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{ OUR TAKE }

Making a case for transparency

Justice BV Nagarathna's note of dissent flags important issues concerning the elevation of judges to the Supreme Court

The Supreme Court collegium's decision to push through the nomination of Patna high court chief justice Vipul M Pancholi to the top court despite a strong dissent note from justice BV Nagarathna, and the Centre's quick confirmation of the proposal just two days later, raises some questions over judicial appointments.

This newspaper reported on Tuesday that the five-member top court collegium, comprising Chief Justice of India Bhushan R Gavai and justices Surya Kant, Vikram Nath, JK Maheshwari and Nagarathna, took the decisions with a 4-1 split on justice Pancholi, even as the lone woman judge in the top court underlined that justice Pancholi's appointment would not only be "counter-productive" to the administration of justice but would also put the credibility of the collegium system at stake.

Justice Nagarathna flagged "serious and grave reasons" that could not be ignored, reviving questions over justice Pancholi's July 2023 transfer from Gujarat to Patna. The transfer followed a prolonged standoff and the Union government had kept the collegium's proposal pending for over nine months. Justice Nagarathna noted that a proposal for justice Pancholi's elevation was first opposed by her amid reservations by justice Vikram Nath in May this year, but still resurfaced three months later.

The controversy has shrouded the collegium's decision in a cloud, and raised a few questions. What necessitated the 2023 transfer? Were there deliberations at the time? Why were representations made to then Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud? Why haven't they been made public? Why hasn't justice Nagarathna's dissent note been uploaded, as requested by the judge? Why was the proposal pushed through despite strong concerns and how did it get a quick confirmation? And, doesn't the public deserve to make a full and informed judgement about a judge who is slated to become the chief justice someday?

This newspaper has lauded the top court for a number of steps taken recently to usher in greater transparency, be it the public declaration of assets or the details of recommendations made by the collegium. But the controversy around the recent elevation shows that unless greater strides are made, such steps might appear as half measures. The row has hit the court at a time when the collegium system is battling both political attacks from the executive and genuine criticism over its lack of representation and diversity, especially on counts of gender and caste. To stem the rot of controversy, the court should let the light shine on the totality of its elevation proposal, including its reasoning. After all, sunlight is the best disinfectant.

New export markets as cure to US trade barriers

Indian exports to the US will now attract a 50% tariff, among the highest for all of US's trading partners. Half of this 50% tariff is on account of India buying crude oil from Russia which the Trump administration has described as a major funding of the "Russian war machine". The move is blatantly unfair. It is China, not India, that is the biggest buyer of Russian crude. Trump has imposed no such tariffs on China. European countries still buy a lot of gas from Russia, and were among the major secondary buyers of Russian crude refined in India. The US itself has not suspended its necessary trade with Russia, which includes difficult to procure commodities such as uranium. If these examples were not enough to show how unfairly the US is treating India, reports say that US oil major Exxon is now talking to Russian oil companies to resume business, including production in Sakhalin, that was stopped after the Russia-Ukraine war in 2022. These reports, including in *The Wall Street Journal*, have said the talks were conducted in secrecy and Exxon had Trump's approval to begin the dialogue.

What does all this entail for India? Geopolitics need not adhere to propriety or justice. Countries must deal with the real world, good, bad or ugly, as it exists. Under Donald Trump, the US has shed away even a pretense of adhering to the rules-based order or being mindful of the interests of even its closest partners. India must accept this new reality, try to protect as much of its commercial and strategic interests vis-à-vis the US as it can, and seek diversification to compensate for what has been lost. It will take a deep synergy between the private sector and government to achieve this objective — but it is possible.

India & Japan: Anchors of Asia's democratic future

Shared values of democracy, openness, and respect for sovereignty have given the India-Japan partnership a moral ballast

Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi's upcoming visit to Japan is the continuation of a journey that has reshaped one of Asia's oldest friendships into one of the most consequential partnerships of the 21st century. Since his first visit to Tokyo in 2014, PM Modi has steadily strengthened India-Japan relations, with strategic trust and a shared vision for the Indo-Pacific as cornerstones.

Japan's support to Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose and the Indian National Army during the freedom struggle remains a powerful reminder that this solidarity preceded India's independence.

After the war, India's refusal to endorse the San Francisco Peace Treaty and its decision to restore full sovereignty to Japan in 1952 created a reservoir of goodwill that endures to this day. Over the last decade, successive Japanese prime ministers — Shinzo Abe, Yoshihide Suga, Fumio Kishida, and now Shigeru Ishiba — have found in Modi a partner willing to elevate symbolic goodwill into practical cooperation.

The results are visible across India's landscape. Though modest compared to Singapore, Japan's \$42 billion FDI carries strategic weight. Japanese financing has powered metro systems in various cities in

India, the ambitious Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor, and India's first bullet train project between Mumbai and Ahmedabad. Urban renewal projects and smart cities now carry a distinctive Japanese imprint. Collaborations in clean energy, skills, and technology have widened the horizon beyond infrastructure. Crucially, Japanese investment is not diffused but aligned with India's long-term priorities: Make in India, Digital India, Startup India, renewable energy, and advanced manufacturing. This alignment gives the partnership durability.

The Indo-Pacific has become the true stage for this partnership. As global geopolitics shifts eastward, India and Japan have emerged as twin anchors of stability — promoting an inclusive, rules-based order where no single power dominates. Both worry about coercion in the maritime commons, about fragile supply chains vulnerable to geopolitical shocks, and about technologies being misused to entrench monopolies. Together, they have turned their shared concerns into shared strategies. Through Quad, they have given new shape to regional cooperation, advancing initiatives in infrastructure, vaccines, critical technologies, trade and investment, and climate action. Their naval exercises and defence dialogues have ensured that maritime security in the Indian and Pacific Oceans is not left unattended.

Personal chemistry has been a crucial force multiplier. Modi's bond with Abe — built on mutual trust and a common vision — gave the relationship extraordinary depth. Abe

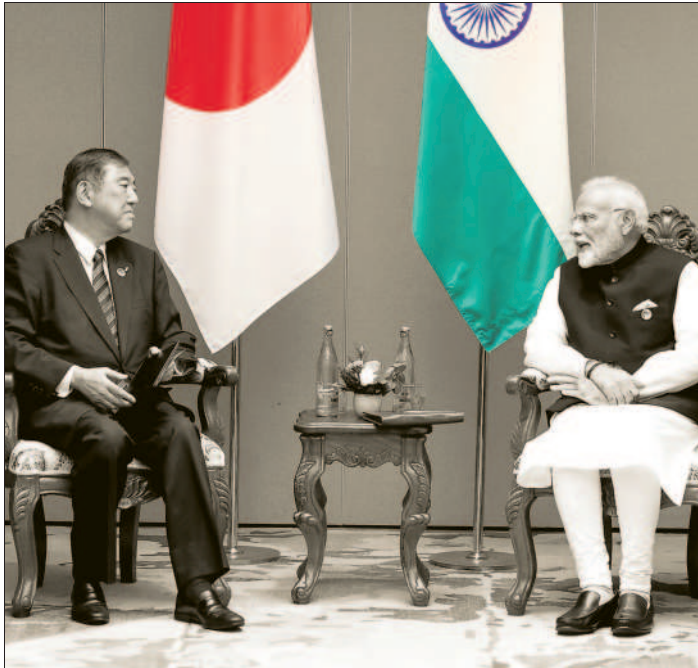
saw India not just as a partner but as indispensable to Japan's future strategic posture, and Modi reciprocated with equal warmth. Even as Japanese domestic politics witnessed leadership changes, India sustained momentum, ensuring remarkable continuity.

Yet the trajectory is not without challenges. From Tokyo's perspective, India's regulatory complexity, delays in project clearances, and lack of long-term policy predictability remain key concerns. Japanese investors, accustomed to predictability and timelines, often find India daunting. From New Delhi's side, concerns linger about Japan's slowing economy, an ageing population that constrains investment appetite, and a diplomacy that remains cautious under the weight of pacifist politics. Trade liberalisation and labour mobility are still contested terrains. If this partnership is to fulfil its promise, both sides must find ways to bridge these gaps, turning friction into opportunities for reform. But, friction does not diminish promise — if anything, it sharpens the urgency for a new phase of collaboration.

As the Indian PM prepares for his two-day visit beginning Friday, the opportunity lies in charting the course hereafter. The focus must now shift from projects to platforms of global leadership. Targeted Japanese investments in semiconductors, defence electronics, and rare earth technologies can secure a shared technological future. Joint ventures in hydrogen, offshore wind, and battery storage can position both countries at the forefront of the global green transition. Building diversified



Sanjay Kumar Verma



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supply chains will allow them to shape resilient trade architectures, while joint research hubs in AI, quantum computing, and robotics can anchor them in the coming digital-industrial revolution. Equally, as data becomes the currency of the digital age, India and Japan must work together on cybersecurity, trusted data flows, and setting global standards that ensure innovation thrives without compromising sovereignty.

Beyond economics, the financial and human linkages need strengthening. Expanding yen-based swap arrangements and portfolio flows can create new sovereign financial choices. Language training, student mobility, cultural exchange, and industry-linked training programmes for Indian youth in Japan can fuse demographic strengths with industrial needs, forging a living partnership across generations. Civil society and parliamentary exchanges can further reinforce the political will necessary for long-term coopera-

tion. In Modi's framing, India-Japan ties are civilisational. Shared values of democracy, openness, and respect for sovereignty have given the partnership a moral ballast that goes beyond contracts and corridors. The story that began when Netaji sought Japan's support during India's struggle for freedom now finds expression in a joint vision of a free, inclusive, and open Indo-Pacific. This is not nostalgia — it is continuity with purpose.

The challenge before both nations is to move from being good partners to being co-architects of Asia's future. As Asia's democratic anchors, they carry a responsibility not only to safeguard their interests but also to ensure that the Indo-Pacific remains open, plural, and fair. The world is watching, and the region is listening.

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De-risking India's exports from the US tariff regime

Trade is a key driver of economic growth. After a prolonged period of disruptions and volatility, global trade regained momentum in 2024, outpacing global output growth for the first time since 2017. India mirrored this trend, with net exports contributing positively to GDP growth during 2024-25. However, there has been renewed volatility, driven by the tariff changes announced by the US since April 2025.

