjab while Haryana would get a part of Fazilka tehsil and Abohar. Haryana was also to be

given an outright grant of Rs 10 crore for building a new capital. In view of the problem of contiguity of the areas proposed to be given to Haryana, the plan of the transfer of Chandigarh to Punjab got stuck.

After the launch of the Nehru Roko Morcha in April 1982, the Akali Dal participated in many rounds of talks with the Central government, negotiating on its demand charter submitted to the Centre in October 1981. The transfer of Chandigarh and Punjabi-speaking areas to Punjab were the major demands. Subsequently, in July 1985, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi signed the Accord with Akali Dal president Harchand Singh Longowal, wherein he the PM gave a solemn undertaking that Chandigarh would be transferred to Punjab on Republic Day, ie, January 26, 1986.

But like the earlier occasion, this promise was also not honoured. The official excuse given by the Centre was that the Matthew Commission — despite two extensions having been given to it — had failed to identify the areas to be given to Haryana in lieu of Chandigarh. However, the real reason was the fear of the loss of Hindu votes in Haryana in the state Assembly elections which were due the following year.

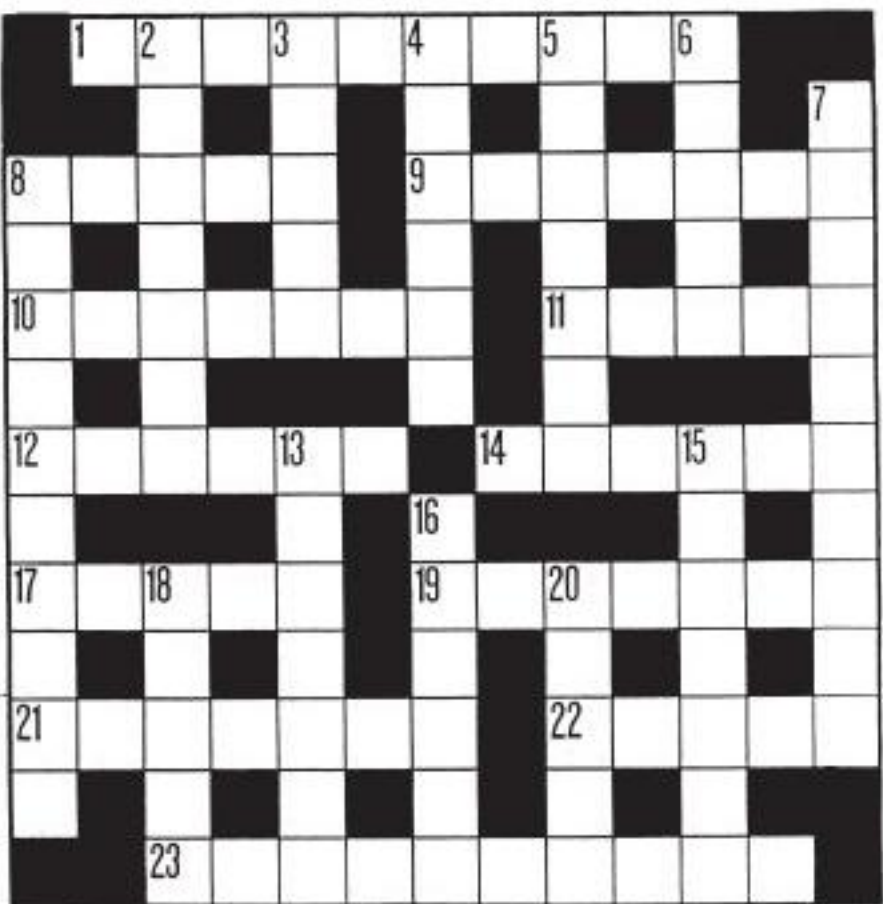
This is why the issue has remained unresolved for so long, even though leaders of Punjab from across the political spectrum have all along been very vocal on the subject.

The politics played on the territorial issues of Punjab pushed the state into the throes of a prolonged political turmoil in the 1980s, which lasted for more than a decade.

The Akali Dal-sponsored agitation, which had the backing of Punjab's peasantry, eventually took a violent form. This led the peasantry, which had earlier supported the movement wholeheartedly, to move away from the violent struggle. Thus, the movement ended without achieving any closure.

However, the political resonance of the territorial issues like Chandigarh has not faded. The importance of the issue of transfer of Chandigarh to Punjab, which has defined the politics of the state for decades, remains intact. It is bound to remain so till a solution acceptable to the politically dominant class of peasants is found. And for this class, Punjab's claim on Chandigarh is indisputable.

### QUICK CROSSWORD



#### ACROSS

- Without preparation (3,3,4)
- Middle East country (5)
- Terrible slaughter in war (7)
- Terminate a relationship (5,2)
- Well-grounded (5)
- Involve unavoidably (6)
- Brood of chicks (6)
- A thread (5)
- An advance showing (7)
- A wry face (7)
- Tastelessly showy (5)
- To marshal (3,2,5)

#### Yesterday's Solution

Across: 1 Debase, 4 Oyster, 9 Stimuli, 10 Usurp, 11 Angel, 12 High-hat, 13 Mind-blowing, 18 Holed up, 20 Upset, 22 Skill, 23 Endorse, 24 Silver, 25 Bedeck.

Down: 1 Dismal, 2 Bring, 3 Squalid, 5 Young, 6 Toughen, 7 Repute, 8 Tight-lipped, 14 Ill will, 15 Wouldbe, 16 Thesis, 17 Streak, 19 Delve, 21 Serve.

#### DOWN

- Impassioned (7)
- Course laid for racing (5)
- Other than (6)
- Disentangle (7)
- In weak health (5)
- Act as guide (4,3,3)
- Deceptive stratagem (10)
- Imprecise (7)
- Expression of high regard (7)
- Ill temper (6)
- Small non-rigid airship (5)
- Impatient (5)

### SU DO KU



HARD

#### YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

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

#### CALENDAR

NOVEMBER 27, 2025, THURSDAY	
■ Shaka Samvat	1947
■ Margshirsh Shaka	6
■ Margshirsh Parvishte	12
■ Hijari	1447
■ Shukla Paksha Tithi 7, up to 12:31 am	
■ Dhruva Yoga up to 12:09 pm	
■ Dhanishtha Nakshatra up to 2:32 am	
■ Moon enters Aquarius sign 2:07 pm	
■ Panchang start 2:07 pm	

### FORECAST

SUNSET:	THURSDAY	17-23 NOV
SUNRISE:	FRIDAY	06:58 HRS
CITY	MAX	MIN
Chandigarh	25	08
New Delhi	24	09
Amritsar	21	07
Bathinda	23	07
Jalandhar	21	07
Ludhiana	21	05
Bhiwani	23	08
Hisar	23	08
Sirsa	24	07
Dharamsala	22	07
Manali	15	01
Shimla	17	06
Srinagar	13	-04
Jammu	23	09
Kargil	07	-09
Leh	06	-09
Dehradun	25	08
Mussoorie	17	07

TEMPERATURE IN °C



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

— Ramnath Goenka

## CONSIDER NEW COACH FOR TESTS, STEADY TEAM PICKS TO BOOST BELIEF

No matter who the captain or coach was, India losing a Test series at home used to be an anomaly. But the 'tiger at home' epithet is demolished after losing the first series to South Africa in a quarter century and suffering the second series whitewash at home in two years. Consider this: India lost only three home series between 2000 and 2012. They were unbeaten for the next 12 years until the 0-3 loss to New Zealand last year. And that clean sweep was the first since the 0-2 loss to South Africa in 2000. The latest loss has pushed India to the fifth spot—below Pakistan—in this World Test Championship cycle.

The excuses are running out. The team seems to be “turning and turning in a widening gyre” as things are falling apart. Batters seem to be struggling against spinners on turners and against fast-bowlers on sporting pitches. Spinners are not taking wickets at the clip needed. Even if the team is in transition—after what looked like the forced retirement of veterans Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli, and R Ashwin—for a behemoth of an organisation like the Indian cricket board, a second string should have been kept ready. Yes, Shubman Gill got injured in Kolkata and missed the series, but that's one in 11.

All guns are now trained at head coach Gautam Gambhir for his team picks and his obsession with all-rounders over specialists. Though Ajit Agarkar's career as a selector has been broadly successful, he looked clueless this time. Even the dressing room seemed a bit shaken. In the 16 months under Gambhir, India have lost five out of nine Tests at home. There have been more than 20 changes in the last nine Tests. The mixed messaging does not help when batters are shuffled around—it could break their confidence.

The coach is squarely under the scanner for this mess. He came in with a reputation for white-ball success in the IPL, Champions Trophy, and Asia Cup. However, he seems to be struggling in red-ball cricket. Maybe it is time for the cricket board to consider a different coach for the longest format. However, with India's next Test assignment slotted in Sri Lanka next year, the decision needs to be taken soon. The time to act is now.

## IPOs DO BOTH: REWARD RISK AND FUND GROWTH

WHAT has been whispered for long was coherently amplified by India's Chief Economic Advisor, V Anantha Nageswaran, at a recent industry conclave. While appreciating the rapid growth of India's equity markets, he said initial public offerings (IPOs) are increasingly used by early investors to exit from the business, rather than for raising long-term capital. The IPO is primarily designed to assist private companies raise funds from investors to pursue growth. In the process, both primary promoters as well as secondary investors benefit. However, most of the nearly ₹65,000 crore that 55 Indian companies raised in the first half of the current financial year was through offers from existing investors. This meant the companies benefited from only a very small quantum of the shares issued.

The CEA rightly underlined that capital markets “must develop not just in scale, but in purpose”. Entrepreneurship must ideally have a long-term vision to produce wealth for both investors and the nation. However, in recent years, business ventures, especially in the tech and fin-tech sectors, have been launched primarily with an eye on attracting super-high valuations through souped-up performance promises; and the IPO route has been used to cash out. Without vision and a plan, many of these businesses turn out duds, and investors lose money.

Digital payments giant Paytm had one of the largest IPOs in November 2021, with a valuation of \$18.7 billion. However, its stock price dived more 70 percent soon after listing because the overinflated valuation was not supported by a clear path to profits. However, there cannot be an iron wall between IPOs being instruments to raise public funds and serving as pathways to disinvest on good performance. Early investors do have the right to benefit from their risk-taking. Venture capitalists and angel investors typically invest in a business idea before its time; if it does well, they should have the option of exiting or selling a part of their holding. As the Securities and Exchange Board Chairman T K Pandey pointed out at the same conclave, IPOs come in many forms. In some cases, investors who have already raised capital privately choose to opt out through an IPO. What is needed is a balance: one where IPOs help companies grow and reward those who take risks.

### QUICK TAKE

#### FILLING THE BLANKS

COME 2026, Malaysia will become the second country to bar under-16 citizens from social media platforms. This December 10, Australia will implement its own ban. New Zealand is planning a similar law and lawmakers in several European countries are discussing advisories. This generational worry has indeed moved politicians on many continents. For India, the Supreme Court rejected a petition to bar minors under 13 from using social media and passed the matter to the government to address. In this new-age dilemma, we often forget the other side—what would teens do if we take away their screens. And that's squarely on parents and school teachers to plan. Demanding more playgrounds for them would be a start.

THE shock and awe over the different versions of the 28-point US-backed peace plan for Ukraine has given way to sobering thoughts and reflections. Senior Western diplomats huddled together at hastily-arranged talks for two days this week in Geneva, which reportedly produced a revised 19-point outline that is not yet in the public domain, except that the UK and European leaders were said to have put forward a counter-proposal to the US plan that apparently contains many of Russia's key demands.

Apart from the super-hawk head of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, who is clinging desperately to her vitriolic anti-Russian rhetoric, there is a palpable optimism in the air: Even Downing Street acknowledged after a phone conversation between the UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer and US President Donald Trump that they remained united in efforts to secure peace in Ukraine at a “critical moment”, and agreed that “we all” must work together to bring about a “just and lasting peace”.

Not to be left behind, French President Emmanuel Macron echoed the same sentiment when he stated on live TV, “We are clearly at a crucial juncture. Negotiations are getting a new impetus, and we should seize this momentum. There is finally a chance to make real progress towards a good peace.” The two apostles of Europe's Coalition of the Willing have signalled a farewell to arms.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Ukrainian chief negotiator Andriy Yermak described their separate talks in Geneva as productive. Rubio said it was “probably the most productive and meaningful meeting so far in this entire process”.

American and Russian officials subsequently met in Abu Dhabi on Tuesday to sensitise Moscow with details of the Geneva talks. A positive response has come from Moscow at no less a level than the Russian Federation Council Speaker Valentina Matviyenko, who said “I believe... that agreements on Ukraine are possible, and I believe in the sincerity of Trump's intentions. I believe that he wants to end this conflict... [Trump and Putin] have reached an understanding on how to end this conflict. And we didn't deviate from the agreed-upon approaches, not in the slightest.”

Trump himself backed away from his Thursday deadline for Kyiv to fall in line with his peace plan. Instead, he's sending envoy Steve Witkoff—and possibly son-

As Washington realises that Moscow is clinching the war and Kyiv's palace intrigue gets darker, emissaries from Trump & Putin are setting the stage for an endgame. Talks in Geneva indicated what's acceptable

## RUSSIA-U.S. PARLEYS SIGNAL A FAREWELL TO ARMS IN UKRAINE

M K BHADRAKUMAR

Former diplomat



SOURAV ROY

in-law Jared Kushner—to meet Putin. Trump played down the element of his plan that would require Ukraine to cede territory to Russia, suggesting Russian forces were already likely to seize the land. “The way it's going, if you look, it's just moving in one direction. So eventually that's land that over the next couple of months might be gotten by Russia anyway.” Simply put, the battlefield realities will ‘resolve’ the territorial question.

The choice of US negotiators carries much symbolism. Witkoff and Kushner are both quintessential businessmen, thoroughly ‘de-ideologised’ personalities who keep the big picture in view, that is, a transformation of the adversarial mode in Russian-American relations to constructive engagement with a primacy on geoeconomics, habitating it

within a security architecture that strengthens its durability. Their central role as negotiators will induce confidence in the Kremlin that a purposive thrust to end the war is in the works.

Meanwhile, US army secretary Daniel Driscoll will also separately negotiate with Ukrainian officials in Kyiv. This is interesting because Keith Kellogg, Trump's Ukraine envoy, is reportedly leaving his post in January. The plucky-ex general has earned the dubious reputation of being a friendly ear in Kyiv and fell out of favour in the most recent months with White House officials who saw him as too sympathetic to Ukraine. Driscoll got largely shut out of the peace talks, with Witkoff and other senior officials including Rubio taking on a greater role. A cohesive White House

## READYING SMALL INC FOR SCALE

CHANDRAJIT BANERJEE

Director General, Confederation of Indian Industry

WHEN the four new labour codes came into force on November 21, India proudly turned a page in its industrial story to a chapter written for a modern workforce and a growing economy. By consolidating 29 older labour laws into four streamlined codes, the government signalled the end of fragmented regulation, ushering in an era defined by clarity, inclusivity, and growth.

Over the past decade, manufacturing, services, and digital innovation have all become pillars of growth. As global supply chains diversify, India is being evaluated not just for market size and skills, but also for institutional predictability. One of the most decisive elements in this transition is labour regulation.

Today, global competitiveness is defined not just by cost, but also by productivity, talent retention, workplace standards, and regulatory certainty. Clear and stable rules encourage companies to invest confidently in technology, facilities, and people. For multinational corporations evaluating India for high-value manufacturing, research and development hubs, or sustainable supply chain operations, a predictable labour environment significantly increases confidence. By rationalising definitions, consolidating processes, and removing inconsistencies across states, the codes send a clear message: India is ready for scale.

It also directly enhances the ease of doing business. In the past, enterprises dealt with multiple filings, varied formats, physical inspections, and differing state requirements which add cost and administrative pressure. The codes ease these frictions by shifting to electronic filings, predefined inspection criteria, and standardised documentation. These are not procedural formalities—they reduce the ‘regulatory friction cost’ that often discourages companies from expanding operations or creating new jobs.

The introduction of the inspector-cum-facilitator model is especially meaningful as it reflects a shift from a system of enforcement alone to one of guided compliance, signalling trust and partnership between industry and government. For businesses operating across multiple states, these provisions translate into faster rollouts, more efficient planning and greater confidence. Smaller businesses, which contribute nearly 30 percent of GDP, will particularly benefit. Simplified processes, digital filings, and clarity in employment arrangements reduce compliance

burdens and support growth and stability.

The codes provide micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) a clear pathway to scale without procedural obstacles. Simplified processes, including uniform documentation, rationalised thresholds, digital filings, and clarity on fixed-term employment, allow enterprises to plan manpower efficiently while protecting worker rights. In sectors with strong seasonality, such as textiles, food processing, logistics, and small-scale manufacturing, this flexibility supports business continuity and operational resilience.



FILE/SHUTTERSTOCK.COM/COMBOS

Global competitiveness is not just about cost, but also about productivity, workplace standards, and regulatory certainty. The labour codes bring in verifiable records, which business partners demand. As smaller enterprises expand, more jobs will be formalised

Streamlined compliance also enhances MSMEs' participation in larger industrial supply chains. Both domestic and global companies increasingly demand verifiable labour and compliance records from their suppliers. The codes' predictable and standardised documentation can help MSMEs secure supply chain contracts and export opportunities that were previously out of reach.

Ease of doing business intersects closely with access to finance. When labour records, wage structures, and social-security contributions are clearly maintained, financial institutions can assess MSMEs with greater confidence. This reduces perceived risk and improves

access to credit on favourable terms.

Viewed from a broader perspective, global competitiveness, ease of doing business, and MSME growth are deeply interlinked. Predictable labour regulations attract investment, which drives industrial expansion and stimulates demand for MSME-supplied goods and services. As MSMEs grow, they generate employment, increase wages, and strengthen consumption, creating a self-reinforcing cycle.

The reforms also significantly strengthen labour welfare and mobility. For the first time, workers across categories, including unorganised, gig, fixed-term, and self-employed workers gain access to securities such as state insurance, provident fund, gratuity, pension, and maternity protection. Portability of benefits through Aadhaar-linked UAN ensures that social-security coverage follows the worker across jobs and states. Migrant workers receive support through portability of ration facilities, travel allowances, and dedicated helplines. Women are permitted to work in all sectors, including on night shifts.

What unfolds from these reforms is not a trade-off between welfare and growth, but a convergence of interests. As enterprises expand, more jobs are created and formalised. When formalisation increases, wage earnings rise, social-security participation deepens, and consumer demand strengthens. Employee's provident fund enrolment patterns, particularly the rise in younger members, point to this gradual but steady shift.

India is entering a decisive moment in global competition. Countries with secure, scalable, and future-ready labour markets will lead the next industrial wave. The codes position India alongside global peers like Vietnam, Indonesia, and China, offering cost advantages, skilled talent, and a predictable, investment-friendly environment.

In essence, the codes set the foundation for a new employment and industrial landscape. If implementation continues with collaboration and hand-holding, India could witness one of the most inclusive industrial transitions in its history.

(Views are personal) (cb@cci.in)

### MAILBAG

WRITE TO: letters@newindianexpress.com

#### Odisha lapses

Ref: *Accountability must for new Odisha hiring panel* (Nov 26). The frequency of question paper leakages necessitates the creation of an umbrella recruitment agency to hire uniformed service personnel. The credibility of the state will be questionable if it goes down the rabbit hole all over again in hiring lapses. **Jayachandran C, Chennai**

#### Free imagination

Ref: *Before dissent, need playfulness in nationalism* (Nov 26). So long as a child lacks freedom in imagination, one can't have any affection for his/her country, let alone the feeling of nationalism? There is depth in what Swami Vivekananda said, “You cannot teach a child any more than you can grow a plant.” **Jitendranath Guru, Padampur**

#### Data loophole

Ref: *Dipping into the DPDP regime* (Nov 26). The Act does deliver dividends for digital dynamos. Yet, sweeping exemptions for the government spark worries of a sinister misuse of power. The fact that pressing citizen-centric rights, such as informed consent and grievance redress, are deferred for another 18 months is a cause for collective concern. **Raju Kolluru, Kakinada**

#### Army discipline

Ref: *Christian officer's sack upheld* (Nov 26). The officer's termination was not just for his refusal to enter the regimental temple because of his faith, but for a chain of past acts of gross indiscipline and insubordination. The armed forces can't tolerate such adamant behaviour despite allowing counselling. **B Kailash Shankar, Thiruvananthapuram**

#### Respect identity

Ref: *Arunachal tangle continues between India and China* (Nov 26). This incident is a powerful reminder of how narrative-driven disputes between nations can spill over into the lives of ordinary people in the most unnecessary ways. No individual should have to endure stress or doubt over their identity. **Aditya Kamble, Kalaburagi**

#### Test venues

Ref: *Another Groundhog Day for hosts* (Nov 26). The Test squad surrendered its proud home record rather meekly. The team management needs serious introspection. One good step in this regard would be to halt the misguided rotation of venues to locations in the backwaters. **Anand Mohan, Hyderabad**



# Indian cricket faces 'Test'ing times once again

EVER since 1991, when South Africa was formally allowed a re-entry into the game of cricket (kept away from the gentleman's game for 21 years since 1970 for their practice of apartheid), India's role has been significant in their scheme of things. Rather coincidentally, it was at Eden Gardens that they began their new journey by playing their first ODI on November 10 that year. It must not have been lost on cricket observers that the City of Joy has turned out to be a favourite hunting ground for the Proteas once again. Quite ironically, it was November (16th) yet again, albeit three decades later. On a viciously spinning track,

famously derided as 'dust bowls' by commentators many a time, they crushed the seemingly invincible home team by 30 runs, shocking the game's fanatics, who consoled themselves feeling that the young team would bounce back and square off in the two-match series. While the hopefuls thought the series would be drawn in Guwahati where action began last weekend, the host's tame surrender against some accurate, hostile spin attack made them look like amateurs, nay paper tigers, a condition which had enveloped them on foreign tours for years together, even on home grounds, where defeating them was con-

sidered nigh impossible for even the best teams in the world not too long ago.

Lack of application and a severe deficiency in playing red ball cricket seems to be the immediate diagnosis bandied about in the media. Those who always had a not-too-flattering opinion of Gautam Gambhir as the coach promptly pointed out to the terrible defeats the Indian team has faced in Test cricket – the earlier one against New Zealand, when the Black Caps secured a new record with a whitewash after more than six decades of touring India. In Temba Bavuma, South Africa has now unearthed a leader who is yet to face defeat in 12

Tests, an envious record by any standards. Already, in the World Test Championship for 2025-27, with this performance India has slipped into fifth place and does not have too much hope of making it to the final with the top two teams being Australia and South Africa, who clashed in June that the latter won, coming from behind after conceding a first innings lead and overhauling the target in the second innings with five wickets to spare.

With the forthcoming Test matches to be played in Sri Lanka, where India has won five of the six Tests earlier and New Zealand, which would be loath to concede its psychologi-

cal hold over the Men in Blue, red ball cricket is going to be the bugbear for India in the forthcoming months. What will be pertinent to note will be the future moves of BCCI, the conciliatory tone of Gambhir, who declared that his future is in the hands of the cricket body, and the mounting opposition to the temperamental attitude of the coach under whose leadership the Indian cricket team has not covered itself with glory in the longest form of the game. Contemptuously termed as 'the eternal chokers' by many, the 'transformed' Proteas have turned into ruthless knockers, which augurs well for cricket overall.

## MEDLEY



## Dawn of a new era for the workforce



VASAMSETTI SUBHASH

INDIA has stepped into a transformative new era of labour governance. With the long-awaited implementation of the four labour codes, the country has undertaken one of the most sweeping reforms in its labour regulatory framework since Independence. These reforms – hailed by the government as historic – seek not only to modernise outdated laws but also to extend dignity, security, and an opportunity to every worker across the country.

For decades, India's labour ecosystem was governed by 29 separate laws, many of them drafted in another era that could not address the realities of a rapidly changing economy. Fragmentation, ambiguity, and complex compliance requirements were common criticisms. The new labour codes aim to reverse this by integrating these laws into four comprehensive pillars: the Code on Wages (2019), Code on Social Security (2020), Industrial Relations Code (2020), and Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code (2020). Together, they promise simplicity, transparency, and efficiency—values that have been missing from India's labour market for far too long.

The most consequential shift lies in the extension of legal protections to nearly 40 crore workers, including those long left out of the formal labour net: gig workers, platform workers, unorganized-sector labourers, and fixed-term employees. Minimum wages, social security, and gratuity—a safety net once confined to the organized sector—are now slated to become universal guarantees.

For states like Andhra Pradesh, where a large portion of the workforce operates in unorganised sectors, this change is particularly significant. It offers millions of families a buffer against economic instability and ushers in a more humane and inclusive labour landscape.

One of the most tangible changes for workers will be the restructuring of work hours and leave eligibility. Retaining the eight-hour workday and 48-hour workweek, the new codes introduce flexibility in how these hours could be distributed—allowing, for example, four 12-hour workdays or five 9.5-hour days. While this could benefit industries with fluctuating demand, it also raises questions about ensuring safety and avoiding exploitation. The onus will lie on state governments and industry bodies to enforce these provisions with balance and prudence. More progressive, however, is the reduction of eligibility for annual paid leave from 240 working days to 180. This is especially impactful in sectors like manufacturing, retail, textiles, and construction, where workers often struggled to accumulate sufficient days. Access to leave earlier in the year is not a trivial change—it improves worker well-being,

retention, and long-term productivity.

Workers above 40 are now entitled to free annual health check-ups, a reform aligned with global standards of preventive care. For plantation workers and those employed in hazardous sectors, extension of ESIC medical benefits marks an overdue rectification of historical inequities. For a nation aspiring to lift both the quality of labour and human capital, such health-oriented policies are foundational.

The codes reinforce equal wages for women and remove discriminatory barriers in employment—an important step toward gender parity in India's labour market. By enabling women to seek employment across sectors without artificial restrictions, the codes contribute to expanding female labour force participation, a long-standing challenge for the economy.

**For states like Andhra Pradesh, where a large portion of the workforce operates in unorganised sectors, this change is particularly significant. It offers millions of families a buffer against economic instability and ushers in a more humane and inclusive labour landscape. One of the most tangible changes for workers will be the restructuring of work hours and leave eligibility. Retaining the eight-hour workday and 48-hour workweek, the new codes introduce flexibility in how these hours could be distributed.**

Beyond worker welfare, the codes aim to create a more predictable and industry-friendly environment. Single registrations, simplified compliance, and unified returns reduce bureaucratic burdens that have historically hampered investment and employment generation. By modernising labour governance, India positions itself as a more attractive destination for global and domestic investors.

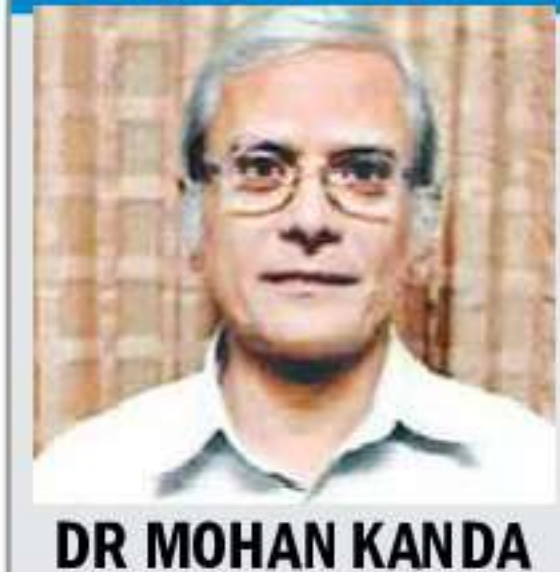
The government has framed the labour codes as a crucial step toward building a Viksit Bharat by 2047—a future where economic growth is matched by social justice. The intent is laudable, but implementation will determine success. State-level adoption, clarity in rules, employer compliance, and effective enforcement mechanisms will shape whether these reforms live up to their promise.

Labour reforms of this scale are neither ordinary nor easy. They touch the lives of millions and have the potential to redefine India's economic trajectory. As these laws take effect, the real test will be ensuring that the vision of dignity, protection, and opportunity for every worker translates from paper to practice. If implemented with sincerity and monitored with accountability, the new labour codes can indeed become a cornerstone in building a fairer, more resilient, and more prosperous India.

*(The author is Minister of Labour, Factories, Boilers and Insurance Medical Services, Government of Andhra Pradesh)*

## Progressing towards 'Viksit Bharat@47' with head held high

### TALKING OF MANY THINGS



DR MOHAN KANDA

George Orwell, author of the legendary book 1984, once famously said "At 50, you get the face you deserve."

After the recent celebration of the 'Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav' the time would appear to have come to think about what Mother India or Bharat Mata, now 75, will see, as she takes a dekho at herself in the looking glass. Most likely, the reflected visage will be one that, by and large, reflects contentment with probably a hint of moisture in the eye and a frown on her face. Happy to notice so many feathers in her cap, but a wee bit disappointed at the things that remain undone, while being concerned about how some of the emerging challenges need to be tackled.

As one compares the accomplishments against the failures, - or stay put - quite a few items will appear on the credit side of the balance sheet.

The journey began with addressing the immediate post - Independence challenges and the introduction of the Five-Year Plan in 1951, focusing on agriculture growth.

To begin with, democracy, the form of governance that our farsighted elders opted for, soon after the formation of the republic, has come of age, having not only survived, but flourished.

Voltaire once famously declared that "When the press is free and the people are literate, democracy is safe." With the literacy rate in India having propelled from 12 per cent in 1947 to 75 per cent in 2024, and the fact that the media, be it the printed or the electronic variety, can be said to be reasonably free reassures one that democracy is safe, secure, and in an unassailable position.

The next item would be how freedom was achieved through a movement that rode on the principle of 'ahimsa'; India standing alone, in the history of the world, from the USA long ago to Sudan recently, to have done that. The rainbow of revolutions in the agriculture sector would be the next with green for food grains, thanks to Dr M.S. Swaminathan, white in milk, thanks to Dr V Kurien, yellow in oil seeds, thanks to Dr M V Rao, as also blue in fisheries, all, together, contributing to the country's transition, from the ignominy of a 'ship-to-mouth' status in the 1960s, to the satisfaction

of becoming a food secure nation at least at the global, if not the grassroots, level.

The exemplary way constitutional and statutory institutions like the Supreme Court, the Election Commission (ECI) and the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) have acquitted themselves would figure prominently on the credit side.

The apex court has to its credit, the extraordinary feat of having, literally, amended the Constitution, through its celebrated verdict in the Golaknath and Keshavanand Bharathi cases, in which it declared the part of the Constitution dealing with fundamental rights as being outside the purview of Parliament's Legislative jurisdiction. In many other instances, it stepped in to provide relief and opportunities to many sections of society such as transgender persons and children of live-in parents, apart from intervening and prodding the executive

with destiny' speech.

Overnight, on that historic occasion, the people of India were also presented with the gift of universal franchise, including votes for women, a dispensation for which people from countries like the USA and the UK had to fight for years.

The period immediately following independence also brought with it some internally inconsistent phenomena being encouraged such as flourishing and active trade union movements on the one hand and capitalistic fee private enterprise on the other. The Tatas, Birlas and Goenkas of yesteryear and Adnanis and Ambanis of the present times, have pursued the path of growth and development through industrialisation; just as fire-brand trade union leaders championing the cause of the working class, such as George Fernandes and Sitaram Yechury had a free hand to pursue their pro left agenda. It is, indeed, a tribute to the robustness of

early history, the first one having been the movement that led to freedom. Thanks to the wisdom, and maturity, shown by the leadership at the national level, the country, while literally tottering at the brink of disaster, not only recovered her balance, but emerged unscathed by the crisis. Realisation dawned, upon those that mattered, that the original Nehruvian dream of 'growth with justice' would have to yield to a new paradigm of 'growth and justice'.

External assistance enabled the ushering in of an era of free enterprise, following the dismantling of the license and permit raj. Growth and development were free to happen, unencumbered by the imperative of the parallel need to ensure fairness and justice. Care was taken to ensure that the impact of that phase was compensated through measures such as the creation of safety nets, and a slew of development programmes, meant for the welfare of the underprive-

**The rainbow of revolutions in the agriculture sector would be the next with green for food grains, thanks to Dr M.S. Swaminathan, white in milk, thanks to Dr V Kurien, yellow in oil seeds, thanks to Dr M V Rao, as also blue in fisheries, all, together, contributing to the country's transition, from the ignominy of a 'ship-to-mouth' status in the 1960s, to the satisfaction of becoming a food secure nation at least at the global, if not the grassroots, level.**



into action, in areas such as the conduct of free and fair elections or anti-pollution measures.

The Election Commission has repeatedly performed the gigantic task of conducting free, fair and impartial elections regularly and ensuring that the voice of the people asserted itself loudly and clearly, enabling the polity to emerge cleaner and brighter, after each election.

The UPSC has also had an enviable and formidable record for its efficient, fair, and transparent systems of selection.

Not that attempts have not been made by successive governments to make inroads into the autonomy and independence of these institutions. But it must be conceded that the bodies have managed to preserve the status and position accorded to them in the Constitution and the laws.