The latest executive order by the US, which includes increased tariffs of up to 50% on select Indian goods, is set to take effect from today. As per our estimates, over 44% of India's exports to the US is expected to remain insulated from the tariff hike. This includes products that are exempted from tariffs, such as pharmaceuticals, petroleum products, select electronics, minerals, etc. Additionally, India is expected to remain price-competitive in the US market across 713 products, wherein the unit value price of Indian goods would remain lower compared to the average unit value price of the US' imports of the product, despite the tariffs. These products account for about 13.9% of India's merchandise exports to the US and include products across sectors, such as machine tools, two-wheelers, leather goods, cereals, etc.

Besides, the impact of tariff hikes on India's exports in the current year is also likely to be eased by front-loading being undertaken by Indian exporters. In fact, India's exports to the US have grown by over 22.3% year-on-year (y-o-y) during April-June 2025, with eight out of the top 10 exported product categories registering positive export growth during this period. Among these, export of telecom instruments recorded a substantial 191.5% y-o-y growth, while electronic components registered a 35.2% growth y-o-y during the same period. India's exports of marine products, electrical machinery, iron and steel products, and ready-made cotton garments also recorded robust double-digit growth during April-June 2025, indicating a possible front-loading to avoid higher tariffs.

Nevertheless, the US tariff hike is expected to negatively affect over 4,038 products, where India's price competitiveness is expected to be significantly impacted. India's exports of these products accounted for over 56% of India's merchandise exports to the US in 2024. India's exports of these products could potentially decline by 17.0% during 2025. Some of the sectors expected to be affected include machinery and mechanical appliances, gems and jewellery, textiles, automotive, articles of iron and steel, furniture, and marine products, among others.

India's overall exports to the US are likely to sustain a y-o-y growth of 6.1% during 2025 on account of the front-loading. However, there is a need for deeper strategic recalibrations in India's export profile to impart resilience to exports.

It would be essential for Indian exporters to consider diversification of export markets to reduce dependence on the US. Indian exporters need to focus on expanding their footprint

across other advanced markets in Europe, where there is substantial demand and high untapped potential. It is noteworthy that while the European region accounts for nearly one-third of the global merchandise imports, it represents only 22% of India's exports in 2024. Indian exporters could leverage the recently signed free trade agreement in the region with the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) and the UK, for enhancing market access in Europe.

A key reason for relatively limited market access in the European region is the non-tariff measures (NTMs). The EU employs a higher number of NTMs compared to the US, particularly in sectors such as footwear, machinery, electrical equipment, and food-related industries, which create higher compliance costs for exporters. There is a need for supporting Indian exporters, particularly MSMEs, in meeting these compliance costs for enhancing market access.

There are also significant opportunities in emerging markets across Asia, Africa, and Latin America that may be targeted by Indian exporters. In fact, as per the IMF, import of goods and services in developing countries is anticipated to increase by 4.8% during 2025-2026, significantly outpacing the expected import growth in advanced economies (at 2.3%). One of the key barriers in accessing these non-traditional markets is the large and growing trade finance gaps. Against this backdrop, innovative trade finance solutions serve as an effective tool for bridging trade finance gaps and leveraging opportunities in non-traditional markets.

Beyond market diversification, financing support would also be essential to enable exporters, particularly MSMEs, to offer competitive terms or scale up exports in competitive markets such as the US and Europe in a high-tariff environment. To that end, support in the form of credit enhancement and interest equalisation can help lower financing costs for MSME exporters and aid in sustaining their competitiveness and export volumes.

Indian businesses can also strengthen value chain linkages through strategic overseas investments for diversification of the manufacturing base. Recent developments on the tariff front bring out a case for countries to actively pursue this as part of de-risking measures. Amid the rising tariffs, the role of connector economies has gained prominence. As per the IMF, since 2017, enhanced Chinese exports or greenfield investments in a "connector" country has been associated with subsequent growth in the connector country's exports to the US. Accordingly, during the trade war between the US and China, the connector economies helped reduce the impact on trade. On similar lines, India could focus on enhancing value chain linkages with relatively low-tariff countries with the necessary political stability, legal and regulatory environment, and manufacturing capabilities.

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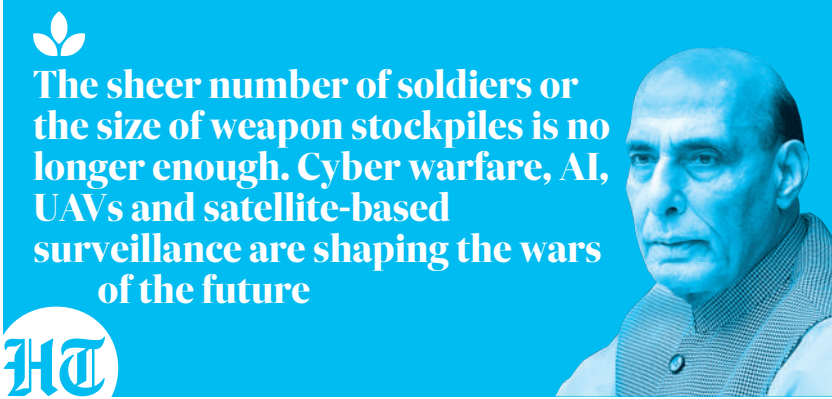


Jahanwi Singh



Neha Raman

{ RAJNATH SINGH } DEFENCE MINISTER, INDIA



In the battle against dowry, women must exercise agency

Courts can't be a solution to everything, the solicitor general of India recently said. So is the case with laws. The alleged dowry killing of Nikki Bhatti in Greater Noida flies in the face of the laws prohibiting dowry and domestic violence. It forces us to ask why these laws have failed to be a deterrent.

Both these laws are criticised when misused to settle scores in a marital discord or deemed ineffective when a life is actually lost. These are, of course, no solution for fixing a bad marriage because marriage should be based on mutual affection and not social considerations. The problem is that such laws, particularly dowry prohibition and the prohibition of child marriage, have had little actual effect. To illustrate, the dowry prohibition law penalises both giving and taking of dowry. It would be difficult to cite an example where the party giving a dowry has been prosecuted. While the alleged act of the accused Vipin Bhatti is undoubtedly culpable, there are many aspects of the case that need our attention as well.

Consider the statement of Nikki's father, who said that the family knew of the torture and excesses that Nikki suffered at the hands of her husband and in-laws in previous instances and had brought the woman to the parental house, but after the intervention of their "samaaj" (caste community), sent her back to her matrimonial home. The father even questioned the utility of taking the matter to the authorities/courts when their "samaaj was with them". This is exactly why these laws suffer from gaps with ground realities. A woman has many custodians in our society, except herself. Didn't the father contribute to her fate?

Consider her uncle's statement: "My brother sold his property, gave a Scorpio car and ₹10 lakhs of jewellery. It was the biggest marriage in our village". While takers don't find it criminal and shameful to take dowry, givers don't realise giving dowry is encouraging and culpably contributing to the crime, even as the law punishes both acts. In fact, until the woman is sacrificed in this give-and-take, no one minds it much.

Laws alone can't change much here, and it would be delusional to expect the change

to come from society. The first step towards changing the situation has to be taken by the women themselves. It's for them to seize their own custody. No matter how much we resist this understanding, marriage in India has been reduced to a transactional event for custody of a woman, shifting from the parents to the husband/in-laws.

Dowry is the consideration for which the two families exchange custody. These laws have been tested for many years now: While there has been considerable punitive success, there has been little preventive success. The fundamental problem is that marriage

has been entrenched as the central axis of people's lives, particularly girls. Parents are in a hurry to marry off their daughters. Otherwise, what stops them from refusing dowry demands? Sometimes, parents of the women themselves say things like "we will spend this much and give this and that". Many women, too, take pride in lavish marriages and extravagant gifts given to their in-laws by their parents. Of course, dowry is called "gift" — often termed the woman's share in parental wealth — right until a crime like domestic violence or dowry torture/killing happens or the marriage sours.

Women must make their education and career the central axis of their life, and their families need to support them in this. They need to aim for self-dependence rather than marriage. They also need to exercise their rights to find their place in the parental family. While women in dissolved marriages seek alimony and maintenance from their husbands and their assets emphatically, most women relinquish their share in parental property or coparceny property, though that's their birthright after the 2005 amendment in Hindu Succession Act. Dowry is often deemed the alternative for this share by the parental family. Until women exercise their rights within their parental family in their own interest and enable and empower themselves to be financially independent, the problem may not be solved.



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OUR VIEW



Natural disasters: Don't let them blindside India

As our vulnerabilities to extreme weather events inevitably increase, we need better risk monitoring, far greater preparedness and quick relief efforts to minimize the loss of lives

Even as we celebrate an above-average monsoon this year, there is a flip side: the death and destruction that torrential rains have brought in their wake in some parts of India, especially areas that are ecologically fragile and least able to deal with it, such as our Himalayan belt. August started with the distressing news of a flash flood and landslide that flattened the village of Dharali in Uttarakhand. Subsequent days have seen a spate of reports of varying gravity from across the country, with heavy rainfall wreaking havoc in hilly regions. Jammu is the latest example. As we are still some weeks away from the monsoon's retreat, we cannot rule out the possibility of further scares of this nature. According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), North India has recorded its wettest monsoon since 2013, a year remembered for the Kedarnath flash flood. In the first 25 days of this month, the North had 21 events of extremely heavy rain, the highest since the IMD began collating this data in 2021 and 50% more than in the same month last year, which was the region's wettest August in 28 years. No doubt, climate change has much to do with the rising frequency of extreme weather events—not only in India, but also globally. Recall July's flash floods in Texas, US, that took at least 135 lives. According to the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, climate-related disasters almost doubled from 1980-1999 to 2000-2019. In the words of UN Secretary General António Guterres, "Climate change is the defining issue of our time... every day we fail to act is a day that we step a little closer to a fate that none of us wants—a fate that will resonate through generations in the damage done to humankind and life on earth."

Sadly, the US withdrawal this January from the Paris pact of 2015 has squashed all hope of global cooperation on this front. Today, it is each country for itself. This means we must redouble our efforts to mitigate the effects of global warming through better monitoring of atmospheric conditions and greater preparedness for inclement weather that may leave a trail of devastation. What worsens matters is that we largely have only ourselves to blame. It is well-known that the Himalayas are sensitive to rising heat levels that lead glaciers to retreat and make cloud bursts likelier, leaving hilly terrain increasingly prone to landslides and water barrages. Unchecked construction, often in violation of the law, hydropower and road projects in fragile zones and relentless tourist pressure have all aggravated the problem. According to a statistics ministry report, *EnviStats* 2025, India recorded 3,080 human deaths due to extreme natural events in 2024-25, the highest in a decade and a 17% rise from 2,616 in 2023-24. The absence of an extensive network of automatic weather stations and weak real-time tracking of risks results in late responses and an inability to alert or evacuate people in advance. However, lives could be saved with better early warning and disaster response systems. Our National Disaster Management Authority, set up after the 2004 Asian Tsunami, has been upgraded and its focus expanded. Also, ISRO's NISAR satellite project with NASA is expected to monitor climate change in ways that could help map risks and forecast disasters. But we also need longer-term plans for the restoration of fragile ecological zones and creation of natural buffers around all development projects. In all, we need speedier relief and rescue efforts to minimize the loss of lives.