The item to figure next would be the mindboggling achievement of the country, in ridding itself of several social evils like child-marriage and untouchability, the practice of sati, the feudal system of zamindari, which all have become things of the past, literally at the press of the button of freedom, on 15 August 1947 when Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister rose in Parliament to deliver the 'tryst

the polity that, till today, the two phenomena coexist with little harm being caused to the progress of the nation.

The situation at that time was somewhat akin to the phase-transition associated with ice becoming water, upon being exposed to the atmosphere, or water becoming steam, when boiled. To transit from one state of stability to the higher one, a system invariably needs to go through a period of chaos. Like butter-milk having to be churned to produce butter, was what happened. A person on a fast-unto-death is usually offered a glass of lime juice, rather than a seven-course meal which the digestive system can hardly face, after the ordeal has just been through. It was as though more had been bitten off than could be chewed, chewed more than could be swallowed and swallowed more than the ability to digest would permit. Unsurprisingly, a period of indigestion followed, which, thankfully, was only a transient condition.

The next achievement, gratifyingly welcome, would be the manner in which the country faced, and overcame, the challenge of the advent of the global forces of liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation; the second watershed in young India's

leged and other neglected sections of society like children, women, the aged, the physically/mentally challenged, as well as those negatively impacted by the growth process, the industrial workers, for instance.

Another policy step that followed was that of exit policies whereby the central government decided to exit from and allow the entry of the private sector into some crucial sectors, such as steel, power, telecommunication and communications. And, as a measure of securing public interest, it introduced the system of self-regulation through regulators meant for those sectors.

Later, the international financial meltdown was another challenge, which the country surmounted with determination, robustness and imaginative foresight.

The way institutions like the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) contributed to that effort and earned global laurels. In fact, the chairman of the Federal Bank of the USA went to the extent of observing that, had that country been fortunate enough to have had similar leadership as in India, the worldwide meltdown might not have happened at all!

*(The writer was formerly Chief Secretary, Government of Andhra Pradesh)*

## LETTERS

### Consequences of cricket burnout

THE Indian cricket team's struggles against South Africa in the recent Test series have highlighted lack of temperament and patience. Indian players have been engaged over the past one year across formats without adequate rest. This hectic schedule has led to fatigue and burnout, clearly reflected in their lack of sharpness and consistency during this test series. A major issue has been the tendency of Indian batsmen to carry their limited-overs mindset into Test cricket. Instead of batting over sessions and building partnerships. Test cricket demands patience, discipline, and the ability to absorb pressure, which all seem to be missing in the current squad. Fitness concerns have added to the problem. A bigger worry is that the players are failing to adapt their game to the demands of Test cricket, while South Africa's success lies in respecting the format.

*Dr O Prasad Rao, Hyderabad*

### SA 'team effort' did India in

THE difference between India and South Africa was that Indian batsmen did not show the patience and application that is required in the longer format. A T20 and ODI approach to thrash every ball does not help in Tests. That only two players Jaiswal (58) and Jadeja (54) scored 50+ in this Test exposes the poor shot selection by all other batsmen. A workable solution is in India forming separate teams for Test matches and the slam bang variety.

*Sreelekha P S, Secunderabad-61*

### Wake-up call for BCCI

INDIA'S dismal performance in Tests in home conditions continues with two series defeats in two years-0-3 to New Zealand last year and 0-2 to South Africa now. The BCCI should wake up and take strong measures to resurrect the Test team, which has touched the nadir. Players performing well in the domestic circuit must be given preference over the tried-and-tested cricketers, who have failed miserably. Poor team selection is one of the prime reasons for the debacle against South Africa.

*S Sankaranarayanan, Chennai-40*

### SC should reinstate dismissed army officer

THE Supreme Court's wisdom in upholding the dismissal of a Christian army officer for his refusal to enter the sanctum sanctorum of a temple to perform pooja defies understanding. The unfortunate decision to dismiss the appeal amounts to making service in the army conditional on a person demonstrating his 'willingness' to enter a place of worship against his will. It is fallacious and preposterous to say that the Christian army officer broke discipline and insulted his troops while all that he did was to exercise the constitutionally guaranteed freedom of religion. The apex court should reconsider its decision and render justice to the army officer by reinstating him in the true spirit of secularism and equality of religions.

*G David Milton, Maruthancode (TN)*

thehansreader@gmail.com

## BENGALURU ONLINE

### K'taka issue will be resolved after discussions with Sonia, Rahul: Kharge

BENGALURU/NEW DELHI: Amid speculation over leadership change in Karnataka, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on Wednesday said the issue will be resolved after discussions with senior leaders Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi, while deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar claimed there is unity in the party.

As the Congress government in Karnataka completed the halfway mark of its five-year tenure on November 20, the power tussle within the party has intensified over a possible change of guard in the state, with a section claiming an alleged "power-sharing" agreement between Siddaramaiah and Shivakumar in 2023. "The high command -- myself, Rahul ji and Sonia ji will together take a decision on the issue and resolve it," Kharge told PTI, when asked about the issue of leadership change in Karnataka. Meanwhile, Karnataka minister Priyank Kharge dismissed as "irrelevant," a section of party leaders pitching his father Mallikarjun Kharge for the CM post amid the leadership issue. As talk of a leadership tussle in the Congress government in Karnataka intensified and MLAs started seeking meetings with the leadership, Siddaramaiah has put the onus on the party high command to put a "full stop to the confusion". Karnataka minister Satish Jarkiholi seemed to back Siddaramaiah, saying he has asked the high command to clear the air at the earliest on the issue of leadership.

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



DECCAN  
Chronicle  
27 NOVEMBER 2025

Ensure diversity & accept history to fulfil 2047 goals

Prime Minister Narendra Modi often speaks about the demographic dividend that awaits India. He bases his prediction for a bright future for the country on its demographic profile — more than 50 per cent of the population of which is aged below 30 years. This is at a time when a great many nations across the world, including several developed economies, are facing the dilemma of an increasingly ageing population and a progressively declining replacement ratio.

The Prime Minister also talks of the Amrit Kaal — the 25 years from 2022 to 2047, the year in which India will celebrate 100 years of its Independence. Mr Modi has shared his vision of redoubling national efforts during these years so that India will be a developed country by their completion. The Prime Minister promises his citizens that the government he leads will do anything in its power, even rework its agenda, too, in order to guide them to prosperity.

Be that as it may, Mr Modi, however, cannot unshackle himself completely from the politics of hatred that has catapulted him to the Prime Minister's chair. His speech at Ayodhya after hoisting the flag marking the completion of the works for the Ram temple there was, unfortunately, no call to duty for a diverse populace but an appeal to the communal feelings of a section of the people whom the Sangh Parivar has fed with its own version of history over a sustained period of time.

The Ram Mandir is a reality, but that it was built after demolishing a Mughal-era mosque is also a reality, as acknowledged by the Supreme Court. The Hindutva forces had the run of the law and the institutions which hold together our democracy before they ensured this. It was the culmination of their efforts of 30 years when it came into being in 2022 and the Prime Minister of the country consecrated it.

However, instead of prodding the people and leading them in a united effort at nation building, the Prime Minister wants to remind them of "wounds and pain of centuries". True, history has its share of injustices but they have been perpetrated by players of all faiths and persuasion. It is one thing to learn from history and try and ensure that its bitter episodes are not repeated but it's another to insist on attempting to 'right' its wrongs. India can be rebuilt not by constantly reminiscing about its past but by accepting the present warts and all and working towards a vision.

Mr Modi reminded the people about the journey of Lord Ram as depicted in the *Ramayana*: "Ram left his palace as a prince but returned as *maryada purushottam*." Lord Ram, undoubtedly, is conceived by generations and geographies as an epitome of grace and detachment to power. The sad fact, however, is that the very same *maryada purushottam* is being used as a tool in the hands of his own *bhaktas* to capture power.

The government must go back to the drawing boards to prepare the blueprint for the future. Jawaharlal Nehru, in his brilliant treatise *Discovery of India*, has insisted that India cannot, and need not, ignore its past. Instead, it must take the right lessons from it and make them the foundation for its future. And that is the way to make the country the rightful recipient of its so-called demographic dividend.

Ethiopian ash hits air traffic

The eruption of Hayli Gubbi in Ethiopia's Afar region, which was dormant for nearly 12,000 years, on November 23 jolted the world into a renewed awareness about its geographies' interwovenness. The shield volcano belched ash high into the sky, generating a plume that soared up to 14 kilometres — affecting air travel from Ethiopia to India.

It showed that no country could remain unaffected by Earth's deep geophysical rhythms. Domestic and international flights to and from India were cancelled, rerouted or delayed as aviation authorities issued urgent advisories and rerouted air-traffic corridors.

A similar impact was seen in 2010 when a volcano erupted Eyjafjallajökull in Iceland, affecting air travel across Europe. Though the immediate ash threat recedes quickly, the world needs to reflect on broader implications.

According to an estimate, the world had seen around 90 major volcanic activities since the year 2000. This is the second volcanic eruption in Ethiopia, which sits on the ridge of two sub-divisions — Nubia and Somalia — of the African plate. The east African country is the most active region for volcanic eruptions due to the drift in the Somalia division.

As the Somali division is adjacent to the Indian plate, India would get affected whenever any major volcanic eruption happens in Ethiopia. Though the major impact of the Somali rift on India is ruled out, the country needs to invest in understanding nature, as no country can withstand its fury. The world, therefore, should have a coordinated, multi-national framework of geological research, satellite surveillance, real-time atmospheric modelling and shared early-warning systems.

As "black-swan" events like volcanic eruptions, severe cyclones, wildfires and glacier melts get more frequent, no country can remain an island. If humanity hopes to avert greater disruption, it must transcend borders and come together to build capacity to either slow down and pause, or reverse climate change.

KAUSHIK MITTER  
Editor

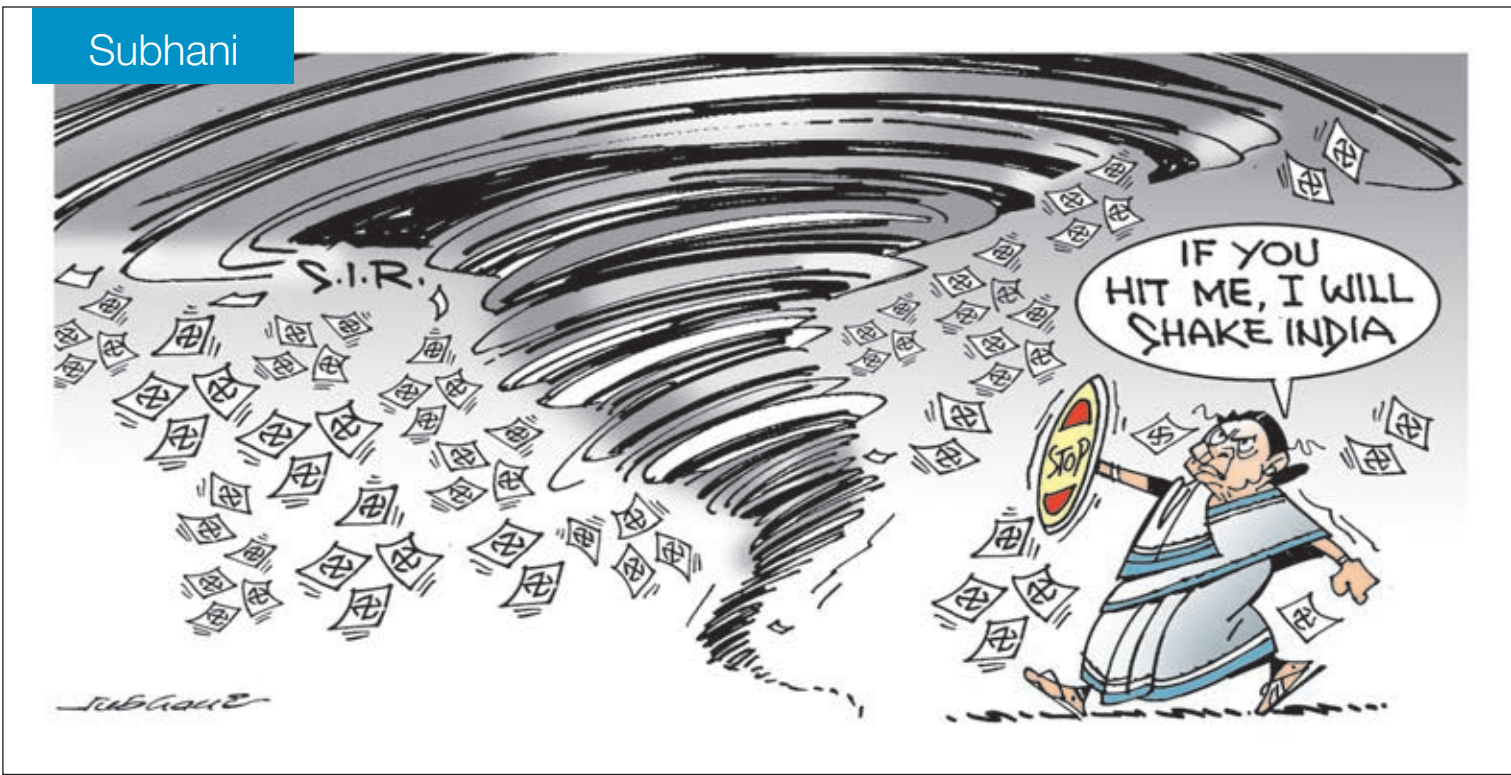
DECCAN CHRONICLE

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Printer & Publisher

R. MOHAN  
Resident Editor

DECCAN CHRONICLE offices are located at:  
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Subhani



Resolve migration issue to tackle ‘illegals’ crisis



Shikha Mukerjee

The 2025-26 election season has resurrected the description of "ghuspehiya" for illegal migrants and punched it up, transforming the intensive revision of electoral rolls into a "Special Intensive Revision" for the purpose of producing "pure electoral rolls," as chief election commissioner Gyanesh Kumar had recently asserted. As the process progresses across nine states and three Union territories, it is not as yet clear what will happen to the 65 lakh deleted voters from the Bihar electoral rolls. Will they end up in expensive-to-run and mostly unmanageable detention centres?

The cocktail of ethnic chauvinism, nativist rhetoric and exclusionary nationalism is entirely populist in nature and purpose and works in different ways for the multiplicity of political parties with different ideologies and inflection points. That is, ethnic chauvinism, nativist rhetoric and exclusionary nationalism are useful in India's present social, religious, political and economic composition and competitive elections.

In that respect, India is one more, and the world's largest democracy, that is intensely exercised about the presence of illegal migrants, as defined by versions of the Citizenship Act and the revised Immigration and Foreigners Registration Act 2025. With due apologies for the colonial/Westernised mindset that finds comparisons with countries like the United States, in the United Kingdom, France, Germany and several other European countries, the fact is that in the 21st century it is striking that there has been a significant rise and spread of political parties advocating the idea that immigrants, illegal immigrants and non-natives pose a threat and are to be feared because the "native"

(sic!) majorities are in danger of being outnumbered.

The people who come into countries like India, the United States, Britain, France, Germany and others, do so for many different reasons; they are trafficked in by networks and or make their way in through illegal border crossings or beach landings as illegal entrants, in search of economic, social and personal security or for political reasons. Once in, like all immigrant groups, they sell their labour cheap and contribute to increasing the wealth of nations, specifically the host nation.

The value of migrant workers has been reconfirmed by US President Donald Trump after triggering chaotic disruptions over visas, deporting foreign workers allegedly violating visa conditions, often in chains, and packing off suspected illegals-undocumented-terrorists-criminals to detention centres. The about-turn over H-1B visas, earlier in November, came because the United States had an urgent need "to bring in talent" and to "teach our people", or finance colleges with international money. This tells it all — immigrants are necessary regardless of the political fallout for the "America First" and "Make America Great Again" campaign promise.

The surge in ethnic chauvinism, nativist rhetoric and exclusionary nationalist discourse in India, around the time of all elections, is part of the anti-Liberal-Left, hardening Rightist politics across the world. In states where the narrative of demographic changes to the majority Hindu communities' status is allegedly a threat because of inflows of illegal migrants of Muslims from Bangladesh and Rohingyas from Myanmar, the Right-Liberal-Left confrontation is inevitable. There are some differences in the details bet-

In the 1990s, then Union home minister L.K. Advani had floated the idea of long-duration work permits, something like the Green Card in the US and the 'Indefinite Leave to Remain' certification in the UK

ween countries and why they harbour illegal immigrants.