MY VIEW | MYTHS AND MANTRAS

Why the US plays fast and loose with India but never with China

It is about relative clout and Beijing's domination of key inputs and products has given it leverage



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I see plenty of commentary in the Indian media about how the US tariff proposals are unfair. Some even point out that China imports more Russian crude than India. And of course China's trade surplus with the US is several times that of India. Why then is the US turning the screws on India? This is only the latest symptom of the relative bargaining power of countries. International bargaining, especially with someone like Trump, is only about relative strength, not 'fairness.' And China has worked over the years with a long-term focus on strengthening itself as a rival to the biggest economies in the world, while simultaneously making itself indispensable to their working. Let us look at why China hates to be even spoken of in the same breath as India—and rightly so. The stark difference between China and India is clear from this statistic: Even if China stops growing and India's GDP compounds at 7% per annum (this has historically happened only once for seven years out of eight in 2003-10), it'll take about 25 years for India to catch up. And this is a make-believe calculation, as China's economy won't stop growing anytime soon. But the point is not about just the size of the Chinese economy, but also its strategic positioning. In every area where China has operations, it may

have started with low-end assembly, but has focused on moving up the value chain bit-by-bit to reach a position where it controls both the technology as well as strategic materials needed. In *Prisoners of Geography: Ten Maps That Tell You Everything You Need to Know About Global Politics* by Tim Marshall, the big takeaway for me was China's control of the world. It made my heart run cold. One, of course, knew of China controlling many areas of mining and materials in Asia and Africa, but from this book it was clear that it has a presence everywhere from South America to the Arctic Circle. You might think you are buying a 'Made in Europe' bag or garment, but it was likely made in a Chinese enclave or township in Italy. China is a huge consumer market and in past trade stand-offs, one weapon the Chinese government had was to restrict market access. But that was not enough for the kind of control it wanted over the global economy. It was also important to control supply lines. Its control over rare earths is an example. China started prospecting for rare earths and mining them decades ago. It even ran into a glut situation that drove a research push. Between 2000 and 2016, the Chinese Academy of Sciences published 2,018 papers on rare earths (*The Economist*). Turning off access to these at will gives China immense leverage over the world. Also, China is not content only with control over raw materials. To give an example, BYD sold more electric vehicles (EVs) in the first half of 2025 than the next four brands combined, two of which are Chinese anyway. This, in a period that saw Tesla sales volumes decline. Seven of the top 10 EV brands are Chinese (data source: *Autovista24*). Here we are talking about critical high-tech fields, not the mass consumer market where Chinese products are dominant anyway. As for India, our trade deficit with China has gone up from about \$37 billion to almost \$100 billion over the last

decade. Meanwhile, our exports to China have not grown at all. Yes, we did ban a few dozen Chinese apps some years ago, but seem to be looking to China now to bail us out from our trade tussle with the US. Around 2020-21, China decided to further laser focus on certain high-tech areas: "In order to achieve breakthroughs in advanced technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI), quantum computing, blockchain, neuroscience, biotechnology, robotics and semiconductors to ensure its technological self-reliance and power its economy, R&D investment will rise to 7% annually and China's leaders intend to spend as much as half a trillion dollars every year, or 4% to 6% of GDP," writes Dexter Tiff Roberts in 'Xi Jinping's politics in command economy' (*Atlantic Council*). Of course, this was to be accompanied by a few other changes, including a crackdown on Big Tech and foreign firms and a move back to more state enterprises. China's R&D spend is estimated to be 20-25 times India's. Five years later, the results are clear. China dominates technology, raw materials, ports, supply chains and final products. While we congratulate ourselves on Indian-origin CEOs, Chinese students who study abroad overwhelmingly return to China for opportunities to both do research and build businesses in their home country. China now holds most of the aces in any negotiation. Ultimately, it is about this raw power, not any woolly notion of righteousness. As Rajinder Krishan wrote, "*Ramchandra keh gaye Siya se, aisa Kalyug aaga...jiske haath mein hogi laathi, bhains wahi le jaayega*" (loosely translated as Ramchandra told Sita that a lawless era will come when whoever has the stick will get his way). That is, the law of the jungle. We in India have to think of our long-term interests and what we can do to secure them. Till then, we may wail and flail, but we will have to put up with any perceived unfairness.

10 YEARS AGO



JUST A THOUGHT

As a species, we've somehow survived large and small ice ages, genetic bottlenecks, plagues, world wars and all manner of natural disasters, but I sometimes wonder if we'll survive our own ingenuity.

DIANE ACKERMAN

MY VIEW | WORLD APART

Why Jagdish Bhagwati isn't overly worried about trade

RAHUL JACOB



is a Mint columnist and a former Financial Times foreign correspondent.

Jagdish Bhagwati, the great trade economist, begins his conversation by reminiscing about a Canadian professor, Harry Johnson, who was an early influence on him because the professor's lectures were a brisk *tour de force* of international economics. As a student, he didn't understand all of it, Bhagwati says, but Johnson's enthusiasm for the subject was infectious. To this day, any conversation with Bhagwati, now 91 and retired from Columbia University, is both educational and entertaining. Ask which metro stop is closest to his apartment and one not only receives directions but also a story, told in a way that is more comic than tragic, about R.K. Laxman. On a visit to Bhagwati's home decades ago, the legendary cartoonist missed the correct subway stop and wandered bewildered through a dangerous neighbourhood. Ever since the new US administration decided to unilaterally impose tariffs on the rest of the world this year, the global trading system has become a rough neighbourhood.

The reassuring news from academia's foremost champion of free trade is that the world trading system is in much better shape than expected. He dismisses the view that the EU has been cowardly in its trade discussions with the US. He argues that EU leaders are being "pragmatic" by "waiting and watching," which is sensible when "you are facing an opponent who is bobbing up and down and in different directions." Happily, Bhagwati says the global trading system today is too integrated for the world economy to suffer as it did a century ago when the Smoot-Hawley tariffs were signed by president Herbert Hoover in 1930. While it is too early to calculate the costs, retailers in the US as well as exporters to the US have thus far sacrificed margins to keep a lid on price increases. Last week, however, Walmart's CEO Doug McMillon warned that the retailer was routinely seeing cost hikes by suppliers that would be passed on to shoppers. Costs have risen each week, he said, and this was expected to continue into the year's third and fourth quarters. Tariffs are expected to cost an average household an additional \$2,400 this year, the Yale Budget Lab calculated recently. The irony may be that as America's developed trade partners comply with unreasonable

demands, their economies may hold up better by comparison. Bhagwati says that exporters in Japan and the EU are suffering "terms of trade" pressures as firms cut margins to stay competitive. But, by not trying to retaliate, neither will European and Japanese consumers suffer price hikes across the board, nor will their companies get addicted to tariff protection and form lobbies that would make it difficult to reduce tariffs later. This is too often the case in the US today and has long been true in India. Bhagwati's powerful yet pithy defence of globalization has never seemed more relevant than it does in 2025. His punchy book, *In Defense of Globalization*, published two decades ago, took aim at the pomposity and posturing of an assorted cast of characters, ranging Wall Street and Oxfam to former World Bank president James Wolfensohn. His book used elegant everyday analogies to argue the case for free trade, a strategy today's politicians should adopt instead of running scared of populism. Early

in the book, he wrote, "If I exchange some of my toothpaste for one of your toothbrushes, we will both have whiter teeth, and the risk that we will have our teeth knocked out by this exchange is negligible." With the delightful mischievousness that has long characterized his writing as well as conversation, Bhagwati observed that the British NGO Oxfam, and others like it, all too frequently expressed opinions on economics and globalization without understanding much about either. "Causing harm to poor countries cannot have been the intention of Oxfam, yet the road to hell is paved with good intentions," he wrote. "Oxfam knows a little, but not enough about trade policy. Mission creep, even by non creeps, is not a good idea." In Bhagwati's arguments for free trade and the efficiencies it brings, he has been critical of developing countries that have average tariffs much higher than those in the developed world. Impartially taking down self-serving economic ideologues, as far

back as the 1990s, he coined 'Wall Street Treasury Complex' as a term to denounce excessive financial liberalization via overly free capital flows forced upon countries such as Korea and Indonesia. He identified this as a root cause of the Asian financial crisis of 1997. He went on to argue that this worldview was the result of a revolving door between Wall Street and the US Treasury as well as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. "They wear similar suits, not just similar ties." This observation proved prescient because the over-financialization of Western economies was not only behind the Great Financial Crisis of 2007-08, but remains a pressing concern. Bhagwati's experience watching India's Planning Commission at close quarters decades ago makes him worry about industrial policy initiatives such as 'Make in India.' He is concerned that too many Indian bureaucrats remain reluctant liberalizers. Back in the Licence Raj days of the 1960s, Bhagwati recalls listening to a bureaucrat denouncing the waste of national resources on the manufacture of products such as lipstick. Always impish and incisive, there is a trademark giggle before he delivers the punchline. He recounts he could not help but smell the Brylcreem in the bureaucrat's hair.

The trading system is well integrated and very few nations have fallen into the trap of protectionism

THE IDEAS PAGE

Who am AI?

An artificial intelligence-powered Bhagavad Gita project raises troubling questions of identity, selfhood and authenticity



GURCHARAN DAS

ONE WINTRY EVENING in Delhi, I received an unusual call from New York. At the other end was a soft, charming voice that belonged to someone who was bringing out the world's classics using Artificial Intelligence. They'd chosen the Bhagavad Gita from India and wondered if I'd be a guide for this interactive AI book. The voice explained that the AI book would encourage readers to ask questions while reading the text. Answers would come from my cloned voice, based on 15 hours of interviews conducted in advance. At the end of each chapter, the reader would engage in a discussion with my clone.

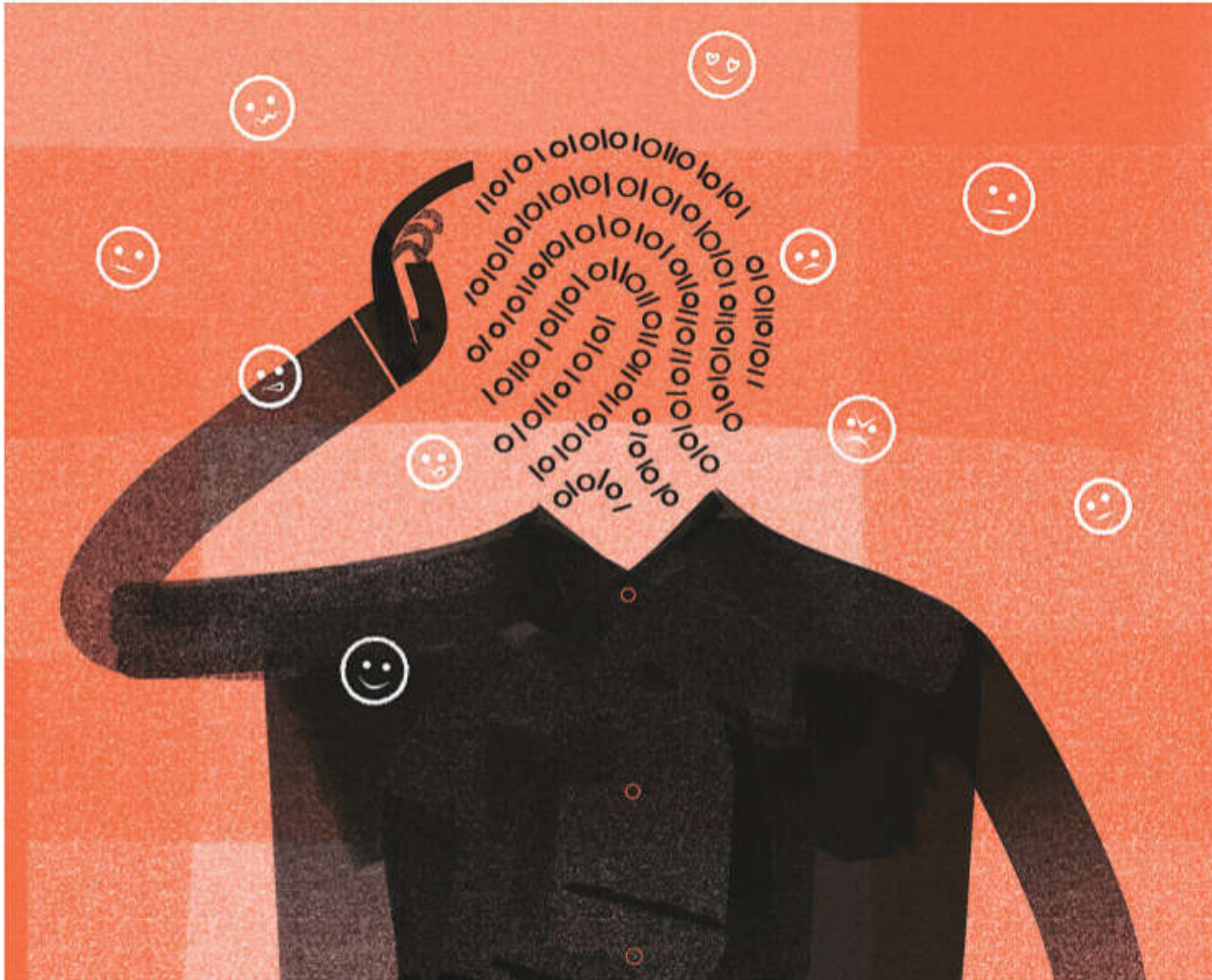
I was fascinated and perturbed. I wished I'd had such a personal tutor while reading the Gita for the first time. But I was also troubled with questions of identity, selfhood and authenticity. It felt strange having a twin speaking in my voice. Ironically, these are the same questions — who am I? — that the *Gita* also addresses.

The friendly voice reassured me that their company had already published half a dozen classics. Well-known names like Salman Rushdie and Margaret Atwood had signed up to do future classics. I was ambivalent but I agreed. After hanging up, I was left to deal with my AI monsters.

Nine months later, I'm hard at work on this project. I have three AI interns to assist me: ChatGPT is the most empathetic, Perplexity is best at research, giving links to follow up, and Claude has a literary style. Gemini is a good standby. They are hugely competent and cheerful. ChatGPT can translate a Sanskrit verse into English in 3 seconds, which is 100 times faster than Patrick Olivelle, the great scholar. When I have occasionally pointed out that something is not quite right, they try again, without a hint of complaint or the need for approval. And they keep getting better. While they have taken away the drudgery of research, I'm troubled by my lack of ownership, feeling an alienating distance from the AI output.

Since the invisible labour of research has been eased, I have more time to think, to play thought games: What if the Buddha had been Arjuna's charioteer? How is it that M K Gandhi, the apostle of non-violence, and Heinrich Himmler, the Nazi apostle of violence, were both inspired by the Gita? Himmler used to train SS officers quoting from the Gita.

I worry about being cloned by a machine. What will my friends think of me spouting fake rubbish? Will my twin know my thoughts, memories, things I don't want to talk about? What if a friend of mine actually developed a closer relationship with my compassionate clone? I'd feel jealous, cheated, and a fool. It feels eerie having him running around giving talks, making podcasts, racking up thousands of listeners. Worse, what if he cleaned out my bank account, confirming transactions on the phone via voice recognition software?



C R Sasikumar

AI raises fundamental questions about what it is to be human. The only thing I am sure of at this moment are the thoughts and feelings going through my head. If I look into my consciousness, I cannot find the thinker of my thoughts, the feeler of my feelings. Western philosophers and neuroscientists have tried to locate the self but haven't found it either. The Gita claims that my sense of identity is an illusion, created by the human ego. My true self is the *atman*, which is identical with the cosmic brahman. Awareness of the oneness of everything is the Gita's central teaching. Buddha also faced this problem but reached the opposite conclusion. He resigned himself to living with the idea of no-self (*anatman*).

AI has added a second layer of falsehood. "Who am I?" is a question based on lived experience, not to be answered by a machine. The idea of a "cloned twin" of my thoughts providing answers feels like betrayal. Already shaken by the realisation that my exalted liberal self is a fictional narrator, AI has added a double fiction, leaving me totally befuddled. Mark Twain must have felt this absurdity when he quipped, "There is no difference between fiction and non-fiction — only that fiction has to make sense!"

That AI might become sentient is my other fear. Before it happens, I believe, AI has formidable hurdles to cross. One, the human experience is inherently subjective and cannot be explained in objective terms. When I observe a red apple, it invokes all kinds of feelings of redness inside me. It could be the memory of blood oozing out of my brother's leg in an ac-

I worry about being cloned by a machine. What will my friends think of me spouting fake rubbish? Will my twin know my thoughts, memories, things I don't want to talk about? What if a friend of mine actually developed a closer relationship with my compassionate clone? I'd feel jealous, cheated, and a fool. It feels eerie having him running around giving talks, making podcasts, racking up thousands of listeners. Worse, what if he cleaned out my bank account, confirming transactions on the phone via voice recognition software?

cident; or the red cheeks of Renoir's young girl in his painting. Philosophers call this subjective content "qualia". The question is how AI will duplicate qualia, the private, unspoken product of the subjective consciousness of eight billion humans?

Another obstacle is to replicate my brain's biological neuron-specific physiology in my subjective experience. AI may copy the objective red colour — its wavelength of 650 nanometres — but it cannot access my subjective redness that emerges from my brain's 86 billion neurons and 500 trillion synapses. Both these hurdles lead to a third one. Essential to human consciousness is spontaneity, a freedom to choose my goals. That autonomy, the Gita tells me, comes from the life force, *atman*. AI today can follow commands based on algorithms and data. It has far to go to achieve self-awareness.

While I am charmed by the wonderful possibilities of AI in teaching classics to the world, I am deeply concerned about its downside. Re-reading the Gita, however, has made me rethink my own values. In the "real world" of work, I was valued for being sharp and acquisitive. What I admired, though, were kindness and generosity, traits of failure in the "real world". What is at stake is our conception of success. The present crisis in public life around the world may lie in this. There are parallels between the Gita's lament and the things we might say about our leaders today.

Das has interrogated the *Mahabharata* in his book, *The Difficulty of Being Good*



AJAY VIR JAKHAR

A bitter dose of tariff therapy

To prepare, India needs improved regulation and governance

IN 1990, MILITARY strategist Edward Luttwak coined the term "geo-economics". Loosely, it is about using economic strength as a tool to achieve strategic and foreign policy goals, rather than solely for economic welfare. Enter US President Donald Trump with his expected transactional approach, which caught India unawares. Though it is safe to think that, over time, the 50 per cent tariff that came into effect on Wednesday will be whittled down to 20-25 per cent.

The UK has succumbed to 10 per cent, the EU 15 per cent, Indonesia 19 per cent and Vietnam 20 per cent import duty. More countries are poised to do the same. It is important to work out the math. India refusing trade concessions and paying 20-25 per cent may be the better option when compared to opening the Indian agricultural markets. In practical terms, India would be competing with a disadvantage of about 5 per cent, which the country can live with. In ignoring the things that governments do right, we omit half the story, and farmers should appreciate the PM's reaffirmation to safeguard Indian farmers' interests.

However, the impact of tariffs will broaden beyond directly affected industries. Growth in the manufacturing sector is an absolute imperative for creating employment. Despite the high-profile "Make in India" campaign, the share of manufacturing in GDP is still 14 per cent, well short of the 25 per cent target set for 2025. After 10 years, possibly for the first time, there

are more unemployed graduates than non-graduates. There is a danger that not only will existing manufacturing be hit, but that businesses will see no reason to grow their businesses in India. Growth, then, does not just stall; it starts contracting.

China created globally successful companies by subjecting them to fierce competition, not protection. In contrast, Indian manufacturing is a pampered space, failing to deliver on expected growth or employment generation. It remains uncompetitive. It is about time for the industry to get a small, bitter dose of tariff therapy.

Allowing agricultural imports with quantitative quotas from the US should be acceptable if it results in import duty concessions for India's manufacturing sector. Such imports could be problematic but manageable, given that normally these are a few percentage points of the production of a particular crop. India is a humongous importer of such agricultural produce as pulses and edible oil, of which some quantity could be specifically allocated for US imports. I would treat this not as a capitulation but as pragmatism. Farmers and the government have observed that if Indian farmers are not allowed to grow GM crops, there is no justification for allowing the import of GM crops. That is a valid point as per the World Trade Organisation (WTO) — but its dispute resolution mechanisms, especially vis-à-vis the US, are all but defunct.