India's rules are peculiar in that sense and framed within the ethnic chauvinist-nativist-exclusionary nationalist discourse. Illegal immigration is a crime for starters; and Muslims are excluded from applying under the Citizenship Amendment Act; there is no transparency about how many can be, usually or annually, given permits to work or apply for citizenship. The policy is framed to be restrictive.

There is no data that is not an estimate or even guesswork as only 3,500 people between January and July 2025 were detected as illegal migrants. There are estimates of how many Bangladeshis are living in India without valid documents; the number varies between two crores and less. In contrast, between 2009 and 2025, some 16,000 Indians were deported from the US to India as illegal immigrants.

But the "ghuspehiya" story is a favourite potboiler. In 2024, for the Jharkhand Assembly election, it was expected to power the Bharatiya Janata Party to a majority. It did not. From 2016, the story in all its variations was used to drive the BJP's appeal and cut into the Trinamul Congress' dominance in West Bengal. The less than successful outcomes, in the 2016, 2019, 2021 and 2024 Assembly and Lok Sabha elections, has not served as a demonstration that Hindu vote bank politics, up against Muslim vote bank politics, is not a winning strategy.

The SIR 2025-2026 is expected to weed out the illegal migrants, or that is what Union home minister Amit Shah implied as much in his

speech last week: "SIR is a purification of the voters' list... We will deport every single infiltrator from this country. This is our resolve." That is, the Election Commission will do the job of detecting, while the home ministry and the machinery of the Border Security Force and intelligence-gathering agencies fail and have failed over years.

The problem is not just the borders. India said it had closed its border with Bangladesh after the deposed Sheikh Hasina fled and received sanctuary in India. It prompted Mamata Banerjee to declare that no one would be turned away if they sought sanctuary in India in troubled times.

The problem is with the policy. In the 1990s, the then Union home minister, L.K. Advani, also of the BJP and the RSS, had floated the idea of long-duration work permits; something like the Green Card in the United States and the "Indefinite Leave to Remain" certification in the UK that enables non-citizens to live and work, pay taxes and receive social security benefits, but not vote in these countries. Had India's various governments, the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance or the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance, spent 30 years in negotiating with South Asian neighbours on how it would host non-Indian migrant workers, it may have been able to save money on policing and failing at policing the borders.

It would be cheaper and better if India had worked harder on resolving the problem of migration across South Asia instead of producing annually yet another "ghuspehiya" pot boiler. It would have saved money on political campaigns and on setting up detention centres for lakhs of "D" (deleted) voters, as has happened in Assam. If, though it is a remote possibility, the Indian government were to think about it as a cost and efficiency problem, it may feel driven to find a solution on voters, illegal migrants with dubious credentials.

Shikha Mukerjee is a senior journalist in Kolkata

LETTERS

‘MACAULAY MINDSET’

Prime Minister Narendra Modi finds a foe in "an Englishman named Lord Macaulay" with renewed interest to pursue his and his party's future course of action. He holds the 19th century British parliamentarian-cum-administrator responsible for 'anglicising' Indian thinking and way of life and "India's disconnection from its roots". It has been Hindu Right's long-held grouse that Macaulay infected Indian polity with Western knowledge systems and values and developed a "slavish mentality" among Indians. Hindutva proponents have coined phrases like "colonial mindset", "Macaulay's children" and "cultural traitors" to tilt the political discourse on Macaulay to its favour. What many British nationals did contrasted with what Britain did as an imperial power during colonial rule. Macaulay and some others ushered in fresh ideas and policies to 'modernise' India. For all his faults, Macaulay introduced the notion of equality in the hidebound and hierarchically organised society. He gave importance to universal education and democratic reforms.

G. David Milton  
Maruthancode

SAI BABA CENTENARY

While our country is now flooded with many Babas and Yogis, many of whom are fakes, the journey of Sri Satya Sai Baba, is a great blessing not only to all believers but also to the non-believers. His devotion to the mission, 'Love all, Serve all. Help ever, Hurt never', was unmatched and adorable and he never missed a day of his life to perform his mission. Service to the poor and needy is service to God and this is what Sri Satya Sai Baba has taught us.

Tharcus S. Fernando  
Chennai

Mail your letters to chennai@deccanmail.com

Skand Tayal



Within one month of assuming office, Japan's new Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi faces a sharp dip in Japan-China relations provoked by her November 7 remarks hinting that any Chinese military action against Taiwan could lead to a Japanese military response. Ms Takaichi said: "If there are battleships and the use of force... it could constitute a survival-threatening situation".

Under Japan's 2015 security laws a "survival-threatening situation" refers to a situation when an armed attack on Japan's allies presents an "existential threat" to Japan. In such an event, Japan's "Self-Defence Forces" can be mobilised.

In a stern "wolf-warrior" response, China's consul-general in Osaka threatened on X to "cut off that dirty neck", in an apparent response to the Japanese PM. China's embassy in Tokyo issued a statement that China was "willing to make every effort to strive for the peaceful reunification of both sides of the Taiwan Straits", but will "never promise to renounce the use of force". China also issued an advisory to its tourists and 100,000 students in Japan to reconsider their travel plans.

China's *Global Times* has sent a clear, stark message to the Japanese leadership, warning: "If Japan dares to interfere in China's reunification cause, or dares to attempt an armed intervention in the cross-straits situation under the pretext of a 'survival-threatening situation', it would be an act of aggression and definitely meet a firm response from China." Responding to the strong criticism by Beijing, Ms Takaichi said she would

refrain from similar comments in future.

This spurt in tensions between Japan and its largest trading partner, China, comes amid political uncertainty and economic stress in Japan. Recent data showed Japan's economy shrank by 0.4 per cent in the third quarter, indicating an annual projected decline of 1.8 per cent in GDP. Chinese tourists make a significant contribution to Japan's service industry and retail sales. After the recent advisory, major Chinese agencies halted sales for Japan tours and allowed customers to cancel or change flights free of charge.

In a bid for damage control, Tokyo said that discouraging personal exchanges such as for tourism and studies was "completely contradicting an agreement" between the Japanese PM and President Xi Jinping at their first meeting in Gyeongju on October 31, on the Apec summit sidelines, for a "strategic and mutually beneficial relationship" as well as "constructive and stable ties."

To calm the waters the director-general of the Japanese foreign ministry's Asian and Oceanic Affairs Bureau visited Beijing on November 17. The meetings did not resolve the issue as China banned Japanese seafood imports. On November 20, the Chinese foreign ministry spokesman stated that Japan "should retract its erroneous remarks and take concrete actions to safeguard the political foundation of China-Japan relations; otherwise, China will have no choice but to take further measures".

It may be recalled that Article 9 of the US occupation forces' drafted Constitution imposed in

1947 on a defeated Japan said: "The Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes." Its interpretation and practice has evolved since then. In the wake of the Communist takeover of China and the Korean War, the 75,000-strong National Police Reserve was converted in 1954 as "Japan Self-Defence Forces". The 2015 legislation introduced the concept of "other crises of Japan's survival", in addition to the existing categories of an "armed attack against Japan" and "anticipated armed attack against Japan" as a situation that may trigger Japan's use of force. This reinterpretation allows Japan to exercise the right of "collective self-defence" and to engage in military action.

In May 2017, then Prime Minister Shinzo Abe had set a 2020 timeline for revising Article 9, which would legitimise the SDF in the Constitution. However, he retired due to health problems and was tragically assassinated in July 2022.

Since 1967, Japan has followed "Three Non-Nuclear Principles" of not possessing, not producing and not allowing introduction of nuclear weapons in Japanese territory. On November 12, during a debate in the Diet, Prime Minister Takaichi said that Japan's security policy would be revised by the end of 2026 and she could not "definitively state" that the wording of these principles will remain the same. This ambiguous statement was criticised by pacifists within Japan and outsiders, particularly in the Chinese media.

In her long political career, Ms Takaichi was

extremely close to the worldview of late Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and was a vocal critic of China's military buildup. She has visited Taiwan in the past and met Taiwan's representative at the recent Apec summit in South Korea.

China is Japan's largest trading partner, with a turnover of \$293 billion in 2024. There is a degree of interdependence in their economy and trade. But on balance, Japan is more exposed to Chinese pressure on export of rare earths, industrial magnets, tourists and import of consumer and industrial products.

On Nov. 21, China sent a letter to UN Secretary-General António Guterres criticising the Japanese PM's remarks as a "grave violation of international law". On November 23, China's foreign minister Wang Yi termed the remarks as "shocking" and said that they had "crossed a red line".

Meanwhile, Japan's decision to station surface-to-air missiles on its southwestern islands — about 110 km from Taiwan — was criticised by China as an "extremely dangerous step". Amidst the escalating tensions, the US reaffirmed its commitment to the security alliance with Japan.

In 2024, China spent an estimated \$314 billion on defence, compared to Japan's expenditure of \$55 billion. The unpredictable and constantly changing power balance in the Indo-Pacific region will need to be factored in by the Japanese leadership in determining their policy towards China and Taiwan.

The writer is a retired Indian diplomat



THE ASIAN AGE

27 NOVEMBER 2025

Ensure diversity & accept history to fulfil 2047 goals

Prime Minister Narendra Modi often speaks about the demographic dividend that awaits India. He bases his prediction for a bright future for the country on its demographic profile — more than 50 per cent of the population of which is aged below 30 years. This is at a time when a great many nations across the world, including several developed economies, are facing the dilemma of an increasingly ageing population and a progressively declining replacement ratio.

The Prime Minister also talks of the Amrit Kaal — the 25 years from 2022 to 2047, the year in which India will celebrate 100 years of its Independence. Mr Modi has shared his vision of redoubling national efforts during these years so that India will be a developed country by their completion. The Prime Minister promises his citizens that the government he leads will do anything in its power, even rework its agenda, too, in order to guide them to prosperity.

Be that as it may, Mr Modi, however, cannot unshackle himself completely from the politics of hatred that has catapulted him to the Prime Minister's chair. His speech at Ayodhya after hoisting the flag marking the completion of the works for the Ram temple there was, unfortunately, no call to duty for a diverse populace but an appeal to the communal feelings of a section of the people whom the Sangh Parivar has fed with its own version of history over a sustained period of time.

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However, instead of prodding the people and leading them in a united effort at nation building, the Prime Minister wants to remind them of "wounds and pain of centuries". True, history has its share of injustices but they have been perpetrated by players of all faiths and persuasion. It is one thing to learn from history and try and ensure that its bitter episodes are not repeated but it's another to insist on attempting to 'right' its wrongs. India can be rebuilt not by constantly reminiscing about its past but by accepting the present warts and all and working towards a vision.

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The government must go back to the drawing boards to prepare the blueprint for the future. Jawaharlal Nehru, in his brilliant treatise *Discovery of India*, has insisted that India cannot, and need not, ignore its past. Instead, it must take the right lessons from it and make them the foundation for its future. And that is the way to make the country the rightful recipient of its so-called demographic dividend.

Ethiopian ash hits air traffic

The eruption of Hayli Gubbi in Ethiopia's Afar region, which was dormant for nearly 12,000 years, on November 23 jolted the world into a renewed awareness about its geographies' interwovenness. The shield volcano belched ash high into the sky, generating a plume that soared up to 14 kilometres — affecting air travel from Ethiopia to India.

It showed that no country could remain unaffected by Earth's deep geophysical rhythms. Domestic and international flights to and from India were cancelled, rerouted or delayed as aviation authorities issued urgent advisories and rerouted air-traffic corridors.

A similar impact was seen in 2010 when a volcano erupted Eyjafjallajökull in Iceland, affecting air travel across Europe. Though the immediate ash threat recedes quickly, the world needs to reflect on broader implications.

According to an estimate, the world had seen around 90 major volcanic activities since the year 2000. This is the second volcanic eruption in Ethiopia, which sits on the ridge of two sub-divisions — Nubia and Somalia — of the African plate. The east African country is the most active region for volcanic eruptions due to the drift in the Somalia division.

As the Somalian division is adjacent to the Indian plate, India would get affected whenever any major volcanic eruption happens in Ethiopia. Though the major impact of the Somalian rift on India is ruled out, the country needs to invest in understanding nature, as no country can withstand its fury. The world, therefore, should have a coordinated, multinational framework of geological research, satellite surveillance, real-time atmospheric modelling and shared early-warning systems.

As "black-swan" events like volcanic eruptions, severe cyclones, wildfires and glacier melts get more frequent, no country can remain an island. If humanity hopes to avert greater disruption, it must transcend borders and come together to build capacity to either slow down and pause, or reverse climate change.

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

Subhani



Resolve migration issue to tackle 'illegals' crisis



Shikha Mukerjee

The 2025-26 election season has resurrected the description of "ghuspeethiya" for illegal migrants and punched it up, transforming the intensive revision of electoral rolls into a "Special Intensive Revision" for the purpose of producing "pure electoral rolls," as chief election commissioner Gyanesh Kumar had recently asserted. As the process progresses across nine states and three Union territories, it is not as yet clear what will happen to the 65 lakh deleted voters from the Bihar electoral rolls. Will they end up in expensive-to-run and mostly unmanageable detention centres?

The cocktail of ethnic chauvinism, nativist rhetoric and exclusionary nationalism is entirely populist in nature and purpose and works in different ways for the multiplicity of political parties with different ideologies and inflection points. That is, ethnic chauvinism, nativist rhetoric and exclusionary nationalism are useful in India's present social, religious, political and economic composition and competitive elections.

In that respect, India is one more, and the world's largest democracy, that is intensely exercised about the presence of illegal migrants, as defined by versions of the Citizenship Act and the revised Immigration and Foreigners Registration Act 2025. With due apologies for the colonial/Westernised mindset that finds comparisons with countries like the United States, in the United Kingdom, France, Germany and several other European countries, the fact is that in the 21st century it is striking that there has been a significant rise and spread of political parties advocating the idea that immigrants, illegal immigrants and non-natives pose a threat and are to be feared because the "native"

(sic!) majorities are in danger of being outnumbered.

The people who come into countries like India, the United States, Britain, France, Germany and others, do so for many different reasons; they are trafficked in by networks and or make their way in through illegal border crossings or beach landings as illegal entrants, in search of economic, social and personal security or for political reasons. Once in, like all immigrant groups, they sell their labour cheap and contribute to increasing the wealth of nations, specifically the host nation.

The value of migrant workers has been reconfirmed by US President Donald Trump after triggering chaotic disruptions over visas, deporting foreign workers allegedly violating visa conditions, often in chains, and packing off suspected illegals-undocumented-terrorists-criminals to detention centres. The about-turn over H-1B visas, earlier in November, came because the United States had an urgent need "to bring in talent" and to "teach our people", or finance colleges with international money. This tells it all — immigrants are necessary regardless of the political fallout for the "America First" and "Make America Great Again" campaign promise.

The surge in ethnic chauvinism, nativist rhetoric and exclusionary nationalist discourse in India, around the time of all elections, is part of the anti-Liberal-Left, hardening Rightist politics across the world. In states where the narrative of demographic changes to the majority Hindu communities' status is allegedly a threat because of inflows of illegal migrants of Muslims from Bangladesh and Rohingyas from Myanmar, the Right-Liberal-Left confrontation is inevitable. There are some differences in the details bet-

In the 1990s, then Union home minister L.K. Advani had floated the idea of long-duration work permits, something like the Green Card in the US and the 'Indefinite Leave to Remain' certification in the UK

ween countries and why they harbour illegal immigrants.

India's rules are peculiar in that sense and framed within the ethnic chauvinist-nativist-exclusionary nationalist discourse. Illegal immigration is a crime for starters; and Muslims are excluded from applying under the Citizenship Amendment Act; there is no transparency about how many can be, usually or annually, given permits to work or apply for citizenship. The policy is framed to be restrictive.

There is no data that is not an estimate or even guesswork as only 3,500 people between January and July 2025 were detected as illegal migrants. There are estimates of how many Bangladeshis are living in India without valid documents; the number varies between two crores and less. In contrast, between 2009 and 2025, some 16,000 Indians were deported from the US to India as illegal immigrants.

But the "ghuspeethiya" story is a favourite potboiler. In 2024, for the Jharkhand Assembly election, it was expected to power the Bharatiya Janata Party to a majority. It did not. From 2016, the story in all its variations was used to drive the BJP's appeal and cut into the Trinamul Congress' dominance in West Bengal. The less than successful outcomes, in the 2016, 2019, 2021 and 2024 Assembly and Lok Sabha elections, has not served as a demonstration that Hindu vote bank politics, up against Muslim vote bank politics, is not a winning strategy.

The SIR 2025-2026 is expected to weed out the illegal migrants, or that is what Union home minister Amit Shah implied as much in his

speech last week: "SIR is a purification of the voters' list... We will deport every single infiltrator from this country. This is our resolve." That is, the Election Commission will do the job of detecting, while the home ministry and the machinery of the Border Security Force and intelligence-gathering agencies fail and have failed over years.