Dairy, however, is the backbone of small

farmers' livelihoods in India. The American dairy sector will find it tough to compete with the Indian dairy sector. Instead, the American corporate sector can and will use predatory pricing to sell its produce at a loss for 10 years to kill the Indian dairy sector. Once the Indian farmer stops keeping milch animals, it will be difficult to get farmers to rear them again. This will be a death knell to the rural economy.

India recently signed a trade deal with the UK, allowing for duty-free Indian agricultural imports. While the deal appears to be a good one, India's internal regulatory issues with agricultural inputs will lead to high-value farm exports failing the UK's safety norms at ports of entry. These may well be termed "non-tariff" barriers later. Besides, concessions around "data" appear to be an oversight.

There is also the issue of the quantum of subsidy the US or EU give their farmers vis-à-vis Indian farmers, which is neither new nor unexpected. Whining about it is not an effective strategy for the future. Realism is all about dealing with the circumstances, not the ones that one may want to.

A trade deal is not the end of the road, but an important step forward. Our policies and structures must evolve constantly to be competitive in the future. Since the WTO came into being, the US, China and the EU have regularly changed their farm support mechanisms. India did not and now runs afoul of the WTO. As far as the

Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) treaty is concerned, many exporters of basmati rice, coffee and tea, which initially opposed the RCEP, now regret their position. The WTO is not dead, and the concessions that the US extracts from India will inevitably become part of the WTO 2.0. The EU, with which India hopes to seal a trade deal soon, will demand the same concessions. A graver issue than the tariffs is the acceptance of US standards and certification.

A once-in-a-generation opportunity beckons, provided the establishment wakes up from its slumber. Not only is the population in the developed world ageing, but it is also shrinking. Radical nationalism will not allow countries to bring in cheap migrant labour, and, in less than 20 years, they will not have sufficient people to work on their farms. Since Trump took charge, the price of fruits and vegetables in the US has already gone up 35 per cent. To prepare, India needs improved regulation and governance, for which it lacks administrative and political capacity.

One view is for nations to simply hang on till the midterm elections in the US, when a political reset is expected. The bottom line is that there is no finality to the trade negotiations with the US. Like the Russian oil tariff, the next barrier will be the carbon tax.

The writer is chairman, Bharat Krishak Samaj

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"As the Israeli occupation of Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese land has shown, the Zionists very much intend to deliver on their promise of 'Greater Israel'. Therefore, unless the slaughter of Palestinians is stopped, large swathes of the region may soon be devoured by the Zionists."

— DAWN, PAKISTAN

A stronger air shield

Successful test of air defence system shows depth of Indian research, how collaboration with private, foreign partners can fill gaps



AJAI SHUKLA

LAST SATURDAY, THE Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) announced the maiden flight test of a new, all-indigenous, Integrated Air Defence Weapon System (IADWS) off the coast of Odisha. The IADWS is a three-layered system for shooting down enemy aircraft, drones and missiles when they are as far away as 30-35 km. It comprises a Quick Reaction Surface-to-Air Missile (QR-SAM) with a range of 30 km, an Advanced Very Short Range Air Defence System (VSHORADS) with a range of up to 6 km, and a high-power, laser-based, directed energy weapon (DEW) with a range of 2-4 km. The integrated operation of all three systems is controlled by a Centralised Command and Control Centre, developed by the Defence Research and Development Laboratory (DRDL) — the DRDO's nodal laboratory in charge of this development programme.

"During the flight tests, three different targets, including two high-speed, fixed-wing unmanned aerial vehicles and a multi-copter drone, were simultaneously engaged and destroyed completely... All the weapon system components, including the missile systems and drone detection and restriction systems, performed flawlessly," stated the DRDO. The IADWS missile defence system incorporates multiple technologies that the DRDO has developed over time, in different labs. This provides a demonstration of how capabilities built in individual technology realms can be integrated into weapon systems that serve specific battlefield requirements.

India began this technological synergising with the Integrated Guided Missile Development Programme (IGMDP) that was set up in 1983 by APJ Abdul Kalam. The IGMDP's "missile cluster", located mainly in Hyderabad, consists of five laboratories, each directed to a specific, but linked, purpose. The so-called missile cluster, which includes the Advanced Systems Laboratory (ASL), specialises in rockets and missiles. It has developed and honed the Agni and Prithvi series of ballistic missiles, which form the delivery end of India's nuclear deterrent. Over the years, the DRDO has developed these two ballistic missiles into a highly advanced anti-ballistic missile (ABM) shield, an anti-satellite (ASAT) missile system and into advanced capabilities such as multi-independently targetable re-entry vehicle (MIRV).

Similarly, as part of the IGMDP, the development of a series of tactical missiles, including the anti-aircraft Trishul and Akash and the anti-tank Nag missile, were entrusted to the DRDL. These, too, have been developed further into a range of more capable tactical missiles.

The IGMDP has also spawned the DRDO Young Scientists Laboratory for asymmetric technologies, such as AI and quantum computing. There is the Terminal Ballistic Research Laboratory that specialises in warhead design. The most essential is the Research Centre Imarat, which specialises in critical missile technologies such as navigation and control, guidance and homing systems, command and control systems and high temperature materials that are essential for long-range missiles and aircraft.

These sophisticated technologies, mostly developed by public sector agencies like the five IGMDP laboratories, are trickling down into defence products manufactured by capable private sector technology companies, such as Carborundum Universal Limited (CUMI). Earlier this year, CUMI announced the signing of a "Licensing Agreement for Transfer of Technology" with the DRDO for manufacturing ceramic radomes — essential, state-of-the-art technology for missiles and high-performance aircraft during flight regimes. Radomes experience extremely high surface temperatures, especially during flight regimes such as re-entry from space. To withstand that, radomes at the tip of Indian missiles are made of specialised ceramics developed in the DRDO's laboratories.

Besides the growing synergy between India's public and private sector defence firms, there are opportunities for working with foreign partners, such as the Israeli military, in developing integrated air defences that can repulse combined operations by the Pakistani and Chinese air forces, such as during Operation Sindoor earlier this year. How would such a technology partnership function? The DRDO could partner with Israel's military and defence industry in developing layered air defence systems such as the Iron Dome. Its sophisticated radar detects, identifies and tracks incoming threats within a 160-km radius. Its Tamir interceptor missile, which travels at one kilometre per second, leaves the Iron Dome battery with less than a minute to respond to a missile launch. Working fast, the battery commanders analyse the threat and launch their Tamir interceptors. In seconds, the incoming warheads would have detonated into lethal fragments of high-speed metal.

In the modern battlefield, money is everything. An interceptor's cost determines how many can be fired. The Tamir initially cost about \$1,00,000 each to produce, but the Israeli industry brought down the price to \$40-\$50,000. The technology challenge involves integrating the individual elements of the missile shield. For targets at ranges beyond the Iron Dome's 160 km, Israel deploys the US-supplied Terminal High Altitude Area Defence System (THAAD), which intercepts ballistic missiles outside the atmosphere at ranges out to 200 km. The next layer is David's Sling, with a range of 300 km. For the outer layer, Israel's Arrow 3 system destroys medium-range ballistic missiles at ranges out to 2,400 km.

When India enters into an international collaboration that involves joint development, we have thus far followed the rule of sharing our strengths and complementing our weaknesses. When we developed the BrahMos cruise missile with Russia, our clearly defined work share included the navigation system and the mission control. We had done a similar exercise in the case of the LR-SAM, where it was reported that we would develop the rear section and the Israelis would provide the front section and the seeker. Since we are doing the entire integration, it will be an Indian product.

When we began jointly developing the LR-SAM with the Israeli weapons industry, we knew that no such system was available with the Israelis. The Israeli Navy came forward to collaborate only because they badly wanted a new system for their warships. The Indian Navy also wanted a new system. We never enter into a collaboration for a product that already exists.

The writer is a retired army officer and journalist

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

INTEGRITY MATTERS

THIS REFERS TO the editorial 'Test for the Fed' (*IE*, August, 27). Indeed, it is the era of political high handedness over autonomous institutions like central banks which are supposed to be managed by experts and apolitical officials with the utmost integrity. Political interference will erode the credibility of not only public institutions but the democratic apparatus of a country itself. This phenomenon of making autonomous institutions subservient has grown consistently across the world in the last decade. India is no exception.

Vasant Nalawade, Satara

DOUBLE STANDARDS

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'A thinning line' (*IE*, August 27). The editorial correctly identifies a critical flaw in our governance: The selective application of the law. While agencies pursue those without proper documentation, a more insidious threat exists where these same institutions help create fraudulent cards. This double standard doesn't just "thin"

the line between legal and illegal; it completely undermines the constitutional guarantee of due process of law. This is a profound betrayal of public trust and requires a complete overhaul of the systems that allow "guardians of the law" to become its primary exploiters.

Krishan Kumar Chug, New Delhi

REACT NOW

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Man and machine' (*IE*, Aug 27). The growing debate on whether artificial intelligence deserves rights may seem futuristic, but it reflects a deeper moral question. Technology is no longer a mere tool; it is becoming a mirror of human thought and behaviour. While machines are not conscious, their increasing ability to imitate emotion and decision-making demands that society prepare ethical frameworks in advance. Ignoring this will only leave us reacting in panic when the line between code and cognition blurs. It is better to begin the conversation now than to wait for a crisis to decide what dignity and responsibility mean in the age of AI.

Dattatray S Giri, Pune

Lend a helping hand

With millions of jobs at stake due to US tariffs, small exporters need a govt bailout package

WITH THE 50% tariffs on export of goods to the US coming into effect, lakhs of India's exporting units are staring at a bleak future. Smaller ones, especially in sectors like textiles, gems and jewellery, and footwear which are heavily dependent on the US market, may have no option but to down their shutters. After all, the US accounts for more than 30% of exports from these sectors. Exports of seafood are also vulnerable to a demand-shock-the US imported 37% of India's total seafood exports of \$7.5 billion in FY25. Indeed, the consequences for millions of workers could be dire since it will be hard for owners of exporting firms to retain them in the absence of any business.

Many of the larger units may try to explore new markets such as the European Union or the Gulf region, but that will be an arduous task as competing countries like Vietnam and Bangladesh will have to pay much a lower tariff of 20%. In the apparel segment, for instance, the 50% US duty results in a tariff difference of 30-31% between India and competing nations. To be able to crack these markets, exports would need to offer a discount of 30-35% to win customers. It's unlikely though that these markets would be able to absorb \$12 billion worth of textiles that the US was buying annually. Routing exports via a third country is also a long shot. In sum, unless there is a reversal of the tariff hike, many exporting units will be wiped out.

Against this backdrop, the government's 40-nation outreach programme to push exports in new markets is a good move. In addition, it must come to their aid with an economic package that will address the cash-flow issues faced by exporting units. This is important from the point of social welfare given the huge numbers that these units employ. The direct economic hit this time will be much smaller at an estimated 50-80 basis points (bps) of the gross domestic product than it was during the Covid pandemic. Importantly, the fisc today is in a far better shape than it was then and that affords the government room to extend support. Even if the fiscal deficit target of 4.4% for FY26 was to slip by about 10 bps, it should not be considered as straying from the path of consolidation given the extraordinary circumstances. Also, the country's banks today have well-capitalised balance sheets with low delinquencies and can provide support.

Consequently, the industry demand for a special interest subvention scheme or access to loans at softer rates should be given due consideration. Banks can also consider a moratorium on repayments of the principal amounts, for at least six months. A scheme on the lines of the ECLGS-Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme-that enables banks to provide collateral-free working capital, backed by a government guarantee, is believed to be in the works. The corpus should be meaningful. The government must ensure that exporters in these badly hit sectors should not suffer any incidence of levies. In general, while duties are refunded there are several local levies. State governments too can chip in and, if needed, the Centre could enhance their borrowing limits. The current crisis may not be as big as it was during the pandemic but the potential loss of livelihoods-estimated in lakhs-is a big concern. The government must provide short-term succour on an immediate basis.

Boeing has upper hand in latest labour strike

BOEING CO. RESUMED talks on Monday with union leaders to end a strike that most investors aren't paying much attention to. This is a problem for the 3,200 employees who rejected a company offer that provided an all-in 40% average compensation increase over four years and walked off the job on August 4. The striking workers help build aircraft, including the F-15 and, among other things, produce kits that turn dumb bombs into smart ones in facilities near St. Louis, Missouri. This labour struggle has drawn little publicity compared with the high-profile strike at the end of last year that shut down commercial aircraft production for 53 days.

In a nod to which side holds the upper hand on talks, the president of the union, which represents about 600,000 workers in North America, sent a letter on August 11 to Missouri lawmakers asking them to urge Boeing to return to the bargaining table. Now, two weeks later, Boeing and union leaders are holding talks again, but don't expect a sense of urgency on the company's part.

Boeing's financial future-and consequently its stock price-hinges on the plane-maker revamping its manufacturing culture and cranking up production at its commercial airplanes unit. The company has a backlog of 5,900 commercial aircraft worth \$522 billion, and a smooth ramp-up of production will turn those orders into a cash machine. That's not the case for the defence, space, and security unit, which has a backlog of \$74 billion. The unit has been losing money after the company got into trouble with fixed-rate contracts that failed to anticipate an inflation surge. While investors expect the business to rebound eventually, defence work doesn't make or break Boeing's finances like the commercial unit.

The union's bargaining position is weakened by company contingency plans that have kept these defence factories operating, albeit at a lower pace.

Workers may have voted against the offer in light of the gains that their commercial-aircraft counterparts made by holding out for more. But machinists in the Seattle area were negotiating their first contract renewal since 2014, when Boeing played hardball by threatening to move production out of the Seattle area and won concessions that angered workers. The St. Louis-area machinists had already renegotiated the 2014 contract in a three-year agreement reached in 2022. That dilutes some of that anger from the days when Boeing

ran roughshod over union workers. Economics have changed as well from just a year ago. The economy is clearly slowing, although defence spending around the world has increased, and the inflation rate is solidly below 3%. A year ago, workers had just come off two years of the highest inflation in decades.

A serious problem that the striking workers face is that the preliminary agreement they rejected was fairly generous. The company offered machinists a 40% all-in compensation increase over four years that included strengthening medical benefits and increasing pension matches, according to the union leadership, which trumpeted the agreement in a July 24 statement. Under the agreement, hourly wage increases average 20% and are weighted more heavily toward those who earn less. A first-shift worker who makes \$34.25 an hour would make \$52.03 an hour in the fourth year of the contract. For workers already at the maximum hourly wage, their annual pay would increase to \$110,718 a year from \$95,326, according to a Boeing fact sheet.

Boeing CEO Kelly Ortberg will have to decide how to balance his strategy of revamping the company's manufacturing culture with stamping out union activism that, if unchecked, could spread as labour contracts come due. The ability to hold costs in check are key for turning around the defence business. Then again, building that manufacturing culture of excellence is also crucial, especially after the company won a contract worth at least \$20 billion to build the sixth-generation fighter jet, known as the F-47, in the St. Louis area.

Time is on Boeing's side. The last time District 837 machinists went on strike, in 1996, the walkout lasted 99 days. One side will have to give ground. If the company ends up sweetening its offer, it won't be by much.

ON AUGUST 6, President Donald Trump's issued an executive order announcing the imposition of an additional ad valorem duty of 25% on Indian imports starting from August 27 for "directly or indirectly importing Russian Federation oil". This was in addition to the 25% reciprocal tariff that took effect on August 7. The additional duty levied on India is unfair on at least two counts. First, energy industry consultants asserted that India began purchasing Russian oil in a major way at the behest of the US (*bit.ly/3UqRuU*). Following the imposition of Western sanctions on Russia, the Biden administration asked India to buy Russian crude to prevent a major oil price spike that would have, in turn, resulted in high gasoline prices in the US which was already burdened with inflationary pressures.

Secondly, several other countries, including China, Türkiye, Brazil, and in the European Union (EU), have also been buying oil and oil products "directly and indirectly" from the Russian Federation, even after Western sanctions took effect. Since 2022-23, the EU emerged as a major importer of India's petroleum products. While its share in India's total exports before Russia's invasion of Ukraine was 12%, during the previous fiscal its share had almost doubled to 22%. What must be pointed out is that the US has also been buying petroleum products from India, even during the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Its share in India's exports remained almost constant at 7%, going up to 8% in the first half of 2025, the highest since 2022. The question is, how can President Trump and the US administration ignore the fact that China and the EU, among others,

BISWAJIT DHAR

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ers, have been "directly and indirectly" importing Russian oil? More importantly, do they have the moral high ground to "punish" India for importing Russian oil for the reasons adduced above?

There is no doubt that the Trump tariffs would adversely impact the Indian economy on several fronts. The most direct one would be on India's exports to its largest trade partner. India's dependence on US markets consistently increased since the world's largest economy became its largest export destination, replacing the UAE in 2012-13. The US share in India's exports, which was then 12%, increased to 23% during the first half of 2025. The Trump tariffs could, therefore, have a major impact on Indian businesses not just because several key industries have large exposures to the US market, but also because the growth of India's exports to the US in the post-pandemic period has been almost four times higher than its overall export growth. For a country whose exports have remained sluggish in the recent past, restrictions on access to its largest market would adversely affect India's trade account and its current account deficit as well.

The 50% tariffs would adversely affect

several sectors in which micro and small industries are prominent players. These include gems and jewellery, garments, carpets, leather and footwear, plastic products, furniture, and marine products. These products accounted for nearly 30% of India's exports in 2024-25. The impact of the Trump tariffs could be quite severe for these labour-intensive sectors, risking livelihoods in India. Restricted market access for marine products would surely hit the coastal states, particularly Kerala, whose exports are hugely dependent on this sector. Among the larger industries, non-electrical machinery such as engines and turbines, automobile parts, and articles of iron and steel would be the most affected.

The impact of the 50% tariffs on these industries would be quite varied, depending on many factors including the likely impact of higher prices of Indian products on consumer demand in the US and the presence of competitors in other countries. The extent to which the government is able to provide financial and other support, especially to the micro, small, and medium enterprise sector, to cushion the blow of the tariffs would play a vital role as well. Let us understand what this means.

The most direct adverse impact of Trump tariffs on India would be on its exports to its largest trade partner

From trust to tariffs



HARSH V PANT VIVEK MISHRA

Respectively vice-president, studies and foreign policy, & fellow, Americas, ORF

If both sides harden positions on tariffs, Sergio Gor's assignment in Delhi as US ambassador could become a baptism by fire

FEW HAD ANTICIPATED six months ago that the India-US relationship would encounter the kind of turbulence it has in recent months. Expectations of unpredictability were always high with Donald Trump's return to the White House for a second term. Yet the scale and immediacy of economic friction have caught many by surprise. The relationship, which has matured steadily over two decades, now faces one of its most severe economic challenges in recent times.

It is important to distinguish between the political and economic dimensions of the bilateral dynamic. Politically, the relationship remains relatively stable. Both recognise their shared stakes in the Indo-Pacific, counterterrorism, and the rise of disruptive technologies. Economically, however, the picture is far more complex. While some argue that direct dialogue between leaders can resolve most disagreements, this view overlooks the fact that the present turbulence is rooted in an economic clash where the Trump administration has drawn firm red lines.

With tariffs of up to 50% on Indian goods imposed by the Trump administration taking effect on Thursday, a sense of unease has settled in New Delhi. What began as a tactical trade dispute has evolved into a deeper impasse, with both sides signalling an unwillingness to back down easily. The tariffs, aimed largely at sectors such as pharmaceuticals, textiles, and certain categories of agricultural goods, represent a direct challenge to India's export competitiveness. For New Delhi, the fear is not only the immediate economic cost but also the precedent it sets for future protectionist moves by

Washington.

From India's perspective, two convictions are likely to guide its response. First, the structural nature of the bilateral relationship anchored by overlapping commitments in the Indo-Pacific, growing defence cooperation, and shared concerns about China will eventually override the friction over trade. That said, normalisation may take longer this time. The US under Trump is not merely reacting to short-term pressures but it is also attempting to drive a fundamental restructuring of its economic engagement with the world. India, therefore, must adjust to a White House that treats trade as a central lever of power.

Second, India's economy has historically proven to be resilient. It weathered the 2008 global financial crisis with limited damage compared to other major economies and managed the Covid-19 pandemic better than many peers. This resilience reinforces the argument that India should remain cautious of externally imposed economic costs. At the same time, the present moment coincides with New Delhi's own push for structural reforms. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Independence Day speech this year, coupled with the high-level meeting on next-generation reforms held on August 18, signalled that India intends to double down on economic modernisation despite external headwinds.