The problem is not just the borders. India said it had closed its border with Bangladesh after the deposed Sheikh Hasina fled and received sanctuary in India. It prompted Mamata Banerjee to declare that no one would be turned away if they sought sanctuary in India in troubled times.

The problem is with the policy. In the 1990s, the then Union home minister, L.K. Advani, also of the BJP and the RSS, had floated the idea of long-duration work permits; something like the Green Card in the United States and the "Indefinite Leave to Remain" certification in the UK that enables non-citizens to live and work, pay taxes and receive social security benefits, but not vote in these countries. Had India's various governments, the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance or the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance, spent 30 years in negotiating with South Asian neighbours on how it would host non-Indian migrant workers, it may have been able to save money on policing and failing at policing the borders.

It would be cheaper and better if India had worked harder on resolving the problem of migration across South Asia instead of producing annually yet another "ghuspeethiya" pot boiler. It would have saved money on political campaigns and on setting up detention centres for lakhs of "D" (deleted) voters, as has happened in Assam. If, though it is a remote possibility, the Indian government were to think about it as a cost and efficiency problem, it may feel driven to find a solution on voters, illegal migrants with dubious credentials.

Shikha Mukerjee is a senior journalist in Kolkata

LETTERS

PAK-FREE COMMERCE

India is cautiously rebuilding trade ties with Afghanistan, even as the nation has still not fully overcome the trauma of the Kandahar air hijack. Fresh cargo routes from Amritsar and Delhi to Kabul have reopened, giving Afghanistan a direct lifeline that bypasses Pakistan entirely. Kabul has also sought inclusion of the Kandahar sector. With Pakistan-Afghanistan trade shrinking from \$1.8 billion to about \$1 billion, Afghanistan is looking for dependable partners. Pakistan's continued ban on Indian carriers using its airspace since April has pushed India to strengthen alternatives. The Chabahar port route through Iran has now widened India's access not only to Afghanistan but also to Europe and West Asia.

R.S. Narula  
Patiala

FEW SAFEGUARDS

THE NEW LABOUR CODES represent a balanced yet challenging reform. On one hand, they consolidate fragmented laws into a simpler, unified framework that promises greater transparency, ease of compliance and wider formalisation, potentially improving wages, social security and documented protection for workers, while on the other hand, weaker job security, tighter restrictions on strikes and unionisation and provisions that allow firms with fewer than 300 employees to dismiss workers more easily raise serious concerns about the erosion of worker rights. These codes are, therefore, neither wholly beneficial nor entirely harmful; their real impact will depend on how responsibly, transparently and fairly states and institutions implement and enforce them.

As'ad Kabir Nagari  
Mumbai

ROCK BOTTOM

IT WILL NOT be an exaggeration if we say that Team India has hit rock bottom because a year back New Zealand has whitewashed us by winning the Test series 3-0 and now the South African team has done the same in the two-Test series by winning the Gwahati test by 408 runs. In the process South Africa handed the biggest defeat to our team by the runs. We have now remarkably lost five of the last seven home Tests. The role of specialists can never be overemphasised. Having four all-rounders was nothing but a luxury. In fact, Team India should learn from IPL where the impact player rule has been a revelation. Lot of heads will have to roll and some serious soul searching has to take place now.

Bal Govind  
Noida

Skand Tayal



Japan's ties with China worsening amid flareup on Taiwan remarks

Within one month of assuming office, Japan's new Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi faces a sharp dip in Japan-China relations provoked by her November 7 remarks hinting that any Chinese military action against Taiwan could lead to a Japanese military response. Ms Takaichi said: "If there are battleships and the use of force... it could constitute a survival-threatening situation".

Under Japan's 2015 security laws a "survival-threatening situation" refers to a situation when an armed attack on Japan's allies presents an "existential threat" to Japan. In such an event, Japan's "Self-Defence Forces" can be mobilised.

In a stern "wolf-warrior" response, China's consul-general in Osaka threatened on X to "cut off that dirty neck", in an apparent response to the Japanese PM. China's embassy in Tokyo issued a statement that China was "willing to make every effort to strive for the peaceful reunification of both sides of the Taiwan Straits", but will "never promise to renounce the use of force". China also issued an advisory to its tourists and 100,000 students in Japan to reconsider their travel plans.

China's *Global Times* has sent a clear, stark message to the Japanese leadership, warning: "If Japan dares to interfere in China's reunification cause, or dares to attempt an armed intervention in the cross-straits situation under the pretext of a 'survival-threatening situation', it would be an act of aggression and definitely meet a firm response from China." Responding to the strong criticism by Beijing, Ms Takaichi said she would

refrain from similar comments in future.

This spurt in tensions between Japan and its largest trading partner, China, comes amid political uncertainty and economic stress in Japan. Recent data showed Japan's economy shrank by 0.4 per cent in the third quarter, indicating an annual projected decline of 1.8 per cent in GDP. Chinese tourists make a significant contribution to Japan's service industry and retail sales. After the recent advisory, major Chinese agencies halted sales for Japan tours and allowed customers to cancel or change flights free of charge.

In a bid for damage control, Tokyo said that discouraging personal exchanges such as for tourism and studies was "completely contradicting an agreement" between the Japanese PM and President Xi Jinping at their first meeting in Gyeongju on October 31, on the Apec summit sidelines, for a "strategic and mutually beneficial relationship" as well as "constructive and stable ties."

To calm the waters the director-general of the Japanese foreign ministry's Asian and Oceanic Affairs Bureau visited Beijing on November 17. The meetings did not resolve the issue as China banned Japanese seafood imports. On November 20, the Chinese foreign ministry spokesman stated that Japan "should retract its erroneous remarks and take concrete actions to safeguard the political foundation of China-Japan relations; otherwise, China will have no choice but to take further measures".

It may be recalled that Article 9 of the US occupation forces' drafted Constitution imposed in

1947 on a defeated Japan said: "The Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes." Its interpretation and practice has evolved since then. In the wake of the Communist takeover of China and the Korean War, the 75,000-strong National Police Reserve was converted in 1954 as "Japan Self-Defence Forces". The 2015 legislation introduced the concept of "other crises of Japan's survival", in addition to the existing categories of an "armed attack against Japan" and "anticipated armed attack against Japan" as a situation that may trigger Japan's use of force. This reinterpretation allows Japan to exercise the right of "collective self-defence" and to engage in military action.

In May 2017, then Prime Minister Shinzo Abe had set a 2020 timeline for revising Article 9, which would legitimise the SDF in the Constitution. However, he retired due to health problems and was tragically assassinated in July 2022.

Since 1967, Japan has followed "Three Non-Nuclear Principles" of not possessing, not producing and not allowing introduction of nuclear weapons in Japanese territory. On November 12, during a debate in the Diet, Prime Minister Takaichi said that Japan's security policy would be revised by the end of 2026 and she could not "definitively state" that the wording of these principles will remain the same. This ambiguous statement was criticised by pacifists within Japan and outsiders, particularly in the Chinese media.

In her long political career, Ms Takaichi was

extremely close to the worldview of late Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and was a vocal critic of China's military buildup. She has visited Taiwan in the past and met Taiwan's representative at the recent Apec summit in South Korea.

China is Japan's largest trading partner, with a turnover of \$293 billion in 2024. There is a degree of interdependence in their economy and trade. But on balance, Japan is more exposed to Chinese pressure on export of rare earths, industrial magnets, tourists and import of consumer and industrial products.

On Nov. 21, China sent a letter to UN Secretary-General António Guterres criticising the Japanese PM's remarks as a "grave violation of international law". On November 23, China's foreign minister Wang Yi termed the remarks as "shocking" and said that they had "crossed a red line".

Meanwhile, Japan's decision to station surface-to-air missiles on its southwestern islands — about 110 km from Taiwan — was criticised by China as an "extremely dangerous step". Amidst the escalating tensions, the US reaffirmed its commitment to the security alliance with Japan.

In 2024, China spent an estimated \$314 billion on defence, compared to Japan's expenditure of \$55 billion. The unpredictable and constantly changing power balance in the Indo-Pacific region will need to be factored in by the Japanese leadership in determining their policy towards China and Taiwan.

The writer is a retired Indian diplomat



Editor's

TAKE

## India's fight against crime against women

The rising cases of violence against women—from female infanticide to domestic abuse and gender-based killing—demand urgent and decisive action

With Bollywood actress Celina Jaitley filing a case against her Austrian husband Hogg, it has once again become evident that domestic violence can occur across class and nationality, and that the rot runs deeper than imagined. She claimed she has suffered severe emotional, physical, sexual, and verbal abuse by her husband, because of which she was forced to flee her home in Austria and return to India.

This menace has been whetted by the latest United Nations data which is a reminder of how deeply violence against women remains embedded across societies. As per the UN data, in 2024 alone, 50,000 women and girls were killed by intimate partners or family members – one every ten minutes. Globally, 137 women lose their lives every day to those closest to them. These numbers, released by UNODC and UN Women, shows the mirror to the societies and nations who claim that gender violence has been controlled.

Back home in India, despite its economic and social advances cannot claim to be different. Female infanticide and gender-based killing in India are for real. In India sex-selective abortions and neglect of girl children, continues through early marriage, dowry-related violence, trafficking, and domestic abuse.

India, home to deep-rooted patriarchal norms and skewed sex ratios in several states, is undeniably a significant contributor to this distressing global statistic. The UN report makes one fact painfully clear: the home remains the most dangerous place for women. In contrast to the global pattern in which only 11 per cent of male homicides are committed by family members, 60 per cent of women's killing occur within the close confines of homes in India. This points to a larger cultural crisis.

When those who should protect become perpetrators, when honour is weaponised, and when daughters are seen as burdens, violence becomes inevitable.

Decades of policy measures—from the Pre-Conception and 'Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques Act' to *Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao*—have created awareness but not transformation. Laws exist, yet implementation leave much to be desired. Deep-seated prejudices, economic pressures, dowry systems, and lack of gender-sensitive policing continue to prevent meaningful change. The onslaught of digital media has opened yet another threat for women. The UN data also highlights a growing threat: digital violence. As UN Women notes, harassment, stalking, and coercion online often escalate offline. In India online abuse is becoming common. Without strong cyber laws, early intervention systems, and trained law-enforcement units, they often have to bear the brunt in silence.

Time to act is now. India must prioritise early prevention—identifying patterns of control, threats, harassment, and coercion. The state agencies must ensure strict enforcement of existing laws while creating specialised femicide investigation units.

And most critically, India must invest in girls – through education, health, legal protection, and economic empowerment—because crimes against women thrives where girls have little perceived value.



BALRAJ MEHTA

*"Remember, for your Progress, for your Welfare, for your Happiness, never fail to cast your vote in elections"- Dr APJ Abdul Kalam"*

The news swirling around us, apart from smog in Delhi NCR, are once again (after the Bihar elections) focusing on the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) being conducted by the Election Commission of India. There is a lot of noise in West Bengal, Jharkhand, Tamil Nadu and surprisingly in UP, Punjab and Delhi NCR. Especially revealing are the videos of illegal immigrants lining up at border checkpoints along WB-BD border for getting back to their native homes in Bangladesh. I wonder if it is because of the SIR being conducted in West Bengal or due to the Immigration and Foreigners Act 2025, which has come into force on 01 Sep 2025 - it is a moot question which, however, will answer itself in due course!

The ongoing debate rekindled the memory of my own experiences of this grave security problem, which I saw from various angles during my service. As a Company Commander, I was deployed for Op RHINO in the district of Barpeta and adjoining areas in Assam for about six months during 1995-96.

I remember coming across many overtly Muslim Bengali-speaking men who claimed to have studied in local schools, being natives of Assam. Whenever I asked them to read a poster/signboard printed in Assamese, they could not - they had no clue; obviously, they were Bangladeshi illegals. Later as CO of my battalion in 2004, I was tasked to prepare a presentation on security threats and consulted a whole lot of literature, intelligence summaries and authoritative books by eminent authors to research on infiltration in areas of West Bengal, Bihar, Jharkhand, as also Pakistan's efforts to export militancy through the Indo-Nepal border. The experiences of Lt Gen SK Sinha, who had been the governor of Assam from Sep 1993 till Apr 1998, and at that time was serving as governor of J&K (Jun 2003 - Jun 2008), provided a lot of clarity.

His accounts were eye-opening as to how the state governments had been encouraging illegal immigration from Bangladesh over the last many decades and recruiting them as captive vote banks. Another useful publication (amongst many others) was the book by Mr Arun Shourie, 'Will the Iron Fence Save a Tree Hollowed by termites', detailing the machinations of Pakistan ISI to foment trouble in India.

It is also worth remembering that Bangladesh had completely come under Pakistan's spell during the regimes of Begum Khaleda Zia between 1991-96 and 2001-2006. Later, while writing my

# To S.I.R. with love

The Special Intensive Revision is a step towards strengthening our democracy and to effectively counter the half-front war we are facing every day, which is being waged from within, facilitated in a very large measure by illegal voters who are not citizens of India



MPhil thesis on 'International Terrorism and Implications for India' in 2007, I was able to see a continuing trend of external enemies undermining our security and own political parties turning willing co-conspirators for selfish power games. I noticed the same many times during my tenure as GOC of a Sub Area looking after almost whole of North East in 2017-18. Coming back to the present turmoil, the air is surcharged (or sir-charged) with uncertainty for the Bangladesh nationals staying illegally.

There are reports of emptying out of slums around Kolkata, panic in areas around the Siliguri corridor and even a shortage of maids/domestic staff in Gurugram, among other cities. While on the border, BSF check posts are having their hands full in dealing with an extraordinary exodus.

In the specific context of West Bengal, it will be worthwhile to recollect that the issue of enclaves was left simmering after the Land Boundary Agreement of 1974. It was finally resolved by the LBA Protocol of 2011, and exchange was completed four years later, when on 31 Jul 2015 India transferred 111 enclaves to Bangladesh and in turn received 54.

Effective border guarding is difficult due to low-lying terrain, unpredictable water bodies, swamps and unfenced stretches. These infirmities permit unchecked infiltration and facilitate illegal trade, including the smuggling of drugs, cattle and other contrabands. Reluctance has been shown by state governments in providing land for border fencing.

Out of the total Bangladesh border of 2261 km with West Bengal, as informed to Lok Sabha by MHA on 20 Aug 2025, 569 km remains unfenced. Land is yet to be acquired for nearly 230 km - more than 10 years after the last of the boundary issue of enclaves was finally resolved and border alignment finalised! This delay, to my

## The Pioneer

SINCE 1865

IT IS ALSO WORTH REMEMBERING THAT BANGLADESH HAD COMPLETELY COME UNDER PAKISTAN'S SPELL DURING THE REGIMES OF BEGUM KHALEDA ZIA BETWEEN 1991-96 AND 2001-2006

Balraj Mehta is a Major General and has been decorated with Sena Medal

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 @BalrajMehta  
 in/maj-gen-balraj-mehta-arazi-group-585098308/

# A New Path For A New World

gion and spirituality, we need to define these two terms and understand clearly that they are not the same. Religions generally have a large amount of faith which may or may not find support in reason and may even go against facts known through enquiry, experimentation, and evidence. Religions also come with rituals, ceremonies, acts, and paraphernalia of worship. Spirituality, in comparison, is free from such elements or has very little of them.

The main substance of spirituality is values, virtues, and rational spiritual beliefs that enlighten a person about the self, the meaning of life, the role and goal of human existence, and the method of bringing purity and quietude to the mind in a simple, rational, and experiential way. It can be said that spirituality is the universal core of all religions. It is the essence of all wisdom. The opposite of spirituality is gross materialism which breeds competition, selfishness, and a struggle for survival. Spirituality leads to harmony and peace.

If it does not bring these benefits, then it is not spirituality but pseudo-spirituality. The aim of every religion is to make a person pious and a good citizen. But with time, every religion went through degeneration. So it is not correct to condemn all religions or reject everything in any one religion. However, if a religion instigates its followers against others or gives its followers such frenzy that they attack

people of other faiths, then such a system cannot be called religion in the true sense. Fanatics who have no deep religious experience but raise slogans and get provoked easily are the real enemies of religion. When many people say that religion and politics should not mix, they say so because of this background. India, with its pluralistic culture, gives every person the right and freedom of religious belief without government interference.

The Indian polity is known as secular. Yet, despite this, many riots after independence were caused by religious intolerance. In such situations, spirituality can play a major role in maintaining peace and harmony in a society where people speak different languages, follow different religions, and have different lifestyles. Spirituality removes bias and prejudice, breaks the walls of casteism, cultism, and meaningless customs, and creates a basis for brotherhood. Spirituality implies universal love, non-violence, compassion, virtue, simplicity, honesty, detachment, and service. If spirituality is placed at the centre of politics and society, the world would be a better place. One cannot have humility, detachment, compassion, or freedom from hatred and violence without spirituality.