Sergio Gor's appointment

Amid this backdrop, the appointment of Sergio Gor as the next US ambassador to India carries unusual significance. It comes at a time when the bilateral relationship requires careful management, not escalation. By nominating a close confidant to this post, the Trump administration is sending a political signal that it intends to keep the channel with India open even while pressing hard on economic issues.

Gor is not a career diplomat. At 38, he is known more as a trusted political aide of Trump than as a seasoned negotiator. He was deeply involved in staffing decisions during Trump's first term and is widely regarded as part of the president's inner circle. His appointment, therefore, reflects Trump's preference for loyalty and political alignment over traditional diplomatic expertise. For

India, the upside is that Gor's proximity to the president ensures that messages from New Delhi will travel quickly to the Oval Office. The downside, however, is equally evident in that he lacks diplomatic training, and his assignment comes at a time when the margin for missteps is extremely narrow. Gor's first hurdle will be Senate confirmation. The case of his predecessor, Eric Garcetti, who waited 26 months for confirmation amid domestic investigations, remains fresh in memory. Gor's path is expected to be smoother, largely because Trump has pushed through confirmations for key nominees with unusual speed.

For Delhi, the task is to resist the temptation of overreacting to tariffs while keeping sight of the larger picture

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Tariff-proofing India

Apropos of "Don't rise to any bait from Trump" (*FE*, August 27), China's rapid rise on the global stage has been propelled not merely by economic reforms or industrial growth, but also by its massive investments in human capital and knowledge capital. By prioritising education, research, and innovation, China has created a skilled workforce that can compete in advanced fields.

For India, the lesson is clear-the most certain way to counter internal divisions, petty rivalries, and distractions rooted in identity politics is to build a strong base of human resources. India cannot afford to squander its potential on narrow concerns. By following China's example in strengthening universities, fostering innovation ecosystems, and upgrading vocational capacities, India can cultivate a citizenry that finds fulfilment in creation rather than

conflict. Thus, human and knowledge capital become not only tools for economic growth but also moral correctives. —Narayanan Kizhumundayur, Thrissur

Making UDAN viable

Apropos of "Faltering connectivity" (*FE*, August 27), Ude Desh ka Aam Nagrik (UDAN) was launched with much fanfare to meet the aspirations of those from smaller cities. If 80% of the airports remain unserved, it means

Expanding the mandate

Adding another layer of complexity is Gor's dual appointment as special envoy for South and Central Asian affairs. In theory, this could have been a boon for India. The position places him in charge of Washington's approach to a vast region spanning Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. With India as the region's largest democracy and economy, Gor's mandate could have reinforced Delhi's centrality. However, South Asia is uniquely fragmented. If the Trump administration uses Gor's role to revive US mediation between India and Pakistan, it could reopen an old fault line. For decades, India has opposed any hyphenation of its ties with Pakistan, insisting that the relationship with Washington stand on its own merits. This is a risk New Delhi will watch closely.

Despite the turbulence, both sides recognise that the India-US relationship is too consequential to be derailed by trade disputes alone. Yet the months ahead will not be easy. If both sides harden positions on tariffs, Gor's assignment in Delhi could become a baptism by fire. His success will depend not only on his access to Trump but also on his ability to convince New Delhi where it matters. For Washington, the challenge lies in balancing the President's protectionist instincts with the long-term value of India as a partner in Asia. For Delhi, the task is to resist the temptation of overreacting to tariffs while keeping sight of the larger picture.

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A thought for today
Never believe that a few caring people can't change the world. For, indeed, that's all who ever have
MARGARET MEAD

Swadeshi Diwali

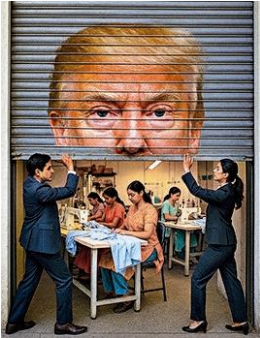
Tariffs have clouded festive season for workers in export hubs. Here's how rest of us can help

History will remember Trump's 50% India tariff as a case of irresistible force meeting immovable object. While he couldn't weaken India's resolve, Trump may have forced a strategic rethink here, and a larger pragmatic realignment in the East. The picture will be clearer after Modi's upcoming visits to Japan and China – fourth and second largest economies, respectively. What is clear, meanwhile, is that India needs to act fast to save its textile, shrimp and other export-oriented industries that employ millions.

Relative to India's \$4tn GDP, the loss of roughly \$40bn worth of exports on account of punishing tariffs might seem insignificant. But this misreads the situation. The sectors hurt most by US tariffs are all labour-intensive. As an example, 3mn jobs could be lost in Tamil Nadu's textile industry alone. TN accounts for 28% of India's textile exports and employs 7.5mn workers in just this sector. Early this year, Modi had talked about trebling India's textile exports earnings from ₹3L cr to ₹9L cr, with a corresponding increase in jobs. Now, the plan is in jeopardy and existing units face a crisis. Other big employers like gems and jewellery, chemicals and seafood sectors are also in for a rough ride.

While states and Centre have promised support to these industries, including finding new markets for them, that will take time. After all, unlike fighter planes, shirts and shrimp aren't sold at the govt-to-govt level. Orders from new clients could take weeks or even months, and the challenge is to ensure these export-oriented factories continue running in the interim without benching or sacking staff.

One way is to heavily tariff imports in the affected sectors, so that apparel from Bangladesh and Vietnam, for example, loses appeal in the Indian market. But India should shun this Trumpian approach. Instead, downstream industries and citizens should consider import substitution now. Modi has been urging all to buy Indian, and domestic demand can certainly keep the lights on in the export hubs. For a few months – until Trump retreats or new export markets are found – businesses should prioritise domestic sourcing over super profits, and consumers should also value the made-in-India label. This is not protectionism but acknowledgement of the role UP's carpet-weavers, Bihar's foxnut farmers and Andhra's shrimp farmers, among others, have played in earning dollars for India. It's time to pay them back, and ensure their homes are not dark on Diwali.



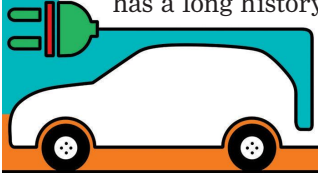
Time To EVolve

India can become a global e-vehicle hub with right incentives & mastery over batteries

With Trump's 50% tariff kicking in, India must devise both short-and-long-term strategies to counter the impact. As the above editorial highlights, with labour-intensive exports slated to take a hit, New Delhi must use this moment to place new thrust on domestic manufacturing. In that context, Maruti Suzuki's electric car and battery manufacturing plant in Ahmedabad is a significant step. Not only will the plant produce Maruti Suzuki's first global battery electric vehicle, the e-VITARA, it will also export the model to over 100 countries from India, including to Europe and Japan.

This is a great example of how India can potentially become a hub of global EV manufacturing and export. True, Maruti Suzuki has a long history in this country as well as the legacy infra to bet on India for its global foray into EVs. But there's no reason other automakers can't be enticed to India for their global expansion. Vietnamese EV-maker VinFast opened its first overseas plant in Tamil Nadu earlier this month with plans to eventually source or manufacture most of its components locally. Instructively, the factory came up just 17 months after signing of MoU. In contrast, VinFast's American factory in North Carolina has blown past several deadlines and doesn't plan to begin operations before 2028, six years after it was first conceived. Tamil Nadu's incentives mattered.

But critical to India's EV push are batteries. The Ahmedabad Maruti Suzuki plant will produce hybrid battery electrodes with 80% domestic production by value. But more needs to be done to indigenise the entire supply chain of battery manufacturing, from sourcing and processing minerals to delivering finished batteries for EVs. Also, with the shortage of lithium-ion reserves, there needs to be a serious ramp-up in R&D into alternatives such as sodium-ion batteries. The point is to move quickly and give domestic auto manufacturing a big boost.



Left in language

Why is English so 'rightwing'?
Bachi Karkaria

We've really taken the Mickey out of Mao. As for Karl Marx, he's been treated so funnily, he might as well be Harpo. Why, leftist ideology seems to have been Putin its place even in the land where a predecessor's brave experiment with 'perestroika' sadly soon reverted to 'glasnyet'. So, should we exult over the new global mantra of 'Right is Might'? Yes, if you lived through the brutal insurgency inspired by Charu Majumdar in late 1960s' West Bengal. Or if you've followed the 'Rise, Crush, Rise, Repeat' trajectory of Naxalism 0.1. Aren't violent ultras *vibes* the Constitution? We should beglad that ultra-thinned Gadchiroli/ Bastar can now experience more pleasurable excitements.

However, mine is a worried 'no' about its urban counterparts. Who exactly are these ill-defined 'danger log'? Why do I keep thinking of Senator McCarthy's 'red under every bed' witch-hunt of the 50s? Or the 'better dead than red' mantra of Liberty Prime, the fictitious giant combat robot that in the Fallout video game series is created by US army as a superweapon against China?

Baapre, should even insignificant me fear the midday knock? Because a dusty 'Das Kapital' might still be lurking on my book-shelves?

Because my phone would reveal several WhatsApps sent to Maoist ideologue Kobad Ghandy before realising that they weren't to my caterer with the same first name?

Because my laptop harbours some warm reference to 'Uncle Ho'? He'd wowed us in our Cal college years when strident wall slogan 'Aamar naam Vietnaam' vied with 'China's Chairman is Our Chairman' and 'Naxalbari amader bari' (our home).

Well, not a machete-wielding combatant, but everyone worth her acne, should be a communist in her youth.

Alas, left has always been handed a bad deal, from cleanliness to compliments; 'sinister' originally meant 'left'; in the Bible, that's the side where demons reside. You must put your 'right-foot forward', else you get 'left behind'.

But, hey, balance is as essential to democracy as to parades. Brigades march 'Left, right'. So should nations which salute free thought.

Alec Smart said: "Free speech needs to be freed from politicking."



erratica

Will Politics Get Trump-Tariffed?

High US duties will worsen an already existing jobs crunch. With Bihar polls soon & big state polls next year, there's a political aspect to this. But Modi has enough political capital to execute key reforms that'll create more jobs

R Jagannathan



It is easy to blame Trump for the problems our economy will face in the coming months – as his 50% tariffs hit exports from our labour-intensive sectors like seafood, textiles, gems and jewellery, leather products, handicrafts and agri-products. He has been an unexpected Black Swan event not just for India, but also close allies like EU and Japan.

Even without Trump, some form of a jobs crunch in India was inevitable, not least because of the advent of AI, which is impacting even software services jobs. The super-high US tariffs themselves are unlikely to remain for a substantial length of time – for they are closer to sanctions and may impact US interests through higher inflation.

What matters for India is not the short-term macro-economic impact of the tariffs (which could be around 0.5-1% of GDP), but its repercussions for jobs and the resultant knock-on impact on domestic politics.

Elections are due in Bihar in a couple of months. Next year will see even more contentious elections in West Bengal, Assam, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Jobs, or rather the lack of them, will be bigger issues than political accusations over "vote chori" in 2026.

It's not as if Modi govt is unaware of the political impact of Trump's tariffs. Speaking on Independence Day, PM promised GST reforms (by Diwali), and cash benefits for those joining the job market for the first time. These include payment of ₹15,000 in two instalments for those taking up jobs for the first time, and ₹3,000 per month for employers creating new jobs. These measures, along with the huge income tax relief offered to taxpayers before the Trump tantrums began (today, incomes up to ₹12L are tax-free) will boost domestic spending and, indirectly, domestic jobs.

What should worry different govts, and not just the one at the Centre, is the immediate fallout on existing jobs and the ones that would have come about with normal economic growth. Even if the tariffs are reduced, their ripple effects will linger long after the event.

Reason: companies shed labour whenever there is a crisis, but even after the crisis, they will be tardy about adding labour. For, by then, more automation and

productivity options will become available. Markets lost during a crisis may also be hard to recover.

Importantly, the political threat to jobs predates Trump. There has been great reluctance to reform the labour markets, which would have made it easier to hire more workers. Fear of political repercussions has also prevented the four new labour codes (on wages, social security, occupational safety, and industrial relations) from being activated.

Instead, there has been more kow-towing to vested interests. A pension reform dating back to the



Vajpayee-Manmohan era, NPS, has been partially rolled back for govt employees. It has been made more lucrative in the form of UPS, with negative consequences for national and state budgets. When spinelessness is the norm in confronting major lobbies in the labour and agricultural sectors, the possibility of generating the next wave of jobs is low.

The lesson Modi govt needs to learn is simple: if reforms are endlessly delayed, other developments make them less useful when actually implemented. For example, once upon a time industry leaders demanded

'Group Captain Shukla's flight was historic on many counts'

Rajya Sabha member & ex-foreign secy writes what an Indian aboard ISS means for India's space ambitions as well as its diplomacy

Harsh Vardhan Shringla



Group Captain Shubhanshu Shukla's 18-day stay aboard the International Space Station as part of Axiom-4 mission was historic on multiple counts. It represented India's growing stature as a participant in global space exploration.

Shukla's flight was the result of a new strategic partnership – in 2023, India and US agreed to jointly send an Indian astronaut to ISS. This collaboration reflects how far India-US space ties have come from the time India faced technology denial regimes. Today, Nasa treats Isro as a partner in cutting-edge projects, underscored by India signing the US-led Artemis Accords for moon exploration.

Shukla's role on Ax-4 was operationally and scientifically significant. He and his crewmates conducted over 60 experiments, many designed by Indian scientists, ranging from growing Indian food crops (moong beans and fenugreek) in microgravity to studying hardy microbes like cyanobacteria and tardigrades in space.

Shukla's experiments yielded practical insights for India's upcoming Gaganyaan programme, improving understanding of life-support, space medicine and astronaut health in orbit. It will also help Isro refine training protocols, spacecraft systems and emergency procedures with real-world astronaut feedback.

The mission has "sparked interest and growth" in India's nascent space start-up sector, underlining how a collaborative venture can also energise domestic industry.

Shukla's ISS foray is just one facet of India's broader international engagement in space technology that's grown remarkably in recent years. Isro has transitioned from a largely indigenous programme into one that actively partners with major space agencies globally. Nasa-Isro collaboration extends well

beyond the astronaut mission.

The two co-developed Nisar satellite, the first joint Earth observation mission featuring Isro's radar and Nasa's radar on a single platform. Nisar will continuously map Earth's land and ice, helping both countries, and the world, monitor climate change and natural disasters.

India's cooperation is not limited to US alone. Isro has longstanding ties with other spacefaring nations. With France's CNES, India is developing a thermal



GSLV-F16 carrying Nisar (left) & PSLV-C59 with ESA satellites of Proba-3 spacecraft (right)

imaging satellite mission called Trishna to study Earth's resources. With Japan's Jaxa, Isro is planning a LupeX (Lunar Polar Exploration) mission featuring a 250kg rover to search for water ice on Moon, leveraging combined expertise in lunar exploration.

India also works with European Space Agency (ESA) that launched its Proba-3 spacecraft satellites on an Indian PSLV rocket. Such collaborations are win-win: India gains access to niche technologies and international datasets, while partner nations benefit from Isro's cost-effective engineering and reliable launch services.

The result is a web of space alliances that reinforce

India's diplomatic relationships. In the 21st century, offering to share outer-space capabilities, from launching a foreign satellite to training alongside Nasa, has become a tool of diplomacy.

India's stature as a global space player has risen in a short time. Modi emphasised pursuit of India's space goals with Atmanirbharta. In the Cold War era India's lone manned spacecraft (Rakesh Sharma in 1984) was enabled by a Soviet mission, when Isro was importing technology.

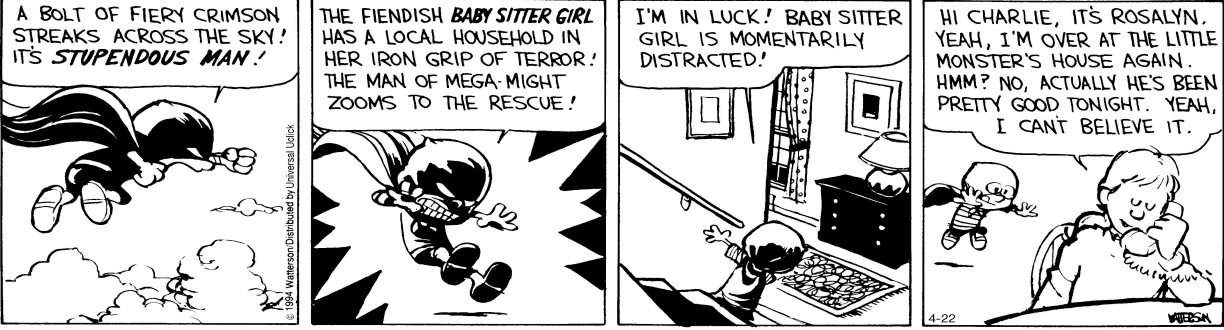
Today India provides launches and satellite data to other countries and is an equal partner to advanced agencies. A telling statistic is that over 400 satellites from 34 countries have been launched using Indian rockets to date, a revenue-generating enterprise for Isro and a sign of international confidence in Indian boosters.

Whether it's putting Singaporean, European or African micro-satellites into orbit, Isro's commercial arm has turned India into the world's go-to launchpad. India's Space Policy 2023 opens the sector to private startups, with over 300 space startups in play.

India has balanced international cooperation with self-reliance and indigenous achievements. The country's track record of space successes speaks for itself. Despite a modest budget, Isro has delivered world-class results that earned global respect, such as Mangalyaan that made India the first Asian nation to reach Mars orbit, on its very first attempt, and Chandrayaan-3 in 2023 where India became the first country to ensure a soft landing on Moon's south polar region. With programmes like Navic, India's own GPS system, and missions like Aditya-L1, a solar observatory, India keeps deepening its range of capabilities in space exploration.

If Gaganyaan's crewed flight succeeds by 2027, India will become only the fourth country – after Russia, US and China – to independently send humans to space with home-grown technology. Likewise, by mastering complex missions like lunar landings and Mars orbits, Isro has joined an exclusive club, gaining it a voice in international rule-setting for space. India is no longer a peripheral player but is shaping the future of space research and commercial space markets.

Calvin & Hobbes



Humility Of Questions: A Cure For Ossified Pride

Partha Sinha

There is a thin line that separates confidence from arrogance. Confidence is porous, open to air and light. Arrogance calcifies into a shell. Confidence grows with learning, while arrogance hardens into certainty. The difference is not always visible, but it becomes clear the moment a question enters the room.

Questions are the natural solvent of pride. They loosen what has become stiff. They remind us that no matter how high the pedestal, gravity still applies. When you are asked a question, you are being invited to revisit your own truth. That invitation can be unsettling. People in authority often reject it, not because the question is flawed, but because it threatens the fragile armour they mistake for strength.

I have seen this often in boardrooms, classrooms, even in living rooms. The most dangerous sentence in any of these places is, "That is a silly question." It is not the question that is silly. It is the refusal to acknowledge that another perspective exists. Confidence says, "Let us consider." Arrogance says, "Do not bother me."

Children know better: Their days are filled with why, how, when, what if. Their questions are not rhetorical devices but lifelines. Each one is an act of humility, a confession that the world is too vast to be managed alone. That is why their questions disarm us. They reveal the pretence of adulthood. When a child asks, "Why is the sky blue?" the right answer is not a lecture in physics. It is wonder.



THE SPEAKING TREE

Our spiritual traditions also honour this truth. Socrates never tired of asking questions, because he believed wisdom was not a well to be filled but a river to be entered again and again. In Zen practice, the koan is not meant to be answered. It is meant to unsettle the self that insists on neat solutions. The Bhagwad Gita begins with a question from Arjun, paralysed by doubt, and it is only through his asking that wisdom flows.

Yet in modern life we prize answers more than questions. The quick reply, instant solution, clever sound bite. Answers inflate the ego, while questions deflate it just enough for humility to enter. To sit quietly with a question, is to let the self breathe.

Think of the last time someone asked

you a real question. Not a trap, not a test, but a true inquiry. For a moment you slowed down. You listened more deeply. You put aside the armour of performance. That moment itself was grace.

Questions and silence are siblings. Both clear the noise. Both remind us that the ego is not a fortress but scaffolding, temporary and fragile, built to be taken down so that we may rebuild again.

So when a question unsettles you, do not swat it away. Hold it gently, the way you hold a seashell to your ear. Listen for the ocean inside it. For in every question lies a hand tugging softly at your sleeve. Take that hand. It does not shrink you. It only reminds you that to be human is not to defend certainty, but to remain curious, open and alive.

Because in the end, it is not answers that keep us alive. It is the courage to keep asking.

Sacredspace



Every rational creature has all nature for his dowry and estate. It is his, if he will. He may divest himself of it; he may creep into a corner, and abdicate his kingdom...but he is entitled to the world by his constitution.

Ralph W Emerson

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