The writer is a spiritual teacher and popular columnist

## The Pioneer

SINCE 1865

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## New CJJ's Challenges and Priorities

The new Chief Justice of India, Justice Surya Kant, will serve for nearly fifteen months, a tenure that is far from insignificant, considering the present condition of the judiciary. The looming threat to judicial independence from various quarters is an issue the fifty-third Chief Justice must tackle with urgency. Equally important is the administrative dimension of the judiciary, which is likely to demand continuous attention.

The transfer and appointment of senior judges have raised widespread concern. "Judges judging judges" is not inherently problematic; however, the increasing tendency of the collegium to overprotect "brother judges", leading to national outcry, needs to be curbed firmly and transparently. The judiciary must recognise its limitations and maintain a balanced approach in its remarks on individuals and issues.

Fair and swift disposal of matters is always a daunting responsibility for a Chief Justice, yet it remains true that no Chief Justice can significantly reduce case pendency on his own. If the government lacks the will to implement meaningful reforms, there is little the highest judicial authority can do. By the time a Chief Justice attempts to undertake reforms beyond lip service, his tenure is often close to ending, making way for his successor.

GANAPATHI BHAT | AKOLA

## Reform Must Balance Compassion

Apologies for the news report "CM Stalin urges PM to amend RTE Act", the appeal to safeguard in-service teachers from disqualification under the Teacher Eligibility Test (TET) mandate is both urgent and humane.

These educators were recruited through official procedures, have served for years, and now face the threat of losing their jobs due to a retrospective requirement. The Supreme Court's directive, though anchored in the pursuit of quality, overlooks the logistical and emotional strain on thousands of teachers, many of whom work in remote regions with limited access to training.

It is a welcome step to shield serving teachers from being penalised for systemic shortcomings. Abrupt dismissals would disrupt classroom continuity and worsen the existing shortage of experienced staff in government schools.

A phased compliance model, service-linked exemptions, and targeted support for TET preparation would offer a fairer approach. Parliament should act swiftly to amend the RTE and NCTE Acts not merely to protect livelihoods, but to uphold the integrity of public education. Teachers deserve dignity, not retroactive punishment. A nation that values learning must also value those who teach.

A. MYILSAMI | COIMBATORE

## Delhi's Transport Crisis Demands Action

The renewed focus on vehicular emissions is both urgent and justified. For decades, transport has remained the weakest link in Delhi's struggle against toxic air. Although the Supreme Court-mandated shift to CNG in the early 2000s provided temporary relief, the rapid surge in private vehicles soon wiped out those gains. Today, with Delhi once again shrouded in a blanket of poisonous smog, decisive action on transport can no longer be delayed.

The recent order to tighten green norms, penalise defaulting vehicles, and accelerate the transition to electric mobility is a step in the right direction. However, genuine progress depends on strengthening public transport. Despite an expanding metro network and an increasing fleet of electric buses, the system still falls short of the city's demands.

Encouraging carpooling and other behavioural changes may help, but such cooperation from the public will emerge only when residents witness a clear and consistent commitment from the government. Immediate, visible measures, such as effective dust control, improved road maintenance, and faster augmentation of the bus fleet, can foster this confidence. Cleaning Delhi's air requires a collective effort, built on credible and sustained governance.

SANJAY CHOPRA | PUNJAB

## PIC TALK



Farm workers pluck marigold flowers from a field, in Nadia, West Bengal. PHOTO: PTI

## DIGITAL EXPERIENCE

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## RUPEE'S DECLINE AND INDIA'S ECONOMIC PRIORITIES

The fall of the Indian rupee is not merely an economic statistic - it affects the daily life of every ordinary citizen. When the rupee weakens, the prices of fuel, cooking oil, electronic goods, and even essential medicines rise sharply. Families feel this burden almost immediately, making household budgeting increasingly difficult and tightening monthly expenses for millions. While it is understandable that global factors such as U.S. tariffs, geopolitical uncertainty, and soaring gold prices have contributed to the rupee's decline, the situation also highlights how dependent India remains on imports. The greater our reliance on foreign products, the more exposed our currency becomes to international volatility, leaving the economy vulnerable to forces beyond our control.

What the nation needs now is a well-designed, long-term strategy aimed at strengthening domestic production, boosting exports, and building sustained confidence among investors. India has enormous talent, abundant resources, and growing entrepreneurial strength. Yet without consistent policy support, improved infrastructure, and meaningful structural reforms, the rupee will continue to experience pressure whenever global markets fluctuate. A stable currency provides citizens with a sense of security and trust in the economy. It is therefore crucial that policymakers concentrate on fortifying India's economic foundations and resilience, ensuring a more predictable financial environment for all.

KR GAGAR | KARNATAKA

Please send your letter to the [info@dailypioneer.com](mailto:info@dailypioneer.com). In not more than 250 words. We appreciate your feedback.



# Who provided oxygen to the Maoists all these years?

Maoism's greatest victims have been the adivasis and indigenous tribal groups. After more than seventy years of independence, the benefits of development are finally beginning to reach the most vulnerable, empowering them to live as free citizens without fear and in control of their own future

FIRST  
Column



BALBIR  
PUNJ

On November 18, security forces successfully neutralized the notorious Naxal (Maoist) commander Madvi Hidma, who was wanted with a bounty of one crore rupees, following a fierce firefight in a remote forested region. With Hidma's elimination, it appears that the anti-Naxal operations have entered their final phase, bringing the Indian government closer to its goal of eradicating Maoist insurgency nationwide by March 2026, a target publicly announced by Union Home Minister Amit Shah.

Undoubtedly, this marks another significant achievement for the Modi government, reflecting ongoing efforts in governance and development. However, a section of Indian society-particularly some factions within the Left- are in mourning following Hidma's killing and the near total demise of Naxal movement.

Hidma is accused of killing over 150 people, including the one in Tadmetta in 2010, which left 76 CRPF personnel dead and the 2013 Jhiram Ghati (Darbha) attack, which wiped out the Congress leadership in Chhattisgarh. Apart from killing countless security personnel, Maoists, under the guise of pursuing a 'revolution,' have brutally murdered hundreds of innocent civilians, including women, children, and the elderly, often targeting villages and communities perceived as enemies.




This orgy of violence and death has persisted for nearly six decades. Couldn't it have been stopped earlier? Why was such decisive action against Naxalism not possible sooner? The answer lies in the worldview of the Left, which has remained deeply rooted in the Indian establishment for decades and has provided both ideological and material support to this violent movement. In other words, a segment of the ruling elite has been complicit in this grim dance of death and destruction, with both overt and covert support all these years.

Dr. Manmohan Singh, who served as India's Prime Minister from 2004 to 2014, identified Naxalism- the extremist Maoist insurgency that began in West Bengal in 1967- as India's most serious internal security threat. In June 2010, he underscored the urgent need for a comprehensive, iron-fisted policy to



DEMOCRACY, WITH ALL ITS INHERENT IMPERFECTIONS, NONETHELESS REMAINS THE MOST BALANCED, HUMANE, AND EFFECTIVE SYSTEM OF GOVERNANCE KNOWN TO HUMANITY

The writer is an eminent columnist and the author of 'Tryst with Ayodhya: Decolonisation of India' and 'Narrative ka Mayajal'

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counter the escalating violence and growing influence of left-wing extremism.

However, the National Advisory Council (NAC)- a body created outside the constitutional framework and chaired by Sonia Gandhi- opposed any strong counter-insurgency operations, advocating instead for negotiation-led and development-centric approaches.

It is widely recognised that the Manmohan Singh government operated largely under the influence of the NAC, whose members predominantly held Left-leaning political views. Most NAC members argued that Naxalism, could not be suppressed through force but required comprehensive development programmes in the affected areas.

The irony, of course, was that the very development projects they advocated- such as the construction of rural roads, the establishment of schools and banks, and the implementation of essential infrastructure- were persistently sabotaged by the Naxals. These insurgents viewed such initiatives as a threat to their territorial control and ideology.

Naxal sympathisers- often referred to as "Urban Naxals" - repeatedly promote the

narrative that Maoists are the true champions of Adivasis and the poor, claiming they resist alleged "oppression" on their behalf. The reality, however, is starkly different.

Owing to a combination of neglect rooted in British colonial policies and the subsequent failures of India's early post-independence governments, Naxals forcibly seized control of many tribal and remote regions through the barrel of a gun, cutting them off from the national mainstream.

The Maoists vandalised government offices, schools, and public infrastructure; set fire to buildings; blew up roads and bridges to hinder movement; and extorted local communities through systematic violence and intimidation- inflicting widespread fear, insecurity, and suffering. The result was all economic activities came to a halt and preventing the growth and integration of these areas into broader economic systems.

Over the past eleven years, the Modi government has actively confronted Naxalism through a dual approach: implementing targeted developmental initiatives such as building roads, schools, and healthcare facilities, while simultaneously deploying security forces to dismantle insurgent net-

works and restore order, with a focus on improving infrastructure, education, health services, and safety.

The ideological foundation of the Naxals is rooted in Mao Zedong's teachings, the Chinese communist leader whose tumultuous era was characterised by widespread atrocities against political dissenters, intellectuals, and perceived enemies of the state. During the Cultural Revolution alone, estimates suggest that approximately two million innocent individuals lost their lives due to purges, executions, and social upheavals orchestrated under his leadership.

Although China has moved away from many of Mao's original economic doctrines, it now relies on a distorted form of state capitalism characterised by significant government control of key industries and resources. Despite these economic shifts, its political and ideological core remains largely unchanged, emphasising centralised authority and a sense of ideological continuity.

Harbouring deep-seated animosity towards India, China has historically used Maoist groups- including urban Naxal activists- as proxies to influence regional conflicts and undermine India's stability.

What recently transpired in Delhi has attracted attention: air pollution remains an undeniably serious issue that demands an honest and open debate. During a demonstration at India Gate addressing this very concern, Left-wing activists shouted slogans such as "Madvi Hidma Amar Rahe," which translates to "Long live Madvi Hidma," and "Har Ghar se Charu Niklega," meaning "A Charu Mazumdar will arise from every home." When approached by authorities to calm the situation, they reportedly used pepper spray on the police officers, indicating a level of hostility and unrest.

The methods of Naxals bear grim resemblance to those of North Korean dictator Kim Jong-un. Just as Kim executes opponents publicly, these Left-wing extremists run kangaroo "people's courts" where innocents- branded arbitrarily as police informers or class enemies are summarily executed. The charges are framed by the Naxals, and the verdict is delivered by them.

The brand of communist ideology pursued by Maoists, characterized by its violent tactics and anti-human principles rooted in revolutionary fervor, has consistently failed to establish a prosperous or rights-respecting society anywhere in the world over till date. Despite various attempts in countries such as Nepal, India, and Peru, the Maoist approach has led to ongoing conflict, human rights violations, and instability.

Democracy, with all its inherent imperfections, nonetheless remains the most balanced, humane, and effective system of governance known to humanity. It offers a framework that emphasises individual rights, rule of law, and civic participation, making it far superior to alternative models, including theocratic systems such as Sharia, which impose strict religious laws and often suppress personal freedoms.

The truth is that Maoism's greatest victims have been the very communities- Adivasis, indigenous tribal groups residing mainly in remote, forested regions- and the deprived, marginalised populations often living in poverty and lacking access to basic amenities.

Hopefully, change is on the horizon. Maoists and their urban supporters are now on the run, signalling a shift. After more than seventy years of independence, the benefits of development are finally beginning to reach the most vulnerable, empowering them to live as free citizens- without fear and in control of their own future.

## Ayodhya Flag Hoisting Marks a Civilisational Turning Point for India



RAHUL  
KAUSHIK

Ayodhya's flag hoisting marks a rupture in India's civilisational timeline. It is not a ceremonial ascent of cloth over stone; it is a declaration that Indian civilisation, after centuries of subjugation, distortion, and hesitation, has resumed authorship of its own story. The moment becomes even more defining when placed alongside the speeches delivered today by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and RSS Sarsangchalak Mohan Bhagwat, both of whom articulated a clear shift in India's civilisational self-understanding. In mainstream political discourse, speeches often function as commentary. Today's addresses were different. They belonged to the category of foundational articulation, the kind that frames eras and redirects national consciousness. The Prime Minister spoke not as an administrator of the present but as a custodian of a long civilisational arc. He placed Ayodhya not merely in the domain of faith or national sentiment but in the deeper continuum of historical recovery- an India reclaiming its civilisational confidence after generations of deliberate erosion.

The PM invoked Thomas Macaulay's 1835 speech, the blueprint of colonial psychological engineering. Macaulay had argued that Britain must detach Indians from "all that is Indian and all that is spiritual," replacing inherited identity with a colonial mindset. By referencing this, the PM signalled that the struggle for the Ram Mandir was not only about a disputed site; it was about reversing the civilisational disorientation imposed upon India. The flag atop the temple stands as a rejection of that colonial project. It asserts that a civilisational people can reclaim their axis even after centuries of attempted deracination. PM Modi's emphasis on removing "symbols of slavery" from the national psyche extends this argument. He pointed out that civilisations decline not only through military defeat but through acceptance of imposed inferiority. His message was clear: India must cleanse its public life, public spaces, and public imagination of frameworks that once justified its subjugation. Ayodhya becomes the counter-symbol- not of triumphalism, but of recovered self-respect. The PM framed



Ayodhya as a civilisational centre, a point around which national memory, ethical order, and cultural purpose realign. He did not present the Ram Mandir as an achievement of his government. He cast it as a civilisational correction, a return of a people to their foundational narrative, interrupted by invaders, colonial administrators, and post-colonial elites. This framing ensures that Ayodhya transcends electoral politics and becomes a civilisational reference point meant to outlast governments and eras. Mohan Bhagwat reinforced this civilisational framing. He emphasised continuity: how generations of swayamsevaks, saints, devotees, and scholars held firm to the belief that the Ram Janmabhoomi must be restored.

He located the movement within a long tradition of sacrifice- civilisational, not partisan. Bhagwat reminded the nation that the Ram Mandir movement was not born recently; it was the cumulative expression of India's cultural memory, preserved by saints, akharas, and ordinary people who never let the idea fade. Together, the speeches formed a dual narrative: one rooted in historical memory, the other in institutional continuity.

Modi spoke to psychological recovery; Bhagwat acknowledged the structural labour that preserved the memory through decades. This moment also demands remembrance of those who carried the burden in earlier decades. L.K. Advani transformed cultural yearning into political articulation. Mahant Paramhans Ramchandra Das embodied the spiritual insistence on the sanctity of the site. Mahant Digvijaynath and Avaidyanath ensured the movement stayed on course. Ashok Singhal provided strategic clarity and national mobilisation. The Sangh Parivar sustained the civilisational claim when the political establishment




dismissed it. Their contributions created the foundation for the present moment. Without the saints, swayamsevaks, and leaders who shaped the movement's vocabulary, Ayodhya's restoration would have remained unresolved. The flag hoisting is therefore not a standalone event; it is the endpoint of a civilisational relay. In this sense, the leadership of the present era delivered the final consolidation. By aligning legal, administrative, infrastructural, and national sentiment into one direction, the current government ensured that centuries of civilisational aspiration materialised.

What makes the moment civilisational is its effect on collective self-understanding. The temple is more than a building; it is a centre of gravity. It signals that Indian civilisation has re-entered public life with clarity, unafraid of its past and unapologetic about its identity. It marks the end of the idea that Indian identity must be diluted to modernise. The PM's speech recognised this shift. He described Ayodhya as a site where India reclaims "virasat" (heritage) and "vikas" (progress), rejecting the colonial binary between roots and modernity.

His invocation of Macaulay underscored that the civilisational correction is also psychological. India must no longer see itself through colonial eyes. The flag rising above the Ram Mandir declares that a civilisation long denied its centre has restored it.

This moment will be remembered not as a religious event or political accomplishment, but as a civilisational turning point when India regained ownership of its narrative, memory, and future.

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## Healthcare: MedTech Innovation for Self-Reliance and Global Reach



JITENDRA  
SHARMA

India stands at the cusp of a healthcare transformation - one which is powered by indigenous innovation, collaboration and commercial scalability. For decades, our medical technology landscape was driven by dependency on foreign and finished goods. Through the help of strategic collaboration, robust R&D and visionary infrastructure, India is currently building its own medical technology ecosystem, which aligns with the nation's vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat, a self-reliant India.

### Beyond Manufacturing: Building the Ecosystem

When India began its MedTech journey, the focus was largely on manufacturing finished products. However, it soon becomes evident that manufacturing alone could not sustain the long-term growth. A deeper change was required for the same which strengthens the entire value chain. For instance, the ₹ 7,000 crore radiology industry depended on ₹ 700 crore worth of imported detectors. Recognising that no imaging manufacturer would set base without reliable access to such critical components, India starts focusing on component-level manufacturing. Leading global suppliers of detectors, generators, and imaging technology have also established factories in India, enabling domestic radiology facilities to flourish. This transformation from finished products to component ecosystems has also created a ripple effect, empowering local manufacturers, startups and researchers to innovate with independence and confidence.

### From Science to Commerce

To enable financial viability, a venture fund for medical technology startups and growth stage firms is being enabled to help them scale, innovate and even reach IPO readiness.

Additionally, our partnership with World Trade Centre- India's first trade centre within a Med Tech Park connects domestic manufacturers with 392 similar centres on a global basis - opening up international collaborations, exports and a distributor network. This unique step continues to position India as a neutral yet influential global trade player in the technology of healthcare.

### Collaboration Over Competition

One of the biggest transformations in India's MedTech sector is the recognition that collaboration is the new pattern of competitiveness. A single company may produce 10 medical devices, but hospital needs 600. Individually, no manufacturer can fulfil such comprehensive orders. However, when 20-30 companies come together under a unified export strategy, India can deliver turnkey hospital solutions to global clients. Recently, 26 Indian Medtech companies collaborated to supply products to meet an international healthcare equipment order from Tajikistan. Such a model of aggregation not only promotes exports but also fosters a culture of independence and shared growth within the domestic ecosystem.

### Made in India Hospitals: A Healthcare Revolution




Taking indigenous innovation a step further, India is now building 100 made-in-India hospitals across tier 2 and tier 3 cities. Each hospital that has around 100 beds will be equipped entirely with domestically manufactured devices, from basic hospital beds and surgical tools to complex MRI and dialysis machines. The model is mainly designed to be asset-light and entrepreneur-friendly; hospitals will operate on leased infrastructure and equipment financed by NBFCs and real estate partners. This approach also reduces upfront investment and allows healthcare entrepreneurs to focus on operations, quality and patient care as well. The first such facility, Bhanu Tai Gadkari Memorial Trust Diagnostic Centre in Nagpur, already stands as the proof of concept for indigenous revolution.

### Driving Ethical and Technological Leadership

India Innovation drive is also expanding into advanced domains like robotic surgery, assistive technologies, and high-end diagnostics. With the upcoming centres dedicated to robotic surgery and open-source assistive platforms, the country is setting a great example in innovation with integrity, ensuring that technology growth remains transparent and inclusive as well.

India's transformation in Medtech goes beyond manufacturing, and it represents a mindful shift from dependency to leadership. By making its own supply chains, funding systems and innovation clusters, India is not only fulfilling its domestic needs but also shaping the global healthcare market.

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# Homelessness is every city’s silent emergency

NARAYANAN  
KIZHUMUNDAYUR

Urbanisation, often celebrated as the hallmark of progress, carries within it a paradox that modern societies are struggling to resolve. As cities grow into centres of economic power, cultural vibrancy, and technological innovation, they simultaneously become landscapes where inequality is etched into everyday life. Amid the towering apartments, gleaming malls, and illuminated flyovers lives a population that has no roof to call its own. Urban homelessness - once viewed as a marginal issue - has now transformed into a silent emergency that shadows the march of development. It is not simply a logistical failure; it is a moral challenge that questions the very soul of our cities.

The roots of this crisis lie in the deep and persistent imbalance between the dream of urban prosperity and the reality of urban planning. Every year, millions leave their villages and small towns, drawn by the promise of jobs, education, and opportunity. But the cities they arrive in suffer from a different crisis: an acute shortage of affordable housing. While high-rise apartments multiply and real-estate prices soar beyond imagination, the poor often find no legal or safe space to live. The mismatch is stark - the engines of the urban economy depend heavily on migrant labourers, domestic workers, street vendors, construction workers, delivery

personnel, and security staff, yet these very contributors cannot afford even the most basic shelter. Real-estate speculation only worsens the problem. Housing stock is increasingly locked up as investment rather than lived-in spaces. Property prices rise far beyond the real income levels of ordinary citizens. Middle-class families stretch their finances to breaking point to secure small apartments, while the urban poor slide further into precarity. Gentrification, now a common urban phenomenon, transforms old, affordable neighbourhoods into glossy enclaves for the wealthy. As buildings are demolished and land is acquired for commercial use, generations-old communities are uprooted. Cultural memory and social cohesion suffer irreparable damage, and the displaced join the swelling ranks of the homeless.

Homelessness, however, is not merely the absence of four walls. It is the erosion of dignity, identity, and agency. Without an address, a person becomes invisible in the administrative map of a city. Identity documents cannot be obtained or renewed. Children are unable to access schooling. Healthcare systems remain out of reach. Welfare schemes, no matter how well designed, exclude those who cannot prove their residence. A homeless person lives at the crossroads of multiple vulnerabilities - economic, social, psychological, and health-related. Each day becomes a struggle for survival, not just existence.

The physical suffering is equally severe. Life on the street exposes

individuals to extreme weather - scorching summers, unending monsoons, and biting winters. Lack of sanitation leads to chronic illnesses. Women and children face constant threats of abuse and exploitation. Elderly homeless persons fight not only hunger but also loneliness and neglect. Many avoid government shelters because these spaces, often overcrowded and poorly maintained, fail to provide privacy, safety, or cleanliness. Some shelters operate more like temporary lock-ups than dignified spaces of refuge, pushing people back into the streets.

The tragedy is that homelessness is often a preventable condition. A sudden job loss, medical emergency, family breakdown, or natural disaster can push an already vulnerable person below the line of stability. Without social security measures - rental support, emergency shelters, counselling, and food assistance - people who were once self-sufficient can quickly slip into chronic homelessness. This is not a failure of individuals; it is a structural failure of the system meant to protect them.

Addressing the crisis demands a compassionate and multi-layered response. Governments must recognise affordable housing not as a charitable act but as a fundamental human right. Urban planners need to shift from a market-driven approach to a people-centred one. Cities must invest in large-scale rental housing specifically designed for low-income and migrant populations. Inclusionary zoning laws can ensure that private developers allocate a portion of every housing project to economically weaker sections



Slum redevelopment should focus on in-situ upgrading - improving water, sanitation, and electricity - rather than displacing residents to far-off resettlement colonies where livelihoods are lost.

Additionally, cities must establish a network of dignified night shelters, community kitchens, mobile healthcare units, and employment-matching centres. Technological tools can be used to identify homeless populations, track their needs, and connect them to government schemes. Civil society organisations and volunteers can help bridge the trust deficit that often keeps the homeless away from institutional support.

Ultimately, the measure of a city's greatness lies not in its architecture

or GDP but in its compassion toward its most vulnerable residents. A truly developed city is one where the poorest citizen can sleep without fear, where no one is forced to call a pavement home, and where the promise of urban life includes dignity, safety, and shelter for all.

Urban homelessness is a reminder that progress without inclusion is merely an illusion. As we build smarter, cleaner, and technologically advanced cities, we must also build kinder ones - cities where every individual, irrespective of class or income, has the basic right to a place to call home.

(The writer is a Thrissur-based accountant and freelance contributor.)

## 100 Years Ago



Front page of The Statesman dated 27 November 1925

## OCCASIONAL NOTE

FIVE of the members of the Communist Party in Great Britain have been sentenced to twelve months imprisonment in the second division, and seven others have gone to prison for six months on refusing to be bound over. All were found guilty on all the charges, which covered conspiracy to publish seditious literature. The case is mainly interesting for the evidence it affords of a change of temper toward extreme political sentiment in Great Britain. The common disposition there is to treat extremists with something of contempt. But public feeling has been deeply stirred by the disaster that has come over Russia, and there is a determination that the forces responsible for shattering ordered life in that country shall not be allowed to take root at Home. In this matter the larger part of the nation is wholly with the authorities. The sentences are salutary; they are certainly not so severe as to excite sympathy for those who have incurred them.

## News Items

### FUNERAL OF QUEEN ALEXANDRA

## TO-DAY’S SERVICES IN CALCUTTA

CALCUTTA to-day will be a city of mourning. Simultaneously with similar services which are to be held throughout India, a State Memorial service for the Queen Mother will take place in St. Paul's Cathedral at 11-30 a.m. All seats will be free.

Instructions have been issued for the closing of all Government offices, and many firms in the city have decided to suspend business either partly or for the whole day.

The Empire Theatre and Cinemas, the Carnival in Chowringhee Road, and the Victoria Memorial are to remain closed. Fort William, at 8-30 a.m. and at noon forty minute-guns, corresponding with half the age of Her Majesty will be fired from the ramparts of the Fort.

The General Post Office and Town sub offices will remain closed for the day, and work will be conducted as on Sundays.

## “ILLEGAL WORK”

## LABOUR MOTION IN THE COMMONS

LONDON, NOV.

THE imprisonment of virtually the whole of the Communist Executive conceivably will not be the end of the Party's discomfiture since the judge used the phrase in sentencing the defendants "you are members of an illegal party carrying on illegal work."

The convictions are the topic of all the newspapers. Many applaud the prosecutions as providing a healthy warning. None question the legal justice of the convictions, though some opposition commentators doubt the wisdom of driving subversive activities underground.

Labourites have lodged a motion in the Commons protesting against the prosecution as a violation of the right of free speech and the publication of opinion. The motion, which is signed by Mr Ramsay Macdonald and Mr. J. H. Thomas among others, comes up on December 1.—Reuter.

## CAPABLANCA FAILS

## BEATEN TWICE IN MOSCOW TOURNAMENT

LONDON, NOV.

TWENTY-ONE chess masters are competing in an international tournament which is being held in Moscow, and as the result of the 11 rounds played up to the present, Bogoljubow leads with 8.5 points, followed by Lasker with eight.

The feature of the tournament has been the comparative failure of the world's champion Capablanca, who has 5.5 points. He has been beaten twice, won twice, and drawn seven times.—Reuter's Special Service.

# A personal journey of nurturing talent

DEBAPRIYA MUKHERJEE

Education is not the learning of facts, but the training of the mind to think, said Albert Einstein.

For the past six years, my work with students has been devoted to introducing and strengthening critical thinking in their learning journey. I often observe that many students struggle to achieve success in life - not because they lack talent or determination, but because they are shaped by an education system that prioritizes marks over real learning, memory over creativity, and conformity over individuality. As a result, students grow up uncertain about their passions, unprepared for real-world challenges, and lacking the confidence to explore new opportunities - creating a gap between academic performance and true success.

Too often, the emphasis on rote learning and examination outcomes prevents children from exploring ideas or understanding concepts at a deeper level. During classroom interactions, it becomes evident that students rely heavily on teachers' prompts, struggle to justify their reasoning, and hesitate to express their own thoughts. Many quietly wait for the "correct answer" rather than sharing their perspectives.

When I ask, "Can you explain your reasoning behind a particular science or mathematics experiment?" several students become unsure, as the question does not come directly from the textbook. Such interactions reveal that they have

not been encouraged to question, analyse, or explore ideas independently - they expect information to be given, not discovered. These classroom conversations highlight the extent to which critical thinking is missing and underline the urgent need to guide students from passive learning toward active reasoning.

In today's world, critical thinking is one of the most essential skills for success, yet many students continue to learn in ways that limit their ability to question, analyse, and think independently. Recognizing this challenge, I have established specialized Mathematics and Science Laboratories to create an experiential learning environment where students can observe, experiment, reflect, and develop the skills needed to become curious, creative, and critical thinkers.

The lab has become a place where students step away from rote memorization and step into the world of hands-on discovery. Here, they build models, test ideas, measure outcomes, and learn through active investigation. For many, this has opened a door to a kind of learning they never thought possible. Concepts that once felt difficult in the classroom suddenly make sense when experienced through experiments and practical activities. What is most remarkable is the confidence our students have gained. Children who once hesitated to speak now eagerly explain their observations. Students who struggled with abstract concepts now demonstrate them with clarity using tools, models, and experiments they designed themselves. Their ability to think

critically-to question, analyze, and reason-has grown stronger with every activity.

One of the most heartwarming transformations has been the spirit of collaboration the lab has fostered. Whether solving a mathematical puzzle, testing the Bernoulli principle, or building a working model, students support one another, share ideas, and celebrate each other's achievements. The lab has become a space where teamwork and creativity shine as brightly as academic success.

Parents often share stories of how their children talk excitedly at home about the experiments they performed - how they made a balloon-powered car, used geometric tools to create designs, or conducted simple chemistry reactions safely under guidance. These conversations show us that the lab's impact travels far beyond the school walls.

This initiative reflects my observations, the current gaps in learning, and the pressing need to transform our teaching approach to nurture strong intellectual habits.

Despite my sincere efforts to develop hands-on learning experiences, another significant barrier I face is excessive mobile usage, which increasingly jeopardizes students' critical thinking abilities. Constant exposure to quick-scroll content, instant answers, and entertainment-driven apps conditions young minds to seek immediate gratification rather than engage in patient analysis or problem-solving.

Instead of exploring ideas deeply or forming their own conclusions,



many students simply "Google the answer," bypassing the cognitive struggle that builds reasoning ability. Mobile addiction reduces attention span, discourages reflective thinking, and limits opportunities for meaningful conversations - elements essential for nurturing curiosity and logical judgment. As students become more dependent on digital shortcuts, their ability to question, evaluate information, and think independently weakens, posing a serious threat to their intellectual growth and long-term learning potential.

Excessive dependence on private tuition further intensifies these challenges. Tuition often reduces students' capacity to learn independently, as many rely on tutors for ready-made answers instead of developing their own problem-solving skills. It also increases academic pressure and stress, leaving little time for rest, hobbies, or healthy social interactions.

Moreover, the financial burden of tuition creates inequality, leaving students who cannot afford it feeling disadvantaged. Over time, students may lose confidence in classroom learning and become less motivated to think creatively, hindering both academic and personal development.

By integrating inquiry-based methods, hands-on learning environments such as the Mathematics and Science Laboratories, and reflective classroom discussions, we can empower students to become confident thinkers and lifelong learners. Let us commit to creating a classroom culture where curiosity is encouraged, mistakes are viewed as opportunities, and every child feels inspired to explore their own ideas. The journey toward stronger critical thinking begins with us, and together, we can ensure that every student discovers the power of their own mind.

(The writer is a former Senior Scientist, Central Pollution Control Board.)

## Crossword | No. 293304

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Yesterday's Solution

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NNREAR

BARGAININGCHIPS

URNFULSWETPEA

ETERPLES

SHERATEALLIS

ANILIOAAD

ANONYMATLANTIC

GGEHCETO

ACROSS

1 Call for colonist seen in procession (7)

5 French art shown in dull Italian port (7)

9 Crazy about noisy estate outside fantasy realm (5-6-4)

10 Former quality discussed in legendary brand (9)

11 Kerry's busy with clothes - not black - and hairdo (5)

12 American in boat denied penny fare from Japan (5)

14 Sound correspondence old granny kept in broken cases (9)

16 Irregular ultimately out fighting to install Left? (9)

17 Goat leaving grain comes to island (5)

19 Advanced alongside second class property (5)

20 Only two revolutionaries indiscriminately killed (9)

22 Breakdowns always occurring along this red route? (10,5)

23 Article about goddess connected with sacred writings (7)

24 Be entitled to answer following two poor grades (7)

DOWN

1 Small, small sinks (7)

2 Here Rosie crush got Lee excited - one love lost (15)

3 Appearing in leotard: Alfred O'Hanlon? (5)

4 Quick sketch you don't want going under the hammer? (9)

5 One accepting bet - selfish sort? (5)

6 Having no carbon in gold, carbon in silver brought up (9)

7 Friend mean to protect right with standard rent rising (8,7)

8 BBC boss wearing electronic tag has time for mate (7)

13 Going back here to renew faith? (2,7)

15 Exhausted cricketer, first dismissed, entering crude pavilion? (9)

16 Imposing area outside a Spanish location (7)

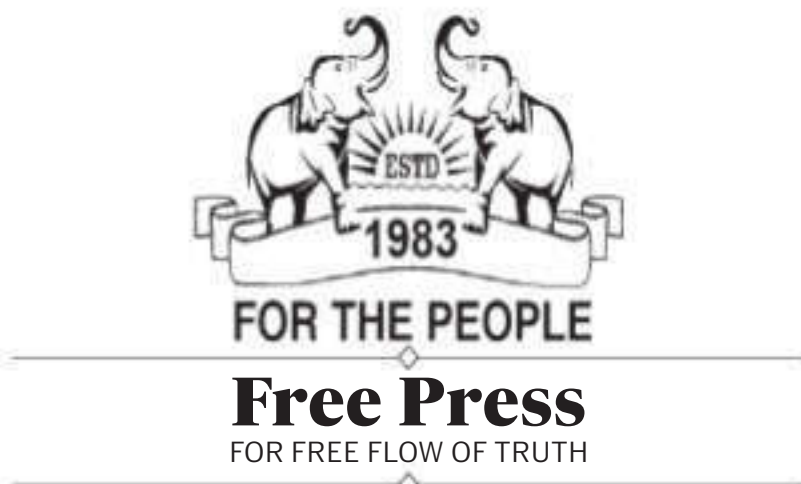
18 Humour eluding nuts (7)

20 Don't declare weapon to police (5)

21 Bill who had a joke or two with bumpkins? (5)

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





## Not where they claim to be

The social media platform X, formerly Twitter, has created a sensation after it revealed that several influential accounts carrying out online flame wars are not in the locations they say they are based in. As part of a transparency move, X introduced an About This Account feature that revealed its real location and the number of times it changed its username. What this showed is that some of those who were not in their claimed home base are vociferous supporters of US President Donald Trump and the Make America Great Again (MAGA) movement. Their real locations pointed to faraway Nigeria, Bangladesh, and Eastern Europe. The discovery appears to buttress the finding that last year's US poll campaign saw online influencer accounts using fake photos of European models and claiming to be independent women supporting Trump but are now shown to have locations in Thailand and Myanmar. One account supporting a court ruling that enabled the US President's deportation of immigrants to El Salvador was based in India, and another claiming to be a fan account of Ivanka Trump had a Nigerian provenance. More online wars got ignited, with a prominent Indian fact-checking website being accused of misrepresenting its location, since X showed it to be in the US, to which it responded that a Virtual Private Network (VPN) was in place. It is true that the X revelations were confounded by this aspect, since it is possible to use a VPN to mask geographic identification or post from a country away from home. What makes the X move significant is that it flags influential, verified and potentially revenue-earning accounts not based in their claimed country of origin.

*What makes the X move significant is that it flags influential, verified and potentially revenue-earning accounts not based in their claimed country of origin*

Rather than be fazed by low accuracy, X redoubled its efforts to put in correctives and, as it claims, has achieved 99.9% accuracy over the past few days. A move to indicate use of a VPN by an account is underway. What X has done is in line with changes it made some years ago, aiming to weed out malign actors and abusive trolls hounding genuine users. But its quest for quick revenues and algorithmic changes to reward paying users—and downgrade others and their posts—has made it unfriendly to many. Today, with a self-declared user base of about 600 million monthly active users and 500 million posts a day, X is still the social media megaphone of choice for many prominent personalities, notably politicians. It remains a marketplace attracting peddlers of snake oil claims and coarse propaganda. Elon Musk, who owns X, has spoken of making changes that will use AI to curate user feeds, aggregating the most interesting posts for a user from accounts she follows. Any initiative to establish credibility and add voluntary granular control over the feed can create value.

## IPL obsession ruining the Test

Indian cricket's much-vaunted home track record, which started in the 1990s under the captaincy of Mohammad Azharuddin and cricket manager Ajit Wadekar, now lies dead and buried. To lose five Tests over two seasons in our own backyard—the 3-0 whitewash at the hands of New Zealand last season and now the 2-0 ignominy against World Test Championship holders South Africa—means the Indian Test team is in the throes of a major crisis, with coach Gautam Gambhir coping much of the blame.

Fingers are being pointed at the coach for the chopping and changing of the playing XI and the preference to go in for all-rounders, sometimes referred to as bits-and-pieces players, rather than choose specialists. Stories of cricketers excelling in domestic cricket yet not getting a look-in, including batsmen Sarfraz Khan and Prithvi Shaw, have been circulating for some time now, causing heartburn and resentment among cricket followers. However, the fact remains the coach does not choose the team; it is the selection committee headed by Ajit Agarkar who are tasked with that responsibility. But with the BCCI for some years now scrapping the press conferences addressed by the chairman of selectors, it is Gambhir who has to front the media and cop the blame after every setback.

Gambhir, though, does not do himself any favours with his permanently sour expression and the lame excuses and justifications he trots out. To put this latest humiliation down to the transitional period with the batting and spin bowling the team is going through ignores the fact that India were whitewashed by New Zealand late last year when the stalwarts were part of the squad; the same was the case when India were beaten 3-1 in Australia in 2024-25. The one glimmer of hope was drawing 2-2 in England this summer. But for a country that is the engine of world cricket's finances and has by far the world's biggest talent pool, a drawn series should no longer be a cause for celebration, even if played abroad. The absence of stalwarts Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli, and R. Ashwin, whether they were pushed or jumped, has certainly left a hole in the side. But to be crushed in such an ignominious manner at home points to a deep malaise in our cricket's infrastructure. This same Indian team has excelled in white-ball cricket under Gambhir, but the obsession with the IPL means the focus is taken off red-ball cricket at the domestic level, which adversely affects the Test team. Bottom line: performance in the IPL should never be the basis for selection to the Test team.



*Insight*

BHAVDEEP KANG

High command will decide", the anodyne statement with which all forms of intra-party dissent in the Congress are met, has failed to stem the factional feud that threatens to destabilise the party in Karnataka. Making his power play on the heels of the party's decimation in Bihar, feisty would-be chief minister DK Shivkumar clearly sees himself as negotiating from a position of strength.

Successive shock electoral defeats in Bihar, Delhi, Maharashtra and Haryana—not to mention an embarrassing performance in Jammu & Kashmir—have eroded the high command's moral authority to mediate between warring factions in the party. Allegations of rent-seeking behaviour by top party leaders in Bihar haven't helped matters.

The absence of a de-centralised dispute-resolution system in the Congress has ensured that the high command is no longer an effective arbitrator. Shivkumar has publicly given credence to reports of a deal for rotational chief ministership, whereby current incumbent Siddaramaiah was to yield office to him after two and a

half years. One report states the Karnataka CM had explicitly promised to hand over the post a week before the deadline of November 20, 2025.

Factions are inevitable in a big tent party, which accommodates differing opinions, interest groups and aspirations. Time was when troubleshooters like Ahmed Patel, Ghulam Nabi Azad, and Pranab Mukherjee would wade in and bring rival factions to the table, thrash out a compromise and get them to work towards a common goal. The party's landslide win in Karnataka in 2023 was a result of the chronic rivals, Siddaramaiah and Shivkumar, burying the hatchet and working together to pool votes rather than focus on their respective strongholds. Voters responded enthusiastically to the viral video of the "heart-to-heart" between the two, ending with the message "We are stronger together".

Both wanted to be CM, with Shivkumar claiming that he had "delivered Karnataka to the fold". He declared that the decision on leadership would be taken in the "temple" that was the party headquarters in Delhi. By all accounts, it wasn't so much the "temple" as the "secret deal" that allowed Siddara-

maiah, who claimed it had been his last election, to become CM.

Fully aware of the said deal, the high command is in a quandary, as both leaders command a strong vote base. Siddaramaiah is the tallest OBC leader, while Shivkumar has considerable traction among the Vokkaligas. Arguably, his efforts enabled the Congress to win 38 of 56 seats in Vokkaliga-dominated Old Mysuru. One option would be to let the MLAs decide in a secret ballot, but that would inevitably lead to horse-trading.

The weaker the Congress gets, the harder it is to manage factionalism in a way that strengthens the party, as was the case in Karnataka. The old system, whereby troubleshooters at the state and district level resolved disputes before they became public knowledge, no longer functions. The high command, meanwhile, tends to be apathetic vis-a-vis the grievances not just of the rank and file but MLAs and MPs as well. The failure of the high command to coordinate with provincial leaders leads to a disunited leadership. Grassroots leaders who feel their concerns are ignored either quit the party or undermine their rivals. Often, the party fares poorly

in seats where such leaders have clout.

In recent years, rivalry between leaders has impacted the Congress electorally. The conciliation between Ashok Gehlot and Sachin Pilot in Rajasthan and Bhupesh Baghel and TS Singh Deo in Chhattisgarh proved to be temporary fixes, and the BJP came roaring back in both states.

In Himachal Pradesh, where Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu beat Pratibha Singh and Mukesh Agnihotri to the top job, the internal feud led to cross-voting by six Congress MLAs in the Rajya Sabha elections last year. As a result, the BJP candidate won despite the Congress having a majority.

Dynasty has arguably played a significant role in provoking rebellion. Congress MP Shashi Tharoor famously pointed out that dynastic politics is bad for democracy. Nothing attests to the dilution of the democratic ethos of the Congress more than party president Mallikarjun Kharge's "High Command will decide" statement. Over-centralisation, arbitrary appointments and the emergence of a cabal that insulates the dynast from on-ground feedback have led to factionalism, which has weakened the party and eroded its electoral com-

petitiveness. The dynast is not held accountable or subject to a performance review, but a perceived loss of popular support and poor electoral outcomes bring dissenting voices out into the open.

In Bihar, rebellion spilt out onto the streets before the elections. Congress workers confronted state in-charge Krishna Allavaru at Patna airport and levelled allegations of corruption in ticket distribution. In the wake of the electoral debacle, Rahul Gandhi's close advisor, KC Venugopal, has become a target of party leaders and workers.

While the brickbats are aimed at him, the fact is that both he and Allavaru are the high command's trusted aides. He is known to use his clout in favour of certain factions in various states, to the annoyance of their rivals.

Broad-based decision-making, a robust second-tier leadership and a democratic approach will serve the Congress better than a concentration of power. Overbearing weight at the top can make any structure fall.

Bhavdeep Kang is a senior journalist with 35 years of experience working with major newspapers and magazines. She is now an independent writer and author.

## The Yogi's Balance: A blueprint for a stable nation

As India rises on the world stage, its greatest strength will not be speed or scale alone, but balance — between ideas and institutions, ambition and restraint



*Niti Sutra*

PROF HIMANSHU RAI

In the Bhagavad Gita, Krishna describes the ideal yogi as one who walks the middle path — "samatva yoga ucyate" — equanimity is yoga. Not the extinguishing of effort, nor the excess of it, but the disciplined balance that aligns body, mind, and spirit. The yogi neither sways in joy nor collapses in sorrow; he proceeds with steadiness of purpose.

Nations, too, must strive for such balance. In an era of geopolitical turbulence, technological disruption, and global interdependence, internal harmony becomes the true measure of strategic strength. A country may boast armies, alliances, and economic might, but without social cohesion, institutional trust, and equitable opportunity, its ascent rests on fragile ground.

### The Balance Within

India's global standing has never been higher. Its voice resonates in multilateral forums; its economy ranks among the fastest-growing; and its technological capabilities expand rapidly. Yet the foundation of this rise must rest on more than external partnerships or military strength.

A nation's credibility abroad is rooted in stability at home. Internal fragmentation, uneven development, or weakening institutions can erode influence faster than any outside pressure. The Mahabharata illustrates this vividly: Hastinapur's downfall was not the work of foreign enemies but the result of inner imbalance — ego, mistrust, and unchecked ambition.

Modern statecraft demands vigilance not only toward borders or markets but toward the equilibrium of society — ensuring that growth remains inclusive, discourse remains constructive, and institutions remain resilient.

### Growth with Grace

Economic expansion is essential, but how the fruits of growth are shared determines the continuity of that progress. The Arthashastra describes the king as "the remover of thorns" — one who eliminates suffering, protects the vulnerable, and ensures prosperity for all.

Kautilya warns that when wealth accumulates only in a few hands, the soil becomes fertile for unrest. Economic inequality does not merely reflect injustice; it weakens national unity and invites instability.

Today, India stands at a deci-

sive juncture — poised for unprecedented technological and demographic advantage, yet confronting disparities in access, skills, and opportunity. The challenge is not growth versus equity, but growth with equity.

This principle is already visible in India's digital public infrastructure, its rural connectivity programmes, and the JAM trinity's role in democratising access. But as the economy scales, so must the commitment to fairness — ensuring no region, identity, or generation is left behind.

### The Emotional Infrastructure of Nations

Physical roads and ports matter, but emotional infrastructure — trust, unity, shared belonging — forms the core of a nation's resilience. A fractured society cannot project confidence abroad, nor sustain ambition within.

The Gita reminds us that a restless mind is the enemy of both clarity and action. Similarly, a society consumed by suspicion or polarisation loses its ability to aspire, innovate, or plan.

India's civilisational ethos has always embraced multiplicity — languages, faiths, customs, and

perspectives coexisting without erasure. Preserving this tapestry is not merely cultural sentimentality; it is strategic necessity. A confident nation does not fear its diversity — it draws strength from it.

### Institutions as Anchors

Institutions are to a nation what steady breath is to a yogi — the anchor that sustains equilibrium in turbulence. From courts to universities, regulators to media, and the armed forces to public administration, institutions shape continuity across electoral cycles, crises, and change.

The stronger and more impartial these institutions are, the greater a nation's credibility — both in the eyes of its citizens and the global community. Krishna's counsel — "Uddhared ātmanātmāna " — lift yourself by yourself — applies equally to nations. True advancement comes not from force but from fairness, competence, accountability, and self-correction.

### The Sutra for Our Times

In a multipolar world, legitimacy is earned not only

by power but by stability, reliability, and moral anchoring. Investors seek predictability; allies seek consistency; citizens seek dignity and opportunity.

Yogic balance is not motionlessness — it is controlled, purposeful movement. It is the art of advancing without stumbling, rising without arrogance, and reconciling ambition with compassion.

### For India, that means:

- pursuing growth while deepening equity
- expanding influence while nurturing unity
- embracing innovation while strengthening ethics
- modernising institutions while honouring civilisational wisdom

The sutra for our age is simple yet profound: *Let the nation move like the yogi — balanced in vision, steady in purpose, and anchored in dharma — for true power flows not from dominance but from inner harmony.*

The writer is director of Indian Institute of Management, Indore

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### Justice denied

Justice means giving punishment to the guilty and protecting the innocent. However, in many societies, justice is often delayed. Criminals receive long periods of time before their cases are decided, while victims suffer through repeated dates and hearings. This delay weakens trust in the legal system and increases the pain of the oppressed. Justice delayed becomes justice denied.

A fair system should give quick and honest decisions so that the guilty are punished without delay and the innocent receive relief.

**Sofikul Islam, Assam**

#### BJP's hypocrisy?

The recent controversy around admissions in Mata Vaishno Devi Medical College in Jammu has exposed the BJP. The party has demanded revocation of the admission list wherein 42 Muslim students out of 50 secured seats in the college based

on merit. It is a matter of pride that Kashmiris are joining the mainstream after decades of alienation and hardship foisted on them due to militancy and wrong policies of successive governments. Rather than trying to score political brownie points, the BJP should make sincere efforts to make the country secular and safe.

**Bhagwan Thadani, Mumbai**

#### Telangana growth

The decision of the Telangana government to merge 20 municipalities and 7 corporations with the GHMC is laudable and a win-win for the citizens and the municipal corporation, leading to savings in administrative costs. The minister, Sridhar Babu, expressed that this became necessary to augment a balanced development of the city. If that is the motto, the government needs to decongest the Southern and Western corridors and relocate major projects like Fab



### Is our morning walk really making us healthy?

Although morning walks are universally accepted as a healthy and fit exercise, it would not be wrong to conclude that they are now failing their purpose due to increasing air pollution, especially in cities like Mumbai and Delhi, where the pollution graph is increasing by the day. Air in the metros is thick with construction dust, industrial emissions, vehicular exhaust, etc., which people are forced to breathe. A walk in the morning or any other activity like yoga or breathing exercises will do more harm than good.

However, rural areas, which are still green, provide relief to those who seek it.

**Kiran P. Chaudhari, Mumbai**

City, Pharma City, Future City, Aerospace, etc., to the Northern and Eastern parts of the city.

**P.R. Ravinder, Hyderabad**

#### It's all about money

HAL's early claim that the Dubai mishap will not affect Tejas deliveries appears premature and

weakens the purpose of a fair enquiry. By assuring stakeholders even before the Court of Inquiry concludes, it risks signalling that economic interests outweigh human life. Such haste suggests damage control rather than accountability. HAL should have waited for the investigation's outcome to

show that safety, transparency, and human value take precedence over commercial or political considerations.

**R.S. Narula, Patiala**

#### Hope for justice

Justice Surya Kant has just taken oath as the 53rd Chief Justice of India, succeeding Justice B R Gavai.

His symbolic Surya-Janta pledge instils hope across the nation—a powerful affirmation of his commitment to justice, integrity, and service. This act strengthens public trust in the judiciary's moral leadership, and we pray that his tenure elevates fairness for every citizen.

**Bhoraniya Muhammad**